

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION COUNCIL MEETING

February 27, 2025

MINUTES

The GMRC Council held its regular monthly meeting on Thursday, February 27, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. at the Hidden Acres Event Venue located at 6467 Old Gillsville Ed., Gillsville, Georgia 30543. The meeting was hosted by Banks County and the Town of Homer.

CALL TO ORDER

GMRC Chairman Ken Schubring called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

Banks County BOC Chairman Taylor Griffith welcomed all to Banks County and thanked them for coming. The Town of Homer Mayor Doug Cheek also thanked all in attendance for coming.

INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

Vice-Chairman Courtney Umbehant recognized special guests Mike Fisher, WGI; Kathy Papa, Georgia Department of Community Affairs; Margaret Ryder, Small Business Development Center; Hope Iglehart, North Georgia Outreach Coordinator for Senator Jon Ossoff; Luke Hetland, North Georgia Outreach Coordinator for Lt. Governor Burt Jones; Cheryl Smith, Georgia Department of Agriculture; and Connor Land, Field Representative for Congressman Andrew Clyde.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/DINNER

Ms. Deborah Mack gave a devotion, invocation, and followed with the Pledge of Allegiance. Dinner was catered by Jax Shack.

PROGRAM

Mr. Mike Beatty gave a presentation on Attainable Housing.

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

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

RLF Loan Application #3080

All pertinent information was provided to Council members for review prior to the meeting. RLF Committee Chairman Mitch Griggs explained that the applicant is requesting \$218,289 in RLF funding to aid in the construction of a 1,600 square foot event venue and associated landscaping, drainage, grading, miscellaneous furnishing for the venue, and Inn upgrades on an approximately four-acre vacation rental property in Blairsville. The applicants are a husband-and-wife team that owns and operates the vacation rental property of six cottages and an Inn with four room suites.

The applicants will both provide a personal guaranty. GMRC will take second position on the property behind the first mortgage holder, Pinnacle Bank. Mr. Griggs noted that the applicants came to the RLF Program because the interest rate would be lower, and even though GMRC has the second position on the property there is enough equity in the property to cover GMRC's interest should the loan go into default.

The applicants receive a military pension and VA benefits which provide their current source of income.

The following terms apply to the loan:

- Interest rate: Fixed 4.0%
- Term length: 15 years
- Amount: \$218,289
- Loan Type: Construction LOC
- Collateral: 2nd Mortgage on Business Property
- Guaranty: Personal guaranty from both Owners
- Fund: CARES Act
- Special Condition: Cleared Environmental Review

Chairman Schubring asked if there were any questions regarding RLF Loan #3080. Hearing none he asked for a motion to approve the RLF Loan Application #3080. Bill Chafin made the motion and Doug Wayne seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

REPORTS

Chairman's Report

Chairman Schubring report that he would be attending the DDAA Conference in Washington D.C. along with Vice-Chairman Umbehant, Executive Director Feldman, and GMRC Staff. Executive Director Feldman, Information Services Director Faith Bryan, and Economic Development Director Patrick Larson will all be presenting during the conference.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Heather Feldman introduced the newest Council members Cory Pulliam, Franklin County Commissioner; Buddy Moore, City of Blairsville Mayor Pro Tem; and Stephanie Almagno, City of Baldwin Mayor. Mrs. Feldman also welcomed the City of Dawsonville Mayor John Walden to the Executive Committee.

Executive Director Feldman reported that GMRC is pulling together its seventh Aerial Photography and LiDAR Project. The potential project would be flown during the 2026 leaf-off season. Communities interested in joining the project should reach out to Faith Bryan at fbryan@gmrc.ga.gov or 770-538-2614.

It was also reported that GMRC just kicked off Phase 5 of the Roadway Element Validation and Mapping Program (REVAMP). During this phase, staff will be collecting the following data elements:

- Median Crossover Left Turn Lane Type
- Right Turn Channelization
- Guardrail Presence and Type
- Transverse Rumble Strip Presence
- Centerline/Right Shoulder Rumble Strip Presence
- Multi-use Path Presence

Mrs. Feldman reminded the Council that the deadline to apply for the PlanFirst designation is May 15, 2025. The PlanFirst designation recognizes communities that demonstrate exemplary implementation of their Local Comprehensive Plan. Any eligible community with a strong history of public involvement, active implementation, and progress toward goals can apply. Each local government must apply separately, even if planning jointly with others. Interested parties that would like assistance with their application should reach out to Adam Hazell at ahazell@gmrc.ga.gov or 770-538-2617.

GMRC – WorkSource Georgia Mountains was undergoing its annual performance audit and monitoring by TCSG the week of February 24th. GMRC anticipates a clean audit and will share details of any findings with the Council at the March meeting.

Executive Director Feldman thanked the City of Dawsonville for hosting the Region 2 Quarterly City and County Managers' meeting on February 12th. The date for the next meeting is May 14th at 10:00 a.m. and will be hosted by the City of Flowery Branch.

Mrs. Feldman advised the Council that the Annual Clerks' meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 16th. The meeting is a great opportunity for the region's clerks to network with each other and discuss topics of mutual interest and benefit. Topics will include a legislative recap, updates from GMA and ACCG, and First Amendment Audits. More information will be forthcoming, but if there are any questions or you would like additional information, please contact Gina Kessler at 770-538-2607 or gkessler@gmrc.ga.gov.

Executive Director Feldman reported that work has begun on the FY26 budget and thanked the GMRC Finance Director Alicia Page for her work on getting the draft budget prepared. The GMRC Finance Committee will set up a meeting soon to review and will present the budget for approval at a future meeting.

Mrs. Feldman reminded the Council that the DCA Planning Contract had been cut by almost 32% over the last 10 + years. Last year, Heather Feldman mentioned that the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions (GARC) is advocating for additional funding from DCA for the Planning Contract. GARC has been working closely with OMB and the Appropriations Committee to make its case for additional funding, and GARC is only asking for restoring the funding to 2010 levels. A letter written to Chairman Blake Tillery, Georgia Senate District 19, providing additional information about the request was shared with the Council prior to the meeting.

The Council was informed that U.S. Senator Jon Ossoff's office has opened its portal for Congressional Spending and the deadline for requests is March 14, 2025. U.S. Senator Raphael Warnock's office is waiting until after the continuing resolution expires to release its application for the Congressional Spending funds.

Executive Director Feldman provided a Legislative update and noted that Crossover Day is March 6, 2025.

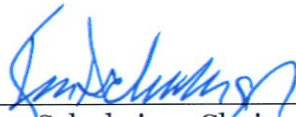
- [HB 137](#), Contracts: Increase Dollar Value of Public Works (Rep. Victor Anderson – R) - Relating to contracts for public work, to increase the dollar value of certain public works contracts exempt from the provisions relating to retention of contractual payments. **Status:** Referred to State and Local Governmental Operations Committee
- [SB 13](#), GEFA Finance of Natural Gas Projects - So as to authorize GEFA to finance and perform certain duties in connection with projects relating to natural gas. **Status:** Pending Rules Committee
- [SB 37](#), Georgia Board for Artificial Intelligence: "AI Accountability Act" - So as to require that all governmental entities develop and maintain artificial intelligence system usage plans **Status:** Referred to Economic Development and Tourism Committee

ANNOUNCEMENTS


The March Council meeting will be hosted by the City of Dawsonville.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:51 p.m.



Ken Schubring, Chairman



Cliff Bradshaw, Secretary

**GMRC COUNCIL
ATTENDANCE SHEET
2024-2025**

Page 1

COUNTY	COUNCIL MEMBER	July 24	Aug 24	Sept 24	Oct 24	Nov 24	Dec 25	Jan 25	Feb 25	March 25	April 25	May 25	June 25
BANKS	Chris Ausburn	(R)	P	X	P	A	P	P	P				
	Sandra Garrison	P	P	X	P	A	P	P	P				
	Vicki Boling Jones	(R)	P	X	P	P	P	P	P				
DAWSON	Billy Thurmond	P	P	X	P	P	A	P	A				
	John Walden	A	A	X	P	P	P	P	P				
	Kevin Herrit	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P				
FRANKLIN	Cory Pulliam	P	A	X	P	E	A	N-E	P				
	Courtney Umbehant**	A	P	X	P	P	P	P	P				
	Leslie McFarlin	A	P	X	P	A	P	P	A				
HABERSHAM	Jimmy Tench	P	P	X	P	P	P	N-E	E				
	Stephanie Almagno	P	A	X	A	P	A	A	N-E				
	Ken Schubring*	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P				
HALL	David Gibbs	E	(R)	X	E	E	A	N-P	E				
	Sam Couvillon	P	P	X	R	P	P	(R)	P				
	Deborah Mack	P	P	X	P	P	P	A	P				
HART	Jeff Brown	A	(R)	X	A	A	A	(P)	E				
	Dan Leard	P	P	X	A	A	A	P	P				
	Bill Chafin	P	A	X	P	P	P	P	P				
LUMPKIN	Chris Dockery	(R)	A	X	P	A	(R)	(R)	(R)				
	JoAnne Taylor	A	A	X	P	P	A	P	(P)				
	Tony Owens	A	V	X	V	N-P	A	P	A				

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Page 2

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RABUN	Kent Woerner	A	(R)	X	(R)	(R)	A	(R)	A				
	Stacy Fountain	A	P	X	A	A	P	P	E				
	Douglas Wayne	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P				
STEPHENS	Tara Simmons	P	A	X	P	P	P	(R)	P				
	Ron Matheson	P	P	X	E	P	A	P	E				
	James Addison	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P				
TOWNS	Cliff Bradshaw***	A	(P)	X	(P)	(R)	P	P	(R)				
	Andrea Gibby	(R)	(R)	X	(R)	(R)	A	(R)	(R)				
	Denise McKay	P	P	X	P	P	A	P	P				
UNION	Harold Collins	P	P	X	A	A	P	N-(R)	A				
	Jim Conley	P	(P)	X	P	P	P	P	(R)				
	Mitch Griggs	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P				
WHITE	Craig Bryant	N-P	P	X	P	(P)	P	P	P				
	Nan Bowen	P	P	X	P	(P)	P	P	P				
	Lauren Williams	N-P	P	X	P	P	P	A	P				
GOV APPT.	Kim Waters	(P)	P	X	P	P	P	P	P				
	Angela Whidby	P	P	X	(P)	(P)	P	P	P				
	VACANT	V	V	X	V	V	V	V	V				
LT. GOV APPT.	David Lee	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P				
SPEAKER APPT.	VACANT	V	V	X	V	V	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