LOWNDES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES
REGULAR SESSION
Tuesday, July 14, 2026 - 5:30 PM

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:
Chairman Bill Slaughter
Vice Chairman Mark Wisenbaker
Commissioner Joyce Evans
Commissioner Scott Orenstein
Commissioner Demarcus Marshall

Commissioner Michael Smith was not in attendance.

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

INVOCATION
Commissioner Marshall

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG
Commissioner Marshall

MINUTES

The minutes were presented for the work session meeting of June 22, 2026, the regular session meeting of June 23, 2026, the FY 2027 Budget Public Hearing of June 23, 2026, and the Special Called Meeting to Adopt the FY 2027 Budget of June 30, 2026. No revisions to the minutes were requested. Commissioner Orenstein made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, seconded by Commissioner Evans. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

APPOINTMENTS

Lowndes County Library System Board of Trustees
County Manager, Paige Dukes, presented the item. Mrs. Dukes stated the Constitution of the Lowndes County Library System was amended in March 2026 to conform with Georgia law. Regarding the Board of Trustees of the Library System, the Constitution, as amended, provides: The Board shall be composed of nine (9) residents of Lowndes County who are appointed by the Board of Commissioners of Lowndes County as the only governmental agency supporting the System on a regular basis. Appointments shall be made in writing and the Board members shall serve staggered terms of three (3) years beginning July 1 and ending June 30.

The following applicants are interested in serving on the Board: William Booth, Dr. Elveta Miller, Dr. Kendal Crawford, Greg Moore, Dean Poling, Dr. Debra Carruth, Jane Peeples, Gary Wisenbaker, and Mary Beth Brownlee.

- Commissioner Evans nominated Dr. Elveta Miller for a one-year term beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2027. There being no other nominations, Dr. Elveta Miller was appointed by acclamation.
- Commissioner Orenstein nominated Mr. William Booth for a one-year term beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2027. There being no other nominations, Mr. William Booth was appointed by acclamation.
- Commissioner Orenstein nominated Mr. Greg Moore for a two-year term beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2028. There being no other nominations, Mr. Greg Moore was appointed by acclamation.
- Vice Chairman Wisenbaker nominated Mrs. Mary Beth Brownlee for a two-year term beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2028. There being no other nominations, Mrs. Mary Beth Brownlee was appointed by acclamation.
- Commissioner Evans nominated Mr. Gary Wisenbaker for a two-year term beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2028. There being no other nominations, Mr. Gary Wisenbaker was appointed by acclamation.
- Commissioner Marshall nominated Dr. Kendal Crawford for a three-year term beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2029. There being no other nominations, Dr. Kendal Crawford was appointed by acclamation.
- Commissioner Marshall nominated Mr. Dean Poling for a three-year term beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2029. There being no other nominations, Mr. Dean Poling was appointed by acclamation.
- Commissioner Orenstein nominated Ms. Jane Peeples for a three-year term beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2029. There being no other nominations, Ms. Jane Peeples was appointed by acclamation.

PUBLIC HEARING

REZ-2026-14 Ray Colding, 6808 Wisenbaker Rd., Lake Park, ~8.5ac, M-1 & R-A to M-2, County Water and Septic

County Planner, J.D. Dillard, presented the item. Mr. Dillard stated this request represents a change in zoning on the subject property from M-1 (Light Manufacturing) and R-A (Residential Agricultural) zoning to M-2 (Heavy Manufacturing) in order to unify the zoning to all for a saw mill operation and related services. Mr. Dillard stated the property is within the Urban Service and Rural Residential Character Areas, and within a groundwater recharge area, with no wetlands on the property. Mr. Dillard stated that Mr. Colding is trying to allow his sons to be able to take over the business. 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 Water, the viability of septic drain fields, the potential environmental impacts, and therefore recommends approval of the request for M-2 zoning with the following conditions:

1. Any proposed commercial/industrial entrances off of Wisenbaker Road will require the developer to pave Wisenbaker Road from the entrance to South Main Street. 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 Wisenbaker Road from the development's easternmost entrance to South Main Street.
2. No Correctional Facilities, Transitional Care Facilities, and Junk and Salvage Yards shall be allowed.

The Planning Commission recommended approval with the two conditions. No one spoke for or against this request. Vice Chairman Wisenbaker made a motion to approve the item with the two conditions as presented, seconded by Commissioner Orenstein. All voted in favor, no one opposed.

TWR-2026-02 Bermuda Run, New 159' Telecommunications Tower near North Valdosta Road and Hyta Mederer Drive
County Planner, J.D. Dillard, presented the item. Mr. Dillard stated the applicant is requesting a new tower 155 feet for the apparatus with a 4-foot lightning rod attached to the top of it. The property is located off of Hyta Mederer Drive, inside of Langdale Park, which is zoned Conservation (CON) and is allowed to be used for the construction of a new telecommunications tower, subject to compliance with the standards. Mr. Dillard stated the proposed tower is within a Floodway and Floodplain zone. Mr. Dillard stated this is not a legislative zoning decision it is a quasi-judicial decision whether the standards for a telecommunications tower have been met in accordance with Section 5.05.05 of the ULDC. This is a 10,000 square foot leased area off of Hyta Mederer Drive proposing approximately 600 square feet for actual equipment to go with the proposed tower. Mr. Dillard stated the applicant provided eight potential view sites. The TRC recommended approval with the standards set forth in Section 5.05.05 of the ULDC. The Planning Commission recommended approval for this new tower.

John Quarterman, 6565 Quarterman Road, spoke in opposition to this request. Mr. Quarterman stated it does not meet several provisions of section 5.05.05 of the ULDC. Mr. Quarterman mentioned the sites and specifications are supposed to be in VALOR-GIS and it is the responsibility of the applicant, but they are not. He further mentioned telecommunication towers should not be in a historic district or scenic view corridor.

Kaitlynn Isley, 577 Mulberry Street, Macon, Georgia, spoke in favor of this request, representing Vertical Bridge. Ms. Isley stated she believes they have complied with local, state and federal laws regarding this telecommunications tower. Ms. Isley stated that they have received approval from the FAA, FCC and FEMA. A full environmental study was conducted and provided to the county as part of the application with no adverse impacts noted to the area. Additionally, she stated this is not a historic district and all requirements have been met to be approved.

Opposition - Rebuttal:
John Quarterman, 6565 Quarterman Road, mentioned Ms. Isley stated it is not in a historic district or a scenic view corridor without any reasoning.

In Favor - Rebuttal: No one spoke.

Commissioner Marshall asked to verify the height of the tower at 159 feet. Chairman Slaughter responded yes. Commissioner Marshall asked if this was designated a historic district or not. Mr. Dillard responded that it is not, that historic designations are required by the Department of Interior. There are no historic designations outside of downtown Valdosta that are registered on the historic places. Commissioner Marshall made a motion to approve the item as presented, seconded by Commissioner Orenstein. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

FOR CONSIDERATION

Award of Pre-Event Disaster Logistics Support Services Contracts

EMA Director, Ashley Tye, presented the item. Mr. Tye stated this is a pre-event no-cost contract for disaster logistics support services such as setting up base camps, running points of distribution, generators, or any type of resource needed after a disaster. The recommendation is to award contracts to three vendors selected on the criteria of services and equipment provided. Staff is recommending MLU Services, LLC, AshBritt, Inc. and Safe Industries to provide on-call disaster logistics support for emergency response and recovery operations. Commissioner Orenstein made a motion to approve MLU Services, LLC, AshBritt, Inc. and Safe Industries, seconded by Commissioner Evans. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Acceptance of FY2027 Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant Award

EMA Director, Ashley Tye, presented the item. Mr. Tye stated in April the board approved submission of the application to continue funding for the Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant, which provides Functional Family Therapy (FFT) services used with Evidence-Based Associates. Mr. Tye stated Lowndes County applied for $375,000.00 and was awarded $325,000.00. Commissioner Orenstein asked if this amount had increased from last year. Mr. Tye responded no, it is the same amount. Commissioner Evans made a motion to approve the grant as presented, seconded by Commissioner Marshall. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

Lift Station Bypass Pump Request for Proposal

Utilities Director, Steve Stalvey, presented the item. Mr. Stalvey stated Lowndes County Utilities was awarded a GEFA loan to install backup bypass pumps at several of our lift stations that lack emergency backup. Staff advertised a request for proposal and received two responses from BBA Pumps, Inc. and Hydra Services, Inc. Proposals were considered based on scoring criteria that comprised several evaluation factors, totaling a maximum potential score of 100. An evaluation committee comprised of Lowndes County staff and Carter and Sloope Engineering representatives scored both proposals. BBA Pumps, Inc. – 96 and Godwin (via Hydra Service, Inc.) – 89. With the highest scoring proposal, BBA Pumps, Inc. was determined to be the most advantageous proposer for the County. Therefore, staff recommends approval to proceed with BBA Pumps, Inc. to provide the bypass pumps. Commissioner Orenstein asked about the amount of the GEFA loan, Mr. Stalvey answered it is over $2 million dollars and another proposal will come at a later date for the pads and connections. Commissioner Marshall asked what is the warranty. Mr. Stalvey answered on the BBA pumps there is a three (3) year warranty. Vice Chairman Wisenbaker made a motion to approve BBA Pumps, Inc. in the amount of $1,718.895.00, seconded by Commissioner Marshall. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried.

REPORTS - County Manager

County Manager, Paige Dukes, asked Fire Rescue Chief Billy Young and Captain Scott Garren to come up. Mrs. Dukes stated as you know, we completed the budget process, and part of that conversation was finding efficiencies and grant opportunities, and Captain Garren was already working in that direction. Mrs. Dukes asked Chief Young to share the announcement with the commission. Chief Young gave the Chairman and Commissioners an update stating we were looking at how we could help with the budget. In 2026, Captain Garren was promoted to our Logistics Captain, and we established some goals for our department. One of his goals was to find grants that we were eligible to apply for. Chief Young stated Lowndes County Fire Rescue has been awarded a grant, and he wanted to commend Captain Garren and introduce him. Chief Young also wanted to thank Ms. Black and her team for their help providing documents as well. Chief Garren stated the goal was to help find money to offset some of the equipment that Lowndes County Fire Rescue needed. Mr. Garren stated they applied for numerous grants, one of which was the Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation Grant. Lowndes County Fire Rescue was one (1) of seventy-six (76) departments nationwide that were awarded. The Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation Grant awarded a total of $1.8 million dollars and Lowndes County Fire Rescue was awarded a total amount of $32,146.00 with that money being used to purchase new extrication tools for Twin Lakes. There is zero cost to the county and the Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation will purchase the equipment outright for Lowndes County Fire Rescue.

Mrs. Dukes asked EMA Director, Ashley Tye, to update the commission with recently received information. Mr. Tye stated the contract just approved will prove to be beneficial. Mr. Tye stated GEMA notified the county office last week regarding policy changes with FEMA as it relates to disaster recovery centers. FEMA will no longer provide that service and if a local government opens a disaster recovery center, everything will fall to the local jurisdiction to maintain and supervise. In addition, there will be no door-to-door communications as provided in the past by FEMA. The only DSA (direct survivor assistance) teams will be provided upon request and they will consider going to festivals or large gatherings. Commissioner Wisenbaker asked whether the county had conducted door-to-door communications in the past. Mr. Tye responded no. Commissioner Orenstein asked if we could have a message prepared to notify the citizens of this new information. Mr. Tye responded yes, that our Public Information Officer, Meghan Barwick sends messaging and updates. Mr. Tye stated this information was received last week and time is needed to evaluate and determine the best course of action. Chairman Slaughter stated it is the County's responsibility to maintain a strong fund balance because any funding shortfall would fall on Lowndes County. Lowndes County will be responsible for ensuring essential services continue to be provided to the community.

Mrs. Dukes stated regarding the data centers, there is still not a data center project, no one has come in to our office and met with Lowndes County, and there are no locations to discuss other than the rezoning that everyone is aware of. Lowndes County is still in the process of gathering information to move forward to develop a draft ordinance related to data centers. There is no additional information from staff to provide.

CITIZENS WISHING TO BE HEARD

Kat Meyers, 1307 Williams Street, addressed the commission regarding updating the animal control ordinance. Ms. Meyers also asked that the county allocate resources to make spay/neuter programs available as well as public education.

Mary Beal, 4841 Oak Arbor Drive, addressed the commission regarding her opposition to data centers in our community. Ms. Beal shared her concern regarding additional water use and asked why the commission would consider a data center in Valdosta.

Lauren Linn, 4039 Foxborough Blvd., addressed the commission regarding her opposition to data centers in our community. Ms. Linn stated that the issues of concern are industrial noise, water, light pollution, decreased home value and possible sinkholes. Ms. Linn asked that the commission choose the families who have invested their lives here.

George Fisher, 5278 Hall Road, addressed the commission regarding his opposition to data centers in our community. Mr. Fisher stated that he believes Rustic Ridge Road in the Foxborough Subdivision has a sinkhole. Additionally, Mr. Fisher stated that data centers would be a risk to our aquifer.

John Quarterman, 6565 Quarterman Road, addressed the commission and thanked EMA Director, Ashley Tye for his planning ahead of the hurricanes. Additionally, Mr. Quarterman stated other counties in Georgia have passed moratoriums on data centers and he recommended the commission consider a moratorium to give time to compose a data center ordinance.

Michael Noll, 2305 Glynndale Drive, addressed the commission regarding his opposition to data centers in our community. Mr. Noll named several counties that have moratoriums that have been passed in order to prepare for a data center ordinance.

Gretchen Quarterman, 6565 Quarterman Road, addressed the commission regarding the Comprehensive Plan update. Mrs. Quarterman asked that the Comprehensive Plan be made available on the county's website for the public, if a public hearing could be held for public comment and if a zoning map could be approved with the Comprehensive Plan.

Amie Burnam, 5207 Abbott Circle, addressed the commission regarding updating the animal control ordinance. Ms. Burnam asked the county to prioritize prevention, mandatory spay/neuter programs, no tethering or chaining of dogs, as well as additional accountability with consequences.

Kelly Saxon, 8 Baldwin Place, addressed the commission to share a national resource for storm survivors and communities. Ms. Saxon mentioned rebuild.us will have a virtual event beginning at 7:00 p.m. tomorrow night and a recording will be available for everyone registered. Ms. Saxon also mentioned FEMA announced millions in federal funding to train community officials on disaster preparedness and response. Lastly, Ms. Saxon asked if we have a succession plan in place when key employees decide to retire. Ms. Saxon questioned if qualified people are available to serve and step into those roles and ensure stability of services.

ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chairman Wisenbaker made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Orenstein. Chairman Slaughter adjourned the regular session meeting at 6:55 p.m.