

LOWNDES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
MINUTES  
WORK SESSION  
Monday, April 27, 2026

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

Vice Chairman Scott Orenstein was not in attendance.

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

## **MINUTES**

The minutes were presented for the work session of April 13, 2026 and the regular session of April 14, 2026. No revisions to the minutes were requested.

## **FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **Adoption of the Lowndes County Resolution for Emergency Management and Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP)**

EMA Director, Ashley Tye, presented the item. Mr. Tye stated the last full revision of the Local Emergency Operations Plan was completed in 2016. While the plan is reviewed annually, a comprehensive revision had not been completed in approximately ten years. He explained the document outlines the county's emergency management practices and is intended to assist outside personnel who may respond during emergencies by providing guidance on procedures and operations. Mr. Tye stated the plan will continue to be revised as new emergencies arise and technologies evolve. The update includes adoption of the Local Emergency Operations Plan along with a Lowndes County Resolution for Emergency Management. Mr. Tye stated that each city has the opportunity to adopt the resolution as well. Commissioner Marshall asked whether reimbursement is available through mutual aid agreements related to fire response. Mr. Tye stated the language is written to allow the county to submit eligible expenses for reimbursement if a federal declaration is in place. Commissioner Marshall clarified that reimbursement depends on when the declaration is made, and Mr. Tye confirmed that is correct. County Manager, Paige Dukes, stated that even with personnel costs and reimbursement opportunities available, the county must still carefully manage resources and remain mindful of the budget. Commissioner Smith asked for an update regarding reimbursement related to Hurricane Helene. Mr. Tye responded that approximately four million dollars in debris reimbursement remains outstanding and is expected to be available within approximately six weeks.

### **FY2027 Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant Application**

EMA Director, Ashley Tye, presented the item. Mr. Tye stated the Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant provides funding for Functional Family Therapy (FFT), which has been implemented since 2014. Mr. Tye stated this program is similar to the Strengthening Families Program (SFP), which is group-based; however, FFT provides one-on-one counseling services within the home for youth and their families. By the end of June, services had been provided to 54 youth and their families. This grant renewal requests funding to serve 59 families during the period of July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027. Commissioner Marshall asked for clarification regarding the statement about reducing new instances of secure detention. Mr. Tye answered that the purpose of this program is to reduce the number of juveniles placed in youth detention centers. Mr. Tye stated that in 2014, the General Assembly recognized it was more cost-effective to require families to participate in intervention programs such as FFT rather than placing juveniles in secure detention facilities. Commissioner Marshall asked whether participation is determined based on financial need. Mr. Tye answered that certain criteria must be considered for participation in the program.

### **Renewal of Disaster Related Debris Contracts**

EMA Director, Ashley Tye, presented the item. Mr. Tye stated on June 25, 2024, the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners awarded pre-event contracts for disaster-related debris removal services. Contracts were executed with Ashbriitt Environmental, DRC Emergency Services, and Southern Disaster Recovery (SDR). The initial contracts were for one-year terms with the option to renew for up to an additional four (4) years. This will be the second renewal and the third year of the contracts. The Board of Commissioners exercised that option in 2025, renewing the contracts for all three vendors through June 24, 2026. As part of that renewal process, the Board approved a 1.9% price increase for Ashbriitt Environmental, based on the Consumer Price Index in effect at the time of renewal and consistent with the terms of the initial contract. This year neither Ashbriitt Environmental, DRC Emergency Services nor Southern Disaster Recovery (SDR) requested a price increase. All three vendors have expressed their desire to renew their contracts with Lowndes County for an additional one-year term, effective from June 25, 2026, through June 24, 2027. None of the vendors are requesting a price increase as part of this renewal. Commissioner Wisenbaker asked if a price decrease could be requested. Mr. Tye answered that he would ask. Commissioner Smith asked if the contracts included a retainer. Mr. Tye responded that there is no retainer and that costs are only incurred if work begins.

### **Consideration of Procurement Determination Declaring Initial Proposal Non-Responsive and Award of Contract to Cowart Electric**

EMA Director, Ashley Tye, presented the item. Mr. Tye stated in 2019, the Board approved a hazard mitigation application to FEMA on behalf of Pruitt Health. In January 2025, that application was approved, and Pruitt Health engaged an engineer to evaluate their facilities and determine what improvements were needed. A detailed specification was issued as part of the RFP process. Mr. Tye stated that in February 2026, the Board approved and awarded the project to Current Edge Solutions based on the determination that the company submitted the most responsive proposal. One requirement of the project was the submission of shop drawings for engineering review. During that review, engineers identified two deviations from the specifications: the bid documents required an aluminum enclosure, while the proposal specified a steel enclosure, and the specifications required a powder-coated finish while the proposal included enamel paint. Mr. Tye stated staff returned to the vendor for clarification, and the vendor advised they could not meet the specifications at the awarded

price. Staff then worked with the Finance Department and Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency to ensure compliance with federal procurement and FEMA policies. Based on those findings, staff recommended the proposal from Current Edge Solutions be deemed non-responsive and that the contract instead be awarded to Cowart Electric in the amount of \$1,845,280.00. Funding for the project includes \$1,088,903.00 from FEMA, \$145,187.00 from GEMA, and \$611,190.00 from Pruitt Health. Mr. Tye stated there is no budget impact to Lowndes County. Commissioner Smith asked whether there were any concerns regarding the Cummins generators, and Mr. Tye responded there were no concerns. Mr. Tye also stated that Lowndes County has a strong history with Cowart Electric and stated that Pruitt Health would benefit from having local service support. Commissioner Smith also asked about the installation timeline, and Mr. Tye stated he is optimistic the project can be completed by the end of the year.

### **VAWA Continuation Grant Application**

The Solicitor General's Office, Victim Services Director, Karen Hayes, presented the item. Ms. Hayes stated on January 27, 2026, the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners approved the application for Continuation Funding available through the VAWA Grant Program. This grant funds budgeted costs associated with a specialized prosecutor to handle Family Violence and Violence Against Women Crimes. We were recently notified that our application was approved at the same amounts as last year; \$79,112.00 in Federal funds and \$26,371.00 in matching funds by the County. The performance period for this grant runs from January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026. The Solicitor General's Office requests acceptance of the award and activation of the award packet which requires that the Chairman sign the award documents.

### **Opioid Litigation - Six (6) Remnant Defendants**

Assistant Finance Director, Rachel Bowen, presented the item. A settlement agreement has been reached by six (6) Remnant Defendants to provide financial resources to combat the opioid epidemic across the United States. Special Counsel has advised Lowndes County to participate in this settlement to receive funds to abate the opioid crisis. Mrs. Bowen stated as a reminder, the funds received from these litigation settlements must be used for treatment, prevention, recovery support or other strategies aimed at addressing the opioid crisis. In order to participate in the settlement, Board approval is requested to authorize the Chairman to execute the documents. Commissioner Smith asked when these funds come in will it be voted on as to which program will be used. County Manager, Paige Dukes, answered our first recommendation would be the intervention and positive impact on recidivism numbers that Lowndes County Probation works through with misdemeanor probation.

### **Potable Well Testing**

Utilities Director, Steve Stalvey, presented the item. Mr. Stalvey stated that due to ongoing issues with water quality at Alapaha Plantation and Stone Creek, staff along with Lovell Engineering Associates met with Scott Sigler, Hydrogeologist, with Jim Stidham & Associates of Tallahassee, Florida. Mr. Sigler brings extensive experience working with municipalities in North Florida and South Georgia on well field development and issues related to the Floridan Aquifer. After reviewing test data from two of our wells, Mr. Sigler recommended extensive testing on the Alapaha Plantation Well #3 and the Stone Creek remote well to determine whether these wells can be restored to service. The cost of the recommended services is \$43,910.00, per well. Staff recommends approval of the potable well testing by Jim Stidham & Associates in the total amount of \$87,820.00.

**REPORTS - County Manager**

There was no additional information to report.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Commissioner Marshall made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Wisenbaker. Chairman Slaughter adjourned the work session meeting at 9:02 a.m.