

**MINUTES
WORK SESSION
WARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MONDAY, AUGUST 11, 2025
3:30 p.m.**

The Ware County Board of Commissioners held a Work Session, Monday, August 11, 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.

CALL TO ORDER	Chairman Elmer Thrift
COMMISSIONERS PRESENT	Commissioner Barry Cox, Commissioner Leonard Burse (in at 3:38 p.m.), Commissioner Jon Tindall, and Commissioner Timmy Lucas
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT	None
STAFF PRESENT	County Manager James Shubert; Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Herzog; County Clerk Melinda Brooks
PRESS	Mittie Vaughn, Waycross Press Express
INVOCATION	The Invocation was given by Commissioner Tindall
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE	The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Elmer Thrift

GUEST SPEAKER(S):

Ricky Wade – Beaver Reapers

Mr. Ricky Wade explained the services that his company offers to local governments. He and his employees (mostly his sons) work full-time to eradicate beavers from properties. They bridge the gap between private property owners and the County for the desired services and property access permission. Services offered include habitat removal, water rehabilitation, and water mitigation. Mr. Wade explained he also has an aquatic excavator, which can remove 75% of the damage without damaging the pipe. He can offer a report for every action that his staff takes, such as the Generational Interruption Gap. The GIG report details location results, such as the number of beavers trapped and actually harvested, the number of dams excavated, the number of culverts opened, the number of males vs females, and the estimated conservative number of kits that will not make it to the dam-building status.

Commissioner Cox asked about the cost. Mr. Wade advised that they will come to a location for \$800 and work for one week. They set a trap at the entrance and exit, and do water mitigation and habitat removal. Commissioner Burse asked if the beavers would return after being quarantined. Mr. Wade said they would quarantine the site and do everything that could be done. He also said they work with the local road department. Commissioner Cox asked long before the County would have to spend another \$800 on the same location. Mr.

Wade explained again about doing everything possible in a week with mitigation removal. He also advised of the defender program, where they check spots four times a year. He gave a list of current customers, including Berrien, Wheeler, Irwin, and Pierce Counties, as well as the cities of Vidalia, Douglas, and Nashville. He told the Commission that Jason Rubenbauer of Waycross-Ware County Development Authority is also a customer.

Barbara Seidman and Kanisha Jones – Helping Hands Community Garden

Kanisha Jones addressed the Commission in reference to the Helping Hands Community Garden partnering with the County to receive assistance with grants. Ms. Barbara Seidman told the Commission that she runs A Helping Hand Outreach, Inc., which is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that aims to get kids off the street and learn to help themselves. Her goal is to teach the children to grow vegetables and to cook without using prepared foods. She says there are funding opportunities available and would like to work with the County to become a grant recipient. She has 2.5 acres at the Dead End Road, near Elmer Thrift Road and hopes to construct a building with a kitchen on this property. In addition to growing crops here, she also plans to raise chickens. As the children learn to grow, harvest, and cook, she would like them to be able to sell the food they raise and prepare.

Daniel Summers - GDOT

Mr. Summers spoke to the Commission about the proposed Restricted Crossing U-Turn (RCUT) on SR520 at SR122. He explained that the traffic rerouting using U-turns (RCUTs) has been proven to prevent crashes. Commissioner Cox raised some objections, including semi-trucks and log trucks that need to turn left, so they would probably use (and tear up) several local roads. Mr. Summers and his counterparts acknowledged SR 520 would have to be widened, along with the shoulders. Access would have to be restricted to some roads. GDOT would determine if the deceleration lane would need to be extended. Commissioner Cox asked if the RCUT would be cheaper than a traffic light. The GDOT representative explained that the intersection doesn't warrant a traffic signal. Traffic volume, not the number of crashes is what is used to determine if a traffic signal is needed. The Chairman asked what it would take to get an overpass bridge at the location and was told approximately \$20 million, which is significantly cheaper than the \$500,000 for the proposed RCUT.

Commissioner Lucas stated the County wants a traffic light. Mr. Summers said he understands, but the intersection has only half the volume needed for a light. He added that vehicles making right turns are not counted because a light is not needed to turn. Commissioner Burse asked if the Commission's support is needed. Mr. Summers said the Commission's support is needed. GDOT will not put in the RCUT without the support of the Commission. However, he added that the RCUT would not be replaced with a traffic signal. GDOT predicts more traffic rerouting than U-turns. The Commission decided to talk about the issue some more before making a decision. GDOT reiterated that a traffic light is not an option for that intersection.

AGENDA ITEMS:

A. Approve Contract with Thrift Brother, LLC for Short Street Paving

This item is to approve the contract with Thrift Brother Construction, LLC, who were awarded the bid on July 14, 2025. \$1,119,535.22 will be paid by 2025 LMIG. The County's responsibility will be \$231,576.93 to be paid out of SPLOST. This project

consists of short streets, the majority of which are located in Emerson Park. Some of these roads have 150-foot dirt sections of road between pavement. This paving project will move the graders out of the urban area. Barring inclement weather, the contractor has 240 days to complete the project.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

B. Approve Title Search, Appraisal, and Purchase of ROW for Wadley Road

This item is to request authorization for the County Attorney to complete title investigations on properties that will be purchased for the paving and realignment of Wadley Road. This request is also to authorize the County Manager to hire a certified appraiser to obtain appraisals of such properties and to purchase such properties at the appraised price. The authorization is to mirror the authorization given in July regarding the Albany Avenue Grade Separation (Overpass). The Commission noted that Banks Lane and Slash Pine Road are to be added to this authorization.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

C. Approve Road List for 2026 LMIG (\$500,000 Surplus)

The 2026 LMIG allocation is \$1,273,448.87 with a 10% county match. The Commission approved allocating a portion of the 2026 LMIG to the 2025 CDBG project in their regular meeting on March 10, 2025. The unallocated funds remaining in the 2026 LMIG (\$552,815.76) will be used on other roads. County Manager Shubert presented the Commission with a list of previously discussed roads. He explained that Grove Avenue was removed because the City has planned underground utility work within the next year, which would make resurfacing futile. Chairman Thrift instructed the manager to get prices. The listed roads include: Tara Road (resurface/patches), East Waring St. (resurface where sewer was installed), Needham Road (resurface in places), Bland Rd. (resurface), N. River Rd. (patches, resurface edges).

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

D. Surplus Request: Items from IT, Fire Rescue, and EMS

IT Director Carlos Jaime explained that the IT items from IT have been in storage for years and are not being used as they are out of date. They can be sold on govdeals.com. County Manager Shubert explained that the items from Fire Rescue and EMS have expired and can no longer be used. A fire department in North Carolina collects these expired items and ships to Mexico, where they are needed and can legally be used.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

E. Progress Reports from Waycross Ware County Development Authority

Jason Rubenbauer, President of WWDA, presented a progress report to the Commission, stating there are prospects on the horizon. He can't make announcements until the companies are ready. WWDA is pushing to develop the area around the Gus Karle Parkway, which still needs to be paved. He reminded the Commission of the GATX groundbreaking next Tuesday, August 19, at 9:30 a.m.

Chairman Thrift noted that the westside water goes through downtown Waycross, which means the canals will flood out, especially behind Wendy's and Gold Key Auto. He said the Army Corp of Engineers need to look into this. Mr. Rubenbauer said the city has been cleaning out the canals. There will be a release valve to help with the canal flow. The

Army Corps has met with the city and will return to inspect the canal behind Wendy's and Gold Key and make its recommendations. They will also be looking at Jax Box.

He is reaching out to companies to show the logistics of Waycross in relation to CSX and the ports of Savannah and Brunswick. The Simmons building was purchased privately one and a half years ago. He has had about half a dozen inquiries in the past couple of months. He said one drawback is that there is no spec building with adequate space. Some timber has been cut, which is good, as standing timber does not attract business. Commissioner Burse thanked Mr. Rubenbauer for his work and acknowledged that money is needed to attract big companies. He asked if curb and gutter or ditches are preferred for the paving of Gus Karle Parkway? Mr. Rubenbauer said it would depend on what business or workforce you want to attract. Right now, the workforce participation is at fifty percent (50%), so a workforce is needed as well. Commissioner Burse asked about the sale of the old WJH building. He was told it was purchased by the Simmons Law Firm.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

F. Resolution 2025-17: Authorizing Participation in ACCG-IRMA Supplemental Medical, Accident, and Disability Fund: First Responder PTSD Program

County Manager Shubert explained that the Ashley Wilson Act was passed and requires that federal, state, and local agencies are required to provide supplemental insurance for first responders to assist with copays, medicines, etc. associated with PTSD treatments. Commissioner Tindall asked if this is the cheapest/best deal for the insurance. County Manager Shubert said he has not been dealing with this, but the HR Director is not at the meeting. He offered to reach out to her at break.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

G. Approve Borrow Pit Option Agreements

This is a request to approve two borrow pit option agreements between Ware County and 1. Rusty Tatum, 2. David Tucker. Both sites are located on Ammons Road and are less than one acre in size. Public Works Director Larry Thrift said he has inspected both sites and says the dirt is of good quality. The landowner will be cutting some trees and preparing the land for him to dig the dirt.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

COMMISSIONER ITEMS: None

COUNTY MANAGER ITEMS: None

ADJOURN:

Commissioner Tindall made a motion to adjourn the Work Session, with Commissioner Lucas seconding the motion, which passed unanimously. The Work Session adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Date proposed to be approved: September 8, 2025


Melinda L. Brooks, County Clerk


Elmer Thrift, Chairman

9-10-2025
Date

