

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION  
*COUNCIL MEETING*

February 26, 2026

MINUTES

The GMRC Council held its regular monthly meeting on Thursday, February 26, 2026 at 6:00 p.m., in the Gordon Pirkle Room of Dawsonville City Hall located at 415 Hwy. 53 East, Dawsonville, GA 30534. The City of Dawsonville hosted the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

GMRC Chairman Courtney Umbehant called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. and thanked the City of Dawsonville for hosting.

WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

City of Dawsonville Mayor John Walden expressed his appreciation of GMRC, welcomed all in attendance, and introduced Jacob Evens, City of Dawsonville Manager; Sara Beacham, Accounts Payable/Event Coordinator; Amanda Edmondson, City of Dawsonville Director of Downtown Development; and Joey Leverette, Dawson County Manager.

INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

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 Connor Land, Field Representative for Congressman Andrew Clyde.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/DINNER

GMRC Council Chaplain Deborah Mack gave the devotion and invocation, then led the Pledge of Allegiance. Dinner was catered by The Station House in Dawsonville, Georgia.

PROGRAM

Amanda Meng from Georgia Tech's School of Computer Science presented on the CellWatch Program.

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

## 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 January 29, 2026 Council meeting. Kevin Herrit 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 and the other GMRC officers would be attending the 2026 National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) & Development District Association of Appalachia (DDAA) Conference in Washington, D.C., along with Executive Director Heather Feldman, Economic Development Director Patrick Larson, and Senior Project Manager Laurin Yoder. Mr. Larson will be presenting on Creative Placemaking. The officers and staff will also be going to Capitol Hill to meet with the Congressional Representatives of the GMRC service area.

Mr. Umbehant welcomed the two newest GMRC Council members – City of Hiawassee Mayor Jay Chastain and City of Hartwell Councilman Richard Sheller.

### Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Feldman also welcomed Jay Chastain and Richard Sheller and thanked them for their willingness to serve on the GMRC Council.

Executive Director Feldman reported that GMRC has just kicked off Phase 6 of the Roadway Element Validation and Mapping Program (REVAMP). During this phase, staff will be correcting the geometry on all roads in the state, cleaning up poorly drawn and defunct roads, and making sure the intersections are actually connected in the data.

The Aerial Photography and LiDAR project is running on schedule despite some delays due to weather. The LIDAR flights are complete, and initial data processing is underway. GMRC anticipates seeing some of the preliminary results of this data early next month. At the time of the meeting, aerial imagery collected was at 42% and should be wrapped up in early March.

The Economic Development Department has been hard at work and has recently submitted the following:

- A grant application for Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank (GTIB) funding was submitted on behalf of the City of Lavonia. The application outlines a request for \$1,000,300 to supplement the city's ARC grant for Downtown Streetscape Improvements. The City of Lavonia will utilize \$1,000,000 in ARC funding as match for the GTIB funding for a total project cost of \$2,000,300.

- An Economic Development Administration - Disaster Recovery application was submitted on behalf of the City of Baldwin. The city is requesting \$13,100,000 to perform improvements and upgrades to the headworks and other system processes at its Wastewater Treatment Plant. The total project cost is \$13,100,000, and they are requesting 100% from EDA's FY25 Disaster Supplemental.
- A BUILD (formerly RAISE) grant application was submitted on behalf of the City of Dawsonville. The grant is for \$7 million to complete the Reconnecting Dawsonville project. The project includes a walkover pedestrian bridge over Hwy 53; roadway construction and on-street parking in historic downtown; sidewalk construction, streetscape improvements, crosswalks, and lighting; stormwater system and utilities extension; as well as preliminary engineering, rights-of-way (ROW) acquisition, environmental, engineering design and construction documents, and construction.

Mrs. Feldman thanked the Economic Development staff for their hard work and dedication.

Executive Director Feldman and the GMRC Finance Team recently attended the Southeast Regional Directors Institute Finance Training in Greenville, South Carolina. The conference was a joint conference for both Executive Directors and Finance staff. Mrs. Feldman had the opportunity to present at the conference on GMRC's work with Continuation Manuals.

Executive Director Feldman reported that work had begun on GMRC's FY27 Budget. Mrs. Feldman thanked Finance Director Alicia Page for her work on getting a draft budget prepared. The GMRC Finance Committee will meet soon to discuss the proposed budget and will bring the budget to a future meeting for approval.

GMRC's Annual Clerks' Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 15, 2026. The meeting is a great opportunity for the region's clerks to network with each other and discuss topics of mutual interest and benefit. This year's topic will be DCA's new annexation portal. More information will be forthcoming, but if you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Gina Kessler at 770-538-2607 or [gkessler@gmrc.ga.gov](mailto:gkessler@gmrc.ga.gov).

Executive Director Heather Feldman thanked Hall County for hosting the Region 2 Quarterly City and County Managers' Meeting on February 11, 2026. The date for the next meeting is June 10, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. and will be hosted by the City of Cornelia.

Executive Director Feldman also reported that she, the GMRC Officers, Patrick Larson, and Laurin Yoder will all attend the NADO & DDAA Conference in Washington, D.C. on March 8 – 11, 2026. This will mark the fifth year in a row that a GMRC staff member has presented at the conference.

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is hosting a regional grant workshop on March 24, 2026 from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. in Cartersville, Georgia. Executive Director Feldman will serve as a panelist to share how GMRC has been successful in writing and

administering ARC grants in our region. If anybody is interested in attending, they should reach out to Mrs. Feldman.

Mrs. Feldman advised the Council that Gina Kessler would place an order for name tags in the near future, and to please contact her should anybody need one. Mrs. Kessler will also be sending out an information questionnaire to the Council.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

None

ANNOUNCEMENTS

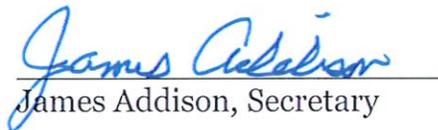
The March meeting will be in the City of Clayton.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:37 p.m.



Courtney Umbehant, Chairman



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
BANKS	Chris Ausburn	P	A	A	P	P	P	A	A				
	Todd Templeton	P	P	A	P	P	P	N-P	A				
	Vicki Bolling Jones	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	A				
	Billy Thurmond	A	(P)	(R)	(P)	A	A	(R)	(P)				
DAWSON	John Walden	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P				
	Kevin Herrit	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P				
	Cory Pulliam	P	P	P	(R)	P	P	(R)	P				
	Courtney Umbehant*	P	P	(P)	P	P	P	P	P				
FRANKLIN	Leslie McFarlin	P	P	P	E	A	P	(R)	(R)				
	Kelly Woodall	A	P	A	P	A	P	N-P	A				
	VACANT	P	P	A	A	A	A	V	V				
	Lawrence Bridges	V	V	V	N-P	A	P	P	A				
HALL	David Gibbs	A	E	E	A	E	A	P	E				
	Jonathan Elliott	P	A	A	A	P	P	N-P	E				
	Deborah Maack	P	P	P	P	P	P	A	P				
	VACANT	A	A	A	A	A	A	V	V				
HART	VACANT	A	A	A	A	A	A	V	V				
	Bill Chafin	P	P	P	P	P	P	(P)	P				
	VACANT	(R)	(R)	A	P	A	A	(R)	V				
	Sam Norton	P	A	P	P	A	A	N-P	A				
LUMPKIN	VACANT	P	A	P	P	P	P	V	V				

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