

LOWNDES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES
REGULAR SESSION
Tuesday, June 9, 2026

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

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

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

INVOCATION

Vice Chairman Scott Orenstein

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

Vice Chairman Scott Orenstein

MINUTES

Chairman Slaughter stated if there were no objections, staff would like to add an item to the agenda. There being no objections, Chairman Slaughter asked that the item be added as agenda item 7F, Proposed Local Act for LHOST.

The minutes were presented for the work session and regular session of May 26, 2026. Commissioner Evans made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, seconded by Commissioner Wisenbaker. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

APPOINTMENTS

Valdosta-Lowndes County Zoning Board of Appeals

County Manager, Paige Dukes, presented the item. Mrs. Dukes stated the terms of Ms. Victoria Copeland and Mr. Marion Ramsey have expired on the Valdosta-Lowndes County Zoning Board of Appeals. Mr. Ramsey would like to be reappointed and Ms. Copeland does not want to be reappointed. Mr. Gary Wisenbaker and Mr. Stacy Young are also interested in serving on this board. Commissioner Wisenbaker asked that he be recused from the vote since he is related to one of the applicants. Commissioner Evans nominated Mr. Gary Wisenbaker for Ms. Victoria Copeland's seat. There being no other nominations, Mr. Gary Wisenbaker was appointed by acclamation. Commissioner Marshall nominated Mr. Marion Ramsey for reappointment. There being no other nominations, Mr. Marion Ramsey was appointed by acclamation.

Valdosta-Lowndes County Airport Authority

County Manager, Paige Dukes, presented the item. Mrs. Dukes stated the term of Mr. Dan Kerrigan has expired, and he is no longer interested in being reappointed at this time. Mr. James Warren, Mr. Christian Funk and Mr. Kevin Lancaster are interested in serving on this board. Commissioner Evans nominated Mr. James Warren. There being no other nominations, Mr. James Warren was appointed by acclamation.

Lowndes County Public Facilities Authority

County Manager, Paige Dukes, presented the appointment stating the terms of Mr. Andy Griffin and Mr. Scott Purvis both expired May 31, 2026, and both would like to be reappointed. Commissioner Smith nominated Mr. Andy Griffin. There being no other nominations, Mr. Andy Griffin was reappointed by acclamation to serve the term of June 1, 2026 - May 31, 2029. Vice Chairman Orenstein nominated Mr. Scott Purvis. There being no other nominations, Mr. Scott Purvis was reappointed by acclamation to serve the term of June 1, 2026 - May 31, 2029.

PUBLIC HEARING

REZ-2026-13 Touchton Lake Park, ~1.4ac, Cannon Dr., Park Dr., US HWY 41 S, C-H to R-10, County Utilities

County Planner, J.D. Dillard, presented the item. Mr. Dillard stated this rezoning request represents a change in zoning on the subject properties from C-H (Highway Commercial) zoning to R-10 (Suburban Density Residential). The general motivation in this case is for the applicant to develop home sites. Mr. Dillard stated this property is within the urban service area and the community activity center area. There are no wetlands on the property. Mr. Dillard stated neighboring properties to the north and east are currently zoned R-10 and the Lowndes County Fire Rescue Station at Twin Lakes is planned for the property to the south. 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, lot sizes, and zoning patterns, the availability of County utilities, the potential environmental impacts, and recommends approval of the request for R-10 zoning. The Planning Commission recommended approval. No one spoke in opposition to this request. Mr. Bill Nijem, 1007 North Patterson, spoke in favor of this request on behalf of the applicant. Mr. Nijem stated he was available to answer any questions from the commission. Commissioner Wisenbaker made a motion to approve the rezoning request as presented, seconded by Commissioner Smith. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

TWR-2026-01 Salem Church Tower - WITHDRAWN

County Planner, J.D. Dillard, presented the item stating this item has been withdrawn by the applicant.

FOR CONSIDERATION

Old US 41 North Widening Phase 4, P.I. 0020531 - Transportation Improvement Act (TIA) Project Agreement

Director of Engineering Services, Chad McLeod, presented the item. Mr. McLeod stated the Board approved the Transportation Investment Act (TIA) Local Government Application for the Old US 41 North Widening Phase 4 Project on May 12th, 2026. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) approved the application and sent staff the Project Agreement to be approved and executed. The Project Agreement is required to be executed prior to beginning any phase of the project. Once

the agreement is fully executed, GDOT will issue a Notice to Proceed for Preliminary Engineering. The agreement is for eligible project costs up to \$13,252,000.00. Vice Chairman Orenstein made a motion to approve the item as presented, seconded by Commissioner Smith. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Beer, Wine, and Liquor License - Jignasha Patel of Pitstop Three Liquors LLC, DBA Pitstop Liquors, 1405 St. Augustine Road Suite B, Valdosta, GA 31605

Finance Director, Stephanie Black, presented the item. Ms. Black stated this is due to a change in ownership and all requirements have been met. Ms. Black stated this is a request for a beer, wine and liquor license for consumption off premises. Commissioner Marshall made a motion to approve the license as presented, seconded by Commissioner Smith. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

GEFA Loan GPPF011 for Bypass Pumps at Lift Station

Utilities Director, Steve Stalvey, presented the item. Mr. Stalvey stated Lowndes County has been preselected for a GEFA loan to install bypass pumps at our lift stations that are currently not equipped with backup capabilities. The loan amount is \$2,812,500.00 with a principal forgiveness of \$703,125.00. This will allow us to have backup capabilities at all of our lift stations. While we have applied for FEMA mitigation money, this will allow us to lock in current pricing and potentially, have equipment in place before the next hurricane season. This project was previously presented to the board at the October 28, 2025, meeting; however, the required resolution and supporting loan documents were not included at that time as they were not available. Staff now requests approval of the attached resolution as required for the GEFA loan approval. Commissioner Evans made a motion to approve the item as presented, seconded by Commissioner Wisenbaker. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

ACCG IRMA Property & Liability Insurance Renewal

Human Resources Director, Kevin Beals, presented the item. Mr. Beals stated this request is the ACCG Interlocal Risk Management Agency Program renewal for fiscal year 2027. The renewal provides for comprehensive blanket coverage for property and liability insurance. The annual renewal amount is \$1,248,947.00; this renewal includes a safety credit discount of \$65,734.00. Commissioner Marshall made a motion to approve the renewal in the amount of \$1,248,947.00, seconded by Commissioner Wisenbaker. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Industrial Authority Series 2026 Bonds

County Manager, Paige Dukes, presented the item. Mrs. Dukes stated that as discussed yesterday in the work session, we are ready to move forward with the finalization of the Industrial Authority's series 2026 bonds. Mrs. Dukes stated this is a fantastic growth opportunity for our community. Mrs. Dukes asked Tom Owens with Raymond James to speak regarding the bond issuance. Mr. Owens stated the bonds were successfully marketed that day with investors committing to provide financing to the Industrial Authority. The bonds fit within the parameters previously approved. The bonds are costing 5.12 percent and there was an improvement in the structuring of the bonds by identifying a portion of the project as not marked for private use. The annual payment on the bonds is approximately \$3.7 million and these are publicly offered bonds. Mr. Owens thanked County Manager, Paige Dukes, Finance Director, Stephanie Black and County Attorney, Walter Elliott for their assistance throughout this process. Commissioner Smith asked when the Industrial Authority had last undertaken a bond issuance. Mr. Owens responded in 2019 and that was a refinancing of prior bonds. Mrs. Dukes stated that Exhibits A, B & C have been substituted for the final loan documents in the agenda packets.

Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve the supplemental bond resolution as presented, seconded by Commissioner Marshall. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Proposed Local Act for LHOST *Agenda Item Added*

County Manager, Paige Dukes, presented the proposed Local Act for LHOST. Mrs. Dukes stated the Senate Bill 33 passed in 2026 authorizes a Local Homestead Option Sales Tax (LHOST) to fund homestead exemptions granted by local Act of the General Assembly and approved by voters by referendum. Staff and the County Attorney have prepared an attached draft proposed local Act providing for a LHOST in Lowndes County. Mrs. Dukes stated if approved, it will be sent to Representative John LaHood, who will forward it to legislative counsel and will prepare the bill language needed for the General Assembly to consider approving this during the special session in June. If approved, we have recommended a referendum this fall, so collections begin in January 2028. Mrs. Dukes presented a presentation regarding the financial considerations of Lowndes County and the impact of rising costs on the community. Commissioner Marshall made a motion to approve submitting the attached proposed local Act to the local delegation of the General Assembly representing Lowndes County, seconded by Commissioner Wisenbaker. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

BID

Twin Lakes Road Bids, P.I. # 0016280 - Transportation Investment Act (TIA)

Director of Engineering Services, Chad McLeod, presented the item. Mr. McLeod stated Twin Lakes Road is a TIA 1 approved project. The project is 1.71 miles long and begins at Loch Laurel Road and ends at State Route 7 (Highway 41 S). The contract time is 365 calendar days. Bids were opened on May 21, 2026, and two (2) bids were received from Reames and Son Construction in the amount of \$2,664,355.90 and the Scruggs Company in the amount of \$3,713,497.24. Commissioner Evans made a motion to approve Reames and Son Construction Company as the low bidder in the amount of \$2,664,355.90, seconded by Commissioner Wisenbaker. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

REPORTS - County Manager

County Manager, Paige Dukes, presented the items below:

- Mrs. Dukes thanked County Attorney, Walter Elliott, for his assistance with Senate Bill 33.
- Mrs. Dukes asked Probation Director, Ferlisha Rountree, to speak regarding the services at Leila Ellis. Mrs. Rountree provided an update on the collaboration with Legacy and the use of the Probation department. Mrs. Rountree met with Mallory Tire and Jennifer Taylor last week to discuss the services they provide to the community. She was informed that there is a community therapist within their department. Her job is to serve the community at certain locations. However, they can only serve clients within that location, such as LAMP. Only their clients can use her at that location. Partnering with Lowndes County Probation will not only benefit our offenders, but also the community. The location will now provide Legacy with a central location for citizens who cannot make it to their Oak Street location, a closer alternative. Also, it provides the use of the Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) as another location for support. A CPS is a citizen who has experienced mental health or substance abuse issues and works for Legacy, so they now in turn help the citizens. At this time, we are waiting for Legacy to finish finalizing everything on their end and meet with their community therapist. They will come visit the building at a later date. Commissioner Smith asked to tour the location and Mrs. Rountree responded that she would contact County Manager, Paige Dukes, once the location is cleaned

and ready. Mrs. Dukes added that this initiative will be using existing space within the current building, and existing county resources, including utilities and overhead services. This is an expansion of services available to our citizens without creating any additional impact on the county budget.

Citizens Wishing To Be Heard

George Fisher, 5278 Hall Road, addressed the commission regarding his opposition to a data center in the community. Mr. Fisher expressed his concerns about the vulnerability of the Withlacooche River and the local aquifer.

Jimmy LeFiles, 3561 Riverchase Drive, addressed the commission regarding his opposition to a data center in the community. Mr. LeFiles, an industrial chemist and longtime Lowndes County resident whose family has lived in the area for generations, expressed concerns about the potential development. Mr. LeFiles asked the commission to carefully review and question the types of chemicals that may be used at the facility.

John Smith, 3797 Old Vine Way, addressed the commission in opposition to a data center in the community. Mr. Smith mentioned concerns regarding increased electrical demand and water consumption.

Robert Willis, 5195 Daniel Drive North, addressed the commission regarding the possibility of installing speed strips or speed bumps on his street due to increased speeding within his neighborhood.

Skyler Ramson, 1601 Norman Drive, addressed the commission regarding concerns about continued increases in rental costs and expressed hope that measures could be considered to reduce or stabilize rent.

Amy Wiegenstein, 4030 Foxborough Blvd., addressed the commission in opposition to a data center in the community. Ms. Wiegenstein, a Valdosta resident for 46 years, requested that the commission consider asking the developer to locate the project on a more rural property.

Sarah Riggle, 709 West Alden Avenue, addressed the commission in opposition to a data center in the community. Ms. Riggle expressed concerns about noise, water consumption, water levels, the long-term availability of water resources for residents, and the potential for increased water costs.

John Quarterman, 6565 Quarterman Road, addressed the commission to invite commissioners to attend a June 20th celebration at Reed Bingham State Park from 11:00 am - 3:00 pm. The event is intended to encourage children to participate in boating activities. Mr. Quarterman also referenced rumors regarding a proposed data center in the community, including speculation that water for the facility could be supplied by a deep well and ejecting the wastewater into the aquifer. Mr. Quarterman stated he believes this untrue. He encouraged citizens not to believe every rumor and emphasized that the project is not confirmed and does not have to happen.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Smith encouraged citizens to participate in early voting and exercise their right to vote. Vice Chairman Orenstein made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Marshall. Chairman Slaughter adjourned the meeting at 6:55 p.m.