

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION  
*COUNCIL MEETING*

January 29, 2026

MINUTES

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission held its monthly meeting on Thursday, January 29, 2026 at 6:00 p.m., at the Hall County Government Center, 2875 Browns Bridge Road, Gainesville, GA 30504. The meeting was hosted by Hall County.

CALL TO ORDER

GMRC Chairman Courtney Umbehant called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. and thanked Hall County for hosting.

WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

Hall County Administrator Zach Propes welcomed all in attendance. Mr. Propes introduced the Hall County Commissioners in attendance - Chairman David Gibbs, Commissioner Billy Powell, Commissioner Gregg Poole, and Commissioner Jeff Stowe. Commissioner Kathy Cooper sent her regards. Mr. Propes also thanked the GMRC Chairman, Executive Director Feldman, and the GMRC staff for all they do for the region.

INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

GMRC Council Vice-Chairman Ron Matheson recognized special guests; Kathy Papa, Georgia Department of Community Affairs; Mike Fisher, WGI; Cheryl Smith, Georgia Department of Agriculture; Luke Hetland, North Georgia Field Director for Lt. Governor Burt Jones; Connor Land, Field Representative for Congressman Andrew Clyde; and Jesus Rubio, Northeast Georgia Outreach Representative for Senator Raphael Warnock.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/DINNER

GMRC Council member David Lee gave the devotion and invocation. Chairman Umbehant followed with the Pledge of Allegiance. Dinner was catered by Amanda's Farm to Table.

PROGRAM

Jacqueline Neubert and Bethany Russell from the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts provided an update on their local government compliance dashboard.

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 December 5, 2025 Council meeting. Craig Bryant made a motion to approve the minutes as written, and Sam Norton seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

## REPORTS

### Chairman's Report

Chairman Courtney Umbehant welcomed the new GMRC Council members, and returning member Sam Norton to the Council.

### Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Heather Feldman welcomed the newest GMRC Council members – Mr. Jon Elliott, City of Gainesville Councilman, replacing Sam Couvillon; Jay Chastain, City of Hiawasse Mayor, replacing Andrea Gibby; Kelly Woodall, Habersham County Commissioner, replacing Jimmy Tench; Todd Templeton, Town of Homer Commissioner; and Sam Norton, Mayor of the City of Dahlonega back to the council. Mr. Norton served on the GMRC Council for several years and served as the GMRC Council Chairman for four years. Orientations are in the process of being scheduled for the new members.

The legislative session commenced on Monday, January 12<sup>th</sup>. Governor Kemp named his Floor Leaders for the 2026 session. The Senate Leaders will be Senators Bo Hatchett and Drew Echols, and the House Leaders will be Representatives Soo Hong, Will Wade, Matthew Gambill, and Devan Seabaugh. Region 2 is very well represented. GMRC will continue to track any bills that will impact cities, counties, or Regional Commissions.

Executive Director Feldman reported that Georgia Mountains Regional Commission will be hosting a panel discussion featuring subject matter experts who will inform communities and businesses of the available opportunities that will come with the opening of the Blue Ridge Connector. The Blue Ridge Connector (i.e., the Inland Port) is opening in Hall County in 2026. The discussion will be held on January 30<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the Jackson EMC office building and registration is free. For more information, please contact Patrick Larson at [plarson@gmrc.ga.gov](mailto:plarson@gmrc.ga.gov).

Both U.S. Senators Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock will open their Congressionally Directed Spending application cycle on February 9, 2026. Interested communities should reach out to Patrick Larson at [plarson@gmrc.ga.gov](mailto:plarson@gmrc.ga.gov) for additional information.

Mrs. Feldman announced that the State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA) has issued a call for proposals through the Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank. Funding will be available in the form of grants and loans and will be available for traditional roadway-

related projects. Also, for the first time, loan funding will be available for public airports for building airport hangars. The deadline for proposals is Friday, February 13, 2026. If your community is interested in applying, please contact GMRC and speak to one of the Economic Development team members.

Executive Director Feldman was pleased to announce that the TCSG's performance monitoring of WorkSource Georgia Mountains resulted in zero findings, marking the fifth consecutive year with a clean audit. Mrs. Feldman thanked the WorkSource staff and Finance team for all of their hard work that contributed to the successful audit.

Mrs. Feldman announced that the next City and County Managers' meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 11, 2026 beginning at 10:00 a.m. and will be hosted by Hall County. The topic for the meeting, in addition to sharing best practices, will be an update from GDOT District Engineer, Jason Dykes.

If your city, county, planning commission, or DDA is interested in having a strategic planning retreat and would like assistance of the GMRC to facilitate the event, please reach out to Executive Director Feldman.

Mrs. Feldman reported that the Annual Meeting Committee met to discuss the 2025 Annual Meeting event. Surveys were very positive on the event and everyone that attended seemed to enjoy the event. The committee has already begun work on the 2026 event and is pleased to report that the 2026 event will be back at The Boathouse.

Mrs. Feldman was saddened to announce that Linda Strickland, former Executive Assistant of 40 years, had passed away at 82. Mrs. Feldman also reported that former Executive Director Ben Hulsesey's wife also passed away.

### Financial Report

A copy of the FY26 Quarter 2 Financial Report was included in the agenda packet that was received prior to the meeting. GMRC Finance Director Alicia Page explained that the report is for the unaudited period ending December 31, 2025.

As of the period end, the year-to-date revenues total \$2,080,324 of which:

- \$1,601,847 or approximately 77% are federal and state funding.
- \$324,373 or approximately 15% are member dues.
- \$84,850 or approximately 3% are charges for services.
- The remaining \$54,886 or 5% is from other revenues.

At the end of the period, expenditures totaled \$2,025,438. Total transfers and matching obligations for the period were \$288,061. Leaving a total surplus of \$54,885.73 for the period end.

Factors that contribute to this surplus include:

- \$20,088 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.
- The remaining surplus is due to recognized savings from interest earnings and conservative spending to facilitate the RCs ongoing operational needs.

Chairman Umbehant asked for a motion to accept the FY26 Quarter 2 Financial Report. Angela Whidby made the motion, and Kevin Herrit seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### Planning & GIS Department Update

GMRC Planning Director Adam Hazell presented a department update. Mr. Hazell also discussed the Department of Community Affairs' requirement updates to Developments of Regional Impact (DRI) and Service Delivery Strategy (SDS). Should you have any questions about those updates or about planning and GIS, please contact Adam Hazell at [ahazell@gmrc.ga.gov](mailto:ahazell@gmrc.ga.gov).

#### OLD BUSINESS

None

#### NEW BUSINESS

#### Acceptance of the FY25 GMRC Audit Report

Council members received the FY25 GMRC Audit Report in their agenda packets. Chairman Umbehant reminded the Council that at the November 13, 2025 meeting Clay Pilgrim with Rushton presented the draft FY25 annual financial audit. At the time of the November Council meeting, Rushton was not able to finalize the audit due to OMB's compliance supplement not yet being released. Part of the holdup from OMB was due to the government shutdown.

The compliance supplement has been released and there were no additional changes to the audit. GMRC is pleased to announce that there were no findings or material weaknesses.

Chairman Umbehant asked for a motion to accept the FY25 GMRC Audit Report. Angela Whidby made the motion, and Kevin Herrit seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

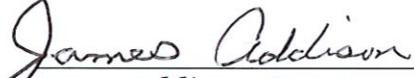
ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman Courtney Umbehant announced that the February meeting will be hosted by the City of Dawsonville.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

  
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Courtney Umbehant, Chairman

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

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