

County Meeting
February 20, 2025, 6:00pm
Minutes
Union County Courthouse

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Harold Collins at 6:00 pm. The invocation was given by Fire Chief, David Dyer, and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Sheriff, Shawn Dyer. The minutes from the January 16, 2025 County Meeting were approved as presented.

The first item on the agenda was the recognition of the Union County Recreation Department's 12U Girls, 12U Boys, and 14U Boys Basketball teams for their wins in the Mountain Athletic Conference Championship games. Tony Hughes, County Manager, provided the details of these games and the subsequent wins. Mrs. Susan Stalcup, Union County Recreation Department, then presented each player with a Proclamation recognizing their hard work and commitment. Tony called up the 12U Girls Basketball Team along with their coaches Kayla Hemphill, Cody White and Ashley Davis. Mr. Hughes stated that these girls will battle on the court. They have a name in 12U girls, agencies know that when they show up they are there to "ball." During the tournament they played 3 games, they had a 32-21 victory over Gilmer, a 57-10 victory over Dawson, and a barn burner 35-34 win over Fannin. This is a very well-coached team, and the Recreation Department looks forward to seeing what the future holds. Mr. Hughes then called up the 12U Boys Basketball Team along with their coaches Tim Mason and Steven McIlroy. This team leaves a footprint wherever they go, beating every team by 20 points or more. They put the work in, and it has shown. They are well coached and show up both defensively and offensively at game time. Their first game - they unfortunately won by forfeit. For their second game, they had a 60-35 win over Gilmer County; and they won their championship game over Dawson County 53-31. Districts are in sight and this team is not done yet. Tony then called up the 14U Boys Basketball Team along with their coaches Trevor Pendergrass and Austin Norman. There are only seven players on their roster, and only five could attend the tournament. That means no breaks with all five playing the entire game. They went into the tournament as the underdog, and they made adjustments every time out and played three games. The scores were as follows: A barn burner against a very well-matched team Lumpkin County 41-37; then after being told they were facing the best team Dawson has had in 18 years, they did not back down. It was yet another barn burner, and they sent Dawson home with a score of 60-5. Last but not least, the team known to dominate 14U is the team they had to meet in the championship. It was not barn burner, but Union County took it to the house with a 46-29 Victory over Gilmer County.

County Manager, Tony Hughes, closed by stating that while the above is about winning and championship, the Union County Recreation Department is very proud of the sportsmanship and leadership shown by these young athletes. Coaches and athletes are held to a higher standard when in uniform, and their representation of the county is appreciated. He thanked the volunteer coaches and the parents of these young athletes for raising these kids and entrusting the Recreation Department with them. Other agencies have commented on our athlete's sportsmanship and on the caliber of coaches. To the Recreation Department, that is better than any trophy, so thank you! All of these teams, plus the 10-year-old teams, will be representing Union County in the District 7 Class C District Tournament.

Commissioner Collins accepted an agreement between Union County and the Georgia Department of Transportation for grant funding in the amount of \$158,250.00 for the period of July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025 for FY2025. These funds are for the operation of the Union County Transportation System. The Commissioner pointed out this agreement was close to expiring and he explained that the Georgia Department of Transportation moves very slowly with the processing of these grants. The original grant documents for signing were sent to Union County in the fall, after the grant period had already started. It was signed digitally by the previous administration and there were subsequent issues with the uploading of the notary's signature and stamp since everything is required by GDOT to be completed digitally. This rolled over into January when Commissioner Collins's term began, and all the signatures were able to be completed to GDOT's standards. This delay has not caused any issues with the county receiving the appropriate reimbursements for the period of July 2024 to present.

The Commissioner accepted a Revocable License Agreement between the State Properties Commission and Union County in the amount of \$10.00 for all that tract, parcel or portion of land consisting of 1.15 acres of real property, lying and being in Union County, Georgia, commonly known as North Georgia Technical College, located at 95 Senior Center Drive, City of Blairsville. This land is located adjacent to the Union County Senior Center. This land will be utilized for additional parking for the Union County Senior Center on the left as you turn onto Senior Center Drive.

All attendees were provided a copy of the list of Business Licenses issued in Union County from January 16, 2025 to February 17, 2025 for the purpose of operating a Short-term Rental in Union County. The Commissioner approved all Business Licenses contained on the list provided and this will be made a part of the minutes.

Commissioner Collins accepted a contract between Estes Equipment Company, Inc. and Union County in the amount of \$11,275.00 for the replacement of the fuel system monitoring equipment at the Union County Road Department.

The Commissioner accepted a contract between Estes Equipment Company, Inc. and Union County in the amount of \$16,665.00 for an OMNTEC ATG Replacement at the Union County Road Department.

Ashley Holland, Administrative Assistant for the Union County Road Department, further explained both contracts. Mrs. Holland's comments are summarized as follows: The \$11,275 dollar contract is for the monitoring of the fuel system. This is for site monitoring, tank monitoring, monthly inspections, and they also change all the filters for the system. The \$16,665 contract is for the replacement of the monitoring system. The Road Department currently has a Veeter Root system that has been in place for over 20 years. As of January 1st of this year it can no longer be fixed if it were to break. This new system can be accessed electronically, which will be much better.

Commissioner Collins accepted a contract between GMASS, Inc. and Union County in the amount of \$255,589.50 for the reappraisal of 1/3 of the properties in Union County for 2025. The duration of this contract is from January 29, 2025 to December 31, 2025. The

Commissioner stated that he was not thrilled with this contract or its amount, but he was able to negotiate it down from approximately \$305,000.00 to \$255,589.50. He thanked all the employees in the Tax Assessor's Office for taking on more work related to the re-appraisal which allowed GMASS to decrease their cost amount. Commissioner Collins plans on moving toward transitioning away from using an outside firm to re-appraise Union County's properties, but this is going to take time. Personnel will have to be hired and go through extensive training in order to be able to appraise properties in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Georgia Department of Revenue, but there is just not enough time to get this accomplished in the first year of his term.

The Commissioner accepted an Accountability Courts Grant K93-8-023 for the First Responder Grant in the amount of \$15,000. This grant period is from January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025. This grant was applied for and awarded to the Union County Fire Department and the Union County Sheriff's Office. The Fire Department is using a portion to purchase positive pressure fans for ventilating structures.

Sheriff Dyer explained what the Sheriff's Office will be using their portion of funding for. Sheriff Dyer's comments are summarized as follows: We are going to be using our portion of this grant to purchase computer software for some of our patrol cars that will give us GPS so we can tell where our officers are at all times when they are out on the road. Some of these funds will also be used for in-car computers for some of our patrol cars. From January 1st to now, I have applied for different grants and so far, we have been awarded \$116,000 dollars' worth of grants and equipment, and I have spent only \$106.00 to get that amount. Some of that has come from the Governor's Office of Highway Safety. We are getting approximately \$50,000 from that grant to outfit all of our patrol cars with in-car computers and printers so our deputies can stay in the field and be safer. We also received enough tazers to outfit everyone in the Sheriff's Office and the Jail with new tazers. These came from other departments that went to a different model. We also received enough cartridges to re-certify all our officers for the next four years. One other thing we have done is - I have attached one of my drug agents to the FBI Drug Task Force. This is going to give us the ability to send our cases to the federal court system on our own without having to call extra people in. It is also providing him with a vehicle, with the maintenance, and the gas at no cost to Union County. Any overtime he acquires will be paid through the FBI. This officer is also going to be sworn in as a US Marshall, which is going to help us cross state lines to combat some of this drug trade here. All this is at no cost to the county. I also made sure that if something don't suit me or don't work out, I can back out of that contract at any time with no penalty. The office has been really busy. A couple of weeks ago I figured up that we have locked up over two dozen in eight days. A lot of them on drug charges. Our jail is full. Right now, we have about 70-72 in our 52 bed jail. As long as I am Sheriff, we are going to keep it full.

Commissioner Collins adopted Resolution R-2025-05 to set the Union County Alcohol License Fee Schedule. In accordance with the Union County Ordinance related to the sale of Alcoholic Beverages the Fee Schedule for licenses and administrative fees is to be set by Resolution. The Commissioner determined that there had not been an increase in license fees for many years. This Fee Schedule increases each license fee a little bit, and the City of Blairsville passed the same license fee increases at their last meeting. Attendees were provided with a copy of the

resolution showing the new license fees as well as the previous fee schedule for comparison purposes.

The Commissioner adopted Resolution R-2025-06 to resolve and elect to cease requiring mobile home location decals in Union County. This resolution hereby relieves the Tax Commissioner of Union County and the Appraiser of Union County of any requirements under the law, pursuant to O.C.G.A. 48-5-263 and O.C.G.A. 48-5-492 or otherwise related to the issuance, inspection, and enforcement of mobile home location decals. Senate Bill 193 amended O.C.G.A. 48-5-492 in the 2021-2022 Regular Session of the Georgia General Assembly to allow the governing authority of the county in which the mobile home is located to opt out of the requirement to issue mobile home decals as evidence of a mobile home location permit. The Union County Tax Commissioner requested this change and the Tax Appraiser agreed.

Commissioner Collins adopted Resolution R-2025-07 to dissolve the Union County Development Authority effective February 20, 2025. Pursuant to Georgia Code Section 36-62-14, a Development Authority may be dissolved by resolution of the governing authority if it has no outstanding unpaid bonds or bond anticipation notes. Upon the dissolution of the Union County Development Authority all assets and debts and rights and obligations held in the name of the Union County Development Authority will be immediately transferred to Union County, a Political Subdivision of the State of Georgia in accordance with the formation documents and O.C.G.A. 36-62-14.

The Commissioner adopted Resolution R-2025-08 to appoint William K. Mercer, Jr. as the County Attorney for Union County, Georgia effective February 1, 2025. Mr. Mercer has been the Assistant County Attorney since September 13, 2016. Commissioner Collins stated that Mr. Mercer has done an exceptional job from what he has seen, he is sure that he will continue to do so as the County Attorney. No Assistant County Attorney was named but one would be in the future if the need were to arise.

Commissioner Collins adopted Resolution R-2025-09 to appoint Jennifer Mahan as the Open Records Officer and Jill Chastain as the Alternate Open Records Officer for Union County, Georgia effective March 1, 2025. The Commissioner said that in his time in office he has learned that Open Records Requests are a large part of the County Clerk's job and consume a lot of her time. This often results in delayed responses as well as missed requests when juggling so many different things. He felt that naming Ms. Mahan and Ms. Chastain, both as Open Records Officers, would allow the workload to be divided and Open Records Requests to be responded to more efficiently. The Commissioner's Office is also working on streamlining the process through other avenues, and he requested that citizens be patient.

Commissioner Collins completed what constitutes as the 1st Reading of the proposed removal of Chapter 2, Article IV, Division 4, in its entirety, from the Union County Code of Ordinances related to the Development Authority. This ordinance simply reads that the resolutions adopted March 6, 1974 and December 24, 1996, relating to the Development Authority of Union County are not repealed and shall continue in full force and effect pending a revision of the subject matter by the county. With the dissolution of the Union County Development Authority by Resolution R-2025-07 this code section is no longer needed.

Tony Hughes provided attendees with an update on county operations. Mr. Hughes comments are summarized as follows: A month ago we were fighting the ice and snow, and the past month we have been trying to fix the damage from the ice and snow. The Road Department has been working extremely hard. Gravel and tar and gravel roads are terrible. They are doing the best they can, but when it is muddy they can't do a whole lot. One of the projects they did for us up below the jail was to repair the retention pond. They took the fence out, cleaned the pond out, repaired the ditch line, and got the water back in the culvert. There was some washout at the bridge at Meeks Park and they replaced the undermining under the bridge. I appreciate all the hard work they do. We are working on some balancing in some areas, such as overtime. Trying to make things balance out. The Transfer Station got the new baler in. They are doing a great job with it and they are in full swing with it now. Mr. Hughes asked Matt White, Transfer Station Director, to come up. Mr. White stated that the new baler will allow them to take numbers 3-7 plastics and tin cans as soon as the new windows are open. Hopefully in two weeks it will be in full operation. The bales actually come out to be about 600 pounds heavier than the old bales. This is more efficient and cuts down on the manpower needed to operate it. Tony Hughes continued by stating that we love the kids in Union County. We have five spring sports coming up and there are a total of 786 kids signed up. The numbers are broken down as follows: 436 in softball and baseball, 148 in volleyball, 33 in wrestling and 169 in soccer. The Recreation Department is doing an excellent job. I do want to say that we have a zero-tolerance policy. When parents register their child, they sign the zero-tolerance policy. In the past few months, we have been having some parent issues. This is all about the kids and we want them to enjoy it. We are going to talk to the game officials and the coaches to keep everything to a tone. When it comes down to the arguing. We have parents that, little Johnny fouled too hard, and the referee missed it. They are human and they are going to miss some calls. If you are at one of our sporting events and things get out of hand, you are going to be asked to stop one time. If you don't want to stop then you will be given a heavier warning. If you don't want to stop then, you will be ejected and have to leave the park or the gym. If you have issues or problems rather than bash the officials or parents arguing between each other, get one of the recreation staff to resolve it. Don't let the kids see this. If they can't resolve it, bring it to me.

Commissioner Collins closed the meeting with a few comments. I would like to thank the taxpayers because they are the ones that make the Recreation Department run. This is what makes the kids have a place to play and show their skills in sports. They are also able to come together as friends. The Union County Finance Director has left and went to work elsewhere. This transition, on top of me taking office, has been challenging. The Commissioner's Office is currently interviewing qualified candidates. When I first came into office, I began looking into the possibility of a forensic audit. Within the office, we contacted multiple firms and there are very few firms that will actually perform a forensic audit on a county government. The main firm that would be willing to take this on stated that with a budget the size of Union County's you were looking at a cost of \$400,00 to \$500,000. We are currently looking into different options that would give similar results such as a transitional audit or an operational assessment or a combination of the two. Now with the leaving of the Finance Director this has somewhat had to be put on hold. We have been reviewing things from an operational standpoint as well as a financial standpoint. We are researching and moving forward in implementing a new budgeting system. I mentioned the Forensic Audit because certain people on social media want one. I will

come right out and tell you that I am not spending half a million dollars of your hard-earned money on a forensic audit. It is not going to happen.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:36 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Jennifer Mahan
Jennifer Mahan, County Clerk

Approved this 20th day of March, 2025

Harold Collins
Harold Collins, Sole Commissioner



**New Union County Short-term Rental Licensees
January 16, 2025 – February 17, 2025**

BROWN, THOMAS B

114 Blood Mountain Cove Rd
Blairsville, Ga 30512

CONLIN DOUGLAS O & MICHELE

115 Gearing Dr
Blairsville, Ga 30512

JENKINS, DON

435 Forest Cir
Blairsville, Ga 30512

THOMPSON, MAUREEN

820 Poplar Cove Road
Suches, Ga 30572