

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION *COUNCIL MEETING*

August 27, 2026

MINUTES

The GMRC Council held its regular monthly meeting on Thursday, August 27, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. at the Lavonia Historic Train Depot located at 1269 East Main Street, Lavonia, GA 30553. The meeting was hosted by the City of Lavonia and Franklin County.

CALL TO ORDER

GMRC Council Chairman Courtney Umbehant called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

The Mayor of Lavonia, Courtney Umbehant, welcomed all to Lavonia and thanked them for coming. Mayor Umbehant introduced Michael Schulman, City of Lavonia Council Member; Robert Ogburn, City of Lavonia Manager; Missy Holbrook, Mayor of the City of Carnesville; Gary Fesperman, City of Carnesville Acting Manager; former City of Royston Mayor Bill Stewart and his wife Carol; Vice President of Economic Development for North Georgia Technical College, Leslie McFarlin and her husband James; Angela Whidby, GMRC Council member; and Ashley Umbehant, DDA Director & Main Street Manager.

Cory Pulliam, Franklin County Commissioner, welcomed all in attendance on behalf of Franklin County and introduced Hart County Board of Commissioners Chairman Marshall Sayer.

INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

GMRC Vice-Chairman Ron Matheson recognized special guests Cheryl Smith, Georgia Department of Agriculture; Mike Fisher, WGI; Thomas Kimsey, U.S. Small Business Administration, and Luke Hetland, North Georgia Field Director for Lt. Governor Burt Jones.

Chairman Umbehant recognized Mike Fisher from WGI as it would be his last GMRC meeting before his retirement. Mr. Umbehant thanked Mr. Fisher for always supporting the GMRC.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/DINNER

Mr. David Lee gave a devotion and invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Dinner was catered by Top Dawg Grillers and 211 on Main provided the dessert.

PROGRAM

Kevin Cooke, District Director, and Thomas Kimsey, Associate Administrator - Office of Capital Access, for the U.S. Small Business Administration provided a program update.

CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES AND ATTENDANCE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Chairman Umbehant asked for any comments or a motion regarding the minutes and attendance report for the July 30, 2026 Council meeting. Doug Wayne made a motion to approve the minutes as written, and Sam Norton seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

REPORTS

Chairman's Report

GMRC Council Chairman Courney Umbehant expressed his appreciation of the GMRC and encouraged the local communities to take advantage of their services. Mr. Umbehant advised the Council that there will be updates to the GMRC Bylaws that will be sent out for review prior to action at the September Council meeting.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Feldman also recognized Mike Fisher from WGI and thanked him for all he has done for the GMRC.

Executive Director Heather Feldman reported that the Economic Development Administration – Revolving Loan Division annually scores active RLFs, and that GMRC received a 28 out of 30 for an “A” rating for the CARES Act (Covid funding). Mrs. Feldman thanked Laurin Yoder, Senior Project Manager, for managing the RLF for GMRC.

GMRC will be hosting training for the RLF Committee on September 16, 2026 from 9:00 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the GMRC office. While the training is designed for the committee members, if other Council members are interested in learning more about GMRC's RLF programs they are welcome to attend.

Executive Director Feldman will once again be serving as a mentor for new Executive Directors. Mrs. Feldman is excited to be mentoring an individual from Virginia and another in Montana.

Executive Director Feldman reported on several upcoming grant deadlines:

- Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) – deadline is October 30, 2026 and the maximum grant amount is \$1,000,000.
- Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) – deadline is October 2, 2026 and the maximum grant amount is \$750,000.

- Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program (GOSP) – deadline is October 16, 2026 and the maximum grant is \$3,000,000.

If there is interest in applying for these grants, please contact Patrick Larson, Laurin Yoder, or Maggie Smith from the GMRC Economic Development Department.

The GMRC will be hosting a Mayors' Symposium on October 9, 2026 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the GMRC office. This is by invitation only and will be limited to the 37 mayors in the region. This is GMRC's first time hosting a meeting like this and in the future, GMRC would like to do something for just the county chairman in the region. Executive Director thanked and recognized Mayor John Walden for thinking of this and for asking GMRC to facilitate the symposium.

Executive Director Feldman thanked White County for hosting the quarterly city and county managers' meeting on August 12, 2026. The next city and county managers' meeting will be hosted by the City of Lavonia on October 28, 2026. Those interested in attending should RSVP to Mrs. Feldman at hfeldman@gmrc.ga.gov.

The Georgia Association of Regional Commissions (GARC) Annual Conference is scheduled for November 4 – 6, 2026 at the King and Prince in St. Simons. For those interested in attending or who would like more information, please reach out to Mrs. Feldman.

Save the Date: The GMRC's Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner will be on Friday, December 4, 2026 and will be held at The Boathouse in Gainesville.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Administrative Leave (Comp Time)

Executive Director Feldman explained that GMRC's Personnel Policies and Procedures allow employees to earn Administrative Leave (Comp Time) for any hours worked over the 37.5 normal workweek as a benefit and that GMRC has a cap of 195 hours of personal leave (vacation, sick leave, additional time off).

Any hours on the books designated as comp time will have to be paid out if an employee leaves, which is a liability for GMRC when Comp Time accrued is "excessive" or not taken and continues to grow. Since GMRC puts a cap on personal leave, it is recommended that a cap of 195 be placed for accruing Comp Time as well.

Any employee that is over this amount currently would be grandfathered but would no longer accrue. Additionally, GMRC would work to pay an employee for any amount over 195 hours.

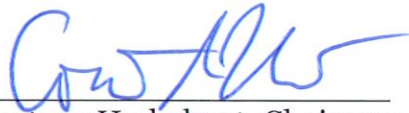
Chairman Umbehant asked for a motion to approve capping Comp Time at 195 hours. Bill Chafin made the motion and Cliff Bradshaw seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The September meeting will be hosted by White County on Thursday, September 24, 2026.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.



Courtney Umbehant, Chairman


James Addison, Secretary

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GMRC COUNCIL
ATTENDANCE SHEET
2026-2027

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