



Minutes

City Council Work Session

July 8th, 2025

6:00 pm

Baldwin PD Training Facility, 155 Willingham Avenue, Baldwin, GA 30511

Mayor Stephanie Almagno, Councilmember Erik Keith, Councilmember Nancy Lehman, Councilmember Kerri Davis, Councilmember Maarten Venter, and Councilmember Alice Venter were all in attendance.

Call Meeting to Order

Mayor Almagno called the meeting to order at 6:04 pm and provided some general housekeeping regarding the restrooms in the training facility and the brief recess between the work session and the council meeting.

Public Hearing

Old Business

New Business

1. Discussion of Mountain System Improvements

Public Works Director Scott Barnhart provided a summary of recent issues in the waterline system. Barnhart asked that residents only use official City means of communication for updates, including City Hall, the City's website, and the City's Facebook page. Barnhart asked residents with any water issues to call City Hall directly so that the Public Works Department can promptly respond and ensure that they have clean water. Barnhart took questions from residents present and from the Council.

2. Discussion of SRO Contract with Habersham Co. Board of Education

Police Chief Chris Jones provided background information on the successful relationship between Baldwin Police Department and Baldwin Elementary, despite dealing with the struggle of School Resource Officers (SROs) being shared between the schools. Sheriff Robin Krockum has proposed that Baldwin PD provide a full-time SRO to Baldwin Elementary and the position would be 100% funded by the Board of Education.

Habersham County Superintendent Patrick Franklin addressed the Council about the importance of SROs in schools for both the safety of the children but also bringing the community together. The City will invoice the BOE for the cost to fund the SRO position and the BOE will cut a monthly check. The contract will be renewed annually, and the cost will change dependent on the City's needs. Sheriff Krockum has also agreed to provide a vehicle for the Baldwin SRO to utilize. During the summer, the SRO will be employed by the City of Baldwin and will complete the required training (handled by the BOE and Chief Jones). The SRO would answer only to Chief Jones or to Principal Long and would not be assigned to another school.

Baldwin Elementary Principal Rodney Long gave his support for the contract, and that while Baldwin Elementary is already a safe school, this would only improve the facility and further protect the students.

Council had no further questions or comments.

3. Discussion of Animal Control Invoice

CAO Emily Woodmaster presented an invoice for animal control services in Fiscal Year 2025, which closed June 30th. Habersham County issued their invoice in June at the end of the fiscal year instead of the beginning. The FY25 budget anticipated a 3% increase to the digest, which created a credit (as shown on the invoice). Unfortunately, \$19,000 was budgeted and the cost came in slightly higher at \$20,997.88. When the contract for animal control service was signed, the City agreed to the County's method of calculating the cost for animal control services, which is then divided amongst the cities based on population. There are no funds allocated out of FY25, as the invoice came in \$1,997 higher than anticipated and there was not time to reallocate funds before June 30th.

Councilmember Alice Venter made a brief statement regarding double taxation and her disagreement with the costs for animal control services. Councilmember Maarten Venter expressed his frustration that the invoice does not break down the service provided or the service that the City received. Councilmember Nancy Lehman added that the City knew the terms of the contract when it was signed without an established cost, other than the County's formula.

Woodmaster said that the County's argument is that animal control is not an obligatory service, but that she was happy to go back to the County to discuss the invoice.

4. Discussion of SPLOST VIII Project List

Woodmaster presented a proposed project list for the upcoming SPLOST VIII, which Habersham County would like to put on November's referendum. Habersham has requested that the cities submit their project lists by this coming Friday so that the County can begin creating the master project list, which must be capital projects in order to be funded by SPLOST. Woodmaster reviewed the proposed project list. Some of the projects are carry-overs from SPLOST VII (which has approximately a year and a half left), as some projects are split in order to ensure funding.

Most of the proposed projects are six to seven years out, so the costs will most definitely change, but Woodmaster said that a slight buffer was included in the calculations to hopefully account for that change. Woodmaster then asked Council for feedback and questions about the project list. The project list is not what will get presented to the voters on the referendum, but only the "buckets" or categories for SPLOST projects.

Council had no further questions or comments.

5. Discussion of Banks County FLOST

Woodmaster led a discussion about Banks County FLOST, a component of House Bill 581 from the beginning of the year. The FLOST sales tax will be used as a dollar-for-dollar rollback on property taxes for Banks County residents, similar to how this already done with Banks County LOST; however, it requires the residents to vote in favor of it in November and requires the participating counties and cities to sign an IGA. While there are still a few unknowns on the law (specifically in terms of distribution involving

cities that rollback their millage to 0.00 because of LOST revenues), there is a time limit to have FLOST on the November referendum.

Banks County has requested to have the IGA signed by the first week of September. Woodmaster stated she was meeting with Banks County Commissioners on July 11th to discuss the water system and would bring up FLOST for discussion as well. Overall, the FLOST sales tax is a win for Banks County residents, because it would result in a rollback on either their county tax bill or their city tax bill.

Council had no further questions or comments.

Announcements

- a. The Banks County Library On the Go will be set up at the TAP Yard at 110 Airport Road from 11 am - 12:00 pm every Friday through the end of July. All residents are welcome to check out or return books. Additionally, those visiting the mobile library with children can receive food bags courtesy of the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia.
- b. Join us for Theron's Theater at the TAP Yard on July 25th at 8:30 pm for a free screening of *Paddington in Peru*! Bring a chair or blanket and enjoy a night under the stars with your friends and family! Concessions are available with all proceeds going to Shop with a Hero.
- c. Highland Pointe Drive from Dawn Place to Trojan Lane will be closed to through traffic from 6/30/25 to 7/11/25 for road repairs. Access will be limited to residents of those roads.
- d. Councilmember Alice Venter made a statement on the success of the Pitnic, reminding everyone that events are funded via donations from local businesses and community partners. Venter also made a statement about NowHabersham not including Baldwin's event on their list of July 4th activities in the county.
- e. Chipping for the month of July will be delayed due to equipment issues. Please note that due to budget cuts, this will be the last monthly pickup for chipping. Only storm debris will be picked up and chipped going forward.

Adjournment

Action: A motion was made by Maarten Venter to adjourn the meeting with a second by Kerri Davis. Motion Carried 5-0 at 7:19 pm.

Mayor Almagno announced there would be a 10-15-minute recess before the Council Meeting began.


Stephanie Almagno, Mayor


Date Approved by Council




Erin Gathercoal, City Clerk