



Coweta County Board of Commissioners

22 East Broad Street
Newnan, GA 30263
www.coweta.ga.us

Called Meeting/Work Session

Minutes

Shannon Zerangue
Fran Collins
770.254.2601

February 27, 2025

9:00 AM

Commission Chambers
37 Perry Street
Newnan, GA 30263

Coweta County Board of Commissioners

Roll Call/Call to Order

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Bill McKenzie	District 2 - Chairman	Present
John Reidelbach	District 4 - Vice Chairman	Present
Jeff Fisher	District 1	Present
Bob Blackburn	District 3	Present
Alphonso Smith	District 5	Present
Michael Fouts	County Administrator	Present
Kelly Mickle	Assistant County Administrator	Present
Sandy Wisenbaker	Assistant County Administrator	Present
Tod Handley	Public Works Administrator	Present
Nathan Lee	County Attorney	Absent
Shannon Zerangue	County Clerk	Present

The Honorable Board of Commissioners of Coweta County, Georgia met in Called Meeting/Work Session on Thursday, February 27, 2025.

Meeting Called to Order

Chairman McKenzie called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.
Chairman McKenzie led the Pledge of Allegiance.
Invocation was given by Commissioner Smith.

Regular Session

1. Discussion Regarding the Rules Governing Commission Meetings

Chairman McKenzie explained that he would like to continue any discussion regarding the rules governing Commission meetings to a later date to give the Board members time to review any changes to the rules that they might wish to see.

Administrator Fouts explained that at the Commission meeting held on January 23, 2025, the Board voted to continue the Public Hearing regarding the rules governing the Commission meetings until March 4, 2025.

Following a brief discussion, it was the consensus of the Board for each Commissioner to send any of their requested edits to the rules to Administration staff prior to the Public Hearing scheduled on Tuesday, March 4, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.

2. Discussion Regarding the Board's Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Expectations

Administrator Fouts explained that staff is seeking feedback from the Board regarding their goals and expectations for Fiscal Year 2026. This will enable staff to calculate any associated costs for inclusion in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. He further explained that personnel and benefits comprise approximately 70% of the County's operating budget.

Commissioner Reidelbach explained that he would like to see each department director present details regarding their staffing needs versus their capital needs.

Administrator Fouts explained that the Administrators and the Finance team meet annually with each department director. During these meetings, operating, personnel, and capital needs are discussed in detail. The budget team works collaboratively with various departments to vet requests (i.e. Fleet Maintenance regarding requests for vehicles). At the annual Commission meetings regarding the proposed budget, any recommended items are presented to the Board for consideration/inclusion in the budget.

Commissioner Reidelbach stated that he would like the directors of departments that constitute the largest portion of the budget (with the exception of personnel and benefits) to personally appear before the Board to present details and defense of their budget requests. He believes it is important for the public to hear these requests directly from the department director. He cited Fire Rescue, Sheriff's office, and the Public Works department as the three (3) main departments that he feels should address the Board regarding their budget requests.

Chairman McKenzie explained that he feels it is also important to hear from the constitutional officers regarding their budget requests.

Commissioner Blackburn expressed that the Board also has to keep in mind that the County's smaller departments also have budgetary needs.

Administrator Fouts explained that it is not mandated but the department directors and

constitutional officers are invited and always welcome to attend the annual Commission meetings regarding the budget.

In response to a question from Commissioner Fisher regarding the attendance of only the three (3) departments mentioned, Commissioner Reidlebach explained that he would like to hear directly from these departments because they are the largest County departments with sizable budgets and budget requests.

Administrator Fouts and Assistant Administrator Mickle explained that Facilities Management also has a large capital budget because they are responsible for all the County's buildings.

Chairman McKenzie explained that he feels that it would be advantageous for the citizens to hear from the department directors regarding their needs to continue to provide services. He is aware that the County has always operated on a lean budget, but he is not certain that the citizens know this.

Administrator Fouts explained that staff is seeking the Board's goals, desires, and expectations for Fiscal Year 2026. He explained that the proposed Fiscal Year 2025 budget was reduced because the millage rate adopted by the Board would not support the recommended budget. This included a reduction of operating expenses, personnel, and capital projects.

Chairman McKenzie and Commissioner Reidelbach recommended adding the services that were reduced in Fiscal Year 2025 back into the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

Commissioner Smith expressed his concerns because Parks and Recreation gymnasium hours are inconsistent. He has heard numerous complaints about this, and he feels that recreation is intrinsically valuable to school-age children.

Ms. Mickle explained that the Parks and Recreation department operates with minimal staff, and it was necessary to reduce gym hours in Fiscal Year 2025 because of the adopted millage rate.

Administrator Fouts explained that for many years the Parks and Recreation department has requested additional staffing, but these requests have rarely been included in the budget because the established millage rates would not fund them.

Commissioner Reidelbach recommended highlighting the cuts that were made to the Fiscal Year 2025 budget. He also explained that HB 581, which caps increases in taxable value of properties, will most likely have an impact on the Board's budget and millage rate decisions for Fiscal Year 2026.

Public Works Administrator Handley explained that staff is not only seeking direction about items that were cut from the Fiscal Year 2025 budget, but also, is asking if the Board desires any new items to be included in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

In response to a question from Chairman McKenzie, Mr. Handley explained that his staff has received fewer than ten (10) complaints regarding the reduced hours and closure of some compactor sites.

The Board discussed adding compactor site hours back into the budget for Fiscal Year 2026, a potential law that may require a full-time veterinarian at Animal Services, whether veterinary technicians could be utilized as a cost-saving measure, and the utilization of offenders at the Work Release Center (WRC) to accomplish various County tasks/projects.

Finance Director Hans Wilson explained that the budget is constrained by revenues. Because of economic conditions, the County is no longer experiencing the type of growth in sales tax that it has experienced over the past few years.

Commissioner Blackburn explained that the County maintains a fund balance, and it is affected when budget amendments are required.

Assistant Administrator Mickle explained that the General Fund fund balance also provides the Board with flexibility when or emergencies arise.

In response to a question from Commissioner Reidelbach, Administrator Fouts and Assistant Administrator Mickle explained that the General Fund fund balance has been reduced for the past two (2) years because the adopted millage rate has not been able to financially support the approved budget.

3. Discussion Regarding Filming of Board/Authority Meetings

Chairman McKenzie explained that he feels that filming/streaming of the County's various boards/authorities would be beneficial to the Board since they cannot attend every meeting.

Administrator Fouts provided a brief history of the County's standardization of the agendas and minutes software. He explained that because of the restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board of Zoning Appeals meetings were streamed. With the end of the pandemic, the Commission meetings are the only meetings currently being streamed. Many of the Board's boards/authorities do not conduct their meetings in the Commission Chambers. This presents a challenge with staffing and audio/visual equipment for those other locations. He further explained that several years ago, the County partnered with the Central Education Center (CEC) to utilize their students to film/stream the Commission meetings. This provides a great opportunity for those students to garner experience in the A/V field.

The Board discussed the importance of them being able to view audience reactions, comments, etc. from other meetings, the possibility of utilizing students from the Central Education Center (CEC) to film meetings other than the Commission meetings, and Commissioner Fisher recommended that the Board and staff consider using an A/V system that anyone can operate instead of hiring/paying additional staff.

Following a brief discussion, it was the consensus of the Board to instruct staff to begin with the Board of Zoning Appeals meetings for filming/streaming because they are a recommending board to the Commission.

4. Discussion Regarding an EMS Special Tax District

Administrator Fouts explained that in 2015, the County began providing fire-based emergency medical services (EMS). The EMS program is funded by taxes levied on both incorporated and unincorporated tax districts. Staff is requesting that the Board consider establishing a countywide special EMS tax district similar to the Fire tax district that was established in 2007.

Assistant Administrator Mickle explained that approximately \$3.85 million is required in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to subsidize the EMS program. Based upon the 2024 tax digest, this equates to approximately 0.4 mills.

Following a brief discussion regarding providing additional transparency to the citizens on their property tax statements, it was the consensus of the Board to instruct staff to proceed with the process to establish a special countywide EMS tax district.

5. Update Regarding Animal Services

Communications Manager Cathy Wickey explained that an open house at Coweta County Animal Services was recently held. This included the roll-out of the concept plans of the new Animal Adoption Center. Following the open house event, an online community survey was made available for the citizens to provide input regarding the design plans for the new Adoption Center. During the two weeks that the survey was open to the public, 165 responses/results were received. She highlighted the following major themes and associated responses:

Facility Size and Capacity:

- Many citizens expressed concerns that the facility is too small to accommodate the current volume of animals.
- Concerns were received that the facility's drawing does not show dimensions to know the size of the room.
- Citizens expressed that there is a need for more kennels for both dogs and cats,

including larger spaces for the animals.

- Suggestions were made to expand the outdoor areas for exercise and enrichment.
- Requests were received for larger food storage areas.
- Suggestions to add fencing, walking paths, and obstacle courses to the outdoor areas were received.

Kennel and Adoption Center Design:

- There was a strong preference for indoor/outdoor access for kennels to allow animals to relieve themselves and get fresh air.
- Requests for better noise reduction, especially to separate dog and cat areas to reduce stress, were received.
- Suggestions were received for larger, more comfortable enclosures for both dogs and cats.
- Requests were received for more bonding/adoption rooms and spaces for meet and greets.

Veterinary Services and Medical Facilities:

- Many citizens advocated for an on-site veterinarian to ensure animals receive timely medical care.
- Requests for a designated medical/surgical area for spay/neuter services were received.
- Concerns were expressed regarding past veterinary shortages and the need for dedicated medical staff.

Location and Accessibility:

- Several responses suggested a more centralized location with better visibility and accessibility.
- Concerns were expressed that the location might not attract as many visitors if it is too remote.

Adoption Process and Community Engagement:

- Requests were received for a more user-friendly adoption process, including better online visibility for available pets.
- Suggestions for a "Dog for a Day" or weekend foster program to increase adoptions were received.
- A desire for more community adoption events and public engagement like outdoor

concerts was expressed.

- Requests were received for an educational/resource center to promote responsible pet ownership.

Noise Reduction and Stress Management:

- Several respondents emphasized the importance of soundproofing to reduce noise from barking.
- Calming music, dimmable lighting, and environmental enrichment to reduce stress were recommended.

Ms. Wickey highlighted the following positive feedback from the online survey:

- General enthusiasm for a new and improved facility to address overcrowding
- Appreciation for the County's investment in animal welfare
- Support for increased space and better conditions compared to the current shelter
- Recognition of staff and volunteers' dedication to animal care

Ms. Wickey also noted that the following concerns and areas for improvement were received:

- Feelings that the current design does not adequately address long-term growth and capacity needs
- Requests to relocate kennels to outer walls for better air circulation and outdoor access
- Concerns regarding the lack of an in-house veterinarian and medical care infrastructure
- Calls for better marketing, increased community engagement, and an improved adoption website

Public Works Administrator Handley provided clarification of the following misconceptions:

- Misconception: The Animal Adoption Center will replace the existing Animal Shelter. Clarification: The Animal Adoption Center will serve as the public-facing facility for the adoption of animals ready for adoption. The existing Animal Shelter will continue to serve as an intake facility to house those animals not available or ready for adoption.
- Misconception: There are only 36 kennels presented on the floor plan. Clarification: The current floor plan of the Animal Adoption Center is designed for

48 dog kennels. 24 kennels for larger dogs and 24 kennels (appear in the floor plan as 6 kennels in each pod, but are "double stacked") for smaller dogs. Specific dimensions are not provided because final sizing will be dependent upon materials. Rough sizing at this time is for the kennels to be approximately 3-feet by 6-feet.

- Misconception: The placement of kennels on the interior of the building serves no purpose. Clarification: The kennel pods are intended to contain/reduce sound to within the pod and provide a separate ventilation and air conditioning system specific to the respective pod. The design would allow staff access and service to the individual kennel through the center walk. The kennel door to the center walk would be solid to shield dogs from viewing other dogs, while the outward-facing side of the kennel would allow citizens to view dogs from walkway within the pod or outside the pod.
- Misconception: There is nothing in the floor plan for on-site veterinary care. Clarification: The Animal Adoption Center is intended to provide a facility for the adoption of animals only. Veterinary care will continue to be provided at the Selt Road Animal Shelter.
- Misconception: There are only enclosures for nine (9) cats. Clarification: The planning team visited multiple shelters and the cat enclosure contemplated by the floor plan would be "stacked" while also providing separate eat/sleep and litter box areas. The dimensions and final capacity are dependent upon final material selected.

Mr. Handley explained that the next step in the process is the establishment of an ad hoc Animal Services Advisory Committee. The purpose of this committee will be to study, make recommendations, and offer professional advice to Administration on animal-related issues in the county. The committee will be responsible for providing communications between citizens and Administration and bringing about cooperation and coordination of resources to maximize animal welfare. He noted that some issues raised in the online survey that could be reviewed by the committee for advice included continued feedback on the Animal Adoption Center plans, animal-related programming, and community education and ordinances. He highlighted the following as target members to compose the committee:

- 1 Administration staff member
- 1 Animal Shelter Coordinator
- 2 Veterinarians
- 2 County citizens
- 1 Animal Services Supervisor
- 2 Rescue agency representatives
- 2 Animal behaviorists or trainers

Mr. Handley also explained that staff has been working on the idea of implementing a "Doggie Day Out" program and recognized Assistant Administrator Wisenbaker for her work on the concept for the program. He further explained that "Doggie Day Out" is a program where shelter dogs are taken on short field trips by volunteer community members, providing much-needed stress relief, socialization, and exercise as well as increasing dogs' chances of finding a permanent home. When dogs are in kennels at the shelter, they are surrounded by strange smells, loud barking, unfamiliar people, and other dogs. Over time, the stress of confinement takes a toll on the mental and physical health of the dogs. The proposed "Doggie Day Out" program creates an opportunity for volunteers who are only able to offer a few hours of their time to help the dogs. The program will serve as a day trip foster program that pairs adoptable shelter dogs with members of the public to go on field trips for a couple of hours or the whole day. He highlighted the following benefits of a "Doggie Day Out" program:

- Reduces kennel stress
- Provides public exposure to improve opportunities for adoption
- Allows the volunteer to get to know the dog's behavior
- Provides benefits to volunteers

During his presentation, Public Works Administrator Handley, Administrator Fouts, and Assistant Administrator Wisenbaker fielded questions from the Board regarding the use of the Selt Road facility when the Adoption Center opens, State regulations related to shelter capacity, potential State bill requiring a full-time veterinarian, use of offenders from the Correctional Institute, weight of the responses from the survey, spay/neuter and educational programs, and any potential liability associated with the "Doggie Day Out" program.

Following a brief discussion, it was the consensus of the Board to instruct staff to proceed with the proposals presented by staff: the ad hoc Animal Services Committee and the "Doggie Day Out" program for Animal Services.

6. Discussion Regarding Facility Rental Fees

Assistant Administrator Mickle explained that staff has been analyzing fees and the revenue collected from rentals associated with the use of various County facilities (community centers, Fairgrounds campus, and Historic Courthouse). Currently, the fees collected do not cover the costs associated with staffing, utilities, and building maintenance. She further explained that the County has not had an actual rate increase in years. In 2015, the Board voted to increase the rental rates, but subsequently decreased them when complaints were received. She briefly reviewed a list of the County's facilities, the current rental rates, and the proposed rental rates. In addition, she provided a chart of the rental rates currently being charged by surrounding counties and municipalities.

Assistant Administrator Mickle and Parks and Recreation Director Jim Gay fielded questions from the Board regarding current rates versus proposed rates (weekly, weekend, hourly, and daily), use of the facilities by various types of groups/organizations, staffing, refundable deposits, in-county versus out-of-county users, and capacities.

In response to questions from Chairman McKenzie regarding the County's ball fields and the Historic Courthouse, Ms. Mickle explained that the County has a separate policy for use of the ball fields, and staff is proposing a flat fee for use of the Historic Courthouse.

Administrator Fouts explained that users are receiving the benefits of quality facilities at a great value/fee.

Ms. Mickle also noted that the proposed rate increases will help recover more of the costs associated with managing and maintaining the various facilities.

In response to a question from Commissioner Reidelbach, Administrator Fouts explained that should the Board choose to adopt the new rental rates, those rates would apply to new rentals, not existing reservations.

Following a lengthy discussion, it was the consensus of the Board to instruct staff to proceed with increases to rental rates for various County facilities as presented. In addition, the new rates shall be applied to new reservations, not existing rentals.

7. Discussion Regarding Pending Ordinance Amendments

Assistant Administrator Wisenbaker explained that staff met with each of the Commissioners to discuss proposed amendments to *Chapter 2. Administration of the Coweta County Code of Ordinances* and has received no further comments regarding the proposed amendments. She has been working with County Attorney Nathan Lee regarding some legal verbiage and the proposed amendment will be presented to the Board at a future Commission meeting for consideration.

Ms. Wisenbaker also noted that staff will be presenting a proposed amendment to the *Code of Ordinances* to add *Chapter 27. Indigent and Unclaimed Remains* at the Commission meeting scheduled on March 4, 2025. The addition of *Chapter 27* will codify and update the County's existing policy to provide for financial assistance for the cremation of indigent individuals as well as provide a process for the disposition of unclaimed remains. In follow-up conversations with the Coroner, staff incorporated his requested edits. Should the Board have any comments, questions, or concerns, staff can address those prior to the March 4, 2025 Commission meeting.

Commissioner Smith requested that staff review the County's current *Sign Ordinance*. He feels that the section that restricts changes to messages displayed on electronic signs to once per day is archaic and needs to be updated. Chairman McKenzie and Commissioner

Reidelbach agreed.

8. **Discussion Regarding Recycling**

Chairman McKenzie explained that Administrator Fouts had made him aware that staff had not yet received a proposal regarding recycling. Therefore, there is no information to discuss with the Board at this time.

Administrator Fouts explained that the Board's next Work Session is scheduled on Tuesday April 22, 2025 at 9:00 a.m. and this issue can be discussed with the Board at that time.

Executive Session - In accordance with O.C.G.A. § 50-14-2

Motion to: Enter Into Executive Session

The Board voted to enter into Executive Session for the purposes of discussing litigation and real estate issues.

Members in attendance included Chairman McKenzie, Commissioner Blackburn, Commissioner Reidelbach, Commissioner Smith, and Commissioner Fisher. Staff members in attendance included Administrator Fouts, Assistant Administrator Mickle, Assistant Administrator Wisenbaker, Public Works Administrator Handley, Attorney Lee, and County Clerk Zerangue.

**** Note:** Commissioner Fisher exited Executive Session prior to discussion of one litigation issue citing a potential conflict of interest. ******

RESULT: (UNANIMOUS)

MOVER: John Reidelbach

SECONDER: Bob Blackburn

AYES: Bill McKenzie, John Reidelbach, Jeff Fisher, Bob Blackburn, Alphonso Smith

Regular Session

Motion to: Return to Regular Session

The Board discussed litigation and real estate issues during Executive Session and voted to return to Regular Session.

RESULT: Passed (UNANIMOUS)

MOVER: Bill McKenzie

SECONDER: John Reidelbach

AYES: Bill McKenzie, John Reidelbach, Jeff Fisher, Bob Blackburn, Alphonso Smith

Affidavit

Motion to: Execute

The Board voted to execute an Affidavit and Resolution for Executive Session.

RESULT: Passed (UNANIMOUS)

MOVER: Bob Blackburn

SECONDER: John Reidelbach

AYES: Bill McKenzie, John Reidelbach, Jeff Fisher, Bob Blackburn, Alphonso Smith

Adjournment

Motion to: Adjourn

The Board voted to adjourn the meeting.

RESULT: Passed (UNANIMOUS)

MOVER: Bob Blackburn

SECONDER: John Reidelbach

AYES: Bill McKenzie, John Reidelbach, Jeff Fisher, Bob Blackburn, Alphonso Smith