

LOWNDES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES
WORK SESSION
Monday, August 25, 2025

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Chairman Bill Slaughter
Commissioner Scott Orenstein
Commissioner Mark Wisenbaker
Commissioner Demarcus Marshall
Commissioner Michael Smith

Vice Chairperson Joyce Evans was not in attendance.

Chairman Slaughter called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

MINUTES

The minutes were presented for the work session of August 11, 2025, and the regular session of August 12, 2025. No revisions to the minutes were requested.

FOR CONSIDERATION

Adoption of the 2025 Millage Rate

Finance Director, Stephanie Black, presented the item stating there would be a presentation regarding the millage agenda items at tomorrow night's meeting. Ms. Black stated the county-wide millage for 2025 should be set at the rollback rate of 5.051 mills. This represents a reduction of 0.232 mills from 2024.

Adoption of Special District Millage for the Industrial Authority for 2025

Finance Director, Stephanie Black, presented the item. Ms. Black stated prior to 2025, the Georgia Department of Revenue required the millage assigned to the authorities to be included in the county-wide millage. However, with the adoption of HB 581 and related legislation, millage assessed for authority funding is now considered a special district and is adopted separately. The Industrial Authority rate was set at 1.00 mill since it was first implemented, but was reduced to 0.823 mills in 2024. The proposed millage for 2025 for the Industrial Authority is 1.00 mill.

Adoption of Special District Millage for the Parks and Recreation Authority for 2025

Finance Director, Stephanie Black, presented the item. Ms. Black stated prior to 2025, the Georgia Department of Revenue required the millage assigned to the authorities to be included in the county-wide millage. However, with the adoption of HB 581 and related legislation, millage assessed for authority funding is now considered a special district and is adopted separately. The Parks and Recreation Authority rate was set at 1.25 mills since it was first implemented. The proposed millage for 2025 for the Parks and Recreation Authority is 1.25 mills. Commissioner Marshall asked regarding the dollar amounts, Ms. Black stated there would be a presentation given tomorrow night to further

explain. Commissioner Wisenbaker asked the value of one mill, Ms. Black answered she would verify and send that amount.

Adoption of Special District Millage for Fire Services for 2025

Finance Director, Stephanie Black, presented the item. Ms. Black stated following the Board's approval to expand fire services in Lowndes County beginning with the FY 2022 budget, a special fire district was created that includes the unincorporated area of Lowndes County. Fire services was moved into a special fund and is supported by a millage from the special fire district. The Board is required annually to set the millage rate for this fire district. The 2025 rate should be set at 2.50 mills which is no charge from the prior year millage.

Opioid Litigation - Purdue Pharma

Assistant Finance Director, Rachel Bowen, presented the item. Ms. Bowen stated at the August 12, 2024, meeting you authorized special counsel for the County to join in a proposed statement of interest in reaching a settlement with Purdue Pharma. Purdue Pharma has now reached a settlement through the bankruptcy process to resolve all pending governmental opioid-related claims. Lowndes County has been advised by special counsel to participate in this settlement in order to receive funds aimed at addressing the opioid crisis. In order to participate, the County must agree to the terms set forth by the State of Georgia and Local Governments and authorize the Chairman to sign the Memorandum of Understanding Concerning National Settlement with Purdue and execute the Subdivision Participation and Release Form. Commissioner Orenstein asked if the Studstill firm was still handling this matter, County Attorney, Walter Elliott, answered Cale Conley's firm in Atlanta and the Studstill firm here locally are both involved in this matter. Commissioner Marshall inquired about the settlement, specifically whether different companies were managing the implementation of benefits or training, Mrs. Dukes responded that this is being handled locally by the Lowndes County Sheriff's Office.

Quit-Claim Deed of Abandoned Section of Hightower Road

Director of Engineering Services, Chad McLeod, presented the item stating that on May 9, 2023 Lowndes County abandoned a section of Hightower Road. Mr. McLeod stated the United States Air Force has requested a quit claim deed for the abandoned section of right of way. The proposed quit claim deed and the plat of the abandoned section of right of way are both attached.

SPLOST IX

County Manager, Paige Dukes, presented, the item. Mrs. Dukes stated Lowndes County approved the SPLOST IX Agreement on August 4, 2025, and all five cities have approved the SPLOST IX agreement as well. Mrs. Dukes further stated the next step requires the Commission to approve the Resolution so that information can be forwarded to the Board of Elections.

TREES Act Resolution

County Manager, Paige Dukes, presented the item. Mrs. Dukes stated this item provides for tax relief for those harvesting timber for the last quarter of 2024 and all of 2025. There is a formula by which any relief which is granted by Lowndes County will be reimbursed by the State of Georgia. This resolution will allow Lowndes County to move forward in the process. Chief Appraiser, Lisa Bryant will be the point of contact for coordinating the necessary forms. Additionally, Mrs. Dukes stated for Lowndes County this is approximately \$46,000.00, on average annual impact. Commissioner Marshall inquired about the reimbursement timeline, and Mrs. Dukes responded she had not yet verified that information.

AFFF/PFAS Groundwater Claims

Utilities Director, Steve Stalvey, presented the item. Mr. Stalvey stated for many years, certain foams known as Aqueous Film-Forming Foams (AFFFs) have been used for extinguishing liquid fuel fires by military bases, airports, fire departments, and industrial operations. These foams contain certain chemicals known as per- or polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) which have the potential to contaminate groundwater. Lawsuits around the country related to AFFF/PFAS claims have been consolidated into one multidistrict litigation (MDL) case. 3M and DuPont recently paid billions of dollars to settle the public water system claims against them. There is now a deadline for local governments to submit claims to recover a portion of the settlement funds. Even if a local government has not yet incurred expenses related to PFAS contamination, if its groundwater tests positive for PFAS, it can make a claim for a portion of the settlement funds, which are meant to address any future expenses the local government may incur. The amount recovered will depend on the level of contaminants found in the water supply. Stag Liuzza, a law firm in New Orleans that specializes in representing local governments in the AFFF/PFAA litigation, and Carothers & Mitchell, a law firm in Buford, Georgia, have offered their services to counties in Georgia related to making a claim for a portion of the settlement funds paid by 3M and DuPont. These firms would be paid on a contingency basis, i.e., attorneys' fees and expenses would be taken out of any settlement recovery. If the County recovers nothing, it would pay nothing in fees and expenses to these firms. There is a deadline of January 1, 2026, for local governments to file a claim related to the 3M and DuPont settlements. To meet this deadline, initial testing of the groundwater would need to begin by about September 1, 2025. Attached are a proposed Agreement with the two law firms and a Resolution of the Board of Commissioners approving the Agreement. Assuming the Board approves the Resolution, the law firms would arrange for experts to test the County's groundwater and obtain certain data from the County. They would then file a claim on behalf of the County for a portion of the settlement funds paid by 3M and DuPont. Commissioner Smith asked to verify that there would be no cost unless something is found, and that any associated costs would be covered by the settlement, Mr. Stalvey responded that depending on the results of the test a settlement may be received. Commissioner Wisenbaker asked whether the testing fee would be covered, Mr. Stalvey answered yes. Commissioner Orenstein asked if the testing would begin next year, Mr. Stalvey answered that, if approved, testing would begin at the end of September.

REPORTS - County Manager

There was no additional information to report.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Marshall made a motion to adjourn the meeting, second by Commissioner Wisenbaker. Chairman Slaughter adjourned the meeting at 8:41 a.m.