

LOWNDES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES
REGULAR SESSION
Tuesday, April 28, 2026

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

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

Vice Chairman Orenstein was not in attendance.

Chairman called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and recognized the presence of a class member with Leadership Lowndes.

INVOCATION

Commissioner Wisenbaker

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

Commissioner Wisenbaker

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. Commissioner Marshall made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, seconded by Commissioner Evans. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

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 Local Emergency Operations Plan has been updated and accurately reflects how the county operates and organizes during emergencies. In addition to updating this plan, adoption of a Lowndes County Resolution for Emergency Management is also being requested. Commissioner Wisenbaker made a motion to approve the Lowndes County Resolution for Emergency Management, adopt the Lowndes County Local Emergency Operations Plan and authorize the Chairman to execute the documents, seconded by Commissioner Smith. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

FY2027 Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant Application

EMA Director, Ashley Tye, presented the item. Mr. Tye stated that since 2014, this application has been submitted annually and has become a valuable tool for the juvenile court judge as an alternative to detention. Staff is requesting authorization to apply for FY27 funding to continue providing

Functional Family Therapy services. Commissioner Evans made a motion to approve the grant application as presented, seconded by Commissioner Marshall. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Renewal of Disaster Related Debris Contracts

EMA Director, Ashley 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 Ashbritt 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, so the third year of the contract. 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 of Commissioners approved a 1.9% price increase for Ashbritt, based on the Consumer Price Index in effect at the time of renewal and consistent with the terms of the initial contract. Neither DRC nor 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. Mr. Tye did ask regarding a price reduction and stated there would be no decrease. Commissioner Marshall asked regarding assistance from the state, do they pay the same rate. Mr. Tye responded no they do not pay the same rate. Additionally, Mr. Tye stated it is the intent of the Army Corps to engage earlier and more often in future disasters. Commissioner Wisenbaker asked if all vendors were used. Mr. Tye stated no, only Ashbritt was used. Commissioner Marshall made a motion to approve the renewal of disaster-related debris contracts with Ashbritt Environmental, DRC Emergency Services and Southern Disaster Recovery (SDR), seconded by Commissioner Wisenbaker. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

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 that in February, sealed bids were brought before the Board as part of a request for proposals for generators for five nursing home facilities in Lowndes County. The bid was awarded to the lowest responsive bidder that met the requirements of Lowndes County. However, after additional research was completed and shop drawings were provided, it was determined that the proposed pricing could not meet the required specifications. As a result, the award was made in error. Staff worked with the Lowndes County Finance Department to ensure local policies were followed as well as with GEMA and FEMA to ensure compliance with all applicable state and federal policies. Mr. Tye stated the request is to declare the original proposal, which was awarded to Current Edge Solutions, non-responsive and award the contract to Cowart Electric as the next vendor. Commissioner Smith asked if Cowart Electric could complete installation by the end of the year. Mr. Tye responded yes. Commissioner Smith also asked if there were approximately 500 residents between all of the facilities. Mr. Tye responded yes. Commissioner Marshall made a motion to declare the initial proposal from Current Edge Solutions non-responsive and award the contract to Cowart Electric, seconded by Commissioner Smith. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

VAWA Continuation Grant Application

Chairman Slaughter presented the item stating the Commission heard from Ms. Karen Hayes with the Solicitor General's Office during the work session. No further discussion took place. Commissioner Smith made a motion to accept the Solicitor General's VAWA Continuation Grant Award AW-VAWA-

25-013-037 and authorize the Chairman to sign all award documents, seconded by Commissioner Wisenbaker. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Opioid Litigation - Six (6) Remnant Defendants

Assistant Finance Director, Rachel Bowen, presented the item. Mrs. Bowen stated 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 help abate the opioid crisis. In order to participate in the settlement, Board approval is requested to authorize the Chairman to execute the necessary settlement documents. Commissioner Marshall asked how much longer the County is expected to receive the funds. Mrs. Bowen responded that each settlement has different terms and timelines. She stated the County is currently participating in several settlements that will continue to provide funding for several years. Commissioner Marshall made a motion to approve the item as presented, seconded by Commissioner Evans. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Potable Well Testing

Utilities Director, Steve Stalvey, presented the item. Mr. Stalvey stated 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. Commissioner Marshall made a motion to approve the item as presented, seconded by Commissioner Smith. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

REPORTS - County Manager

County Manager, Paige Dukes, stated there have been questions related to the current drought category. Utilities Director, Steve Stalvey provided the commission with an update and stated the Georgia Environmental Protection Division has issued a Level 1 drought response following months of dry conditions and growing concerns regarding water resources. Mrs. Dukes asked Fire Rescue Chief, Billy Young, to address the commission regarding the wildfires. Chief Young stated the Clinch/Echols County fire is currently at 32,541 acres at 23 percent containment. The Highway 82 fire in Brantley County is currently 22,600 acres and 32 percent contained. Chief Young mentioned Lowndes County Fire Rescue personnel are expected to return home tomorrow. Chief Young mentioned a current concern is "reburns" which occur when a wildfire burns over an area that has previously burned. Vegetation not fully consumed during the initial fire can later fall and ignite, creating additional flare-ups. Chairman Slaughter asked Chief Young to convey the commission's gratitude and appreciation to the personnel representing Lowndes County. Mrs. Dukes mentioned hurricane preparedness week begins next week. Additionally, on Monday, May 4th at 9:00 a.m. a proclamation presentation recognizing National Small Business Week will be held at 106 South Patterson Street to celebrate small businesses. Commissioner Marshall requested citizens to honor the current burn ban. Chairman Slaughter reiterated that until the burn ban is lifted, residents should understand how quickly a fire can spread and become uncontrollable.

CITIZENS WISHING TO BE HEARD

Jimmy Lefiles, 3561 River Chase Drive, addressed the commission to reiterate his concerns regarding data centers. Mr. Lefiles requested an update from the commission on the data center visits.

Michael Noll, 2305 Glynnedale Drive, addressed the commission regarding his opposition to data centers in our community. Mr. Noll requested an update from the commission regarding their visits to the data centers and also mentioned the development of a data center ordinance. Lastly, Mr. Noll extended an invitation to the commission for an upcoming town hall meeting being held in June.

Susan Wehling, 2410 Georgia Avenue, thanked the commission for attending the previous town hall meeting held related to data centers. Additionally, Ms. Wehling addressed the commission regarding her opposition to data centers in our community and asked why the commission meetings were not live-streamed.

Kelly Jarvis, 3120 Stallings Road, addressed the commission regarding animal overpopulation, specifically programs to help, such as spaying and neutering.

Mr. George Fisher, 5278 Hall Road, addressed the commission regarding his opposition to data centers in our community. Mr. Fisher mentioned the increase in water usage for these centers and the possibility of sinkhole development.

Dr. Amanda Hall, 2102 North Sherwood Drive, gave the commission a copy of information from Brooks County and Tift County related to their tethering laws. Additionally, Dr. Hall spoke regarding the revisions which need to be made to our current animal control ordinance.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Wisenbaker made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Evans. Chairman Slaughter adjourned the meeting at 6:17 p.m.