

**MINUTES
CALLED MEETING
WARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MONDAY, JULY 30, 2026
10:00 a.m.**

The Ware County Board of Commissioners held a Called Meeting, Monday, July 30, 2026, at 10:00 a.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
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT	Commissioner Timmy Lucas
STAFF PRESENT	County Manager James Shubert; County Clerk Melinda Brooks
PRESS	None
INVOCATION	Commissioner Tindall
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE	Chairman Elmer Thrift

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion was made by Commissioner Burse to approve the agenda as presented, with Commissioner Tindall seconding the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Leonard Burse-aye; Commissioner Jon Tindall-aye; Commissioner Barry Cox-aye, Commissioner Timmy Lucas-ABSENT; and Chairman Elmer Thrift-aye.

GUEST SPEAKER: **None**

AGENDA ITEMS

A. Discuss 2026 Millage Rate

County Manager Shubert asked the Commission to give staff direction on what they want to do with the millage rate, but explained there would be no vote at this meeting. He explained the millage rate has been reduced from 15.677 in 2016 to 11.502 mills in 2025, a reduction of 4.175 mills or approximately 26.6%. The Commission adopted the FY2027 General Funds budget of \$34,415,351.00, which is approximately \$1.6 million greater than the expected revenues. Staff is in process of closing out the FY2026 budget year. Preliminary figures show expenditures are projected to exceed collected revenues by \$1.2 million. Final figures are subject to final reconciliation and audit adjustments, current projections indicate the County will have experienced two consecutive years in which expenditures have exceeded revenues.

Tax Commissioner Roger Collins noted that the current millage rate is 11.502. New growth is at 1.8. He spoke about exemptions and growth. Ware County has had a freeze in place for several years, which does hurt revenues. However, when a homesteaded property is sold, the frozen exemption does not transfer to the new owner. The new homeowner will pay property taxes based on the newly assessed fair market value of the home. Mr. Collins said the rollback rate is 11.419, which is a .083 mill reduction. At the request of the Commission, he calculated a .5 mill increase (11.919 mills), which would give an increase of \$1,810,934. An increase of 1.0 mill (12.419 mills) would increase revenues by \$2,436,053.00. He said the rollback rate is based on new values. Although there are some appeals left to be heard, the threshold has been met to set the millage rate.

Commissioner Burse asked about the millage rate rollback and whether to go up or down. Tax Commissioner Collins explained that, as a Ware County taxpayer himself, he will always recommend adopting the roll back rate. He noted that once the millage rate is set, he will apply for the Georgia Homestead Tax Relief Grant (HTRG). This grant provides eligible homeowners with an \$18,000 reduction in the assessed value of their home. However, he clarified that not all counties will receive this grant, as it will be distributed on a first come, first served basis. For qualifying homeowners, the grant would result in a \$750 reduction for County homeowners and a \$500 reduction for City homeowners. The state would reimburse Ware County for approximately \$2 million to offset these reduced tax bills, with \$844 million allocated statewide for this program.

B. Approval of the Rural Fire Defense Cooperative Lease Agreement and MOU with Georgia Forestry

County Manager James Shubert explained to the Commission that this Memorandum of Understanding is necessary for each fire department that has loaned or leased equipment from the Georgia Forestry Commission. Because of the intermingling of structures and wildland fuels in areas of Ware County, the objectives of Ware County and the Georgia Forestry Commission are inseparable, to minimize loss of life and property as a result of uncontrolled fire. The purposes of this MOU are to provide for closes possible cooperation on mutual objective and to clarify the purpose and responsibilities of each organization.

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

Commissioner Tindall made a motion to accept the Rural Fire Defense Cooperative Lease and Agreement and MOU with Georgia Forestry. Commissioner Cox seconded the motion.

Discussion: None

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Leonard Burse-aye; Commissioner Jon Tindall-aye; Commissioner Timmy Lucas-ABSENT; Commissioner Barry Cox-no; and Chairman Elmer Thrift-no.

C. Approval to Add Resurfacing of 8 Mile Post Road and Associated Patching to the Beach Road/Lucy Moore Road Resurfacing Project

County Manager James Shubert reminded the Commission of discussion at previous meeting of agreement to swap the ends of 8 Mile Post Road scheduled for resurfacing. 8 Mile Post Road is also known as Needham Road and Gibbs Street depending on the portion of road in question. After the meeting, Mr. Shubert spoke with the engineer regarding working on the end called Gibbs Street,

beginning at South Plant Ave. The engineer agreed that this swap in location on the same road could be done, but nothing was put in writing and given to the contractor. When Mr. Shubert checked on the road project, the contractor had already started on the end of the street as listed in the bid and on the contract. The engineer did not remember to change the order. County Manager Shubert asked the Commission to approve a change order to add the resurfacing of 8 Mile Post Road from Huckleberry Road to Old Shop Road, along with the patching of four locations on 8 Mile Post Road between Old Shop Road and South Plant Avenue, to the existing bid package for the Lucy Moore Road and Beach Road resurfacing project. The Engineer's Opinion of Probable Construction Cost for the additional work is \$310,206.96. Funding for this project would be provided through the 2025 Local Road Assistance (LAR) Program, which has no match.

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

Commissioner Burse made a motion to approve resurfacing of 8 Mile Post Road and Associated Patching to the Beach Road/Lucy Moore Road Resurfacing Project for \$310,206.96. Commissioner Cox seconded the motion.

Discussion: None

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Leonard Burse-aye; Commissioner Jon Tindall-aye; Commissioner Timmy Lucas-ABSENT; Commissioner Barry Cox-aye; and Chairman Elmer Thrift-aye.

D. Discuss adding Left Turn Signals on Augusta Avenue at Albany Avenue

County Manager Shubert told the Commission he had someone question him about adding left turn signals to the traffic light at the Augusta Avenue and Albany Avenue intersection. He said he got a price of \$160,000 to add the turn signal. He mentioned about possibly making it a 3-way stop intersection. Chairman Thrift said he sat at the intersection after the manager had contacted him and noticed that it can be hard to make a left turn from Augusta Avenue onto Albany Avenue. He advised the County Manager to look into pricing. He told him to check on widening a portion of Augusta Avenue for the bridge project.

COUNTY MANAGER REPORT:

County Manager Shubert advised the Commission he and the Chairman had been speaking to the affected parties on the Albany Avenue grade separation project (overpass). Most are interested in selling. He noted the appraisals were done in 2024 and may need to be updated. He noted that some properties will need appraisers with different certification levels, such as DOT Level 4, to determine value of business over value of land. He noted that his goal is to have some signed property agreements by mid-August.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Commissioner Tindall told the Commission that he recently represented Ware County when he attended the National Association of Counties (NACO) Conference in New Orleans. He was able to network with County Commissioners from across the United States and picked up several good ideas that he will be sharing with his fellow Commissioners. He also noted that this trip was made possible by a scholarship program through the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) which will reimburse all expenses.

Commissioner Cox noted he was able to tour the new Waycross Middle School, which is a nice facility for our youth. He asked for an update on Thigpen Road. County Manager Shubert stated the deeds and plats have been sent to the attorneys. The County is currently waiting on bids.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Tindall made a motion to adjourn the called meeting. Commissioner Burse seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 11:34 a. m.

Date proposed to be approved: August 10, 2026

ATTEST:


Melinda E. Brooks, County Clerk


Elmer Thrift, Chairman
8-12-2026
Date

