

**MINUTES  
WORK SESSION  
WARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
THURSDAY, JANUARY 16, 2025  
3:30 p.m.**

**The Ware County Board of Commissioners held a Work Session, Thursday, January 16, 2025 at 3:30 p.m. in the Ware County Commission Chambers, 305 Oak Street, Suite 201 Waycross, Georgia 31501 with Chairman Elmer Thrift presiding.**

<b>CALL TO ORDER</b>	Chairman Elmer Thrift
<b>COMMISSIONERS PRESENT</b>	Commissioner Barry Cox, Commissioner Leonard Burse, Commissioner Jon Tindall, and Commissioner Timmy Lucas
<b>COMMISSIONERS ABSENT</b>	None
<b>STAFF PRESENT</b>	Interim County Manager Melinda Brooks; Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Herzog; Deputy County Clerk Melissa Bennett; County Manager Appointee James Shubert
<b>PRESS</b>	Danny Bartlett, WJH
<b>INVOCATION</b>	The Invocation was given by Danny Bartlett
<b>PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE</b>	The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Elmer Thrift

**GUEST SPEAKER(S):**

- **Jacqueline Shoemaker – Red Cross**  
Ms. Shoemaker gave an update on assistance provided by Red Cross during the Hurricane Helene disaster. She explained that the Red Cross is always available during a crisis and has several ways of helping citizens
- **Frank Riley – Georgia Forestry**  
Mr. Riley explained he is applying for some grants for Ware County to be used during wildfires.
- **Erica Stembridge – Okefenokee Regional Library**  
Ms. Stembridge explained the designs are coming along for the library and construction should be starting by the spring.

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

**A. Ordinance 2025-01: Decrease Maximum Speed Limit on Fulford Road**

WWDA Director Jason Rubenbauer requested that this item be added to the agenda. Mr. Rubenbauer addressed the Commission in August 2024 regarding drivers speeding on Fulford Road. He stated there had been five (5) wrecks in the past six (6) years at the intersection of Fulford Road and Industrial Blvd, with several near misses. At that time the Commission discussed lowering the speed limit to the appropriate legal speed. This ordinance decreases the speed limit from 45 mph to 35 mph on Fulford Road from Scapa Road (Hwy 23) to Keen Drive. The Sheriff's Office gave an okay for the change. There was discussion that the lowered speed limit may not be enough to deter drivers from speeding. It was determined that the best way to get drivers to slow down would be to install a four-way stop at the intersection. To make this safe, especially at night, solar-powered, flashing lights need to be attached to the stop signs.

**Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

**B. Resolution 2025-03: Selection of the CDBG Engineer**

This item is to authorize the selection of the 2025 CDBG Engineering Services. Using score sheets mandated by the State of Georgia, a team consisting of Chairman Thrift, Commissioner Lucas, Planning and Codes Director Shubert, along with former Commissioners Pope and Hendricks scored all engineering firms that submitted bids. Staff at Southern Georgia Regional Commission tabulated the scores. Statewide Engineering received the highest score.

**Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

**C. Resolution of 2025-04: Reactivation of Recreation Board and Appointment of Board Members**

This resolution reactivates the Recreation Advisory Board and appoints the board members previously nominated by the 2024 Commission. Each appointee has been randomly assigned a one-, two-, or three-year term in order to stagger term end dates. With future appointments and reappointments, board members will serve a five-year term based on Ware County Code. The appointees and term dates are as follows:

- Post 1. Carlos Nelson: Jan 16, 2025 to Dec 31, 2025
- Post 2. Mike Thigpen: Jan 16, 2025 to Dec 31, 2027
- Post 3. John White: Jan 16, 2025 to Dec 31, 2026
- Post 4. Alesia Gibson: Jan 16, 2025 to Dec 31, 2027
- Post 5. Ramona Thrift: Jan 16, 2025 to Dec 31, 2025
- Post 6. Madelyn Tanner: Jan 16, 2025 to Dec 31, 2026
- Post 7. Martin Cheatham: Jan 16, 2025 to Dec 31, 2027

**Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

**D. Appointment: Waycross-Ware County Development Authority**

Thomas Wesley held County Seat #3 on the WWDA Board, but he had to relocated outside of Ware County due to employment. He term does not expire until December 31, 2027. WWDA is requesting that Daniel Morris be appointed to fill the unexpired term. Mr. Morris has served before and is eligible to be appointed.

**Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

**E. Appointment – Downtown Waycross Development Authority**

This appointment is to fill the post held by former Commissioner Jerry Pope whose term expired December 31, 2024. Per the DWDA Director, this is not an ex-officio position. A

sitting Commissioner or a citizen of Ware County can be appointed to this post. It is up to the discretion of the Commission who they would like to appoint.

**Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

**F. Rezoning Request: Intersection of Dorothy Street and East Blackshear Avenue**

The property in question is located at the intersection of Dorothy Street and East Blackshear Avenue, currently a part of parcel number "051 A04 059". The request is for the purpose of opening a retail business (Dollar General). The Waycross-Ware County Planning Commission unanimously approved the rezoning request during their regular called meeting on November 14, 2024. The Ware County Board of Commissioners held a public hearing on December 9, 2024 and a regular meeting immediately afterwards. The Commission discussed the rezoning; however, the item was tabled when Commissioner Lucas revealed that he owns the adjoining property. It was noted that he does not own the property under the rezoning request. The property is at the intersection across Dorothy Street from the Center Elementary school and diagonally across the intersection from the Waycross Health and Rehabilitation Nursing Home. Commissioner Burse felt the property was too close to residential areas, while other Commissioners felt it would be convenient shopping for those who might get caught by trains.

**Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

**G. Discussion of Roads for 2025 LMIG Application**

Interim County Manager Brooks explained the 2025 application is due by the end of January. The grant award totals \$1.19 million. County Manager presented a list of roads that had been approved for the 2022 LMIG project, but the list was changed.

Commissioner Tindall noted that he rode with Mr. Shubert to check out the roads on this list. He said these roads are short and all in the same area and would eliminate the need for the road graders to run in this particular section. Total cost for this area would be around \$800,000 and would be a good use of the money. The Chairman would like some roads in Manor to be patched that will not require full resurfacing.

**Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

**MANAGER COMMENTS:**

Interim County Manager Brooks gave an update on the State Street overpass. The expected let date is September 2025 with actual construction to hopefully begin by January 2026. The proposed plans for the Albany Avenue overpass were given to the Commission to look at while she explained that Phase 1 Environmental Assessment showed historical record of contamination by fuel tanks, so there will be a Phase 2 Assessment before right of way acquisition can begin. The cost of this testing will be around \$100,000, and the engineers are being careful to test only what is absolutely necessary. County Manager Appointee Shubert explained the design change plans that he just distributed to the Commission is without the retaining walls. It has pushed the ROW out 60 feet, but the cost will still be less than the \$3 million saved by removing the retaining walls. He said the Commission needs to give its approval before PDP can move forward with the design plan. A sheet with the timeline was also handed out. It looks like the let date for the Albany Avenue overpass will be April 2026. Interim Planning & Codes Director Dustin Minchew addressed the Commission and explained how the public can access the link to an online survey for the Comprehensive Transportation Study currently being conducted by Atlas Technical Consultants. The link on the County website will allow the citizens to give input and voice concerns regarding transportation needs for the City of Waycross and Ware County.

**COMMISSION COMMENTS:** None

**ADJOURN:**

Commissioner Lucas made a motion to adjourn the Work Session, with Commissioner Tindall seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The Work Session adjourned at 5:35 p.m.

Date proposed to be approved: July 14, 2025

  
Elmer Thrift, Chairman

  
Melissa Bennett, Deputy County Clerk

7/16/2025  
Date

