



DRAFT Minutes

May 13, 2025

Cochran City Council

Regular Meeting @ 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 Billy Yeomans called the meeting to order at 6:01

II. Invocation led by Council Member Ates

III. Pledge of Allegiance led by council Member Gardner

IV. Attendance

Mayor Yeomans confirmed that all six council members were present, establishing a quorum.

V. Adopt Agenda/Minutes

1. Approve Minutes from April 8, 2025, Regular Council Meeting

Motion: Council Member Ates moved to approve the minutes.

Second: Council Member Lester

Vote: Unanimous approval

2. Approve Minutes from April 28, 2025, Special Called Meeting

Motion: Council Member Ates moved to approve the minutes.

Second: Council Member Tedders

Vote: Unanimous approval

3. Approve Agenda for May 13, 2025, Regular Council Meeting

Mayor Yeomans requested adding item 15 to the agenda regarding approval for the NAACP's June 8th parade.

Motion: Council Member Tedders moved to approve adding the item to the agenda.

Second: Council Member Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval

VI. Public Comments

A. Melissa Barker (Chamber of Commerce)

Ms. Barker distributed a calendar of upcoming events for May and June. She reported that the Chamber Classic on May 2nd was the most successful to date with a 60% increase in teams. She mentioned recent ribbon-cuttings at Cochran Motor Speedway and Blossoms and Blooms. The Chamber participated in Bleckley Memorial Hospital events and fed hospital staff for National Hospital Week.

Ms. Barker announced upcoming events including:

- Russell Whit Davidson Day on May 14th
- County Commissioners' Meeting on May 15th
- Bingo Night on May 19th (final one at the Extension Office before moving downtown)
- Memorial Day event on May 27th
- Dre Day Aim for a Better Future on June 7th
- Chamber Board meeting on June 10th
- "Leveraging AI Tools to Save Time and Money" workshop with Greg George on June 11th
- Second Saturday music event on June 14th with food trucks and music on the courthouse steps
- Business After Hours at Jellystone Park on June 19th
- July 4th celebration featuring live DJ, inflatables, fun run/5K, and fireworks

B. Edward Peacock (244 Crest Drive)

Mr. Peacock followed up on a September 2019 presentation to the council about proper policing. He read an email he had sent to Georgia POST (Peace Officers Standards and Training) Director Chris Harvey and Senator Walker praising Richmond County Deputy David Hopkins's body camera video showing life-saving "stop-the-bleed" training applied during a police incident. Mr. Peacock commended the Cochran Police Department for their policy of providing first aid to deadly force victims, which he believes is unique in the country. He expressed his desire to see this policy expanded to county, state, and national levels.

C. Josete Scott (Warner Robins, Georgia)

Ms. Scott expressed concerns about recognition and inclusion regarding the new park development. She recalled that Mayor Yeomans had appointed a committee with Dr. Stoy and Mary Pitts to manage park planning, but felt that Mary Pitts was being overlooked despite her advocating for a park for over ten years. She noted that private meetings were being held about the park's development where Mary was not included. Ms. Scott also inquired about grant money for the Payton Williams area walkway, and reported concerns about a property on Dinah Street where construction debris and materials were being dumped near residential homes.

D. Ken Land

Mr. Land thanked the city council for Georgia Cities Week activities, particularly the "Touch a Truck" event that was popular with children. He mentioned ongoing discussions with James from Falcon Engineering about T-SPLOST projects. Mr. Land also reported positive developments in negotiations with Norfolk Southern regarding the Depot building, which could help improve that area of town.

VII. Agenda Items

1. Proclamation on National Mental Health Awareness Week

Mayor Yeomans read a proclamation declaring May 2025 as Mental Health Awareness Month in the City of Cochran. The proclamation highlighted that mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being, affects how people think, feel, and act, and is essential to everyone's life. It noted that nearly 20% of children and young people report having a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorder, and approximately one in five adults live with a mental health condition. The proclamation emphasized that evidence-based mental health awareness training teaches individuals to recognize signs and symptoms of mental health challenges and provides skills to help those facing mental health crises.

Two representatives from 4-H were present to receive the proclamation.

2. Proclamation on National Hospitals Week

Mayor Yeomans read a proclamation recognizing May 11-17, 2025, as National Hospital Week in the City of Cochran. The proclamation highlighted that public health is critical to sustaining and improving the community, healthcare professionals demonstrate remarkable resilience in their care for patients, and hospitals address social determinants of health, provide behavioral health services, and serve as vital economic anchors in the community. A representative from the hospital was present to receive the proclamation.

Mayor Yeomans noted that Cochran has one of the best rural hospitals in Georgia, with a swing bed program that is ranked number one in the state.

3. Proclamation on Georgia Municipal Clerk's Week

Mayor Yeomans read a proclamation declaring May 4-10, 2025, as Professional Municipal Clerks Week in the City of Cochran. The proclamation recognized that the office of municipal clerk is the oldest among public servants, providing a professional link between citizens, local governing bodies, and other levels of government. The proclamation acknowledged that professional clerks pledge to be neutral and impartial, serve as information centers on local government functions, and continually improve their professional skills through educational programs.

City Clerk Candace Summerall was not present as she was attending her daughter's graduation.

4. Presentation by State Representative Danny Mathis (R-133)

Representative Mathis provided an update on the recent legislative session, which he described as unusual due to many senators running for other offices. He highlighted several bills that passed:

- Religious Freedom Act
- Protection for girls' sports
- School safety legislation following the tragedy in Barrow County
- Hurricane relief funding for areas impacted by Hurricane Helene

Rep. Mathis discussed the \$600,000 grant secured for Cochran Municipal Airport and emphasized the importance of the airport for local economic development. He noted the growth in takeoffs and landings (approximately quadrupled) and the connection to Middle Georgia State University's aviation program.

He praised Cochran's rural hospital as one of the best in the state and emphasized the importance of maintaining such facilities. He noted that 52% of the state's \$37.7 billion budget goes to K-12 and higher education.

Rep. Mathis encouraged the city to proceed with annexation of Highway 87 to the industrial park, as industrial development would bring businesses downtown, improve schools, and potentially lower taxes. He suggested focusing on attracting businesses with 200-600 employees rather than larger operations with thousands of workers.

He mentioned the state's balanced budget and efforts to address problems in the corrections system. Rep. Mathis also noted an increase in sovereign immunity limits for municipalities from \$3 million to \$5 million and indicated he would pursue lowering the population threshold for rural community grants from 50,000 to 25,000 to help communities like Cochran compete more effectively.

5. Consideration of a cash match for a Georgia DOT state grant for construction of a ten-unit "T-Hangar" at the Cochran Municipal Airport

Jim Washburn, Airport Authority Manager, presented a request for the city to commit to a \$66,667 cash match (one-third of the \$200,000 total match) for a \$600,000 state grant to build a 10-unit T-hangar at the airport. The total project cost is \$800,000. The Airport Authority and County Commissioners have verbally agreed to contribute one-third each.

Mr. Washburn explained that the match percentage is higher than the previous hangar project because this is statewide funding (75/25) rather than FAA funding (90/10). He reported having 13 people on the waiting list for hangars, and noted that based aircraft are important for FAA funding levels. The new hangar would generate \$2,200 monthly (\$26,400 annually) in rental proceeds for the Airport Authority and personal property tax revenues for the county.

City Manager Newbern noted that the match would need to be budgeted for FY 2025-26 and would be an increase from the typical \$15,000-\$18,000 annual airport matching funds. He mentioned discussing with Mr. Washburn the possibility of spreading the payment over a 2-3 year period.

During discussion, Council Member Coley asked about Middle Georgia State University's use of the airport for aviation students. Mr. Washburn confirmed that students benefit greatly from using the Cochran facility because it saves them a 45-minute bus ride to Eastman.

Council Member Savant inquired about possibly entering into an agreement with the county to recoup some funds since the city receives no direct revenue from the airport. Council Member Coley suggested the need for long-term planning regarding the airport, possibly including annexation discussions.

Motion: Council Member Tedders moved to cover the city's portion of the grant.

Second: Council Member Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval (6-0)

6. Public Hearing and consideration on Text Amendment for RV Recreational Vehicle zoning designation

Mayor Yeomans called the public hearing to order at 7:01 PM.

The hearing concerned amending Article 4 of the zoning ordinance to add RV (Recreational Vehicle) as a zoning category. The amendment would become Section 4.7, with current sections 4.7-4.15 renumbered as 4.8-4.16. The amendment establishes a zoning district dealing exclusively with RV parks and provides appropriate development standards.

The Planning Commission met on May 5th and recommended approval with a suggested change to reduce the maximum number of sites from 15 to 10 sites/units per acre to allow for adequate site sizes.

No public comments were received. The public hearing closed at 7:05 PM.

Motion: Council Member Tedders moved to adopt the text amendment to the zoning ordinance.

Second: Council Member Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval

7. Public Hearing and consideration on Annexation of 5.19-acres of Sunset RV Park and 0.45-acre utility easement west of City limits

Mayor Yeomans called the public hearing to order at 7:08 PM.

The hearing concerned a petition from Jack and Denise Nobles, owners of Sunset Pines RV Park, for annexation of 5.19 acres of their RV park site along Westside Road. The site contains 30 RV sites and is a portion of their 56-site park at 273 Westside Road.

No public comments were received. The public hearing closed at 7:09 PM.

Motion: Council Member Savant moved to approve the annexation of 5.19 acres and 0.45 acres on Westside Road.

Second: Council Member Coley

Vote: Unanimous approval

8. Public Hearing and consideration on Planning Commission recommendation for zoning for annexed Sunset Pines RV Park tract located at 273 Westside Road

Mayor Yeomans called the public hearing to order at 7:10 PM.

The hearing concerned assigning an RV-Recreational Vehicle zoning designation to the 5.19-acre tract annexed from Sunset Pines RV Park. The Planning Commission had recommended at their May 5th meeting that an RV campground zoning designation be assigned to the parcel.

No public comments were received. The public hearing closed at 7:12 PM.

Motion: Council Member Savant moved to assign RV-Recreational Vehicle zoning designation for the property located at 273 Westside Road.

Second: Council Member Tedders

Vote: Unanimous approval

9. Consider Ordinance for designating enforceable "no parking" requirements by painting selected City curbs yellow, and approve Mary Drive cul-de-sac as a place for the curbs to be painted

City Manager Newbern explained that the proposed ordinance would allow the City Council to designate areas where curbs could be painted yellow to indicate no parking zones, enabling police enforcement of no-parking rules. The city attorney advised that appropriate signage should accompany the painted curbs.

Council Member Savant emphasized that the ordinance specifies both signage and yellow lines, not just painted curbs.

Motion: Council Member Tedders moved to adopt the ordinance governing authority of the City of Cochran amending the city code to provide no parking zones and other purposes.

Second: Council Member Savant

Vote: Unanimous approval

10. Consider extending liquor licenses by six months for two license holders to allow more time for liquor stores to be completed and opened

City Manager Newbern clarified that the current extension for both Bobby Patel's C Store (including a liquor store) and AJ Patel's liquor store on East Dykes Street will expire at the end of July, not late June as stated in the agenda. A six-month extension would extend the licenses to January 30, 2026, giving the businesses more time to complete construction and stock merchandise.

After discussion about the status of both projects, Council Member Savant expressed concern about Bobby Patel's project, which appears to be in the early stages, while AJ Patel's store was further along in construction. The council discussed Bobby Patel's timeline delays, including issues with Georgia DOT approvals for entrance from Dykes Street rather than Masonic Drive as initially planned.

James Jones from Falcon Engineering confirmed that truck access for deliveries was a factor in changing the entrance location, and that the turning radius requirements from Masonic Drive were substantial.

Motion: Council Member Savant moved to extend the liquor store construction timeline for AJ Patel six months to January 30, 2026.

Second: Council Member Coley

Vote: 5-1 (In favor: Gardner, Lester, Savant, Coley, Tedders; Against: Ates)

Motion: Council Member Savant moved to table the decision on Bobby Patel's extension until the June council session.

Second: Council Member Tedders

Vote: 5-1 (In favor: Gardner, Lester, Savant, Coley, Tedders; Against: Ates)

11. Consider the sequence of holding annexation hearings for thirty-six (36) County "islands" that need to be annexed

City Manager Newbern explained that the city has identified 36 county islands (primarily residential properties) eligible for unilateral annexation as they have existed since before 1992. The attorney advised that the council could annex all islands at once or over a period of time. If annexed, the properties would officially become part of the city on the first of the following month, but would not be taxed until January 1, 2026.

The Planning Commission would need to meet to recommend zoning for each property before annexation. During discussion, Council Member Lester asked about the locations of the islands, and Mr. Newbern indicated they were concentrated mainly in District 3, with possibly a few in District 2, and one or two in District 1.

Council Member Savant expressed concern about the burden on the Planning Commission if they had to meet multiple times, and suggested splitting the annexations 50/50 between two meetings. Council Member Coley requested information about which properties already receive city services such as water and sewer.

Motion: Council Member Savant moved to set the sequence for annexation to be 18 properties in July and 18 in August.

Second: Council Member Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval

12. Consider adopting an updated Cochran Community Work Program (CWP) document for inclusion in the City's PlanFirst application

City Manager Newbern explained that Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) recently notified the city that an updated Community Work Program document would strengthen the city's PlanFirst application, which is due May 15. He noted that the PlanFirst designation indicates good planning practices, helps make the city more competitive for grants, and provides discounts for the Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund.

Council Member Coley asked about two items in the CWP: subdivision regulations (which she thought had been dismissed) and paving the roadway to the water treatment plant (which she thought was no longer being pursued). Mr. Newbern clarified that paving West Railroad Avenue at least to the animal control center is slated to be done with T-SPLOST funds, and that the document would be updated again next year.

Motion: Council Member Tedders moved to approve the updated CWP.

Second: Council Member Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval

13. Nomination of Dr. Mary Christian to the Library Board to fill the remaining term of Tyler Sapp which expired June 30, 2028

Council Member Savant asked why Tyler Sapp resigned from the Library Board. Mayor Yeomans clarified that Mr. Sapp had resigned to run for council.

Motion: Council Member Savant moved to approve the nomination of Dr. Mary Christian to the Library Board.

Second: Council Member Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval

14. Consider rescinding Council's action regarding September 10, 2024 decision to name the new park

City Manager Newbern explained that in September 2024, the council had voted through a poll reported to the City Clerk to name the park "Cochran Community Park." This was a valid action according to the city attorney. To change the name, the council would first need to rescind the previous action.

Council Member Coley acknowledged she had raised the issue to respect Earl Arnold, who donated the land for the park. She noted other places in town named for people who made significant contributions, such as the Willie Basby Park and the Glenn Sawyer Gym.

Council Member Savant noted that while the land donor may have received a tax write-off, it was still a generous donation that warranted recognition.

Mayor Yeomans reminded the council that a bronze plaque would recognize Earl Arnold's contribution regardless of the park's name.

Motion: Council Member Ates moved to let the park name remain as Cochran Community Park.

Second: Council Member Gardner

Vote: 5-1 (In favor: Savant, Lester, Ates, Gardner, Tedders; Against: Coley)

15. Approval for NAACP Juneteenth Parade

Mayor Yeomans introduced a request from the NAACP for approval to close Second Street from the corner of Ash Street south to the courthouse from 11 AM to 12 PM on June 19th for a Juneteenth parade.

There was discussion about ensuring proper permits were obtained from the Georgia Department of Transportation.

Motion: Council Member Coley moved to approve the Juneteenth parade route as stated, pending Georgia DOT approval.

Second: Council Member Savant

Vote: Unanimous approval

VIII. City Manager Discussion/Items/Updates

City Manager Newbern provided several updates:

1. High School Graduation: Invited Mayor and Council to attend on May 24th at 8 AM at Royal Stadium. RSVP requested by May 19th.

2. Budget Sessions: Scheduled a work session for May 20th at 6 PM to continue reviewing the budget. Public hearings on the budget are scheduled for June 3rd and June 10th, with potential budget adoption on June 10th.
3. Housing Assistance Programs:
 - Announced a lottery for the Roof, Windows, and Doors program and CHIP grant on May 29th at 9 AM at the auditorium
 - Explained that the CHIP lottery would select one house in District 1 and up to three houses in Districts 2 and 3
 - Clarified income eligibility requirements for both programs (maximum 80% of area median income)
 - Explained that the Roof, Windows, and Doors program would select up to six houses per district with benefits averaging \$15,000 per house
 - Noted that applicants must bring completed applications, driver's licenses, and must own their homes without tax liens
4. Planned Unit Development: Distributed excerpts from the zoning ordinance regarding PUD zoning, which might be useful for a proposed workforce housing development. The city may apply for an infrastructure grant by the September 11th deadline.
5. Payton Williams/Willie Basby Park: Confirmed that the city received an \$84,900 grant from Georgia DNR for walking trails, playground, and cooking equipment.

James Jones from Falcon Engineering provided updates on several city projects:

1. Willie Basby Park: In the design stage with a concept layout. Project will include walking trails, picnic tables, and grills. Bidding expected in late August.
2. Peacock and Lewis Drainage Plan: Completed design with estimated cost of \$1.84 million for the full project. Recommended limiting scope to just the Peacock Street section (approximately \$300,000) due to budget constraints. The pipe under Lewis Street is functional but nearing end of life, while the Peacock portion has an immediate maintenance concern with a leaking pipe.
3. Downtown Intersection Improvements: Working with Downtown Development Authority to reduce project scope to meet budget constraints. Changes include limiting impact to existing sidewalks, reducing demolition, and limiting landscape beds. Lighting issues were discussed.
4. Cochran Community Park: Project is ahead of schedule despite issues with soft soils that required additional stone under the access road. Expected completion in July, with only the restroom installation (handled by the city) remaining after that time.
5. Wastewater Treatment Plant: Working with GEFA on improvements using remaining loan funds. Project includes relocating a belt press indoors or building a structure to protect it. GEFA conditionally approved the project, pending NEPA categorical exclusion documentation.
6. Lift Station: Reviewed revised budget for a lift station project funded by a federal grant assigned to EPA. Currently working with Flight to get an accurate quote for pumps.
7. Upcoming Developments: Two developers are interested in extending city services – one northeast of East Dykes and Cochran Bypass intersection (extending water and sewer) and another in southeast Cochran planning RV stations and requesting city sewer connection. Engineering review is ongoing to ensure system capacity.

IX. Council/Mayor Discussion/Items

Council Member Gardner: Thanked everyone for what they're doing.

Council Member Ates:

- Thanked Jeff Trawick at Cochran Police Department and Daniel Cape at Bleckley County Sheriffs Office for making an appearance they have been doing a great job in District 1
- District 1 meeting Thursday at 6:30 Peyton Williams building.

Council Member Coley:

- Agreed with Josette Scott about concerns regarding the debris collection site on Dinah Street, noting it has grown worse and is an eyesore when entering the city
- Addressed Joseph Scott's concerns about Mary Pitts not receiving recognition for her park advocacy, explaining that her Facebook post mentioned Mary Pitts but the newspaper article based on it omitted her name
- Noted that she wore green for Mental Health Awareness Month and shared statistics:
 - Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Georgians aged 10-34
 - Rural counties have an average of one mental health provider per 4,000 residents
 - Regular exercise reduces depression symptoms by 45%, emphasizing the importance of walkability and parks
 - Nutritional deficiencies correlate with 35% higher mental health risks
 - Educational attainment correlates with 40% lower mental health risks
- Reminded everyone about the 988 mental health hotline that is available 24/7

Council Member Tedders: No comment.

Council Member Lester:

- Commented that it had been a busy 30 days full of activity
- Stated she was looking forward to moving forward

Council Member Savant:

- Welcomed Trecia Gardner to her first council meeting after last week's first work session
- Acknowledged Mother's Day the previous weekend and thanked all mothers in the community
- Congratulated high school students receiving honors, awards, and scholarships
- Recognized athletic achievements including the boys track team state championship, girls track team's fourth-place finish, and other teams reaching Elite Eight or Final Four
- Praised coaches for building community leaders and instilling Christian beliefs
- Shared a quote about "doing the simple things better" as a way to produce good results without trying to change the world at once

Mayor Yeomans:

- Emphasized safety as temperatures rise
- Asked everyone to take care of themselves and their neighbors
- Thanked city employees and council for their work
- Concluded with "No matter what your neighbors think about you, Jesus still loves you and I do too"

X. Announcement of Upcoming Meetings and Events

1. Next Work Session - Thursday, June 5, 2025 @ 6:00 PM
2. Next Regular Council Meeting - Tuesday, June 10, 2025 @ 6:00 PM

XI. Executive Session

No executive session needed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Yeomans adjourned the meeting at 8:50 PM

Minutes prepared and submitted by:

**Candace Summerall
City Clerk**