

LOWNDES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES
REGULAR SESSION
Tuesday, August 26, 2025

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Chairman Bill Slaughter
Commissioner Scott Orenstein
Commissioner Mark Wisenbaker
Commissioner Demarcus Marshall
Commissioner Michael Smith

Vice Chairperson Joyce Evans was not in attendance.

Chairman Slaughter called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

INVOCATION

Commissioner Michael Smith

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

Commissioner Michael Smith

MINUTES

The minutes were presented for the work session of August 11, 2025 and the regular session of August 12, 2025. Commissioner Orenstein made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, second by Commissioners Wisenbaker and Smith. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Chairman Slaughter stated if there were no objections, staff would like to add an item to the agenda, an appointment to the South Georgia Community Service Board. There being no objections, Chairman Slaughter asked that the item be added.

APPOINTMENT

South Georgia Community Service Board

Chairman Slaughter presented the item stating there is a vacant seat on this board for an elected official and nominated Commissioner Demarcus Marshall. There being no other nominations, Commissioner Demarcus Marshall was appointed by acclamation.

FOR CONSIDERATION

Adoption of the 2025 Millage Rate

Finance Director, Stephanie Black, presented the item stating the next four agenda items have to do with the millage rate and Ms. Black gave a brief presentation. Ms. Black stated the county-wide millage for 2025 should be set at the rollback rate of 5.051 mills. This represents a reduction of 0.232 mills

from 2024. Commissioner Orenstein made a motion to adopt the 2025 millage rate of 5.051, second by Commissioner Wisenbaker. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Adoption of Special District Millage for the Industrial Authority for 2025

Finance Director, Stephanie Black, presented the item. Ms. Black stated prior to 2025, the Georgia Department of Revenue required the millage assigned to the authorities to be included in the county-wide millage. However, with the adoption of HB 581 and related legislation, millage assessed for authority funding is now considered a special district and is adopted separately. The Industrial Authority rate was set at 1.00 mill since it was first implemented, but was reduced to 0.823 mills in 2024. The proposed millage for 2025 for the Industrial Authority is 1.00 mills, but there is an option to use 1.10 mills. Commissioner Orenstein made a motion to adopt the special district millage for the Industrial Authority for 2025 for 1.10 mills, second by Commissioner Smith. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Adoption of Special District Millage for the Parks and Recreation Authority for 2025

Finance Director, Stephanie Black, presented the item. Ms. Black stated that prior to 2025, the Georgia Department of Revenue required the millage assigned to the authorities to be included in the county-wide millage. However, with the adoption of HB 581 and related legislation, millage assessed for authority funding is now considered a special district and is adopted separately. The Parks and Recreation Authority rate was set at 1.25 mills since it was first implemented. The proposed millage for 2025 for the Parks and Recreation Authority is 1.25 mills. Commissioner Wisenbaker asked what year this was initiated, Ms. Black answered 2008 or 2009. Chairman Slaughter stated this was part of the enabling legislation. Commissioner Marshall made a motion to adopt the special district millage for the Parks and Recreation Authority for 2025 for 1.25 mills, second by Commissioner Orenstein. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Adoption of Special District Millage for Fire Services for 2025

Finance Director, Stephanie Black, presented the item. Ms. Black stated following the Board's approval to expand fire services in Lowndes County beginning with the FY 2022 budget, a special fire district was created that includes the unincorporated area of Lowndes County. Fire services was moved into a special fund and is supported by a millage from the special fire district. The Board is required annually to set the millage rate for this fire district. The 2025 rate should be set at 2.50 mills, which is no change from the prior year millage. Commissioner Wisenbaker asked did the legislature set this amount, Chairman Slaughter answered no. Commissioner Orenstein made a motion to adopt the special district millage for Fire Services for 2025 for 2.50 mills, second by Commissioner Marshall. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Opioid Litigation - Purdue Pharma

Finance Director, Stephanie Black, presented the item. Ms. Black stated at the August 12, 2024 meeting you authorized special counsel for the County to join in a proposed statement of interest in reaching a settlement with Purdue Pharma. Purdue Pharma has now reached a settlement through the bankruptcy process to resolve all pending governmental opioid-related claims. Lowndes County has been advised by special counsel to participate in this settlement in order to receive funds aimed at addressing the opioid crisis. In order to participate, the County must agree to the terms set forth by the State of Georgia and Local Governments and authorize the Chairman to sign the Memorandum of Understanding Concerning National Settlement with Purdue and execute the Subdivision Participation and Release Form.

Commissioner Marshall asked if there has been any indication regarding an amount that might be received for these services provided, Ms. Black answered she was unsure regarding Purdue Pharma, but she could get the amount received to date on the opioid funds and there are restrictions on how this money is used. Commissioner Smith asked if this is a final payment, Ms. Black responded no, this continues to come in. Commissioner Orenstein asked the County Attorney, Walter Elliott, if he saw anything in the Memorandum of Understanding that needs to be highlighted, County Attorney, Walter Elliott responded this is identical to the documents signed previously regarding the opioid litigation. Commissioner Marshall made a motion to approve the item as presented, second by Commissioner Smith. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Quit-Claim Deed of Abandoned Section of Hightower Road

Director of Engineering Services, Chad McLeod, presented the item stating that on May 9, 2023 Lowndes County abandoned a section of High Tower Road. Mr. McLeod stated the United States Air Force has requested a quit claim deed for the abandoned section of right of way. The proposed quit claim deed and the plat of the abandoned section of right of way are both attached. Commissioner Wisenbaker made a motion to approve the request as presented, second by Commissioner Orenstein. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

SPLOST IX

County Manager, Paige Dukes, presented the item. Mrs. Dukes stated Lowndes County approved the SPLOST IX Agreement on August 4, 2025, and all five cities have approved the SPLOST IX agreement as well. Mrs. Dukes further stated the next step requires the Commission to approve the Resolution so that information can be forwarded to the Board of Elections. Commissioner Smith asked if the timeline was able to stay on track, Mrs. Dukes responded yes. Commissioner Wisenbaker made a motion to approve the resolution as presented, second by Commissioner Smith. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

TREES Act Resolution

County Manager, Paige Dukes, presented the item. Mrs. Dukes stated this item provides for tax relief for those harvesting timber for the last quarter of 2024 and all of 2025. There is a formula by which any relief which is granted by Lowndes County will be reimbursed by the State of Georgia. This resolution will allow Lowndes County to move forward in the process. Chief Appraiser, Lisa Bryant, will be the point of contact for coordinating the necessary forms. Additionally, Mrs. Dukes stated for Lowndes County this is about \$46,000 on average annual impact. Commissioner Marshall asked for the timeline for reimbursements, Mrs. Dukes answered she hasn't checked for that information yet. Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve the resolution, second by Commissioner Orenstein. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

AFFF/PFAS Groundwater Claims

Utilities Director, Steve Stalvey, presented the item. Mr. Stalvey stated the Aqueous Film Forming Foams (AFFF), used to fight liquid fuel fires, contain PFAS ("forever chemicals") identified by the EPA as carcinogenic. Manufacturers 3M and Dupont have paid billions in lawsuit settlements. Local governments must file claims by January 1, 2026, and begin testing by September 2025 to join the litigation. Two law firms, Stag Liuzza located in New Orleans and Carothers and Mitchell located in Georgia, have offered legal services to Georgia municipalities, including Lowndes County, on a contingency basis (no upfront cost; fees only if a settlement is received). Staff recommends the Board approve and authorize the Chairman to sign agreements with the firms and adopt the resolution.

Commissioner Orenstein made a motion to approve the item as presented, second by Commissioner Marshall. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

REPORTS - County Manager

County Manager, Paige Dukes, asked Utilities Director, Steve Stalvey to give an update regarding the Naylor Well Project. Mr. Stalvey stated the contractor has mobilized, onsite piping is twenty-five percent complete and Georgia Power is in the process of running power lines to the sites.

Mrs. Dukes asked Engineering Services Director, Chad McLeod to give an update regarding the jail expansion. Mr. McLeod stated the jail expansion is nearing completion over the next two weeks and a punch list is expect to be finalized by the end of September. Mr. McLeod stated final inspections are anticipated by the end of October. Commissioner Smith asked regarding the supply chain issues, Mr. McLeod answered there have been no issues. Chairman Slaughter requested Mr. McLeod to coordinate with Sheriff Paulk for a tour of the facility for the Commissioners.

Mrs. Dukes asked Public Information Officer, Meghan Barwick to give an update regarding the 'Made in Lowndes Market' with thirty vendors participating. Mrs. Barwick stated the event was a success and there was a significant increase in the traffic downtown. The Lowndes County Gift Shop generated \$2,000.00 in sales. All of the vendors expressed interest in future events. Mrs. Barwick gave a special thanks to Jessica Ganas, the Historic Courthouse Facility & Marketing Coordinator, for her efforts in helping with this event. Commissioner Wisenbaker asked Mrs. Barwick regarding the Bird Hospital, Mrs. Barwick noted the Lowndes County Historical Society recently completed a timeline of Lowndes County displayed in their building.

Mrs. Dukes expressed her gratitude for the Commission's leadership and for allowing staff to participate in these activities.

CITIZENS WISHING TO BE HEARD -

There were no citizens wishing to be heard.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Marshall wished everyone a happy and safe Labor Day weekend. Chairman Slaughter expressed appreciation to the Commissioners for their efforts related to several items on the agenda tonight. Commissioner Smith made a motion to adjourn the meeting, second by Commissioner Orenstein. Chairman Slaughter adjourned the meeting at 6:02 p.m.