



DRAFT Minutes

August 12, 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 Billy Yeomans called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

II. Invocation

Invocation was led by Commissioner Mike Davis

III. Pledge of Allegiance

Pledge of allegiance was led by Council Member Lonnie Tedders.

IV. Attendance

Present: Mayor Billy Yeomans, Council Members Gary Ates, Carla Coley, Trecia Gardner, Dianne Lester, Lonnie Tedders, Shane Savant **Absent:** None **Records show that six members of council are present. None are absent.**

V. Adopt Agenda/Minutes

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

Motion: Council Member Tedders moved to approve the minutes from the July 8, 2025 Regular Council Meeting **Second:** Council Member Savant **Vote:** Unanimous approval

2. Approve Agenda for August 12, 2025, Regular Council Meeting

Mayor Yeomans noted the agenda has eight items and asked if all council members had the latest version.

Motion: Council Member Lester moved to accept the agenda **Second:** Council Member Savant **Vote:** Unanimous approval

VI. Public Comments

Mayor Yeomans explained the procedures for public comment, clarifying that those here for the annexation public hearing should not sign up for general public comments as they are separate items.

Chan Jones - (Recreation Department)

Chan Jones addressed the Council regarding recreational SPLOST funding allocation:

- Discussed the difference in land area maintenance ratios (4:1) between existing facilities and proposed new parks
- Emphasized the age difference in infrastructure - existing equipment dating back decades versus new equipment needs

- Highlighted the known quantity of people served by the recreation department (approximately 3,900 registrations annually) versus unknown usage of new parks
- Presented three funding options as real dollar impacts rather than percentages:
 - **Option A:** \$18,500 more than last year's allocation
 - **Option B:** \$20,200 cut from current funding
 - **Option C:** \$46,000 cut from current funding
- Requested complete transparency in future SPLOST allocations, noting that "recreation" can be interpreted many ways
- Suggested listing specific departments (like police and fire) rather than general terms

Melissa Barker - Chamber of Commerce Representative

Melissa Barker provided updates on Chamber activities:

Upcoming Events:

- Second Saturday events with music and food trucks
- Seven Bridges Serenade performance next month with local opening act "Soup"
- Lunch and Learn tomorrow at noon at the Commons on cyber security (lunch provided by Scotts)
- Bingo on Monday, August 18th at 6:30 PM at Chamber Commons

Business Opportunities:

- Part-time job fair on Tuesday, August 19th from 11 AM to 2 PM at the college
- Taste of Scotland and Ireland trip in April 2026 with 5% discount for early registration

Country Fest Updates:

- Adding car show this year
- Bringing back Miss Pumpkin pageant
- Vendor spots available

Facility News:

- Finalized lease agreement for the commons. .Information available for those interested in leasing

VII. Agenda Items

1. Public Hearing on annexation of seventeen (17) unincorporated County islands

Public Hearing Called to Order: 6:17 PM

Mayor Yeomans provided extensive background and legal clarification with City Attorney Jim Elliott:

Legal Timeline Questions:

- Mayor asked if all 17 islands meet qualification for annexation - **Attorney Elliott confirmed yes**
- Discussed timeline requirements: letters must be sent to affected property owners within 30 days of council action
- Mayor noted concern about voter registration deadline (October 6th) for upcoming election

Annexation Process:

- Annexations become effective the first of the month following ordinance adoption
- If voted before September 30th, residents would be eligible to vote in upcoming election
- This public hearing was chosen by council for public input, though not legally required
- Notice properly advertised in Times-Journal Post

Speaking Rules:

- Affected residents (17 islands): 10 minutes
- Non-affected residents with interest: 5 minutes
- Other speakers: 5 minutes

Public Comments on Annexation

Christy Barton - 102 Hillside Drive (Affected Property Owner)

- Property purchased by grandmother in 1966, specifically chose county location over city
- Family acquired property in 2016, valued county services
- Fully satisfied with current county services (sheriff, fire department)
- Opposes annexation due to higher property taxes without additional benefits
- Requested council withdraw or vote against annexation proposal

Dana Selph - 202 Crest Drive (Second Wave Property)

Dana Selph provided extensive opposition arguments:

Personal Experience:

- Previously lived in city on 12th Street
- Home burned down completely despite city fire department response and fire hydrant on property
- Argued city fire protection doesn't guarantee better outcomes

Service Quality Concerns:

- Satisfied with current county sheriff and fire department services
- Criticized city regulations as "quite pliable" after witnessing council change regulations for one person
- Noted lack of streetlights on Crest Drive (residents installed own security lighting)
- Only two fire hydrants on long street, both at city corners

Financial Impact:

- Would double taxes for many retired residents on fixed income
- No additional benefits provided for increased cost
- County residents already pay higher rates for city services (water/sewer) as transactional purchases

Legal Challenge:

- Cited Title 36, Article 6 regarding annexation requirements
- Argued properties don't meet "island" definition as they're not 100% surrounded by city
- Identified four county houses at end of 12th Street that border the area but remain county

Personal Choice:

- Intentionally chose county when moving from Warner Robins
- Emphasized forced annexation removes personal decision-making

Alternative Suggestions:

- Recommended working with county commissioner to bring industry to town
- Focus on job creation rather than taking money from retired residents

Scott Selph - 202 Crest Drive

Scott Selph provided passionate opposition:

Personal Impact:

- Discussed neighbor's health issues and financial concerns
- Emphasized the burden on residents, who are on fixed income with health problems
- Noted neighbor's genuine fear about doubling property taxes

Moral Arguments:

- Distinguished between voluntary annexation (which he supports) versus forced annexation
- Stated: "Because something's not illegal does not make it right"
- Argued taking property and changing everything while charging double is morally wrong

Community Values:

- Referenced Cochran and Bleckley County's tradition of helping each other and respecting property rights
- Stated the action goes against small-town mentality of looking out for people

Legal Threat:

- Promised to fight annexation "as far as we've got to go"
- Had consulted with state-level contacts for advice
- Warned the fight would be public if annexation proceeds

Metro Narcisi - 205 10th Street (Husband of Ms. Hill)

Metro Narcisi provided detailed personal circumstances:

Background:

- Transplanted from Rhode Island to be with grandchildren
- Wife made specific inquiries to realtor and town hall to ensure property was outside city limits
- Needed certainty about tax implications due to small home business

Financial Hardship:

- Took 65% pay cut to move to Georgia
- Working three jobs to maintain household
- Wife battling life-threatening disease and undergoing chemotherapy
- Cannot afford 40% or double tax increase

Process Criticism:

- Questioned who initiated the annexation idea
- Suggested it's a money grab because few businesses exist for revenue
- Called the justifications "smoking mirrors" with no real benefits
- Argued timing is "horrific" and will "change lives"

Personal Plea:

- Asked council to consider impact on families
- Warned annexation could force families out of their homes
- Begged council to reconsider the decision

State Representative Danny Mathis

Representative Mathis provided legislative perspective and strong opposition:

Process Criticism:

- Criticized the approach of sending intimidating lawyer letters instead of talking to residents
- Stated residents could have been asked if they wanted to be annexed
- Noted legal complexities about what constitutes an "island"

Service Quality:

- Praised county sheriff and fire departments
- Argued city services aren't better than county services
- Criticized some city regulations and infrastructure issues

Financial Priorities:

- Suggested fixing infrastructure (water, gas, sewers) to attract business instead of "wasting money"
- Referenced expensive building demolitions that provided no tax revenue return

Legislative Action Threat:

- Consulted with legislative counselor Morello in Atlanta
- **Read official quote:** "The General Assembly has retained the power to unilaterally revise the boundaries of cities so the annexation of an island over the objections of the property owner can be reversed by the General Assembly adopting a local bill annexing the property"
- **Promised:** If any affected residents request it, he will introduce legislation to reverse the annexation
- Committed to dropping legislation if he's still in office when session reconvenes

Community Unity:

- Emphasized need to work together and lead rather than force people
- Praised Cochran's potential and good people
- Opposed "ego trip and power trip" approaches

Bleckley County Commissioner Mike Davis

The County Commissioner provided official county position:

Representation:

- Represents both city and county residents
- Has fielded calls from affected residents

Service Defense:

- Defended county sheriff and fire departments' quality
- Challenged claims that city services are better
- Noted residents live on peninsula, not island (not completely surrounded by city)

Personal Stories:

- Mentioned Fred and Cynthia White traveling from mountains to attend meeting
- Emphasized personal relationships with affected residents like Fred White

Annexation Philosophy:

- Supports voluntary annexation when residents request it
- Receives regular annexation requests from Richard (City Manager)
- Opposes forced annexation against residents' will

Development Concerns:

- Mentioned pending 50-100 home subdivision project requiring city utilities
- Expressed frustration that council can't coordinate to visit developer's other projects
- Questioned priorities: forced annexation versus economic development

Personal Appeal:

- Asked council to consider community harmony
- Emphasized friendship with council members while opposing this action
- Urged protection of county residents' rights

Correspondence and Clarifications

Mayor Yeomans asked about letters mentioned by speakers. **Council Member Carla Coley** clarified she had sent two separate letters:

1. **Variance Letter:** Apologizing for lack of transparency in variance process
2. **Annexation Letter:** Explaining city perspective on annexation benefits and continuity of service
 - Clarified revenue impact is approximately \$33,000, not hundreds of thousands
 - Emphasized transparency efforts
 - Noted she acted individually, not representing full council

Dana Selph challenged the legal basis, questioning how annexation can proceed when Article VI requires complete city surrounding and properties aren't fully surrounded.

Public Hearing Closed: 7:00 PM

Mayor Yeomans thanked all speakers and announced this was the last public hearing for audience participation on the 17 islands. The next session will be when council discusses and votes.

Future Process:

- Next meeting will be streamed on Facebook
- Date will be on additional letters to be sent out
- **Council Member Coley** assured residents they don't want to "string along" the process
- Clarification needed before final decision

2. Public Hearing and consideration of abandonment of twenty (20') foot wide alley behind Zaxby's along S. Sixth Street

Council Member Lester noted the applicant decided not to move forward with the request.

Motion: Council Member Lester moved to remove item number two from the agenda **Second:** Council Member Ates **Vote:** Unanimous approval to remove item

3. Consider allocating a portion of SPLOST Recreation funds to the Cochran-Bleckley County Recreation Complex

Mayor Yeomans provided comprehensive background:

SPLOST Recreation Funding Details:

- Current total: \$258,000 expected through December 31, 2030
- Monthly generation: approximately \$4,300
- Recreation Board requested 75% allocation (\$193,500) for Recreation Complex
- Would leave \$64,500 for other city recreation needs

City Park Needs:

- Cochran Community Park and Willie Basby Park will need capital improvements
- Fencing needed for new community park (not budgeted)
- \$64,500 insufficient for two parks over 5.5 years

Three Options Presented:

1. **Option A (Recreation Board Request):** 75% Recreation (\$193,500) / 25% City (\$64,500)
2. **Option B:** 60% Recreation (\$154,800) / 40% City (\$103,200)
3. **Option C:** 50% Recreation (\$129,000) / 50% City (\$129,000)

Council Discussion

Council Member Gary Ates supported 50-50 split:

- Noted recreation department receives registration income while city parks don't
- Argued \$64,500 insufficient for city park needs over timeline

Council Member Dianne Lester supported Option A (75-25):

- Emphasized importance of recreation for children not making school teams
- Noted incomplete city parks don't need immediate funding

Chan Jones (Recreation Department) provided operational clarifications:

- Registration fees are negative income - cost \$384 per child without city/county support
- Only charges \$65 registration due to city/county subsidies
- Age cutoff typically around 12 years old due to participation levels
- Confirmed anything less than 67% would be a funding cut

Council Member Shane Savant supported Option A:

- Noted 3,900 annual registrations (counting multiple sports per child)
- Recreation department has 80% of land acreage for city recreation
- Age and condition of recreation infrastructure
- 75% gets them just above historical funding levels

Council Member Carla Coley supported Option A:

- Calculated significant foot traffic with families attending practices and games
- Emphasized not taking money away from recreation department

Council Member Ates countered:

- Recreation gets \$358,000 from county SPLOST
- Questioned why 50-50 isn't fair when they have other revenue sources

City Manager Clarifications:

- **Richard Newbern:** SPLOST funds are for capital only, not maintenance or personnel
- **Candace Summerall:** Noted city park can't open without fence around detention pond due to liability
- Fencing wasn't included in original budget planning
- Biannual certified playground inspector required

Public Works Director Willie Farrow outlined city park needs:

- Maintenance equipment needed for new park
- Basketball court resurfacing needed (\$20,000+ estimated)
- Playground equipment fencing required for security
- Cameras needed for safety

Final Discussion: Council Member Lester emphasized maintenance planning importance while questioning why pond fencing wasn't in original budget.

Motion: Council Member Savant moved to compromise with 65% recreation, 35% city parks **Second:**

Council Member Tedders **Vote:** 5-1 (Council Member Ates voted no)

Final Allocation: 65% Recreation Department (\$167,700) / 35% City Parks (\$90,300)

4. Consider award of bid to Comfort Pro in Cochran for heat pump at Municipal Building

Amount: \$7,391 for five-ton heat pump replacement

Public Works Director Willie Farrow explained:

- Unit serves half of municipal building (one side before side door)
- Building has four units total (two per side)
- Old unit served its purpose but needed replacement
- Comfort Pro is lowest bidder and handles all city HVAC servicing

Council Member Savant asked about warranty and confirmed factory parts warranty would be provided after installation.

Council Member Tedders inquired about additional line work costs, estimated at few hundred dollars.

Motion: Council Member Savant moved to accept bid for \$7,391 to Comfort Pro for HVAC unit at municipal building **Second:** Council Member Ates **Vote:** Unanimous approval

5. Consider award of bid to Comfort Pro in Cochran for HVAC at Peyton Williams Building

Amount: \$6,744 for three-ton split system heat pump

Public Works Director Farrow explained:

- Peyton Williams Center has six units total
- Previously replaced one unit, now replacing another
- Units original to building construction (2002-2003)
- Only using left side and front offices currently
- Right side units turned off to save energy when not in use

Motion: Council Member Tedders moved to accept the bid **Second:** Council Member Ates **Vote:** Unanimous approval

6. Consider award of bid to Georgia Outdoor Power & Equipment for Exmark zero-turn mower

Amount: \$11,644 for 60-inch commercial mower

Significant Discussion on Bidding Process:

Public Works Director Farrow explained:

- Five-year plan specifically listed Exmark brand
- City previously purchased two Dixie Choppers (lowest bids)
- Workers prefer Exmark for comfort and durability
- Have 13-year-old Exmark still operational after motor replacement

Council Member Carla Coley raised process concerns:

- Questioned fairness of requesting general "60-inch mower" bids then selecting specific brand
- Asked if other bidders knew they weren't being considered
- Emphasized transparency in bidding process

Brian Lucas (Ace Hardware - Local Dealer) provided public comment:

- Represents Dixie Chopper with seven commercial mower lines
- Can customize builds with various specifications
- Emphasized local service and parts availability
- Expressed frustration as local business being outbid by higher-priced distant option
- Compared situation to buying expensive "King Ranch Ford F-250" for personal preference over standard F-250
- Questioned spending extra taxpayer money for worker preferences

City Manager Newbern noted city retains right to reject any/all bids and could re-bid with detailed specifications.

Proposed Solution: **Willie Farrow** offered to work with Brian Lucas to:

- Test drive equivalent Dixie Chopper models
- Compare specifications and features
- Let workers evaluate different options
- Return next month with recommendation

Motion: Council Member Ates moved to table until next meeting for Willie and Brian to collaborate on specifications and testing **Second:** Council Member Gardner **Vote:** Unanimous approval to table

7. Consider purchasing 2026 Sierra 1500 pickup truck off state contract

Amount: \$45,300 from Hardy Automotive Fleet Group, Dallas, GA

Public Works Director Farrow provided detailed fleet breakdown:

Current Fleet Assignment (18 trucks for 15 full-time employees):

Wastewater Plant:

- Unit 92 and 025: Clay Baggett and Shaun Bass
- Unit 135 (F-250): Sewer trailer use (not assigned to individual)

Water Department:

- Unit 126: Mike Horne
- Unit 009: Isaac Evans (older truck for water supplies)
- Unit 125: Dennis Rozier (daily meter reading)
- Unit 127: Meter readers (part-time worker driven)
- Unit 138: Seth Bowman

- Unit 15 (older 3500 manual): Back machine carrier (sent to shop today)

Street Department:

- Unit 154 (GMC): Willie Farrow
- Unit 137: Tiger (supervisor)
- Unit 26: Kenji White (mechanic)
- Unit 123: Stacey Owens and Derrick Stevens (shared)
- Unit 124: Bennie Williams and Thomas Edenfield

Part-time Workers:

- Units 006, 64, and 175 (older trucks from Fire Department)

Fleet Management Philosophy:

- Keep older trucks for backup when newer trucks need AC/heating repairs
- Don't use newer trucks for pulling trailers (use older trucks)
- Need flexibility for multiple department assignments
- Planning to surplus unit 008 (already declared by City Manager)

Council Member Savant asked about:

- **State Contract:** Pre-bid through Georgia Department of Administrative Services with verification numbers required
- **Four-wheel drive:** Same price as two-wheel drive
- **Brand choice:** Chevrolet \$2,500 cheaper than Ford F-150, fewer issues than previous F-150s

Motion: Council Member Ates moved to purchase 2026 Sierra 1500 pickup truck for \$45,300 **Second:** Council Member Savant

Vote: Unanimous approval

Mayor Yeomans then excused himself for personal reasons and turned the meeting over to **Council Member Ates as Mayor Pro Tem.**

8. Discussion of City Manager evaluation timeline

Council Member Savant explained the issue:

- City Manager contract requires evaluation before contract renewal date
- Previously conducted evaluations after renewal date
- Need to align with actual contract language
- Recommending immediate action to start evaluation process

Evaluation Process Discussion:

Department Head Input:

- Previous request for department head surveys not yet completed
- Council wants department head perspectives since they work directly with City Manager
- Discussion of anonymous versus direct feedback methods

City Clerk Summerall suggested:

- Anonymous numerical evaluation system she uses with her staff
- Sealed envelopes to protect anonymity
- Evaluations submitted to her for compilation

Council Member Coley preferred:

- Anonymous evaluations plus optional individual meetings
- Non-leading questions provided in advance
- Open-ended conversation opportunities

Timeline Established:

- **Tuesday, August 19th at 6:00 PM** for initial evaluation session
- Executive session format
- **City Clerk** to provide evaluation forms to department heads
- **City Attorney Elliott** confirmed proper special meeting procedure

Motion: Council Member Savant moved for Tuesday at 6:00 PM executive session for evaluation review

Second: Council Member Coley **Vote:** Unanimous approval

VIII. City Manager Discussion/Items/Updates

City Manager Richard Newbern provided comprehensive updates:

Development Projects

Circle K Annexation:

- Gas station/convenience store at Highway 26 and bypass corner
- Annexation petition filed
- Planning Commission hearing September 2nd for zoning
- City Council hearing September 9th for annexation and zoning

Manufacturing Development:

- Developer for wiring molding manufacturer on Mendel Lane
- Likely requires rezoning to light industrial
- Active discussions ongoing

Training and Development

Georgia Association of Zoning Administrators Conference:

- August 13-15 in Rome, Georgia
- Richard Newbern, Lisa Eisele, and four planning commissioners attending
- Available by phone during absence

Housing Development

Smith Douglas Homes:

- Expects 60-house neighborhood proposal
- Previous council presentation three months ago
- Planning site visit to Hampton development
- **Potential dates:** August 29, September 5, 12, or 19 (Fridays)
- **Council preference:** Saturday visits (August 30, September 6, 13)
- confirm developer's Saturday availability

Solid Waste Services

Bidding Process:

- Specs sent to various solid waste companies
- **Deadline:** September 19th for sealed bids
- Services include: residential, commercial dumpsters, limb pickup, bulk waste, recycling (alternate)
- **Presentations:** October 9th work session
- **Decision:** Potentially October 14th meeting
- **Contract expiration:** February 28, 2026 (Waste Management)
- **New service start:** March 1, 2026

Utility Billing Issues

Water Meter Reading Problems:

- Bills arriving late to customers
- Recent improvement: bills typically arrive 25th-26th of month
- **May bill:** Sent to South Data June 4th
- **June bill:** Sent July 2nd
- **July bill:** Sent June 30th

Technical Issues:

- Water meter accuracy problems
- AMI system reading issues
- Two years warranty remaining on meters
- Putting new meter heads on some meters

Proposed Solution:

- **Consolidated Pipe proposal** for comprehensive AMI system conversion
- New, more accurate water meters
- Company would buy out existing warranty
- Would pay off GEFA water loan used for original meters

- **City Clerk:** Needs more time for accurate financial analysis

City Clerk Announcements

Candace Summerall:

- **Qualifying period:** August 18-21, 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM
- **Open positions:** Districts 1, 2, 3 (Posts 1) plus Mayor
- Encouraged current members and others to qualify

IX. Council/Mayor Discussion/Items

- Council Member Gardner expressed her thankfulness for all city and employees

X. Announcement of Upcoming Meetings and Events

1. **Next Work Session:** Thursday, September 4, 2025 @ 6:00 PM
2. **Next Regular Council Meeting:** Tuesday, September 9, 2025 @ 6:00 PM

XI. Executive Session

Motion: Council Member Savant moved to go into executive session for personnel matters **Second:** Council Member Coley **Vote:** Unanimous approval

Meeting recessed for executive session at approximately 8:48 PM

Meeting adjourned at approximately 9:03 PM

Minutes prepared and submitted by:

Candace Summerall

City Clerk