

**Oconee County Board of Commissioners Meeting
Administrative Building Commission Chambers
May 5, 2026 – 6:00 p.m.
Minutes**

Members Present:

Chairman John Daniell
Commissioner Mark Thomas
Commissioner Chuck Horton
Commissioner Amrey Harden
Commissioner Mark Saxon

Staff Present:

Daniel Haygood, County Attorney
Justin Kirouac, County Administrator
Holly Stephenson, County Clerk
Melissa Braswell, Finance Director
Donna Norton, Budget Officer
Whitney Sperlik, Civic Center Director
Lisa Davol, Parks and Recreation Director
Guy Herring, Planning and Code Enforcement Director
Ethan Perry, Planner

Constitutional Officers Present:

Sheriff James Hale

FY27 Proposed Budget Public Hearing:

Finance Director Melissa Braswell presented the proposed FY27 Budget, stating the Budget supports the mission of Oconee County and is designed to achieve the strategic goals set forth for the county.

The proposed FY27 General Fund Budget is \$49,004,700, which is a balanced budget. She discussed the FY27 General Fund proposed revenues and expenditures as compared to the FY26 budget, while detailing some increases departmentally and by classification. The proposed budget is an increase of 7.22% over the FY26 General Fund Budget and includes the new EMS Department funding.

The total proposed budget for FY27 is \$85,493,242 to include capital, SPLOST and TSPLOST, special revenue, and enterprise funds. This is 2.14% increase from prior year. Proposed revenues and expenses by fund and function were presented.

The total proposed budget for Water Resources, the largest Enterprise Fund, is \$16,919,892. Revenues and expenses were presented by classification.

The FY27 Budget supports the strategic goals of the county with a commitment to public safety, transportation maintenance and improvements, water and sewer infrastructure plan, and the fleet phase replacement program.

The 2nd Budget Hearing is scheduled for May 19, 2026 at 6pm and the Budget Adoption scheduled for June 2, 2026. The full presentation, budget summary, and fee schedule will be posted on the Oconee County website at the conclusion of this meeting. Ms. Braswell explained some fee schedule changes for FY27.

Call to Order: 6:25 p.m.

Chairman John Daniell called the meeting to order.

Pledge of Allegiance:

County Administrator Justin Kirouac led the Pledge after a moment of silence

Approval of Agenda:

Chairman Daniell asked to amend the agenda to add an item inadvertently left off the Consent Agenda: Approval of the Award of the OVP Tennis Court Expansion Project.

ACTION:

Motion: Mark Saxon made a motion to approve the May 5, 2026 Agenda with the addition of Item 12 on the Consent Agenda.

Second: Amrey Harden

Voted in Favor of Motion: Mark Thomas, Chuck Horton, Amrey Harden, Mark Saxon

Voted Against Motion: None

Final Action: **Motion Passed.**

Statements and Remarks from Citizens:

None.

Statements and Remarks from Commissioners:

Chairman Daniell reminded everyone of the Summer Burn Ban being in effect from May 1 to September 30. He also announced the county is seeking applicants for the following Community Advisory Boards: Animal Services Advisory Board; Keep Oconee County Beautiful Commission; Family & Children's Services; Library Advisory Board; and Tourism & Visitors Bureau. The deadline for applications is May 15, 2026 at 12noon. Early Voting is currently under way at the Oconee County Administrative Building through May 15. Early voting will also be held on Saturday, May 9 from 9am to 5pm.

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes of April 7, 2026 Regular Meeting and April 28, 2026 Agenda Meeting:

ACTION:

Motion: Mark Saxon made a motion to approve the April 7, 2026 Regular Meeting and April 28, 2026 Agenda Meeting minutes.

Second: Mark Thomas

Voted in Favor of Motion: Mark Thomas, Chuck Horton, Amrey Harden, Mark Saxon

Voted Against Motion: None

Final Action: **Motion Passed.**

Special Use P26-0025:

Applicants:	Bethlehem Church
Owners:	Grace Baptist Church of Watkinsville, Georgia, Inc.
Location:	6401 and 6441 Hog Mountain Road
Acreage:	±18.07
Zoning:	AG (Agricultural)
Request:	Modify the conditions of Special Use #5459 for a Community Scale Church and add an adjacent property to the existing Special Use Permit.

Presented by: Guy Herring, Planning & Code Enforcement Director

Discussion: Mr. Herring briefed the Board regarding the request for the property, which is currently zoned AG (Agricultural) in the Suburban Neighborhood Character Area. The applicants and owners are requesting Special Use Approval to allow the renovation of the current church worship building to accommodate 650 people in the primary area of assembly. A second property will be added to accommodate the parking areas, amending the Special Use approval #5459 for a Community Scale Church. Staff and Planning Commission recommend approval of the request with six conditions.

The Public Hearing was opened.

Luke Morton, Precision Planning, representing the owner, spoke in favor of the request which has historically been a place of worship and is being purchased by Bethlehem Church.

There were no further comments in favor of the request.

Joseph Kikly, 6461 Hog Mountain Road, spoke against the request due to the traffic and the location next door to his property. He requests a berm of evergreens down Goat Farm Road, no access granted from the property to dirt road Goat Farm Road, and access to the home from Hog Mountain Road only. He states allowing a church this size will alter the residential neighboring area.

There were no further comments against the request.

The Public Hearing was closed.

Commissioner Harden asked Mr. Kikly if he had voiced his concerns previously to the Planning Commission or to the Commissioners.

Mr. Kikly responded that he did not.

Commissioner Horton questioned a possible accusation made by Mr. Kikly.

Commissioner Harden suggested postponing the Special Use for time to do more investigation.

Mr. Herring advised the Concept Plan shows no access to Old Goat Farm Road. All access would be from State Route 53. He also explained a buffer would be required but could be enhanced.

Commissioner Thomas clarified that the size of the sanctuary would remain the same, with the additional residence being used as a youth center.

ACTION:

Motion:

Chuck Horton made a motion to approve Special Use P26-0025 for Grace Baptist Church of Watkinsville, Georgia, Inc.; Modify the conditions of existing Special Use approval #5459 for a Community Scale Church and add an adjacent property to the existing Special Use Permit; ±18.07 acres; 6410 and 6441 Hog Mountain Road with six conditions.

Second:

Mark Thomas

Voted in Favor of Motion:

Mark Thomas, Chuck Horton, Mark Saxon

Abstained from the Vote:

Amrey Harden

Voted Against Motion:

None

Final Action:

Motion Passed 3-0 to Approve Special Use P26-0025 with six conditions.

(See documentation in Ordinance and Resolutions Book No. 26.)

Rezone P26-0044:

Applicants:	Daniel Bodie
Owners:	Cynthia Bodie
Location:	Plantation Drive
Acreage:	±5.4
Zoning:	AG (Agricultural)
Request:	Rezone from AG (Agriculture) to AR (Agricultural-Residential)

Presented by: Guy Herring, Planning & Code Enforcement Director

Discussion: Mr. Herring briefed the Board regarding the request for the property, which is currently zoned AG (Agricultural) in the Suburban Neighborhood Character Area. The applicant and owner are requesting Rezone to AR (Agricultural-Residential) to allow for the addition of a second residence. Staff and Planning Commission recommend approval of the request with four conditions.

The Public Hearing was opened.

Daniel Bodie, applicant, spoke in favor of the request to relocate his family to his mother's land.

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Cynthia Bodie, owner, spoke in favor of the request.

Chuck Neely, neighbor, spoke in favor of the request.

*There were no further comments in favor of the request and no comments against the request.
The Public Hearing was closed.*

ACTION:

Motion: Mark Saxon made a motion to approve Rezone P26-0044 for Cynthia Bodie; Rezone from AG to AR; ±5.4 acres; Plantation Drive with four conditions.
Second: Mark Thomas
Voted in Favor of Motion: Mark Thomas, Chuck Horton, Amrey Harden, Mark Saxon
Voted Against Motion: None
Final Action: **Motion Passed to Approve Rezone P26-0044 with four conditions.**
(See documentation in Ordinance and Resolutions Book No. 26.)

Variance P25-0269:

Applicants:	Katy Rowan
Owners:	Joshua and Emily Ann Sweat
Location:	2300 Stone Road
Acreage:	±0.71
Zoning:	R-1 (Residential)
Request:	Request to allow an accessory building to exceed 1000 square feet in the R-1 zoning district.

Presented by: Guy Herring, Planning & Code Enforcement Director
Discussion: Mr. Herring briefed the Board regarding the request for the property, which is currently zoned R-1 (Residential) in the Suburban Neighborhood Character Area. The applicants and owners are requesting a Variance to allow for an accessory building to exceed 1000 square feet in the R-1 zoning district. Staff recommends approval of the request with one condition.

The Public Hearing was opened.

Joshua Sweat, owner, spoke in favor of the request.

*There were no further comments in favor of the request and no comments against the request.
The Public Hearing was closed.*

Commissioner Harden confirmed with Mr. Herring that no public comments were received on this request.

Commissioner Horton asked if the owner has any concerns with the Homeowners Association.

Mr. Sweat responded that he had no complaints from them.

Commissioner Thomas confirmed this does not affect the septic system.

ACTION:

Motion: Mark Thomas made a motion to approve Variance P25-0269 for Joshua and Emily Ann Sweat; Allow an accessory building to exceed 1000 square feet in the R-1 zoning district; ±0.71 acres; 2300 Stone Road with one condition.
Second: Chuck Horton
Voted in Favor of Motion: Mark Thomas, Chuck Horton, Amrey Harden, Mark Saxon
Voted Against Motion: None
Final Action: **Motion Passed to Approve Variance P25-0269 with one condition.**
(See documentation in Ordinance and Resolutions Book No. 26.)

Ratify EMS Director:

Presented by: John Daniell, Chairman

Discussion: Chairman John Daniell announced Jaron Queen as the new Director of the EMS Department.

ACTION:

Motion: Mark Thomas made a motion to ratify Jaron Queen as the EMS Director.

Second: Amrey Harden

Voted in Favor of Motion: Mark Thomas, Chuck Horton, Amrey Harden, Mark Saxon

Voted Against Motion: None

Final Action: **Motion Passed.**

Discuss on the South Watkinsville Bypass Project:

Presented by: John Daniell, Chairman

Discussion: Chairman John Daniell explained that Public Comment was received at the last meeting along with other comments since the proposed routes were announced. Commissioner Harden read a proposed Resolution to address the citizen concerns.

The Public Comment Period was opened.

Alan Bell, 1411 Colham Ferry Road, thanked the Commission for the Resolution and asked that they stand to defend the farmland with the families affected.

State Representative Eric Gisler, representing District 121, gave an update on his conversations with GDOT employees. He states GDOT is in the alignment phase and is still looking for a solution that makes the most sense for everyone involved. He spoke in favor of the resolution and has asked GDOT to strongly reconsider other solutions. He mentioned construction of the Bishop bypass with a connection to Astondale Road as a possibility. He also relayed information he received from a GDOT engineer about the Watkinsville traffic signals.

Drew Kurtz, 2151 Price Mill Road, spoke as the Mayor of Bishop in favor of finding one plan to solve the Bishop and Watkinsville traffic issues. He thanked the Board for this Resolution.

Ginny King thanked the Commission for the Resolution.

Katie Wilkes, 1311 Geen Ferry Road, spoke as a representative of a farming family, asking that farmland be preserved. She thanked the Commission for the Resolution.

Caitlyn Keele, 2160 Salem Road, spoke in favor of continuing farming in the county and in favor of the Resolution.

Robin Redd, 2850 Salem Road, spoke about traffic concerns and requested preservation of county land.

Diane Border, 4564 Greensboro Highway, spoke of a bypass fostering commercial development in the future. She thanked the Commission for the Resolution.

Clara Wilkes, 1311 Green Ferry Road, spoke of her family's heritage in farming and asked for support of farmland preservation.

Nathan Bressler, 4031 Colham Ferry Road, thanked the Commission for the Resolution.

Brandon Wilkes, 1311 Green Ferry Road, thanked the Commissioners for hearing the citizens and the Resolution.

Mallory Moye, 1121 Ivywood Drive, spoke in favor of the Resolution.

There were no further comments, and the Public Comment Period was closed.

ACTION:

Motion: Chuck Horton made a motion to approve the Resolution to GDOT Concerning the Watkinsville Bypass.
Second: Mark Thomas
Voted in Favor of Motion: Mark Thomas, Chuck Horton, Amrey Harden, Mark Saxon
Voted Against Motion: None
Final Action: **Motion Passed.**

Consent Agenda:

There were no items removed from the Consent Agenda.

ACTION

Motion: Mark Saxon made a motion to approve the consent agenda with the addition on #12.
Second: Amrey Harden
Voted in Favor of Motion: Mark Thomas, Chuck Horton, Amrey Harden, Mark Saxon
Voted Against Motion: None
Final Action: **Motion Passed.**

- 1) Approval of IT Cable Replacement for the Courthouse Upgrade.
- 2) Approval of the SARS Donation Request for OVP.
- 3) Approval of the Local Emergency Operations Plan Adoption.
- 4) Approval of the Renewal of CodeRED Mass Notification Solution.
- 5) Approval of the Renewal of the IPAWS Messaging MOA.
- 6) Approval of the GDOT Utility Aid Contract Agreement for SR53/Rays Church/Malcom Bridge Road.
- 7) Approval of the Ardurra Rapid Mix Evaluation for the Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority.
- 8) Approval of Reimbursement to GDOT for Project 0013763 Water Relocation.
- 9) Approval of the 2026 GDOT Local Road Assistance Application.
- 10) Approval of an IGA with Athens-Clarke County regarding a New ADA Position.
- 11) Approval of the Quarterly Acceptance of Deeds, Easements, Etc.
- 12) Approval of the Award of the OVP Tennis Court Expansion Project.

Executive Session:

Motion: Mark Thomas made a motion to adjourn into Executive Session to discuss land acquisition, personnel, and litigation.
Second: Mark Saxon
Voted in Favor of Motion: Mark Thomas, Chuck Horton, Amrey Harden, Mark Saxon
Voted Against Motion: None
Action/Motion: **Motion Passed.**

Adjourn into Executive Session: 7:30 p.m.

No action was taken in Executive Session.

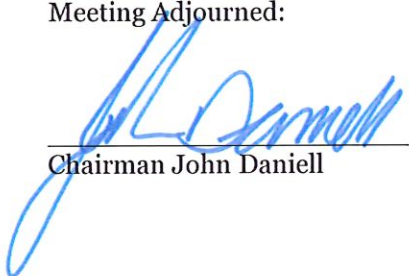
Executive Session Adjourned: 7:51 p.m.

Regular Session:

Motion: Chuck Horton made a motion to adjourn back into Regular Session.
Second: Mark Thomas
Voted in Favor of Motion: Mark Thomas, Chuck Horton, Amrey Harden, Mark Saxon
Voted Against Motion: None
Action/Motion: **Motion Passed.**
Adjourned into Regular Session: 7:52 p.m.

Adjourned:

Motion: Mark Saxon made a motion to adjourn the meeting.
Second: Mark Thomas
Voted in Favor of Motion: Mark Thomas, Chuck Horton, Amrey Harden, Mark Saxon
Voted Against Motion: None
Action/Motion: **Motion Passed.**
Meeting Adjourned: 7:52 p.m.


Chairman John Daniell


Holly Stephenson, County Clerk

6-2-26
Date