GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION
COUNCIL MEETING
October 29, 2026

MINUTES

The GMRC Council held its regular monthly meeting Thursday, October 29, 2026 at 6:00 p.m., at Camp Glisson - 690 Camp Glisson Road, Dahlonega, Georgia 30533. The meeting was hosted by the City of Dahlonega and Lumpkin County.

CALL TO ORDER

GMRC Council Chairman Courtney Umbehant called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

City of Dahlonega Mayor Sam Norton introduced Ms. Brittney Martin, Retreats Coordinator at Camp Glisson. Ms. Martin welcomed everybody to Camp Glisson and thanked them for coming. Mayor Norton also thanked everybody for attending and introduced City of Dahlonega Council Members Dan Brown, Lance Bagley, Tony Owens, and Johnny Ariemma. The mayor also introduced George Albert, City of Dahlonega Chief of Police and thanked Rhonda Hansard, City of Dahlonega Clerk, for coordinating everything for the meeting.

Lumpkin County Board of Commissioners Chairman Rhett Stringer welcomed all in attendance and introduced Nathan Davis, Lumpkin County Commissioner and Alan Ours, Lumpkin County Manager.

INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

GMRC Vice-Chairman Ron Matheson recognized special guests Kathy Papa, Georgia Department of Community Affairs; Luke Hetland, North Georgia Field Director for Lt. Governor Burt Jones; and the guest speaker Brooke Anderson P.E., General Manager, Etowah Water and Sewer Authority.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/DINNER

Mr. David Lee gave a devotion and invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Dinner was catered by Chef Paco's.

PROGRAM

Brooke Anderson, P.E., General Manager, Etowah Water and Sewer Authority spoke on data centers.

CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES AND ATTENDANCE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

GMRC Secretary James Addison asked for any comments or a motion regarding the minutes and attendance report for the September 24, 2026 Council meeting. Doug Wayne made a motion to approve the minutes as written, and Stacy Fountain seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

REPORTS

Chairman's Report

GMRC Chairman Umbehant did not have a report and deferred his time to Executive Director Heather Feldman.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Feldman was saddened to announce the passing of long-time Council member J.B. Jones. Mr. Jones was a pillar of his community and served as Chairman of the Georgia Mountains Area Planning and Development Commission from 1980-1985 and then again in 1989-1991 for the Georgia Mountains Regional Development Center. J.B. Jones then served on the GMRC Council from 2001-2023.

Mrs. Feldman welcomed the newest GMRC Council members – Mr. Samuel Dunlap, Dawson County Chamber of Commerce's Economic Development Manager, is serving as the Private Sector Representative for Dawson County. Ms. Leigh Johnston, Councilwoman for the City of Clarkesville, is serving as the City Representative for Habersham County on the GMRC Council. Executive Director Feldman and Executive Assistant Kessler met with both Mrs. Johnston and Mr. Dunlap to provide orientation on GMRC.

The Georgia Association of Regional Commissions is hosting their annual conference in St. Simons on November 4-6, 2026. GMRC Department Heads and several members of the Executive Committee will be representing GMRC at the conference.

Executive Director Feldman reported that GMRC hosted its first-ever Mayors' Symposium on October 9, 2026. It was a successful event, and GMRC appreciates Dee Anderson, City Manager for the City of Cornelia, for presenting on infrastructure and downtown development, and Sam Latimer with Rushton for presenting on financial statements and audits. GMRC hopes to host this event quarterly, similar to the City and County Managers' meetings.

Alicia Page and Cheryl Smith recently attended the Georgia Government Finance Officers Association (GGFOA) conference in Savannah. Mrs. Page presented GMRC's use of continuation manuals and continuation planning as well as naming conventions.

Executive Director Feldman thanked the City of Lavonia for hosting the City and County Managers' meeting on October 28, 2026.

Executive Director Feldman reported that work on the aerial photography project is complete. GMRC is awaiting final approval from the participating communities. Once approval is received, GMRC will begin the closeout phase. GMRC anticipates issuing a call for a 2028 project sometime next year.

GMRC will be publishing its 2026 Annual Report in a digital format, and it should be out at the end of November/early December.

Executive Director Feldman reminded all in attendance to purchase tickets or sponsorship for the upcoming Annual Meeting on December 4, 2026. Ticket purchases and sponsorship purchases will close on Monday, November 23, 2026.

Quarterly Finance Report

A copy of the FY27 Quarter 1 Financial Report was included in the agenda packet distributed prior to the meeting. GMRC Finance Director Alicia Page explained that the report covers the unaudited period ending September 30, 2026.

As of the period end, the year-to-date revenues total $1,100,752.20 of which:

- $732,390.73 or approximately 67% are federal and state funding.
- $165,754.42 or approximately 15% are member dues.
- $164,408.55 or approximately 15% are charges for services.
- The remaining $38,198.50 or 3% is from other revenues.

At the end of the period, expenditures totaled $1,034,330.72. Total transfers and matching obligations for the period were $108,697.26, leaving a total surplus of $66,421.48.

Factors that contribute to this surplus include:

- $16,456.15 in investment income from the Regional Commission's two revolving loan funds. This income is invested back into the RLFs to grow the funds for future available lending.

Chairman Umbehant asked for a motion to approve the FY27 Quarter 1 Financial Report as presented. Bill Chafin made the motion and Doug Wayne seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner Update

Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner Committee Chairwoman Vicki Boling Jones encouraged all in attendance to purchase tickets for GMRC's 64th Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner on Friday, December 4, 2026. Mrs. Boling Jones reminded Council members that they are also required to purchase a ticket and that all members are welcome to bring a door prize donated by their community. Members were also

encouraged to seek out sponsors for the event. Those interested in attending may also reach out to Executive Assistant Gina Kessler at gkessler@gmrc.ga.gov.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

CEDS Annual Update

Executive Director Feldman explained that the Economic Development Administration (EDA) requires recipients of its planning program funding to develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The document must be rewritten every five years, with annual updates on progress toward the goals and objectives outlined in the document. The GMRC CEDS and Regional Plan was last rewritten in 2022, and 2026 serves as the most recent annual update for the 2022–2026 document.

This update provides EDA with progress made in each of the documents seven goal areas: Natural and Cultural Resources; Land Use; Community Facilities and Services; Economic Development, Business, and Industry; Workforce Development; Housing; and Pre-Disaster Mitigation.

The CEDS Committee met on August 11, 2026, and approved moving the CEDS and Regional Plan Annual Update to the GMRC Council for review and approval.

Executive Assistant Kessler emailed the document to all Council members on September 28, 2026 for review. No questions or comments were received during the review period.

GMRC Council Chairman Courtney Umbehant asked for a motion to approve the updated document as presented. Stacy Fountain made the motion and Doug Wayne seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

FY28 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 FY28 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.

Chairman Umbehant 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. Bill Chafin made the motion, and James Addison seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

RLF Loan #3086

GMRC Senior Project Manager Laurin Yoder explained that an applicant has requested $387,000 in RLF funding to purchase a single-story, 3,300-square-foot commercial building consisting of two storefronts in downtown Lavonia. The applicant currently rents the building and operates an antique mall consignment/collective retail marketplace that has been at the location since 2021. The applicant currently pays $1,500 per month in rent. If she purchases the building, her monthly expenses will increase by approximately $1,000. This is a turnkey business that has no current business debt. An appraisal of the building is scheduled for October 21, 2026.

The applicant will provide a personal guarantee. GMRC will take the first and only position on the property.

Terms:

- Interest rate: Fixed 4.0%
- Term length: 20 years
- Amount: $387,000
- Loan Type: Real Estate Purchase
- Collateral: 1st Mortgage on Business Property
- Guarantee: Personal Guarantee from Owner
- Fund: Traditional
- Special Conditions:
    1. Appraisal: with a minimum property valuation of $431,000.
    2. Updated credit report: showing no increases in debt obligations.

At the time of the meeting the property appraisal of $435,000 had been received and the updated credit check showed no new debt. Chairman Umbehant asked for a motion to approve the loan with the terms and conditions outlined above. Sam Norton made the motion and John Walden seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The November meeting will be hosted by the City of Flowery Branch. The meeting will be held on Thursday, November 12, 2026 so as not to conflict with Thanksgiving.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:49 p.m.

Courtney Umbehant, Chairman

James Addison, Secretary

GMRC COUNCIL
ATTENDANCE SHEET
2026-2027

COUNTY	COUNCIL MEMBER	July 26	Aug 26	Sept 26	Oct 26	Nov 26	Dec 26	Jan 27	Feb 27	March 27	April 27	May 27	June 27
BANKS	Chris Ausburn	P	P	A	P								
	Todd Templeton	P	(R)	P	P								
	Vicki Boling Jones	P	A	P	P								
DAWSON	Billy Thurmond	A	A	(P)	P								
	John Walden	P	(R)	A	P								
	Samuel Dunlap	V	V	V	N - P								
FRANKLIN	Cory Pulliam	(R)	P	P	P								
	Courtney Umbehant*	P	P	P	P								
	Leslie McFarlin	A	P	(R)	A								
HABERSHAM	Kelly Woodall	A	A	P	(R)								
	Leigh Johnston	V	V	V	N - P								
	Lawrence Bridges	A	A	P	P								
HALL	David Gibbs	(P)	E	E	A								
	Jonathan Elliott	P	P	P	(P)								
	Angela Middleton	P-N	P	P	P								
HART	VACANT	V	V	V	V								
	Richard Sheller	P	P	P	P								
	Bill Chafin	P	P	P	P								
LUMPKIN	Rhett Stringer	(R)	(R)	P	P								
	Sam Norton	P	P	P	P								
	VACANT	V	V	V	V								

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RABUN	VACANT	V	V	V	V								
	Stacy Fountain	P	(R)	A	P								
	Douglas Wayne	P	P	P	P								
STEPHENS	Tara Simmons	P	A	P	P								
	Ron Matheson**	A	P	P	P								
	James Addison***	P	A	P	P								
TOWNS	Cliff Bradshaw	(P)	P	P	(P)								
	Jay Chastain	A	(R)	P	(R)								
	Michael Courey	P	P	P	P								
UNION	Harold Collins	P	A	P	P								
	Buddy Moore	P	(P)	P	P								
	Kristen Bentley	P	P	P	P								
WHITE	Craig Bryant	P	P	P	P								
	Nan Bowen	P	P	(P)	P								
	Lauren Williams	A	P	P	P								
GOV APPT.	Kim Waters	P	P	(R)	(R)								
	Angela Whidby	A	P	P	(P)								
	VACANT	V	V	V	V								
LT. GOV APPT.	David Lee	P	P	A	P								
SPEAKER APPT.	VACANT	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