



Minutes

Special Called Meeting

September 29th, 2025

6:00 pm

Baldwin Municipal Courtroom, 155 Willingham Avenue, Baldwin, GA 30511

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

Call Meeting to Order

Mayor Stephanie Almagno called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

Action: A motion was made by Nancy Lehman to amend the agenda to add New Business Items #3 "Consideration/Approval of Animal Control Service Addition to FY26 Budget" and #4 "Consideration/Approval of Social Media Coordinator Addition to FY26 Budget" with a second by Erik Keith. Motion Carried 4-0.

Mayor Almagno opened the public hearing for the 2025 millage rate at 6:03 pm.

Public Hearings

2025 Millage Rate – Public Hearing 2 of 4

- Joe Elam of 200 Sappling Place inquired as to why there was no rollback information included in the millage rate options presented, despite it being "traditional" to present such an option. Elam stated that the amendments to tonight's agenda are additional costs to an already astronomical budget for a City the size of Baldwin. Elam said that a vote in favor of the millage increase shows a disconnect between the Council and the residents.
- Mike Tope of 216 Heindel Street spoke about the Animal Control issues he brought forward at the previous Council meeting, given the addition of the item to the agenda. Tope trapped a feral cat as directed by Animal Control, but when he brought it to the shelter, he was required to sign an animal relinquishment form, which makes him ineligible to adopt from the shelter again. Tope was also displeased with the staff's lack of professionalism for mentioning euthanasia in front of his children, and that he has never seen an Animal Control vehicle in Baldwin since living here.
- Doug Faust of 128 Lake Ridge Trail stated that he understood that the Council had faced a few tough years of high expenses and inflationary issues. Council utilized the fund balance to offset costs, which created the necessity of raising taxes "to catch up." Faust acknowledged Mr. Elam's comments regarding a rollback, but that it would require citizens to accept a reduction of City services. Faust said that he didn't like taxes going up, but that he was willing to pay the increase to prevent a loss in services.
- Alice Venter of 580 Baldwin Falls Road addressed the remaining Council members, stating that over her eight years on the Council there were instances where she did not understand the City's financial position and that she accepted responsibility for those mistakes. Venter said that while some are willing to pay higher taxes for a higher level of service, there are some residents that do not have that choice because of financial hardship. Venter said that it

was very important for Baldwin's Council to build and maintain relationships with neighboring governments to work together to provide services to those who need it.

- Laura Rose of 699 Park Avenue addressed the Council about a few items:
 - a. Regarding Animal Control, Rose said there have been multiple instances of an aggressive dog attacking her mother, but neither Banks nor Habersham County will do anything about it, and something needs to be done about the lack of service.
 - b. Regarding taxes, Rose stated that she and her mother are on fixed incomes through disability and cannot afford a property tax increase. Rose said that she didn't believe anyone working for the City should make more than \$100,000 when there are residents that make so little.
 - c. Regarding trash service, Rose said that her trash was not picked up and when she called City Hall about it, the call kept getting transferred and disconnected. The trash was not picked up until a week later even though she was told by an FCS representative that they would pick up on Monday.
- Marcia Batson of 122 Banks Highland spoke regarding services that had been cut like chipping to accommodate the budget, and why a helpful service that benefits many residents would be cut. Batson explained how her taxes have increased each year from the \$70 she paid when she first moved into Banks Ridge and said that she agreed with Venter's statements about ensuring people are taken care of. Batson also brought up the lack of a rollback option presented to Council.
- Frances Hayes of 699 Park Avenue stated that she didn't want taxes to go up because she cannot afford more increases. Hayes stated she had spoken with Banks County about why seniors pay school taxes, and the County responded that they are necessary "to fix the roads."
- Randy Lewallen of 400 Wilbanks Street spoke regarding previous conversations regarding selling City Hall and said that he was in favor of the idea.
- Deborah Wilson of 315 Church Street asked Council if a reduction in turn out to the millage rate public hearings would affect the Council's decision.

Mayor Almagno opened the floor again to anyone who wanted to speak regarding the millage rate. No one came forward. Mayor Almagno closed the public hearing at 6:40 pm.

Old Business

1. Ratification of FLOST IGA with Banks County

CAO Emily Woodmaster presented the IGA with Banks County for FLOST to be placed on November's ballot with the funds distribution as presented for Banks County voters. Should the Banks County voters pass FLOST and the anticipated revenue coming in is in line with LOST, SPLOST, and TSPLOST, the anticipated collections Baldwin will

receive could possibly back the Banks County Baldwin millage rate entirely (at a dollar-for-dollar rate). For 2026, Baldwin's allocation begins at \$260,000, and by 2030, it's set for \$340,807. The distributions would come in as a monthly check, the same way the City receives distributions for LOST.

Action: A motion was made by Alice Venter to ratify the Banks County FLOST IGA as presented with a second by Nancy Lehman. Motion Carried 4-0.

New Business

2. Consideration/Approval of Finance Director Position Addition to FY26 Budget

Woodmaster presented Council with a job description for the position of Finance Director, as the Council must agree and approve to fund the position before posting it. In order for City staff to submit the five-year tax history to the newspaper with the correct proposed millage, Council must make final decisions on funding this position, as well as the two other items added to tonight's agenda. Council had no further questions.

Action: A motion was made by Alice Venter to approve the addition of a Finance Director to the FY26 Budget as presented with a second by Kerri Davis. Motion Carried 4-0.

3. Consideration/Approval of Animal Control Service Addition to FY26 Budget

Woodmaster provided an email from Habersham County Manager Tim Sims with Baldwin's estimated (not finalized) FY26 cost of Animal Control Services of \$19,544.47. While Sims doesn't anticipate the number to change, as it was calculated using the County's digest, a formal quote has not been given to the City. This cost is less than the FY25 charge by \$1,453, as there has been a reduction in Magistrate Court costs and citations will be heard in Baldwin's Municipal Court. Woodmaster's recommendation is for Council to allot \$20,000 to cover a slight increase, should the number change.

Venter asked the rest of Council how they felt about adding Animal Control, given the complaints from the residents about the lack of quality of service they have been receiving from Animal Control. Woodmaster recommended still funding and adding the service to the budget to advertise the proposed millage rate, and Council can set a meeting with Habersham County to work out the details of the IGA or decide not to enter into the agreement at all. If Council did not enter into the agreement, the \$20,000 would be in the City's Fund Balance and could be used to rollback next year's property taxes. Woodmaster agreed that conversations need to be had regarding the quality of service and said that she would schedule a meeting with Sims.

Action: A motion was made by Alice Venter to approve the addition of Animal Control Services through Habersham County to the FY26 Budget, not to exceed \$20,000 as presented with a second by Erik Keith. Motion Carried 4-0.

4. Consideration/Approval of Social Media Coordinator Addition to FY26 Budget

At the request of Council, Woodmaster created a proposal to add a Social Media Coordinator to the budget to assist in public communication. This position would oversee the City's Facebook page, website, and any public notifications through

Everbridge. As reflected in the millage rate options presented to Council, this part-time position would be an addition of \$10,000 total. No job description is available, as it would be dependent on Council's desires for the position.

Venter stated that she had had two residents reach out to her to express that they were opposed to the addition of a Social Media Coordinator and that the responsibilities should be handled at City Hall. Councilmember Nancy Lehman agreed that with the addition of a Finance Director and the possibility of outsourcing building and planning, City Hall staff should be able to handle the task of communications.

Action: A motion was made by Nancy Lehman to strike the Social Media Coordinator position from the FY26 millage rate options with a second by Alice Venter. Motion Carried 4-0.

Executive Session

Announcements

- a. Public notifications through Everbridge are live! You can sign up using the QR code on the back of your September water bill, on the City's website, or at City Hall.
- b. Raffle tickets for the Shop With a Hero gun raffle are available for purchase through Baldwin Fire and Police Departments. Tickets are \$10 a piece, and the drawings will begin December 1st. If 10 tickets are purchased at once, the purchaser is entered into a bonus drawing.
- c. The 8th Annual City of Baldwin Fall Festival will be on October 18th from 12:00 pm to 8:00 pm at The TAP Yard at 110 Airport Road. Enjoy live music, local crafters and vendors, food trucks, and a closing fireworks show. As always, admission and all activities are free thanks to generous sponsorships and donations from local businesses and community partners.

Adjournment

Action: A motion was made by Kerri Davis to adjourn the meeting with a second by Nancy Lehman. Motion Carried 4-0 at 7:13 pm.


Stephanie Almagno, Mayor

10/7/2025
Date Approved by Council


Erin Gathercoal, City Clerk

