

**MINUTES
WORK SESSION
WARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2025
3:30 p.m.**

The Ware County Board of Commissioners held a Work Session, Monday, November 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, Commissioner Jon Tindall, and Commissioner Timmy Lucas (via phone)
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT	None
STAFF PRESENT	County Manager James Shubert; Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Herzog; County Clerk Melinda Brooks
PRESS	Mittie Vaughan – Ware 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):

John Randall Smith & Sandy Haut – Request for Pickleball Courts

Mr. Smith and Mrs. Haut explained the need for pickleball courts in the County and included a slideshow in their presentation. Although he is a relative newcomer to this activity, Mr. Smith explained how this fast-growing sport has made a huge economic impact in local communities that host tournaments. The participants are spending money on fuel, food, shopping, and hotels. Pickleball is a sport that is good for all ages, and especially keeps the retired community active. Mrs. Haut told the Commission that she has been playing since before COVID. The only local court is in the city, but tree roots have caused cracks to form. She and other local players travel to Brantley and Glynn Counties to play. They will even travel to Northeast Florida to participate in tournaments. Both noted that they have met people at the Monroe Park who were traveling and searched for a local pickleball court online. This shows a need for more local courts. Recreation Department Director Lance Adamson addressed the Commission, stating that pickleball courts have been in the plans for some time. He will submit an application for a recreation grant once it becomes available in June 2026 to help fund this project. All of the Commissioners agreed that they support the idea of building pickleball courts at the Trembling Earth complex.

AGENDA ITEMS:

A. ESG – Industrial Park Water Connection

County Manager James Shubert told the Commission that this item has been carried over from the previous agenda. He explained that Commissioners Burse and Lucas met with ESG representatives, so he put this item on the agenda to clear up any information. He noted that updated plans and an MOU are needed before the Commission can proceed with final approval. Commissioner Tindall told the Chairman that the ESG engineer, Charlie Bridges, was present and asked if he could speak to the Commission. Commissioner Tindall noted that some of the concerns of the County regarded cuts in the roads and citizens' driveways, but he understood that ESG would bore under the roads and driveways. Mr. Bridges stated that it was correct. He also said they have discussed having language in the MOU to address any damage to County roads as a result of a line break or similar issue; the burden of the repair costs would be on the City. Commissioner Tindall also noted that it had been mentioned that if the utility ever needed to be moved for a reason such as widening of the road, then that expense would also fall on the City. Mr. Bridges said that wording is being included. He noted the City Attorney is working on finalizing the MOU and will be sending to the County Attorney.

Chairman Thrift asked Commissioner Burse if he is satisfied with the route of the water connection. Commissioner Burse stated that he and Commissioner Lucas met with Mr. Bridges and the City Manager. He stated he supports the project, understands the need for it, but there were two routes on the original drawing. He said that when speaking with Mr. Bridges and others who are involved in the project, they explained to him why the proposed route was chosen and the difficulties encountered with the alternate route. He also wanted assurance that there would be no road cuts and everything would be bored underground instead. Lastly, once the MOU has been signed, have a campaign to let the citizens know what will be going on. ESG Engineer Charlie Bridges stated that once the contractor has been selected, if the Commission would like, a town hall-style meeting could be held for those citizens who will be affected. Representatives from the City, ESG, and the contractor would be on hand to answer questions regarding timing, etc. Commissioner Lucas said he agreed with what Commissioner Burse said. He believes this project is a good idea as long as the lines are laid correctly. Commissioners Burse and Tindall mentioned they both represent citizens in the City and County. Both spoke about relieving stagnant water issues within the industrial park. Commissioner Cox stated his only concern had been about the water pressure in the industrial park, but this project will hopefully help that. The item will not carry over as the MOU is not ready.

B. Resolution 2025-22: Approve Tri-County Resolution Supporting Perimeter Road

County Manager James Shubert told the Commission he understood that Brantley and Pierce County Commissions had already approved the resolution at their respective monthly meetings the previous week; however, he had not received a copy of the other counties' signature page yet. Commissioner Tindall spoke to clarify to the public that the counties (Pierce, Brantley, and Ware) held a meeting a couple of weeks before to look at a concept map of the perimeter road. He specified that the Commission was not voting on an exact path of a perimeter road. It would ultimately be up to the Georgia Department of Transportation to determine where any future perimeter road would potentially be constructed. Instead, they would be voting on the concept (idea) of the perimeter road. He cautioned anyone looking at the map with lines on it to refrain from calling and fussing because it looks like it is going through your yard. The reality is the final path will be up to GDOT. He also noted that the project would be large and lengthy, which means

several people present would most likely not live to see it come to fruition. He reiterated that this agenda item is just for the concept of a perimeter road.

Chairman Thrift confirmed Commissioner Tindall's statement. He said the Commission is not saying this is the route. He noted that the route would be whatever GDOT designs if they can "get it on the table for DOT" and other state officials to see. He stated that is the purpose of the resolution. County Clerk Melinda Brooks read the resolution for the record. Commissioner Tindall noted that it is a bold move to try to bring the three counties together. He mentioned that in the past few months, the County, City, and BOE have begun to meet to enhance communication between the three entities. He noted that counties have borders, but it is a good thing when they can be unified. Lastly, he mentioned a project from several years ago that was fully supported until it was not. The City and County wound up pushing away \$70 million for a project, which has them in the position of still trying to get back in good standing with GDOT. The State Street overpass originally had a preliminary engineering start date of 2032. To try to regain ground with GDOT, the County and City Commissions paid \$5 million each towards the overpass. Construction should begin in the spring of 2026. He stated the perimeter road project is far enough outside of the city limits that it will allow for an expansion of services, industry, and housing.

Commissioner Cox stated he wanted it known that the Commission was not voting to build a perimeter road right now, but was putting something in motion. He noted that he may never get to drive on it. He has had a lot of calls from people who misunderstand because they think something is being done right now. He said it may come down to just changing some streets around in Waycross, but a move needs to be made somewhere to get started. Commissioner Burse noted the Commission did not come up with the idea of a perimeter road out of the blue. He explained that the traffic, especially truck traffic, has increased so that a change is necessary. He expects to hear people saying the road isn't needed because it will affect them personally, which he understands. He explained that they are tasked with looking at what is best for the overall community, not just one individual. Commissioner Lucas expressed his support for a perimeter road, stating it is needed.

County Manager Shubert told the Commission that he thought it was important that it be known that the Commission did not just come up with this idea. According to the initial findings of the comprehensive transportation study, it shows a 90% feasibility rate for constructing a perimeter road. He noted that the transportation study included the feasibility study of a perimeter road, which was supported by the findings. Chairman Thrift stated the Commission had voted to have a transportation study and paid an extra \$50,000 for this feasibility study. The plan has been ongoing for well over a year. He also asked the County Manager to check with the City manager regarding a resolution for support.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

C. Approve Air Evac Lease

The County Manager explained that Air Evac EMS, Inc. has submitted a request to lease a designated area located behind the Industrial Park Fire Station, the same parcel they had previously leased in 2009. The purpose of the lease is to put a manufactured home on the property to serve as sleeping quarters for the staff when they are not on duty. The Air

Evac helicopter will be available 24 hours per day. Fire Chief Meadows, who also serves as the airport manager, assured the Commission that there will be no loss of fuel sales. This lease is the same set-up that was in place years ago. He explained work would begin on the land within the next 24-48 hours. The manufactured home will have to meet County regulations.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

D. Board Appointment: WWDA Seat 2 Kim Bennett Callahan

County Manager Shubert explained that Waycross Ware County Development Authority Seat 2 will be up for appointment as of December 31, 2025, as the current board member, Candice Moody Rice, has reached her term limits. WWDA advertised the vacancy and received a number of applications. The WWDA Board of Directors reviewed these and nominated Ms. Kim Bennett Callahan to fulfill this role. Her term would run from January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2029.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

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

County Manager Shubert told the Commission that this request is to approve a proposal submitted by Roberts Civil Engineering, LLC to coordinate with utility companies for the relocation of any utilities that conflict with the planned road paving and to ensure the successful completion of the paving project on Wadley Road, Elmer Thrift Road, Slash Pine Road, Banks Lane, and Banks Road. The cost for the additional scope of work is \$42,000 and would be added to the existing paving contract. Mr. Shubert stated the reason for the request is to free him up for his daily operation duties. Currently, the County does not have an inspection coordinator. During the discussion, it was noted that if the utilities (including the light poles) are moved before construction begins, the project will

move faster. If the project is shortened, the price will be decreased. The Commission also discussed that the price of having an engineering firm pay for this utility coordination would more than cover the salary of an on-staff person to handle the same duties.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

F. Resolution 2025-23: Public Defender Contract – First Half of 2026 Calendar Year

Chairman Thrift read the agenda item and noted that this is a recurring item. County Manager Shubert explained that the Public Defender contract runs on the calendar year (January – December), but the County budget is on the fiscal year calendar (July – June). For this reason, the contract is only approved for 6 months at a time.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

G. Approve Contract with Thrift Brothers, LLC for 2023 CDBG Paving -Katie & Dusty Lanes

Due to his connection to Thrift Brothers, LLC, the Chairman passed this item to Vice Chairman Barry Cox to handle while he sat out of the discussion. County Manager Shubert told the Commission the bid for this project was awarded at the October 27, 2025, meeting. This item is to approve the \$270,217.87 contract.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

H. Award Bid for Two (2) Motor Graders

Three bids were received for the purchase of two road graders. The lowest bid was

received from Yancey Brothers (Caterpillar) for purchase at \$307,836.00 with a maintenance contract. The lowest lease option was also received from Yancey Brother for \$4,611.00 per month. Vehicle Maintenance Supervisor Michael Carrin told the Commission that four of the current graders have more than 10,000 hours. Between February and today, more than \$95,000 has been spent on repairs. The two new graders only require the blades and tires to be changed, along with oil changes. One is currently out of service, and the repair is running at \$8,000, which is in excess of the \$95,000 already accrued in repairs. Commissioner Cox noted that due to the electronics on the newer models, the dealer has to handle some of the repairs. He also noted that Yancey has a store in Waycross, so it is a local dealer. The cost of buying both machines outright is \$615,672, and the County would own both machines with several thousand hours on them. The cost of leasing is \$553,320 after a 5-year lease, and the County would turn the machines in for new ones. The difference in price is \$62,352.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

I. Award Bid for Two (2) Tractors with Two (2) 7' Mowers

County Manager Shubert told the Commission that five bids were received for this item. The lowest bid was from Dixon Tractor for a 75 HP Mahinda tractor and 7 ft rotary mower in the amount of \$88,024 per tractor/mower combo. The next closest bid was from Kingline Equipment listing a New Holland Tractor with mower for \$107,050.38. These mowers are not to replace the vendor who is mowing the roadways throughout the County.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

J. Award Bid for One (1) Dump Truck

County Manager Shubert told the Commission that this item is to purchase a new dump truck with an Ox Body. It will replace an old dump truck that will be sold. The lowest bid was from Tom Nehl of Waycross for a 2027 Freightliner in the amount of \$155,494.00. The lowest bid was for a 2026 Peterbilt from Atlanta for \$169,080.08.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

K. Bid Award for One (1) Excavator

County Manager Shubert explained to the Commission that the lowest bid to purchase an excavator was from National Equipment Dealers, LLC for a Hyundai for \$195,500. The lowest bid for a lease option is from Yancey Brothers for a Caterpillar in the amount of \$3,989.88 per month. Purchase price is \$264,840.00. Vehicle Maintenance Supervisor Carrin told the Commission that the current excavator (a Hyundai) has over 8,000 hours on it. He also said the same operator has been running the excavator since its purchase, and he is known to take very good care of the equipment. Commissioner Cox noted that he prefers to work with a local dealer. Commissioner Tindall asked David Pinter of Yancey Brothers what the breaking point (number of hours) is for a piece of equipment. Mr. Pinter stated that it is dependent on the operators, whether there are several different operators or a single operator. He advised that a Caterpillar excavator should get up to 8,000 to 10,000 hours.

Chairman Thrift stated that for longevity purposes, a Caterpillar or Komatsu would be the better choice due to the durability of the machines. He prefers Komatsu. Commissioner Cox stated during the discussion that he prefers to work with a local dealer. The purchase

price for the Caterpillar is \$264,840, and the Komatsu is \$259,169.00. The total lease price for the Caterpillar is \$239,392.80, which is lower than the purchase price of the Komatsu and the Caterpillar.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

L. Request to Establish 120-day Moratorium on Alcohol Delivery Service

Code Department Director Dave Hanson spoke to the Commission about his request for a moratorium on alcohol delivery service. He was contacted by a consulting service about ordinances in Ware County governing this service. There are currently only state laws in place, but nothing within the County. He is asking for a 120-day moratorium, which would halt permits for this service and allow time to research current laws and establish any needed County ordinances. Lt. Hanson explained the service would allow home delivery of sealed alcoholic beverages from a grocery store or package store, possibly by a third party. Because the City allows on and off-premises sales on Sunday, but the County only allows on-premises sales on Sunday, he felt that this is an area that needs clarification. Commissioner Burse asked about determining the age of the purchaser who is requesting delivery. County Manager Shubert explained that Georgia already has provisions in the laws for circumstances like that. He also explained that on-premises consumption of alcoholic beverages refers to a bar or restaurant, while off-premises consumption refers to a package or liquor store. Commissioner Cox recommended carrying the item over.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

M. Resolution 2025-24: Approve Ware County Safety Incentive Pay

County Manager Shubert explained to the Commission that the resolution approves safety incentive pay for all employees, including the Commission, based on the employees' safety history and work-related claims. Full-time employees receive \$125, and part-time employees receive \$65. The amount is included in the general fund budget, and it is reimbursed through the workers' compensation refund at the end of the calendar year.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

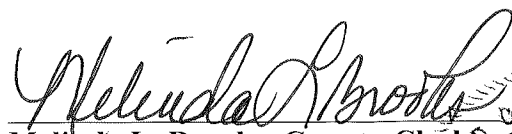
COUNTY MANAGER COMMENTS: None


COMMISSION COMMENTS: None

ADJOURN:

Commissioner Burse made a motion to adjourn the Work Session, with Commissioner Tindall seconding the motion, which passed unanimously. The Work Session adjourned at 5:48 p.m.

Date proposed to be approved: December 8, 2025


Melinda L. Brooks, County Clerk


Elmer Thrift, Chairman

12-11-2025
Date