



DRAFT Minutes

June 10, 2025

Cochran City Council

Regular Session @ 6:00 PM

City Auditorium, 102 N Second Street, Cochran, GA 31014

City Council

City Staff

Billy Yeomans, Mayor	Richard Newbern, City Manager
Trecia Gardner (District 1, Post 1)	Candace Summerall, City Clerk
Gary Ates, Council Member (District 1, Post 2)	Jim Elliott, City Attorney
Carla Coley, Council Member (District 2 Post 1)	
Lonnie Tedders, Council Member (District 2, Post 2)	
Dianne Lester (District 3, Post 1)	
Shane Savant, Council Member (District 3, Post 2)	

I. Call to Order by the Mayor

Mayor Pro Tem Gary Ates called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM due to Mayor Yeomans' absence.

II. Invocation

Invocation was led by Council Member Lester.

III. Pledge of Allegiance

Pledge of allegiance was led by Council Member Gardner.

IV. Attendance

All council members were present. Mayor Billy Yeomans was absent.

V. Adopt Agenda/Minutes

1. Approve Minutes from May 13, 2025, Regular Council Meeting

Motion: Council Member Coley moved to approve the minutes from the May 13, 2025 Regular Council Meeting Second: Council Member Savant Vote: Unanimous approval

2. Approve Minutes from May 28, 2025 Meeting

Motion: Council Member Coley moved to approve the minutes from the May 28, 2025 Regular Council Meeting Second: Council Member Savant Vote: Unanimous approval

3. Approve Agenda for June 10, 2025, Regular Council Meeting

Motion: Council Member Savant moved to approve the agenda for June 10, 2025 Regular Council Meeting Second: Council Member Gardner Vote: Unanimous approval

VI. Public Comments

Melissa Barker (Chamber of Commerce) provided updates on upcoming events including:

- Saturday, June 14th: Second Saturday event with live music (Southbound Mojo) and food trucks
- Monday, June 16th: Bingo
- Tuesday, June 17th: Sheppard Community Blood Drive at the auditorium
- Thursday, June 19th: Juneteenth holiday (city and county closed)
- Saturday, June 21st: Juneteenth celebration at City Auditorium
- Tuesday, June 24th: Joint business after hours/customer appreciation/barbecue/ribbon cutting in Hawkinsville at newly renovated Sparklight business (5-7 PM)

- Thursday, June 26th: Business after hours at Jellystone Resort and Park
- Wednesday, July 2nd: Caffeinated Connections downtown at Haven Grace Salon (8 AM)
- Friday, July 4th: Independence Day celebration with fun run (1 mile and 5K), DJ, live band, inflatables
- Saturday, July 12th: Second Saturday event with Double Barrel Band

Ken Lane (representing Downtown Development Authority) spoke about:

- July 4th celebration partnership
- Bleckley Bullseye partnership with Chamber, giving away \$2,500 worth of Bleckley Bucks gift cards to local businesses
- Program runs June 15th through July 33rd, with winners announced August 1st on radio

Eugene Brannon (Nabo's Food Truck Owner) thanked the city council, noting:

- Operates barbecue food truck on Wednesdays and Fridays
- Offers discounts for law enforcement, fire department, and first responders
- Expressed appreciation for city ordinances and embracing food trucks
- Called Cochran "probably the best spot for all the food trucks"

VII. Agenda Items

1. Employee of the Quarter

City Clerk Candace Summerall recognized two employees:

Mercedes Sanders - Recognized for Quarter 1 employee of the quarter for tremendous hard work and research on city leaders and buildings. Summerall noted this was a surprise role for Mercedes last year and thanked her for extra work done to make things right for citizens and coworkers while maintaining excellent customer service skills.

Tiffany Lampp - Recognized for Quarter 2 employee of the quarter (admin assistant). Summerall thanked her for hard work supporting city services and stepping up in an unexpected role, showing massive growth and helping the city look its best.

2. Public Hearing on the FY 2025/26 Budget

Mayor Pro Tem Ates opened the public hearing at approximately 6:20 PM.

Mi Waters (Snow's Asian Grill owner and Chamber board member) provided extensive comments on Chamber activities:

- Highlighted Chamber's work promoting City of Cochran over past three years
- Caffeinated Connections and Business After Hours events (quarterly and monthly) with 30-40 attendees
- 22 ribbon cuttings in the last 16 months promoting new businesses and growth
- Country Fest bringing thousands to Cochran from across the state
- Monthly bingo events with 50-100+ attendees providing clean family fun
- Dueling Piano events (sold out for 2 years)
- Second Saturday events starting this weekend
- Council Candidate Forum hosting
- \$3,000 in scholarships awarded to local students
- Chamber works beyond tourism to promote Cochran and would appreciate increased funding

Eugene Brannon (Nabo's Food Truck Owner) spoke about his journey and experience with the Chamber:

- Moved to middle Georgia from Rockdale County five years ago
- Initially had negative perceptions of rural areas
- Launched Nabo's Barbecue and Food Truck in 2023
- Heard Melissa Barker on radio discussing Chamber activities and became excited about participating
- Praised the Chamber's promotion, events, knowledge, information, and networking opportunities
- Stated whatever the Chamber asks for, they deserve it and more
- Emphasized the Chamber provides a foundation for other businesses to succeed

Melissa Barker read multiple letters from Chamber members unable to attend:

- **Brittany Foskey** (two local businesses): Praised Chamber for social media support when they can't focus on advertising, fun giveaways, community engagement, and being one call away for business help
- **Dana from Blossoms and Blooms**: Noted Chamber always includes them in activities and provides assistance when needed
- **Ron Daniels** (board member and business owner): Believes market is growing due to Chamber efforts, notes other chambers asking what Cochran's Chamber does to be so successful
- **Gunner Roberts** (Zaxby's lead district manager): Credited Chamber support for successful opening week and meaningful community connections
- **Matt Fordham** (Citizens Bank of Cochran): Praised Melissa and Lynn's leadership bringing new energy and involvement, resulting in more projects, partnerships, and engagement
- **Matt Oxley** (Oxley Performance Computers): Compared Cochran Chamber favorably to Eastman Chamber, noting "radically different" effectiveness, revenues almost doubled since moving to Cochran, crediting Chamber for business growth
- **Jackie Bowen** (State Bank): Noted Chamber's increased visibility under Melissa and Lynn's leadership, community events bringing people together
- **Green Family Businesses** (Green & Wimberly Law Firms, Sojourner Travel, Middle Georgia Structures): Praised Chamber as cornerstone of local economy, highlighted business after hours events, caffeinated connections, advertising opportunities, and Melissa Barker's transformative leadership

Barker expressed frustration that the Chamber feels "ignored, and unheard" compared to other organizations receiving higher funding. She questioned what the Chamber needs to do to get Council's attention and value, calling a previous comment about "free rent" a "slap in the face."

Public hearing closed at 6:38 PM.

3. Consider an Ordinance adopting the City's FY 2025/26 budget

City Manager Richard Newbern explained the ordinance for FY 2025-2026 budget adoption, prepared by City Attorney using version 5.0 figures including General Fund, Water and Sewer Fund, Gas Fund, and Solid Waste Fund. He thanked department heads and city staff for budget preparation work.

Council Discussion on Chamber Funding:

Council Member Savant asked questions about Chamber funding:

- County provides \$10,000 annually to Chamber (increased from \$7,500 with 33% increase)
- Chamber generates revenue through events and memberships to pay salaries (unlike IDA and DDA whose funding goes toward salaries)
- Chamber has almost doubled revenue this year compared to last year
- Chamber provided \$3,000 in student scholarships and paid tuition for two business owners' continuing education (\$895 each)

Council Member Coley noted the need to see Chamber's budget details similar to other organizations and mentioned hotel motel tax restrictions requiring tourism-only use.

Council Member Lester asked about differences between Chamber, IDA, and DDA funding restrictions.

Coley explained hotel motel tax must legally go toward tourism only.

Software Budget Discussion:

Council Member Savant asked about \$16,800 for software additions:

- City Clerk Summerall explained this covers code enforcement permitting software and city app for notifications
- HR software was not included but could be considered for budget amendment in January if funds available

Fire Department Revenue Discussion:

Council Member Coley clarified fire fee revenue structure:

- \$215,000 budgeted includes \$65,000 from fee increase
- Anything over \$65,000 goes to fire department capital expense fund
- Year-end unused funds go to separate fire department account, not absorbed by general fund

Budget Amendment for Chamber:

Council Member Savant initially moved to table budget decision to allow time for Chamber to provide detailed revenue information, but after discussion, made motion to increase Chamber funding by 10%.

Motion: Council Member Savant moved to increase Chamber of Commerce funding to \$29,000 (from \$25,500) Second: Council Member Tedders

Vote: Unanimous approval

City Manager Newbern explained hotel motel tax would fund up to \$25,500, with city covering difference up to \$29,000.

Final Budget Adoption:

Motion: Council Member Coley moved to accept the budget as amended with \$29,000 Chamber funding

Second: Council Member Lester Vote: Unanimous approval

4. Consider approving the Mary Street cul-de-sac for painting/signage for no parking

City Manager Newbern explained that at the May 13th meeting, Council adopted an ordinance allowing city curbs and cul-de-sacs to be painted yellow with no parking signs, but Mary Street cul-de-sac was discussed but not included in the motion. Council must specifically designate locations for yellow painting and no parking enforcement.

Motion: Council Member Tedders moved to approve Mary Street cul-de-sac for yellow painting and no parking signage Second: Council Member Savant Vote: Unanimous approval

VIII. City Manager Discussion/Items/Updates

City Manager Richard Newbern provided updates:

- City staff will be off Thursday, June 19th for Juneteenth
- Georgia Municipal Association convention in Savannah coming up
- Working on retreat report covering approximately 30 projects with various degrees of progress
- Will send report to Council for review

Infrastructure Updates by James Jones (Falcon Design):**Cochran Community Park (9th Street):**

- Storm drainage work in progress with tents around ditch area
- Next step: road installation
- Expected completion end of July except restroom

Peyton Williams-Willie-Basby Park:

- Walking trail, benches, and mounted barbecues planned
- Design proposal on desk for final review, will be sent this week
- Bid process late August, completion possibly by end of year

Peacock and Lewis Improvements:

- Design completed, final review in progress
- Bid expected in one month
- Storm sewer repair along Peacock Street
- Lewis Street work limited by budget constraints due to large culvert
- May bid both projects separately to allow partial completion

DDA Beautification Project:

- Working on seating areas, trash cans, landscaping downtown
- Low maintenance, drought tolerant landscaping planned
- Maintenance will fall to public works/city

Yellowstone Lift Station Assessment:

- Assessing capacity for Yellowstone expansion
- Numbers and information compiled, final assessment nearly complete

Wastewater Plant Improvements:

- Working with EPD and GEPA on upgrades
- Belt press building expansion needed
- Control panel replacement for generator automation
- Bar screen replacement needed

- GEPA board approved amendment May 13th, awaiting EPD approval

Asset Management Plan:

- Beginning discussions for city-owned property assessments
- Will start with existing condition assessments

GDOT Intersection Improvements:

- City Manager discussed intersection improvements with District 2 engineer
- GDOT working on infrastructure improvements, may need Georgia Power involvement for pole relocation

City Clerk Updates:

- Two facility use agreements for July 4th celebration and second Saturday events (no Council vote required)
- Moving to new payment platform (Government Windows) reducing credit card fees from 3.2% to 2.9% and offering tap pay/Apple pay with better user interface

IX. Council/Mayor Discussion/Items

Council Member Gardner:

- Thanked everyone for participation in city activities
- Announced upcoming back-to-school giveaway in July for Dre Day Foundation

Council Member Coley:

- Asked for continued prayers for Mayor Yeomans and family
- Thanked Richard and staff for budget work
- Expressed relief that budget season is over

Council Member Tedders:

- Thanked city employees for their work
- Acknowledged upcoming city closure for holidays

Council Member Lester:

- Expressed gratitude for budget completion
- Committed to learning more about budget, ordinances, codes, and charter to be more effective

Council Member Savant:

- Extended condolences to Mayor Yeomans family
- Thanked Willie and Richard for CDBG houses tour with him and Council member Gardner
- Discussed back-to-school event funding gap due to reduced state support, encouraged community contributions
- Asked about Bobby Patel's claim that city stopped work at his site
- City Clerk clarified no city personnel stopped work; certified letters were sent to both AJ and Bobby Patel

Mayor Pro Tem Ates:

- Thanked staff and council for hard work
- Noted success of Dre Day event
- Encouraged continued cooperation and support
- Extended prayers for Yeomans family and Kevin's funeral service

X. Announcement of Upcoming Meetings and Events

1. Next Work Session - Thursday July 3, 2025 @ 6:00 PM
2. Next Regular Council Meeting - Tuesday, July 8, 2025 @ 6:00 PM
3. Planning Commission Meeting - Monday, July 1 @ 6:30 PM

XI. Executive Session

Motion: Council Member Tedders made motion to adjourn into executive session to discuss property

Second: Council Member Coley Vote: Unanimous approval

Meeting adjourned into executive session at approximately 7:29 PM.

Exit Executive session at 7:57 PM

Meeting adjourned at 7:58 PM

Minutes prepared and submitted by:
Candace Summerall
City Clerk