

LOWNDES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
MINUTES  
WORK SESSION  
Monday, December 8, 2025

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:**

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

Vice Chairman Scott Orenstein and Commissioner Joyce Evans were not in attendance.

Chairman Slaughter called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

**PRESENTATIONS**

**GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award**

Chairman Slaughter stated this item would be presented at the regular session commission meeting.

**Georgia Firefighters Burn Foundation Check Presentation (Work Session)**

Fire Rescue Chief, Billy Young, introduced Nathan Huffmaster, Battalion Chief with Lowndes County Fire Rescue. Chief Huffmaster spoke about the Mulligans and Halligans Golf Tournament held in October at Quiet Pines Golf Course. Proceeds from the tournament totaled \$3,350.00, and a check was presented to the Executive Director, Dennis Gardin, of the Georgia Firefighters Burn Foundation.

**Historic Preservation Award Presentation by Daughters of the American Revolution (Regular Session)** Chairman Slaughter stated this item would be presented at the regular session commission meeting.

**Recognition of EMA Director Ashley Tye for receiving the Prestigious Clayton R. Christopher Memorial Award by the International Association of Emergency Managers (Regular Session)**

Chairman Slaughter commended Emergency Management Director, Ashley Tye, for receiving the Clayton R. Christopher Memorial Award from the International Association of Emergency Managers. Chairman Slaughter stated that it is the highest award an emergency manager can receive nationwide. Chairman Slaughter congratulated Mr. Tye and stated that the recognition would be formally presented at the regular session commission meeting.

**MINUTES**

The minutes were presented for the work session and regular session of November 12, 2025. No revisions to the minutes were requested.

## **APPOINTMENTS**

### **Appointments for the Greater Lowndes Planning Commission, Lowndes County Board of Assessors, Lowndes County Library Board, & Valdosta-Lowndes County Conference Center and Tourism Authority**

Chairman Slaughter stated that all appointments would be presented during the regular session meeting.

## **PUBLIC HEARING**

### **Basic Decorative Street Lighting Districts – Grove Pointe, Phase V, Sec. 3, The Landings, Phase 4, and Val Del Estates, Phases 4 & 5**

County Planner, J.D. Dillard, presented the item. Mr. Dillard stated this request is to add fifty-two (52) lots of Phase V, Section 3 of the Grove Pointe Subdivision, fifty-two (52) lots of Phase 4 of the Landings Subdivision and forty-nine (49) lots of Phase 4 and 5 of the Val Del Estates Subdivision into Lowndes County's basic decorative street lighting district under the Street Lighting Ordinance. Mr. Dillard stated the current charge for the basic decorative street lighting is \$61.50 per lot, per year.

### **REZ-2025-16 Copeland Road Subdivision, 2480 Copeland Rd, ~18ac, County Utilities, R-10/c to R-10**

County Planner, J.D. Dillard, presented the item. Mr. Dillard stated this request seeks to remove several of the conditions that were placed on the property as a result of REZ-2018-07, which was ultimately approved for R-10 with the following conditions:

1. All lots, including the existing residence, shall front interior roads.
2. If there are any proposed entrances off of Lester Road, then the developer will be required to pave Lester Road from the entrance to Copeland Road. The Developer will also be responsible for the design, any acquisition of necessary right-of-way, relocation of utilities, and construction costs for the paving of Lester Road from the development's southernmost entrance to Copeland Road.
3. The developer will be required to construct a pedestrian crossing and sidewalk from the subdivision to Lowndes Middle School. The developer will be responsible for the design, relocation of utilities, and construction costs for those improvements.
4. All lots adjacent to the western border and the southern border of the subject property shall meet or exceed a minimum lot width of 100'.
5. No manufactured homes or mobile homes.
6. No two-family or duplex residences.
7. Minimum lot size of 1/3 acre lots (14,520 sq. ft.) instead of 1/4 acre lots.

The applicant has applied for straight R-10 zoning and given the property's history, it is within the Urban Service Area, Valdosta Airport (VLD) Overlay, a drastic groundwater recharge area, and Suburban Character Area, which recommend R-10 zoning. The subject property possesses road frontage on Copeland Road and Lester Road, a county-maintained major collector and local road respectively, with proposed access from Copeland Road only.

The TRC analyzed the request, the standards governing the exercise of zoning power set forth in 10.01.05 of the ULDC, and factors most relevant to this application, including the neighboring land uses and lot sizes, the availability of County Utilities, the nearby existing school campus (Lowndes Middle), the adjacent undeveloped Board of Education owned property, and some of the previously

imposed conditions that have already been resolved or are under GDOT guidelines, and therefore recommends approval of the request for R-10 zoning with the following conditions:

1. All new lots shall front interior roads.
2. All lots adjacent to the western border and the southern border of the subject property shall meet or exceed a minimum lot width of 100'.
3. No manufactured homes or mobile homes.
4. No two-family or duplex residences.
5. Minimum lot size of 1/3 acre lots (14,520 sq. ft.) along the southern border instead of 1/4 acre lots.

There is a total lot change of approximately six lots overall from the current conditions to the proposed new conditions. The Planning Commission recommended approval of the request with the five (5) new TRC conditions.

Commissioner Wisenbaker asked if there was any consideration of ingress and egress on Copeland Road instead of Lester Road. Mr. Dillard responded yes, TRC still recommended approval for these proposed access points on Copeland Road. This is not a final design. Commissioner Wisenbaker stated he is concerned with the traffic on Copeland Road in front of the schools and it needs to be considered for the ingress/egress to go on Lester Road instead of Copeland Road. Chairman Slaughter asked Director of Engineering Services, Chad McLeod, with Copeland Road improvements as one of the TIA projects would the ingress/egress from decel lanes or turn lanes would that be something that would be included in the design of Copeland Road. Mr. McLeod stated it would have to be studied, that will be a widening project on Copeland Road it will go from two to either three or four lanes but will be taken into consideration with traffic studies. Chairman Slaughter stated there was opposition regarding ingress/egress off of Lester Road, years ago. Mr. Dillard stated there was previously opposition and Lester Road was unpaved at that time, it has since been paved with no opposition presented to staff. Commissioner Wisenbaker stated that from a financial standpoint coming off of Lester Road would not require a deceleration lane, so financially it would be better to use Lester Road. Mr. McLeod stated that will be considered. Commissioner Smith asked if Lester Road is paved from Copeland Road to Inner Perimeter, Mr. McLeod answered that is correct. Commissioner Marshall, stated as it pertains to the new school that will be built, the school zone will be shifted. Mr. McLeod stated that is correct and it depends on the exit and entrance that the school will be using will depend on the school zone. Mr. McLeod stated we haven't seen a master plan to see the entrance and exit. Chairman Slaughter asked County Manager, Paige Dukes to schedule a meeting with the school board and commissioners to be on the same page. Our understanding of the school has changed, and they are leaning towards one school instead of two schools.

#### **REZ-2025-17 Shiloh Road, ~8.2 ac 6641 Shiloh Road, E-A to R-A, Well & Septic**

County Planner, J.D. Dillard, presented the item. Mr. Dillard stated this request represents a change in zoning on the subject property from E-A (Estate Agricultural) to R-A (Residential Agricultural) in order for the property to be subdivided into legally conforming parcels. The subject property is within the Rural Service Area and Agricultural Character Areas, which recommend R-A zoning, while access to the property is from Shiloh Road, a County maintained Collector. There is a small pond/wetland area in the southwest corner, and an existing residence and accessory structure in the northeast corner. The TRC analyzed the request, the standards governing the exercise of zoning power set forth in 10.01.05 of the ULDC, and factors most relevant to this application, including the neighboring land

uses and lot sizes, the viability of well and septic systems, the potential environmental impacts, and the ability to properly apply the standards of the ULDC, and therefore recommends approval of the request for R-A zoning only on the 2.5-acre portion (Tract 1) as depicted by the Carter Surveying plat dated 10-31-2025. At the November Planning Commission meeting, the applicant's representative spoke in support, and no one spoke in opposition. The GLPC recommended approval of the request for R-A zoning only on the 2.5-acre portion (Tract 1) as depicted by the Carter Surveying plat dated 10-31-2025 unanimously.

## **FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **FY2027 5311 Rural Transit Authorizing Resolution**

County Planner, J.D. Dillard, presented the item. Mr. Dillard stated the Southern Georgia Regional Commission voted at their August 28, 2025, meeting to apply for the FY2027 5311 Rural Transportation Program Grant Funding from the Georgia Department of Transportation in order to continue operating the regional transit system on behalf of the participating local municipalities, including Lowndes County. Commissioner Smith inquired if every county has to be approved for the eighteen (18) county area. Mr. Dillard responded yes. Commissioner Smith asked if every county participates, Mr. Dillard responded that fourteen (14) out of the eighteen (18) are participating.

### **Abandonment of Grice Road**

Director of Engineering Services, Chad McLeod, presented the item. Mr. McLeod stated a request to abandon Grice Road was received from Dale Grice who owns the property at 3532 Grice Road. Staff asked for comments from stakeholder departments and public safety regarding this abandonment. All comments were from public safety relating to access to all the parcels in case of an emergency. The owners will be required to install a pre-planned access gate in the event they install a fence in the future, and they must maintain the driveway. The abandonment will also landlock a three-acre parcel that is owned by Joy M. Bassford, the sister of Dale Grice. Mr. McLeod stated they understand if they ever want to build on that parcel they will have to get a variance. Georgia statute requires an initial determination either (a) "that the section of the county road system has for any reason ceased to be used by the public to the extent that no substantial public purpose is served by it" or (b) "that its removal from the county road system is otherwise in the best public interest," or both. If the Board makes either or both of these determinations, the statute provides for notice to adjoining property owners, notice to the public by newspaper publication, and a public hearing. Commissioner Smith inquired regarding the grading of this road. Mr. McLeod answered that if the commission votes to abandon it, Lowndes County will have no rights to the road. Commissioner Smith asked if the road was being maintained. Mr. McLeod answered a little.

### **PI# 0016280 Twin Lakes Road Paving and Drainage Improvements Georgia Power Relocation Agreement**

Director of Engineering Services, Chad McLeod, presented the item. Mr. McLeod stated the Twin Lakes Road Paving and Drainage Improvements is a TIA 1 project. The design and documents are in the final stages of being complete. Georgia Power will have to relocate seventeen (17) poles and the lines for these poles. Georgia Power has proved prior rights and provided Lowndes County with a relocation agreement with a not to exceed amount of \$721,989.00. This is a planned cost and will be covered by TSPLOST. Commissioner Marshall asked regarding a timeline, Mr. McLeod answered the project will be bid in March 2026 and there is a sixty-day process to complete contracts. The utilities will begin the process of relocation and hopefully next fall will be when Georgia Power will be relocating the poles. Commissioner Smith asked if this was a TIA 1 Project. Mr. McLeod answered yes.

Commissioner Smith asked how many miles is Twin Lakes Road. Mr. McLeod answered he was unsure, but would verify.

### **PI 0016280 Twin Lakes Road Right of Way Purchases for Parcels 19 and 20**

Director of Engineering Services, Chad McLeod, presented the item. Mr. McLeod stated staff has negotiated purchase of the right of way for Parcels 19 and 20 for the Twin Lakes Road TSPLOST project. The attached detailed schedule identifies the property, the grantor, and the purchase price for each parcel. Lowndes County is purchasing 0.080 acres from Brenda Johnson, Parcel 19, for \$1,714.00 and 0.069 acres from Katrina Moore, Parcel 20, for \$3,000.00.

### **PI 0016280 Twin Lakes Road Right of Way Purchases for Parcels 2, 6, and 10**

Director of Engineering Services, Chad McLeod, presented the item. Mr. McLeod stated staff has negotiated purchase of the right of way for parcels 2, 6, and 10 for the Twin Lakes Road which is owned by L. Warren Turner, Jr. The attached Purchase Agreement identifies the property, the grantor, and the purchase price and other consideration regarding gates, fencing, trees, access to water, and CUVA application fees for all three parcels. Lowndes County is purchasing 1.612 acres from L. Warren Turner, Jr. The purchase price is \$6,008.00.

### **Transportation Investment Act (TIA) Local Delivery Application for Hickory Grove Road Shoulder Widening and Skipper Bridge Road Shoulder Widening**

Director of Engineering Services, Chad McLeod, presented the item. Mr. McLeod stated Hickory Grove Road Shoulder Widening and Skipper Bridge Road Shoulder Widening are on the TIA II list to bid in July 2026. The Local Delivery Application starts the process by allowing Lowndes County to manage the project at the local government level. If approved, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) will send an approval letter and agreement to be approved by the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners. The project will include a 2' widening on each side of the road, resurfacing, new signage, audible edge rumble strips, and drainage structure improvement, if required. The Hickory Grove Road project will begin at US Hwy 41 and end at the Echols County/Lowndes County line. The Skipper Bridge Road project will begin near Bemiss Road and end at Hwy 122. Commissioner Wisenbaker asked if the audible rumble strips can be removed. Mr. Mcleod responded that will be taken into consideration.

### **Transportation Investment Act (TIA) Local Delivery Application for Val Del Road Widening**

Director of Engineering, Chad McLeod, presented the item. Mr. McLeod stated Val Del Road Widening is on the TIA II list to bid in January 2030. The Local Delivery Application starts the process by allowing Lowndes County to manage the project at the local government level. If approved, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) will send an approval letter and agreement to be approved by the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners. Staff has already started preliminary programming and traffic studies to help determine the final typical section. The project will begin at North Valdosta Road and end at McMillian Road with the widening, and the remaining portion being resurfaced. Commissioner Wisenbaker asked if this was going to be four lanes. Mr. McLeod answered yes. Commissioner Marshall asked regarding the bid date of 2030 and if that date could be moved up. Mr. McLeod stated the TIA money is programmed ahead of time based on selections by the TIA office. Mr. McLeod stated there may be a possibility that the date will move up based on collections in the TIA Office, and how the engineering work moves forward, but for now it is January 2030. Commissioner Marshall asked regarding the McMillian intersection with Val Del Road if there are plans to improve the crossway to realign. Mr. McLeod responded yes, that is part of this project to realign the intersection for better site distance and alignment. Chairman Slaughter stated to support what Mr.

McLeod explained regarding delivery, it does depend on when the revenue comes in and if there is an opportunity to move forward.

### **Design-Build Contract for Lowndes County Animal Shelter**

Director of Engineering Services, Chad McLeod, presented the item. Mr. McLeod stated Lowndes County solicited for Design-Build contractors with proposals due on September 12, 2025. Seven Design-Build firms turned in a proposal. The scoring committee reviewed the proposals and scored each proposer on the specific information requested. The Design-Build firm of Kellerman Construction, Inc. lead all firms in scoring from the scoring committee. The breakdown of the contract is \$450,000.00 for sitework, \$4,050,000.00 for construction, \$200,000.00 for contingency, and \$300,000.00 for Architectural & Engineering. If approved, the design process will begin immediately and the Design-Builder will submit a final proposal for construction to Lowndes County for approval in April 2026. Mr. McLeod stated this is a design build in which a contractor is going to be hired, if the board approves, then the contractor hires the architect and begins the design process. This will be done within the five million allotted for the project. The contractor, architect and staff will be working together. Chairman Slaughter stated this is an effort to keep this project within the budget set and the contractor must work within that budget from a design standpoint and deliver the project. Commissioner Marshall asked regarding a completion date. Mr. McLeod responded that if everything moves forward and a final approval for construction is submitted, which will come before the board in April 2026, construction could begin in May 2026. This project will be completed within one year to eighteen months. Commissioner Smith asked how this is being funded. Mr. McLeod answered SPLOST VII and VIII.

### **Quit Claim Deed (QCD) for Navigable Waters, LLC at 4939 Bemiss Road**

Director of Engineering Services, Chad McLeod, presented the item. Mr. McLeod stated Parcel 0145B 185B, owned by Navigable Waters, LLC on Bemiss Road, shows a drainage easement on plats dating back to 1968. Lowndes County does not have any record of any rights to the drainage easement. The owner has requested a Quit Claim Deed from Lowndes County stating that Lowndes County has not had or claimed, and does not now have or claim, any interest in said described property, including any interest in the "25' drainage easement."

### **Adoption of 2027 Budget Calendar**

Finance Director, Stephanie Black, presented the proposed budget calendar for fiscal year 2027. Ms. Black stated the Commission is required to adopt a balanced budget by June 30, 2026, adding the other dates are presented as guidelines for the process.

### **2026 Public Defender Contracts**

Chairman Slaughter stated if there were no objections, he would like to let Public Defender, Wade Krueger present his item first, since he needs to leave for court.

Public Defender, Wade Krueger, presented the item. Mr. Krueger stated this is an ongoing renewal of the current contract required by the state with no changes to this contract. Mr. Krueger stated this contract has been in place for twenty years. Commissioner Marshall asked if there were any changes in twenty years that needs to be changed contractually or financially to improve the Public Defender's Office. Mr. Krueger responded as far as the contract, those are basic terms and are standard. Mr. Krueger stated continuing to keep the office fully staffed has been a challenge and possibly increasing the entry-level salaries will be an item to continually address. Commissioner Marshall wanted to verify, from a policy standpoint, that as times change, the Public Defender's Office is operating satisfactorily on a daily basis. Mr. Krueger responded that an ongoing effort by the state agency has resulted in

securing legislative approval over the years for an increased starting salary for an entry-level public defender, currently set at \$72,000.00. He stated that our office has worked to remain competitive and that this will continue to be addressed during budget meetings. Chairman Slaughter stated that with the increased jail population, the Commission is working to track and implement improvements to help reduce that population. Chairman Slaughter requested that the Public Defender's Office review its operations to ensure there are no delays that would keep individuals incarcerated longer than necessary and to report back on any areas where improvements are needed.

### **2026 ACCG Workers' Compensation Insurance Renewal**

Human Resources Director, Kevin Beals, presented the item. Mr. Beals presented the renewal in the amount of \$301,680.00 to include discounts and safety credits that reduce the annual premium to \$280,452.00. Mr. Beals stated that due to the County's safety/loss control program, there was a 7.5% reduction added as well.

### **2026 Stop Loss Insurance Coverage Renewal**

Human Resources Director, Kevin Beals, presented the annual Stop Loss coverage related to Lowndes County's self-insured employee insurance plan, in the amount of \$1,929,379.00. Mr. Beals stated that EPIC Brokers & Consultants represents Lowndes County as our health insurance broker and Swiss Re is currently offering the lowest available rates for the upcoming 2026 plan year.

### **Enhancement and Innovation/Law Enforcement Grant**

Lowndes County Accountability Court Representative, Geoffrey Martin, stated this request is for two grants recently submitted. The Lowndes County Juvenile Accountability Court is a grant-funded program serving high-risk, high-need juveniles in the court system with underlying substance use disorders that contribute to their charges. The goals are to address group causes and behavior through treatment, supervision structure, ultimately improving public safety and reducing recidivism. Mr. Martin stated there are currently thirteen (13) active participants, with five (5) participants that have begun to test consistently negative for THC. For the Enhancement and Innovation Grant money was requested for case management, drug testing and supplies and we were awarded \$7,626.00 and there is a 15 % match in the amount of \$1,346.00. The Law Enforcement Grant has not been completed yet and that amount requested is \$3,000.00 and those funds are for deputies that visit juveniles at their homes for drug screenings. Commissioner Marshall asked what onsite screening devices were used, breathalyzers. Mr. Martin answered instant read urine drug testing cups. Commissioner Marshall asked if these tests were given at home or the Sheriff's Office, Mr. Martin answered different locations such as court, in the courthouse and also the juveniles' homes. Chairman Slaughter stated for the Law Enforcement Grant this will be prepared by the end of the year and we are giving approval to move forward with the grant.

### **Motorola Migration Assurance Plan (MAP)**

911 Director, Tonya Davis, presented the item. Mrs. Davis stated the Motorola Migration Assurance Plan (MAP) is a continuation of our existing evergreen agreement, which has been in place since 2017, that provides the ongoing maintenance, upgrades, and system enhancements required to sustain the Public Safety Radio System. Our current agreement expires in August 2027. The agreement presented for consideration allows us to secure pricing at current rates, with the new term beginning in September 2027 and extending through August 2032. The total cost is \$5,039,730.00, of that amount, approximately \$2,143,327.00, will be for equipment planned for use with future SPLOST funds. Chairman Slaughter asked if this was for the equipment and software. Mrs. Davis responded yes, and the equipment can be invoiced separately. County Manager, Paige Dukes, stated a question

was asked from Commissioner Marshall related to future AI capabilities and this system being able to accept that technology. Mrs. Davis responded that this does provide for any future technology upgrades and enhancements through 2032. Commissioner Smith asked regarding the quantity of 12 consoles, if there may be a need for additional consoles in the upcoming years. Mrs. Davis stated twelve (12) consoles are sufficient with nine (9) currently being used and three (3) consoles were built in to be used for overflow, such as hurricanes.

## **BID**

### **LAS Pump Station Upgrade**

Utilities Director, Steve Stalvey, presented the item. Mr. Stalvey stated the next step in upgrading the LAS and increasing the permit capacity is replacing the existing pump station. The current station has three pumps, with additional fields under irrigation; the new station will have four pumps. Additionally, we will be installing a back-up generator to provide emergency power to the pump station. The project was advertised, and three bids were received. Doyle Hancock and Sons Construction Company, Inc. \$3,487,498.00, RPI Underground, Inc. \$3,700,144.00, and James Warren & Associates, \$3,932,804.15. Bids included an alternate manufacturer, USEMCO, for the pump station. After consultation with the engineer and references, staff chose the alternate manufacturer, resulting in a \$922,192.56 savings. Staff recommends approval and to authorize the Chairman to sign the agreement with Doyle Hancock and Sons Construction Company, Inc. for \$2,565,305.44. Commissioner Smith asked if this was one of the last ARPA projects to fund. Ms. Black responded that this comes from the state ARPA grant. There is a match that comes out of the federal APRA fund, but the majority is out of the state ARPA fund.

### **REPORTS - County Manager**

Mrs. Dukes deferred her report until tomorrow evening.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Chairman Slaughter recognized City of Valdosta Councilwoman Sandra Tooley for being in attendance this morning.

Commissioner Wisenbaker made a motion to adjourn the meeting, second by Commissioner Smith. Chairman Slaughter adjourned the meeting at 9:26 a.m.