

**MINUTES
CALLED MEETING
WARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2025
4:30 p.m.**

The Ware County Board of Commissioners held a Called Meeting, Monday, September 22, 2025, at 4:30 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;
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT	Commissioner Jon Tindall; Commissioner Timmy Lucas
STAFF PRESENT	County Manager James Shubert; Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Herzog; County Clerk Melinda Brooks
PRESS	Danny Bartlett, WJH
INVOCATION	The invocation was given by Commissioner Burse
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE	The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Elmer Thrift

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Commissioner Burse made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Commissioner Cox seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

GUEST SPEAKER: Carlos Nelson – Ware County Board of Elections Supervisor

After his recent attendance at the Blue-Ribbon Commission, Carlos Nelson gave an update to the Commission on changes for the upcoming year. He noted there are three ways to change the existing equipment, all of which are expensive. The choices include: replacing all equipment, upgrading all equipment, or going with paper ballots. He explained that the State of Georgia pays for all the equipment, and the individual counties handle the maintenance. He encouraged the Commissioners to speak with their legislators and ACCG. All QR codes are off in July 2026, so they will have to be upgraded or replaced. If the choice is to go to paper ballots, Ware would need at least 20,000. However, during a primary, that number could increase to 45,000 when voters have to choose which party ballot to use. He explained the current equipment can be used for five (5) years, which can be up to 10 years with updates.

When questioned why the change, he stated that while QR codes have less than 1% error, they do not offer transparency. Commissioner Cox asked about Georgia paying for the equipment and Ware County paying for the maintenance. Mr. Nelson explained that the County pays \$2,000 for a basic contract for maintenance as needed. There is another contract available that is \$20,000 per year. By using the \$2,000 basic contract, the County saves \$18,000 annually. Commissioner Burse asked Board of Elections Chairman Danny Bartlett for his opinion. Mr. Bartlett said they always precheck

one precinct every time, and they have only found one (1) human error. He added that some people believe voting machines can be hacked, which leads them to feel their votes won't matter and discourages them from participating in elections. He said they cannot use what they have and follow what the law says about QR codes, as that would not have a good ending. Carlos Nelson is anticipating a repeal of this law. He is concerned about getting new equipment and getting all of the volunteers trained in time, as that is a long process.

Alberto Toll – 1204 Sequoia Circle

Mr. Toll wants to see a consolidation of the City and the County governments. He has been here seven to eight years and has seen the city of Waycross going down instead of up. He said he would like to see the County take over the City. The Chairman deferred to Assistant County Attorney Herzog. She explained that there is a lot to the consolidation of local governments. Consideration must be given to staff and the delivery of services to the citizens. She explained that both entities must agree before the matter goes to the state level. Then it would have to be put on a ballot for voters. She also advised that a Commission would have to be established to study the plan, noting that a significant amount of work goes into laying consolidation plans.

Commissioner Burse stated the County Commission had been in existence for over 72 years. He referred to the consolidation of the City and County school system, noting it was not due to economics, but rather a study put together by the Mayor.

Esdon Dieu – 1203 Baltimore

Mr. Dieu expressed his frustration at the lack of professional treatment and questioned the legality of some citations that he had received when his permit had not expired. Commissioner Burse explained that the County has no authority over the City operations, just as the City has no say over the County.

Russell Lee – 4237 Harley Mixon Rd.

Mr. Lee stated he would like to see the County take over the City and have the County Manager fire employees to save money. He added that the Sheriff's office could handle all law enforcement.

AGENDA ITEMS

A. Proposal from Roberts Civil Engineering, LLC to Handle Utility Coordination

County Manager James Shubert explained to the Commission that Roberts Civil Engineering submitted a proposal to coordinate with utility companies the relocation of poles and utilities that may conflict with the planned paving. This coordination would be for the paving project on the following roads: Wadley Road, Elmer Thrift Road, Slash Pine Road, Banks Lane, and Banks Road. Commissioner Burse asked what the firm would actually be doing. Mr. Shubert responded that the firm would consult with utility companies (water, sewer, etc.) to relocate poles, wires, water lines, etc. He said he does not have time to handle this in addition to his regular daily duties. This would normally fall under the responsibility of the County engineer, if the County had one. He explained that if the County owns the ROW, there is no charge to move the utilities. If the County does not own the ROW, then the expense falls to the County. Roberts Civil Engineering is the engineering firm for this paving project. The cost to add the utility Coordination would be \$42,000.00. There

Chairman Thrift asked if there was a motion on this item.

Commissioner Cox made a motion to table this item. Commissioner Burse seconded the motion.

The Chairman asked if there is any discussion on this item.

Chairman Thrift asked if all were in favor instead of asking for individual votes. All Commissioners could be heard voting in the affirmative, so the motion passed.

B. Public Works Purchase Request – Ammons Road Drainage Project and Inventory Stock

County Manager Shubert explained that this item is to request approval for the purchase of pipe materials related to the Ammons Road drainage improvement project. The total request for metal pipe is \$30,695.34. Stock inventory total is \$6,518.4. The project-specific total is \$24,176.94. The total request for concrete pipe, which is project-specific, is \$32,019.44.

Chairman Thrift clarified that Ammons Road is not being paved. Public Works Director Larry Thrift said there have been numerous complaints about the drainage issues, so this pipe purchase is to fix the issue. He said the concrete or metal pipe would work. He noted if the road is paved in the future, it is likely the concrete pipe could be torn out. Discussion was to use concrete pipes in the cross drains and metal pipes for the side drains.

Chairman Thrift asked if there was a motion on this item.

Commissioner Burse made a motion to approve the purchase of pipe: concrete pipe for the cross drain and metal pipe for the side drain. Commissioner Cox seconded the motion.

Chairman Thrift asked if all were in favor rather than polling the Commissioners individually for their vote. All Commissioners could be heard voting in the affirmative, so the motion passed.

C. ESG – Industrial Water Park Connection

Commissioner Burse noted he would like to have a discussion about this item, which is in Commissioner Lucas's district. Due to Commissioner Lucas and ESG representatives not being present at the meeting, it was decided not to discuss this agenda item.

D. Approve MOU between Ware County Board of Commissioners and UGA Extension

County Manager Shubert explained that this is a request to renew the MOU, which is to be updated and signed every five (5) years. It was last signed in 2020.

Chairman Thrift asked if there was a motion on this item.

Commissioner Cox made a motion to approve the MOU between the Ware County Board of Commissioners and UGA Extension. Commissioner Burse seconded the motion.

The Chairman asked if there was any discussion.

Commissioner Burse said he attended the recent 4-H banquet. He noted the recently repaired AC works really well. The other improvements look good.

Chairman Thrift asked if all were in favor rather than polling the Commissioners individually for their vote. All Commissioners could be heard voting in the affirmative, so the motion passed.

Manager's Comments:

County Manager Shubert brought up the R-CUT on Albany Avenue, but thought it best to wait until the October meeting to discuss it when all Commissioners would be in attendance. He noted that Veterans' Day has been discussed to add to the list of County holidays. He knows that Commissioners Tindall and Lucas support adding it as a holiday.

He noted that all road projects are moving along. The first part of the 2023 CDBG is almost finished. Bid request for Katie Lane & Dusty Lane is about to go out. This is the second part of the 2023 CDBG project. The County Attorney is working on researching titles for ROW on the Albany Avenue overpass project. There will be a pre-construction conference on Friday, September 26, for the short roads project. He also noted that in phase 2 of projects on Screven Avenue and Lakeview Drive, he will meet with the City Manager to see whether the City will split the \$1.6 million cost. The drainage design on Lakeview Drive was the cause of the increase in the project cost.


ADJOURN

Commissioner Burse made a motion to adjourn the Called Meeting at 6:02 p.m. Commissioner Cox seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Date proposed to be approved: December 8, 2025


Elmer Thrift, Chairman

ATTEST:


Melinda L. Brooks, County Clerk


Date

[SEAL]

