GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION
COUNCIL MEETING
September 24, 2026

MINUTES

The GMRC Council held its regular monthly meeting Thursday, September 24, 2026 at 6:00 p.m., at the White County Parks & Recreation - Yonah Preserve Recreation Center located at 327 Asbestos Road, Cleveland, Georgia. The meeting is being sponsored by White County and the City of Cleveland.

CALL TO ORDER

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

WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

White County Commissioner Craig Bryant welcomed everybody to White County and thanked them for coming. Commissioner Bryant introduced Lyn Holcomb, White County Commissioner; Annie Sutton, City of Cleveland Council Member; and Shanda Murphy, White County Assistant Manager. Mr. Bryant also thanked Lauren Williams, owner of Cowboys and Angels, for catering the meal.

INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

GMRC Vice-Chairman Ron Matheson recognized special guests Cheryl Smith, Georgia Department of Agriculture; Kathy Papa, Georgia Department of Community Affairs; and Luke Hetland, North Georgia Field Director for Lt. Governor Burt Jones.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/DINNER

Mr. Richard Sheller gave a devotion and invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Dinner was catered by Cowboys and Angels.

PROGRAM

Jason Dykes, District Engineer for the Georgia Department of Transportation, provided a program update.

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 August 27, 2026 Council meeting. Cliff Bradshaw made a motion to approve the minutes as written, and Doug Wayne seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

REPORTS

Chairman's Report

GMRC Chairman Umbehant reported that he had recently attended the GMRC's staff retreat with Vice-Chairman Matheson and Secretary James Addison. He enjoyed the opportunity to spend time with the staff.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Feldman reported that GMRC held its annual staff retreat on September 11th at Atlanta Motorsports Park in Dawsonville, Georgia. It was a productive day of cross-training, team building, and learning. Mrs. Feldman thanked GMRC Chairman Courtney Umbehant, Vice-Chairman Ron Matheson, Secretary James Addison, and Mayor John Walden for attending the retreat and speaking to the staff.

GMRC held an informative Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) training course for committee members on September 16th. Executive Director Feldman thanked the committee members for attending and for serving on the committee.

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. Executive Director Feldman thanked and congratulated all GMRC Workforce Development staff!

Executive Director Feldman reported that GMRC was the recipient of a Community Impact Grant in the amount of $20,000 from United Way of Northeast Georgia. Funds will 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 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.

Chairman Umbehant and Executive Director Feldman had a productive meeting with Representative Victor Anderson in September to share the work of the Regional Commission and ideas to help form a stronger partnership together going forward. Representative Anderson serves an important role in the state legislature as Chairman of the House Governmental Affairs Committee and a member on the Appropriations Committee.

Executive Assistant Gina Kessler sent out the nomination form for Council Member of the Year which will be presented at the GMRC's Annual Meeting in December. Please submit your nomination form no later than **October 16th.**

Executive Director Feldman recognized Cheryl Smith from the Georgia Department of Agriculture as it would be her last GMRC meeting before her retirement. Mrs. Smith has brought a wealth of knowledge and support to the GMRC during her tenure and will be missed.

CEDS Update

GMRC Economic Development Director Patrick Larson explained that the Economic Development Administration (EDA) requires an annual update to the CEDS/Regional Plan. Executive Assistant Gina Kessler will send a copy of the proposed updated document to the Council on Monday, September 28, 2026 for review. Action will be taken at the October meeting on the document. If there are any questions, 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.

Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner Update

Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner Committee Chairwoman Vicki Boling Jones encouraged all in attendance to save the date of December 4, 2026 for GMRC's 64th Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner. 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. At the time of the meeting, GMRC had secured five Diamond Level Sponsors and one Silver Level Sponsor. Invitations with ticket sale and sponsorship information were on the table for attendees to take. Those interested in attending may also reach out to Executive Assistant Gina Kessler at gkessler@gmrc.ga.gov.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

GMRC Bylaw Revisions

The revised GMRC Bylaws were sent to all members on September 1, 2026 for review and again with the agenda packets prior to the meeting. During the review period there were no questions presented. Major highlights within the revisions included:

- Removing Article III, Section III, Part E which stated that GMRC would serve as a mediator between two local governments or county and city.
- Adding language to Article IV, Section III, Part 5, subsection E regarding excused absences and adding language to allow for military duty. Language was also added to include that the officers in conjunction with the Executive Director can suspend or waive council attendance requirements for situations that may affect a large number of council members.

- Adding Part 6 under Article IV, Section III, to allow for council members to have an individual represent them for attendance purposes without having to cast a vote (proxy). The council member is required to notify the Executive Director or her designee of who will represent them. This section allows for a council member to have a representative no more than four times during the GMRC's Fiscal Year.
- Allowing for the use of a proxy vote no more than two times per GMRC's Fiscal Year.

Chairman Umbehant asked for a motion to approve the revised GMRC Bylaws as presented. Bill Chafin made the motion and Doug Wayne seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Ethics Committee Members

Pursuant to the GMRC Bylaws, the GMRC Council is required to have a Board of Ethics consisting of three residents of the Georgia Mountains Region, known as Ethics Officers. Also pursuant to the GMRC Bylaws, the GMRC Council Chairman chooses one of the members and the Council votes on the remaining two positions. The individuals will be responsible for overseeing and reviewing any complaints filed against the Chairman, Executive Director, or any member of the Council. The Ethics Officers will serve a two-year term.

Chairman Umbehant selected Gary Fesperman, a resident of Franklin County to serve as his appointment, and the nominees for consideration to fill the two remaining positions are David Stovall from Hall County and Ken Schubring from Habersham County.

Hearing no other nominees, GMRC Chairman Umbehant asked for a motion to approve Gary Fesperman, David Stovall, and Ken Schubring to serve on the Board of Ethics. Angela Whidby made the motion and Doug Wayne seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Dawson County Private Sector Appointee

Executive Director Heather 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 the GMRC's Fiscal Year. However, Dawson County did not have an appointee to present at that time. Dawson County would like to present Mr. Samuel Dunlap, Economic Development Manager with the Dawson County Chamber of Commerce, as their private sector appointee.

Chairman Umbehant asked for a motion to approve Mr. Dunlap as the Dawson County private sector appointee. Doug Wayne made the motion, and Todd Templeton seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The October meeting will be hosted by the City of Dahlonega on Thursday, October 29, 2026.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:47 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									
	Todd Templeton	P	(R)	P									
	Vicki Boling Jones	P	A	P									
DAWSON	Billy Thurmond	A	A	(P)									
	John Walden	P	(R)	A									
	VACANT	V	V	V									
FRANKLIN	Cory Pulliam	(R)	P	P									
	Courtney Umbehant*	P	P	P									
	Leslie McFarlin	A	P	(R)									
HABERSHAM	Kelly Woodall	A	A	P									
	VACANT	V	V	V									
	Lawrence Bridges	A	A	P									
HALL	David Gibbs	(P)	E	A									
	Jonathan Elliott	P	P	P									
	Angela Middleton	P-N	P	P									
HART	VACANT	V	V	V									
	VACANT	V	V	V									
	Bill Chafin	P	P	P									
LUMPKIN	Rhett Stringer	(R)	(R)	P									
	Sam Norton	P	P	P									
	VACANT	V	V	V									

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