

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION
COUNCIL MEETING

September 25, 2025

MINUTES

The GMRC Council held its regular monthly meeting on Thursday, September 25, 2025 at 6:00 p.m., at the White County Parks & Recreation - Yonah Preserve Recreation Center located at 327 Asbestos Rd., Cleveland, Georgia. The meeting was hosted by White County and the City of Cleveland.

CALL TO ORDER

On behalf of GMRC Chairman Courtney Umbehant, the City of Dawsonville Mayor John Walden called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

White County Board of Commissioners Chairman Travis Turner welcomed all in attendance and thanked them for coming. Chairman Turner provided the history of the meeting venue and introduced White County staff and commissioners that were present.

City of Cleveland Mayor Josh Turner also welcomed all in attendance and introduced the City of Cleveland staff and council that were present.

INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

Mayor Walden recognized special guests Mike Fisher, WGI; and Connor Land, Field Representative for Congressman Andrew Clyde.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/DINNER

GMRC Council Chaplain Deborah Mack gave the devotion, invocation, and followed with the Pledge of Allegiance. Dinner was catered by Leaf Grocery.

PROGRAM

Brandon Lounsbury, Project Manager for the Georgia Department of Economic Development, provided a program update.

A copy of that presentation can be found at <https://www.gmrc.ga.gov/gmrccouncil>.

CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES AND ATTENDANCE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Mayor Walden asked for any comments or a motion regarding the minutes and attendance report for the August 28, 2025 Council meeting. Doug Wayne made a motion

to approve the minutes as written and JoAnne Taylor seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

REPORTS

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Heather Feldman reported that GMRC held its annual staff retreat on September 11, 2026 at The Venue at the Star Theater in Toccoa, Georgia. It was an extremely productive day of cross-training, team building, and learning. Mrs. Feldman thanked GMRC Chairman Courtney Umbehant; Vice-Chairman Ron Matheson; and Secretary James Addison for attending and speaking to the staff. Mrs. Feldman also thanked Ron Matheson and the City of Toccoa for their hospitality and providing gifts for the staff.

Executive Director Feldman announced that September is National Workforce Development Month. Created in 2005 by the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals, it recognizes awareness about the importance of developing the workforce to a growing national economy. Mrs. Feldman congratulated and thanked all GMRC Workforce Development staff.

GMRC was the recipient of a Community Impact Grant in the amount of \$15,000 from United Way of Northeast Georgia. Executive Director Feldman explained that the funds would be used to fund tuition and supportive services for five participants in an accelerated, customized training bootcamp. Serving Banks, Franklin, and Hart Counties, the program will engage both students and employers from these areas to strengthen local workforce pipelines. This initiative will provide industry-recognized credentials and direct connections to hiring employers, helping participants successfully transition into sustainable employment. WorkSource Georgia Mountains will target at-risk graduating seniors without post-graduation plans, equipping them with the skills, experience, and support needed to enter the workforce with confidence and achieve long-term success.

Mrs. Feldman congratulated the City of Cleveland - The Economic Development Administration (EDA) recently announced that they are hoping to feature the City of Cleveland's 2024 EDA award in their annual report. In 2024, Cleveland received \$17 million in EDA Disaster Funds for their infrastructure project.

Executive Director Feldman announced that the Georgia Department of Community Affairs will be hosting the Community Planning Institute October 28 – 29, 2025 at Brasstown Valley Resort. The Institute provides information about planning for land use, growth and development. For more information, please reach out to Adam Hazell, GMRC Planning Director or Kathy Papa with DCA.

Executive Assistant Gina Kessler will be sending out ballots soon for the Council Member of the Year Award which will be given at our Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner.

Mrs. Feldman reminded the Council that GMRC's 63rd Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner is Friday, December 5, 2025 beginning with a reception at 4:30 p.m. followed with dinner and a program at 6:00 p.m. This is a ticketed event for all attendees, including Council members. Mrs. Feldman also encouraged Council members to seek out sponsors for the event. For ticket sales and sponsorship opportunities please visit <https://www.gmrc.ga.gov/annualmeeting>.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Update

GMRC Economic Development Director Patrick Larson explained that the Economic Development Administration (EDA) requires an annual update to the CEDS/Regional Plan. A copy of the proposed updated document will be sent to the Council on Monday, September 29, 2026 by Executive Assistant Gina Kessler for review. Action will be taken at the October meeting on the document. If there are any questions about the document Mr. Larson can be reached at plarson@gmrc.ga.gov or 770-538-2611.

Mr. Larson thanked the CEDS Committee for their work in getting the updates completed.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Travel Policy Updates

The council received the updated Travel Policy in their agenda packet prior to the meeting. Executive Director Feldman explained that there had been some confusion among staff about how travel time and time at conferences is allocated, so language was added to the policy that is less vague and specific examples were cited.

Mayor John Walden asked for a motion to approve the Travel Policy updates. Bill Chafin made the motion, and Deborah Mack seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Personnel Policies and Procedures Updates

GMRC Council members received the updated Personnel Policies and Procedures in their agenda packets prior to the meeting. Executive Director Feldman reviewed the following updates:

- Removed Information Services Director throughout the document relating to IT services and changed to Executive Director.
- Updated language around performance evaluations – now done between May 15th and June 15th annually instead of in conjunction with an employee's work anniversary date.
- Added Executive Assistant as GMRC's Open Records Officer.

- Added language regarding digital files and GMRC related software.
- Added language regarding how time and time at conferences is allocated and cited specific examples.
- Updated Appendix B (Travel Policies) with the changes outlined regarding time during travel.

All other aspects of the Personnel Policies and Procedures will remain the same.

Mayor Walden asked for a motion to approve the Personnel Policies and Procedures updates as presented. Angela Whidby made the motion and Doug Wayne seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

GDOT Resolution

Council received the resolution in their agenda packet prior to the meeting. GMRC Planning Director Adam Hazell explained that pertaining to GMRC's annual contracts with GDOT, a standard resolution is required by GDOT for any agency participating in their 5304 programs on behalf of rural transit services. It affirms GMRC's commitment to abide by federal policies in execution of the contract.

The resolution concerns GMRC's application for the FY27 contract and would be in support of update to rural transit assessments. GMRC has passed the same resolution in previous years regarding the same contract.

Mayor Walden asked for a motion to approve and submit the resolution authorizing the filing of an application with the Department of Transportation, United States of America, and Georgia Department of Transportation, for a grant under Title 49 U.S.C., Section 5304. JoAnne Taylor made the motion, and Doug Wayne seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Habersham County Private Sector Appointee

Executive Director Feldman explained that pursuant to the GMRC bylaws, all private sector appointees must be certified prior to July 1st annually to coincide with the beginning of GMRC's Fiscal Year. However, Habersham County did not have an appointee named at that time. Habersham County has selected Lawrence Bridges to be their Private Sector Appointee. Mr. Bridges is a resident of Habersham County.

Mayor John Walden asked for a motion to approve Mr. Bridges as the Habersham County Private Sector Appointee. Stacy Fountain made the motion to approve, and Kevin Herrit seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

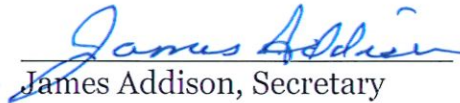
The October meeting will be in Lumpkin County.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:44 p.m.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Courtney Umbehant', written over a horizontal line.

Courtney Umbehant, Chairman

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Addison', written over a horizontal line.

James Addison, Secretary

GMRC COUNCIL
ATTENDANCE SHEET
2025-2026

COUNTY	COUNCIL MEMBER	July 25	Aug 25	Sept 25	Oct 25	Nov 25	Dec 25	Jan 26	Feb 26	March 26	April 26	May 26	June 26
RABUN	Scott Crane	A	P	P									
	Stacy Fountain	P	P	P									
	Douglas Wayne	P	P	P									
STEPHENS	Tara Simmons	P	P	E									
	Ron Matheson**	P	P	E									
	James Addison***	P	P	A									
TOWNS	Cliff Bradshaw	(P)	P	P									
	Andrea Gibby	A	A	(R)									
	Michael Courey	N-P	P	P									
UNION	Harold Collins	P	A	P									
	Buddy Moore	P	P	P									
	Kristen Bentley	N-P	(P)	(R)									
WHITE	Craig Bryant	P	P	P									
	Nan Bowen	P	P	P									
	Lauren Williams	P	P	P									
GOV APPT.	Kim Waters	P	P	P									
	Angela Whidby	(P)	P	P									
	VACANT	V	V	V									
LT. GOV APPT.	David Lee	P	P	P									
SPEAKER APPT.	VACANT	V	V	V									

P = PRESENT A = ABSENT (R) = REPRESENTED (P) PROXY VOTE V = VACANCY E = EXCUSED N = NEW MEMBER X = NO MEETING

* Chairman
** Vice Chairman
*** Secretary