



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**

June 19, 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	Absent
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, June 19, 2025.

Meeting Called to Order

Chairman McKenzie called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman McKenzie led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Invocation

Invocation was given by Commissioner Smith.

Regular Session

Motion to: Amend the Agenda

The Board voted to amend the agenda to add a presentation from the Coweta County Cattleman's Association.

RESULT: Passed (4 to 0)

MOVER: Bob Blackburn

SECONDER: John Reidelbach

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

ABSENT: Jeff Fisher

Ms. Penny Bowie, Coweta County Cattleman's Association President, and Association member Mr. Jeff Link addressed the Board regarding their request for the County to financially partner with their Association to construct an agribusiness complex in Coweta County, possibly at the Fairgrounds. They highlighted the history and success of the rodeo, noted that the complex would promote agribusiness, accommodate expos, RVs, a multi-use arena, possibly a large animal clinic, etc., and explained that their group has met with the County's local legislators to discuss their ideas and potential funding mechanisms from the State, and met with Explore Newnan-Coweta, Inc. (ENCI) to discuss the tourism component of the project. In order to proceed, the Association will need a feasibility analysis, renderings, and a cost estimate. They have determined that the feasibility analysis and the renderings will cost approximately \$125,000 and asked the Board to consider funding half of the expense to accomplish these items in order to present the proposed project to the legislators in early September for inclusion in the State's budgetary process.

In response to a question from Commissioner Reidelbach, Mr. Link explained that the feasibility analysis (needs assessment) can be performed before any renderings are produced, and that ENCI may be willing to partner with the Association and the County to fund one-third of the associated cost to perform the analysis.

Commissioner Blackburn expressed his belief that a covered arena at the Fairgrounds is an important project and will keep the youth involved in agricultural activities in the county.

Commissioner Smith expressed his belief that the proposed agribusiness complex project will also help maintain the rural character of Coweta County.

Former Commissioner Paul Poole addressed the Board, explaining that he is a member of the Cattleman's Association and one of the founders of the annual rodeo. He briefly highlighted the success and growth of the rodeo since its inception and urged the Board to consider the Cattleman's request because he believes the agribusiness complex will be positive for the community. In response to a question from Chairman McKenzie, he

explained that if he were still a Commissioner, he would support the proposed project.

In response to a question from Chairman McKenzie, Administrator Fouts explained that traditionally Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds are used for capital projects. The 2025 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) referendum included approximately \$8 million for a multipurpose covered arena and expansion of the Fairgrounds complex. However, the vision of the proposed agribusiness project is for a broader regional use.

In response to a question from Commissioner Reidelbach, Administrator Fouts explained that ENCI has a board meeting next week, and he will confirm whether the agribusiness project is on their agenda.

1. Discuss the Fiscal Year 2026 Draft Budget

Administrator Fouts explained that staff has prepared a draft proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget and briefly highlighted the budget and millage rate timeline, explaining that this year staff is presenting the draft budget prior to the millage rate Public Hearing(s). He noted that the new special service districts (EMS, 911, and Parks and Recreation) have been denoted in the draft Fiscal Year 2026 budget. He provided the 2024 millage rates and an overview of the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, explaining that the draft budget provides for the maintenance of service levels, programs, and operations, restores part-time hours for the Tag and Tax Office, restores professional development training, funds necessary capital projects/improvements, funds merit raises based upon performance evaluations, and supports the addition of personnel. He reviewed changes in the total Operating Funds from Fiscal Year 2025 to Fiscal Year 2026, and highlighted the proposed General Fund revenues. He provided a breakdown of the General Fund budget by function, including General Government, Judicial, Public Safety, Public Works, Public Health and Welfare, Recreation and Culture, and Housing and Development. He also reviewed the General Fund expenditures (not including SPLOST projects), noting that salaries and benefits are the largest portion of the County's budget. He explained that a total of 59.5 full-time positions (full-time equivalents) were requested by the various County departments, with a total of 27.5 FTEs being recommended in the budget. In closing, he explained that the Public Hearing regarding the Fiscal Year 2026 budget is scheduled for July 15, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.

During his presentation, Administrator Fouts along with Assistant Administrator Mickle, Public Works Administrator Handley, and Finance Director Hans Wilson, fielded questions from the Board regarding reductions noted in the budget presentation, potential health insurance increases, the percentage of health insurance premiums paid by the County versus those paid by employees, workers' compensation deductibles, potential establishment of a wellness clinic, transition of some employees in the District Attorney's office from State paid to County employees, staffing for the Superior Court Public Defender, IGAs with the municipalities to house offenders at the County jail,

reclassification of some employees, roadside pruning, streetlight districts, Public Works crews, sales tax trends, appropriations to the District Attorney and Department of Family and Children Services, the County's public transit system, debt service, and vacancies at the Sheriff's office.

Georgia General Assembly House Representative Lydia Glaize also attended the meeting and explained that she was excited to witness the County's budget process.

The following Department Directors, Constitutional Officers, and Elected Officials addressed the Board regarding the draft Fiscal Year 2026 budget:

- Sheriff Lenn Wood explained that he currently has eight (8) jail position vacancies, and eight (8) patrol position vacancies, but his personnel requests are mainly related to the new jail expansion. In addition, one of his Drug Investigators has been serving as an Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Investigator. He is asking to transfer her back to drug investigations and to hire two (2) ICAC Investigators (not supported in the draft budget).
- Warden Jeff Rogers explained that he is requesting to add one (1) Animal Services Officer (supported in the draft budget) and one (1) Programs Coordinator (supported in the draft budget) to integrate more programs offered to offenders at the C.I. Currently, the programs at the C.I. are being overseen by an offender.
- Superior Court Clerk Niki Sewell explained that she is requesting three (3) full-time positions. Two (2) are to assist with the caseload in Superior Court and one (1) to process Magistrate Court warrants (none supported in the draft budget).
- Tax Commissioner Justin McMichael explained that he is not requesting any full-time positions, but he is requesting to reinstate a part-time position (supported in the draft budget) that was cut in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget. He also explained that he has contacted the vendor regarding the possibility of purchasing additional kiosks for tag renewals, but has been told this is not a possibility at this time.
- Probate Court Judge Carrie Markham explained that she is requesting one (1) full-time Associate Judge (not supported in the draft budget) to assist with court hearings. A part-time position was included in previous budget years, and she is asking that it be restored in the budget as a full-time position. In response to a question from Commissioner Reidelbach, she explained that it is possible to explore contracting with an attorney to assist with Probate Court hearings dependent upon his/her qualifications. In response to a question from Chairman McKenzie, she explained that she does not assist Magistrate Court with the issuance of warrants, but she does provide assistance to the Coweta County Accountability Courts.
- Community and Human Resources Director Patricia Plamer explained that she does not have any personnel requests, but she is requesting an increase of approximately \$100,000. Of that, \$30,000 will be utilized to improve the County's communications platforms (social media, website, etc.) to comply with new ADA

requirements that will take effect in April 2026. In addition, \$30,000 will be utilized to update the County's software system with ADP to implement a time and attendance module.

- 911/EMA Director Michael Terrell explained that he is requesting four (4) full-time Dispatchers (supported in the draft budget) to facilitate fire calls and one (1) full-time Radio Manager (supported in the draft budget). However, his request for a full-time 911 Operations Manager because Ms. Arlene Whisenhunt is retiring was not supported in the draft budget. He explained that Mr. Nic Burgess was promoted to backfill Ms. Whisenhunt's position as Assistant 911/EMA Director, but there are many times when he and Mr. Burgess have to be offsite from the 911/EMA Center. He feels that the 911 Operations Manager is a necessary position.
- Parks and Recreation Director Jim Gay explained that the majority of his budget requests involve capital expenses such as parks and grounds maintenance. He did request one (1) full-time position for a Community Athletic Manager (supported in the proposed budget). With the exponential increase in participants in the County's athletic programs, he feels that this position is necessary to keep pace with the growth.
- District Attorney Herb Cranford provided a PowerPoint presentation regarding his budget requests for Fiscal Year 2026. During this presentation, he noted the number of open cases, jail overcrowding, high employee turnover rate, lack of competitive salaries, backlog of serious violent felonies, delays for victims and offenders, staff fielding calls at night and on weekends, and potential long-term risks to the community. He explained that he is requesting one (1) Senior Assistant District Attorney position and one (1) Legal Assistant position for a total budget increase of \$225,000. He also asked that the salary grades for the District Attorney's office receive a higher designation than those of the Solicitor's office because his staff deals with a higher level of difficult cases. DA Cranford also fielded questions from the Board regarding the "Rapid Resolution Program".
- Solicitor General Amy Godfrey explained that her office is also understaffed and dealing with a backlog of cases. In addition, her staff salaries are not competitive, and they are processing cases such as serious traffic offenses (DUI, vehicular homicide) as well as cases involving domestic violence. Her team also fields calls during the night and on weekends. She does not believe that the entry-level salaries or grades for the District Attorney's office should be higher than those of the Solicitor's office. In closing, she explained that she is requesting a third Victim's Advocate position(not supported in the draft budget) and a third Investigator position (supported in the draft budget) for Fiscal Year 2026.

Also, during the draft budget presentation, Administrator Fouts explained that the Tax Assessor has provided the preliminary digest, but the final tax digest will not be available until mid-July. Staff is waiting on the final tax digest from the state. In addition, Assistant

Administrator Mickle explained that approximately \$5 million has had to be utilized from the General Fund, the EMS Fund, and the Health Insurance Fund to balance the Fiscal Year 2025 budget. Mr. Fouts and Ms. Mickle also noted that staff is awaiting the healthcare renewal cost information from the County's insurance broker.

Following a lengthy discussion, it was the consensus of the Board to instruct staff to add funding for the following positions that are not currently supported in the Fiscal year 2026 draft budget:

- One (1) Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Investigator for the Sheriff's office
- One (1) Senior Assistant District Attorney for the District Attorney's office
- One (1) Legal Assistant/Administrative Support position for the District Attorney's office
- Funds to provide for one (1) Senior Judge as needed for Probate Court
- Support staffing requests for the Superior Court Public Defender

Adjournment

Motion to: Adjourn

The Board voted to adjourn the meeting.

RESULT: Passed (4 to 0)

MOVER: Bob Blackburn

SECONDER: John Reidelbach

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

ABSENT: Jeff Fisher