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Coweta County Board of Commissioners

Work Session

Minutes

July 22, 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	Present
Shannon Zerangue	County Clerk	Present

The Honorable Board of Commissioners of Coweta County, Georgia met in Called Meeting/Regular Session on Tuesday, July 22, 2025.

Meeting Called to Order

Chairman McKenizie 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.

Notification of Location of Rules

Chairman McKenzie explained that the rules governing the meeting could be found on the County's website as well as on the table located in the lobby outside the meeting room.

Regular Session

1. **Discuss 2026 Health Insurance Renewal**

Assistant County Administrator Mickle provided a presentation regarding the County's 2026 health insurance renewal. She explained that the County's health insurance coverage starts every January 1st and for calendar year 2025, the County became fully-insured (versus self-insured). She further explained that preliminary data received from the County's health insurance broker indicates a renewal increase of approximately 2.5%. Based upon this information, the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget will be $800,000 short for the health insurance renewal. Staff is seeking direction from the Board regarding potential plan design and/or premium changes to level out the shortfall. She highlighted the 2025 employee health insurance premiums for the Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA) and Health Savings Account (HSA) plans offered to employees, noted the deductibles, out-of-pocket maximums, pharmacy coverage, and employer contributions for both plans, and explained that in 2025, the employer contribution for the HSA plan is approximately 95% with the employee contributing approximately 5% toward the health insurance costs. In addition, she explained that there are other similar local governments that contribute approximately 85% with 15% contributed by the employee.

During her presentation, Assistant Administrator Mickle and Administrator Fouts fielded questions from the Board regarding higher costs for employees to utilize the emergency room or urgent care versus those of a clinic, the potential establishment of an onsite employee health clinic to reduce costs, the fact that the County has absorbed increases to health insurance renewals for the past ten (10) years, employee education, how increased premiums affect employee paychecks, deductibles for both plans, increase in workforce from 2022-2025, average cost share in the public sector, and IRS guidelines related to each plan.

Administrator Fouts and Assistant Administrator Mickle also explained that a Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued for the provision of an onsite health clinic for employees. The responses were narrowed down to two (2) finalists and staff plans to make a recommendation to the Board in September with a proposed "go live" date in March 2026. They noted that although the Board may choose to establish an employee clinic, it will take approximately two (2) years to realize any cost savings.

Assistant Administrator Mickle explained that the establishment of an onsite employee health clinic is included in the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget. Staff plans to utilize interest earned on American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and $150,000 from the General Fund to fund the employee clinic. She also explained that the inclusion of a wellness component in the plan design and establishment of tiered insurance premiums based upon employee salaries are other avenues that staff has explored regarding the rising health insurance renewal rates.

In response to a question from Commissioner Reidelbach, Administrator Fouts explained that staff has been in communication with the City of Newnan regarding a partnership related to the employee clinic, and Newnan has expressed a potential interest.

In response to a question from Commissioner Smith, Assistant Administrator Mickle explained that the General Fund fund balance along with the fund balance in the EMS Fund and the Health Insurance Internal Service Fund have been reduced by approximately $8 million because the adopted millage rate has not been able to financially support the current budget. She cautioned that this practice is not sustainable. In addition, she noted that the reduction in service as a result of the millage rate the Board adopted for Fiscal Year 2025 has been negligible.

Administrator Fouts explained that staff is seeking direction from the Board regarding whether to implement changes to the health insurance plan design and/or employee premiums or whether the Board desires to absorb the projected increase in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. Should the Board desire to absorb the increased cost in the budget, this will potentially affect the proposed 2025 millage rate that is scheduled to be discussed as the next agenda item.

2. **Discuss 2025 Millage Rates**

Administrator Fouts provided the countywide gross tax digest from 2024 and 2025, explaining that from 2024 to 2025, the digest grew from $10 billion to approximately $10.5 billion. He highlighted the net digest, noting that of the $10.5 billion, 1.93% was inflationary growth and 2.41% was new growth (new construction). He explained that over the past several years the County has been experiencing above 5% in new growth, but this past year was not as strong. He further explained that the Board conducted a Work Session on June 19, 2025, to discuss the Fiscal Year 2026 draft budget, and on July 15, 2025, the Board conducted a Public Hearing regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget. He briefly highlighted the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget, including the establishment of an Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Special District, a Parks and Recreation Special Service District, and a 911 Special Service District. He explained that the Special Service Districts were created to provide more transparency and will be provided on property owners' tax bills to help them understand what portion of their property taxes fund those services. He noted that the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget would require $81,984,728 in property taxes, which includes the new Special Service Districts, the Fire District and the Fire Bond District. While the proposed General Fund budget will increase by $14 million, the Fire Fund and Fire Bond Fund will decrease by approximately $2.2

million. The total combined budget for Fiscal Year 2026 represents a property tax increase of $11.9 million from Fiscal Year 2025. In closing, he explained that the Board adopted a millage rate of 4.688 mills for 2024, and staff is proposing a millage rate of 4.740 mills to fully fund Maintenance and Operations (M&O) in the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget. However, should the Board desire to absorb the $800,000 shortfall to renew the County's health insurance plans as discussed earlier in the meeting, the proposed millage rate to fully fund Maintenance and Operations (M&O) in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget (as presented) would need to be set at 4.817 mills.

During his presentation, Administrator Fouts and Assistant Administrator Mickle fielded questions from the Board regarding the inclusion of the municipalities in the Special Service Districts, the Board of Education receiving the "lion's share" of property taxes via their millage rate, the inclusion of requests from various court functions in the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget, the reason for the decrease in the Fire Fund and Fire Bond Fund, the State's rollback calculation formula, the proposed onsite employee health clinic, the proposed 2025 millage rate, and whether there is a way to establish a flat rate tax.

Commissioner Fisher expressed that the State's calculation formula is confusing and misleading to the public.

Commissioner Smith agreed that the State's calculation formula is very difficult to understand.

In response to a question from Commissioner Fisher, Administrator Fouts explained that if the Board approves holding a referendum in November, the registered voters of Coweta County will have an opportunity to vote to adopt a Floating Local Option Sales Tax (FLOST) which, if passed, must be utilized to lower property taxes. This could result in the Board having an option to reduce the millage rate (property taxes) next year.

Administrator Fouts asked for the Board's direction regarding implementing plan design and/or premium changes to the County's health insurance plans or absorbing the shortfall in the budget because the deadline to submit the advertisement regarding the millage rate Public Hearings is tomorrow (July 23, 2025).

Following a discussion regarding the proposed 2025 millage rate, it was the consensus of the Board to instruct staff to advertise the proposed 2025 millage rate as 4.817 mills.

Administrator Fouts explained that the Board can choose to adopt a millage rate lower than the rate advertised, but not higher.

3. **Discuss Work Release Center**

Warden Jeff Rogers addressed the Board regarding the Coweta County Work Release Center (WRC). He explained that since the WRC was established approximately twenty

(20) years ago, it has never been utilized to its full potential because the court system generally sentences an offender to probation or to serve time in jail. Currently, the Coweta County Prison housing capacity is for 216 State offenders. The WRC can house 64 offenders, but there have never been more than 10 to 20 housed at a time. He would like to transition the WRC to house only State offenders that have been sentenced to the Correctional Insitution (prison). Currently, offenders housed at the WRC are allowed to leave the facility to go to work unsupervised and return to stay overnight, and this situation presents numerous challenges. He believes that transitioning the WRC to house State offenders would provide a good opportunity to have more offenders to help provide workforce support to Public Works.

Public Works Administrator Handley explained that staff is requesting that the Board consider eliminating the WRC. This would provide an opportunity to potentially add up to 32 State offenders to the County's Public Works' supervised detail crews. If approved, staff has considered adding a detail crew that can facilitate requests from the smaller municipalities with Public Works' projects.

Warden Rogers noted that transitioning the WRC to house State offenders will require the addition of four (4) correctional officers. If supported by the Board, he plans to phase out the WRC and the first step would be for him to cease accepting applications for the WRC.

Warden Rogers and Administrator Fouts fielded questions from Chairman McKenzie, Commissioner Smith, and Commissioner Reidelbach regarding the two different types of offenders (State and local) housed at the WRC, how the Work Release system functions for the two different types of offenders, and the details of the plan to phase out the Work Release Center.

Following a brief discussion, it was the consensus of the Board to instruct staff to proceed with the proposed plans to phase out the Coweta County Work Release Center (WRC) so that it can be utilized to house additional State offenders sentenced to the Correctional Institution (prison).

4. **Discuss Proposed Data Center Ordinance**

Administrator Fouts explained that at the Commission meeting held on July 15, 2025, the Board voted to continue the Public Hearing regarding the County's proposed *Data Center Ordinance* until August 19, 2025. The purpose of the conversation today is to discuss the comments and feedback staff has received regarding the proposed ordinance and to garner additional input from the Board regarding any further edits that they desire so that those can be incorporated and presented on August 19th.

Administrator Fouts explained that the primary consideration is whether data centers should be approved through a *Conditional Use Permit* (*CUP*) in *LM* (*Light Industrial*) zoned districts or added as a permitted use without having to receive approval by the Board (aka "by right"). He further explained that data centers are very similar to the land uses already allowed (permitted uses) in the County's *LM* (*Light Industrial*) zoning district. Therefore, if a property is already zoned, an application would simply be filed through Community Development and proceed through the development process without any legislative action being required by the Board. He also noted that the ordinance currently allows any permitted uses in the *LM* (*Light Industrial*) district for any property already zoned *M* (*Industrial*).

During the discussion, Administrator Fouts, Assistant Community Development Director Ben Sewell, and Fire Chief Robby Flanagan fielded questions from the Board regarding a requirement for a "will serve" letter from utility companies, how to address adjacent developments (one data center developing next to another), the potential for edge scaled data centers to develop in *O-I* (*Office-Institutional*) districts, possible rezoning of property for data centers located outside *LM* (*Light Industrial*) or *M* (*Industrial*) districts based upon the Comprehensive Plan's Character Areas, potential challenges with future annexations, community meetings, building heights, buffers, building design, fencing, testing of backup generators, environmental analyses, lighting, parking, noise, construction traffic, waste management, mechanical equipment, utilities, substations, height capabilities of the County's ladder trucks, and decommissioning requirements.

Following a lengthy discussion with staff regarding the proposed *Data Center Ordinance*, in addition to the draft verbiage presented by staff, it was the consensus of the Board to make the following edits:

- Allow construction of data centers in *LM* (*Light Industrial*) districts "by right" with a "will serve" letter from appropriate utility providers.
- Clarify the definition of "Character area".
- Require specific building design features for data centers located within 300-feet of properties zoned or utilized for residential purposes and for data centers viewable from public roads and rights-of-way.
- Eliminate a minimum/maximum lot size requirement.
- Eliminate required community meetings for data centers being developed "by right" in *LM* (*Light Industrial*) districts.
- Require a minimum buffer of 300-feet from the property line(s) that adjoin properties zoned or utilized for residential purposes, with the first 100-feet along the property line(s) remaining undisturbed.
- Allow testing of backup generators on weekdays between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., excluding Federal holidays.
- Eliminate a required environmental site analysis.
- Require approval of a construction traffic management plan by Community Development, Public Works, the Fire Chief, and the Sheriff prior to issuance of a land disturbance permit.
- Require a surety bond at the discretion of the Public Works Administrator to cover

costs related to potential damage to public roads and rights-of-way.
- Elimination of a requirement that an amended *Conditional Use Permit* (*CUP*) must be submitted if a change or expansion occurs that impacts utility resources, because data centers will now be permitted "by right" in *LM* (*Light Industrial*) districts.

Commissioner Reidelbach expressed his belief that the Board needs to consider requiring a decommissioning plan.

In conclusion, Administrator Fouts explained that staff will incorporate these changes into the proposed ordinance, send it to the Board, and publish it on the County's website for public viewing prior to the continuation of the Public Hearing regarding this issue on August 19th.

Executive Session - In accordance with O.C.G.A. § 50-14-4

There were no issues to be discussed in Executive Session.

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