



**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
MAY 28, 2025  
CONTINUED SESSION MINUTES**

Chairman Young reconvened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. as continued from the May 22, 2025, continued session and welcomed all in attendance. All Board Members, County Manager Warren Cabe, Deputy Clerk Tammy Keezer, Finance Director Lori Carpenter, and County Attorney Eric Ridenour were present, as were a number of county employees, media, and citizens.

**FISCAL YEAR 2025-26 BUDGET WORK SESSION**

**MACON COUNTY SCHOOLS** – Superintendent Josh Lynch handed out a packet with audit reports and information about the fund balance for Macon County Schools. CFO Alayna Ledford used a PowerPoint to explain how the fund balance status had changed since 2016, including the balance at the beginning of the year, end of the year, and the net change. She provided some explanation about the receipt of ESSER funds in 2024 and how they were used to fund key needs related to COVID-19, such as instruction, safety, and student support. Ms. Ledford stated that the ESSER funds had to be used by December 2024. Mr. Lynch said that through the use of ESSER funds, they were able to have a mental health professional at every school and are now back to only a guidance counselor in each school. They had planned to use about 1.1 million dollars of the fund balance this year and they try to keep enough fund balance to cover payroll for two to three months and a reserve to cover necessary emergency items like HVAC failures that were not covered in capital outlay. Ms. Ledford said 300,000 dollars of the funds included in the fund balance are specialized and restricted. After a short discussion, no action was taken.

**SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE (SCC)** – SCC President Dr. Don Tomas said this was an opportunity to say thank you to the board for their support over the years and that he has presented their operational and capital needs and is here to answer questions and create a plan. Commissioner Young said there was strong support from this board about the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program and asked if there was a way for SCC to look at a feasibility study to bring back to the board. Dr. Tomas said they would do that and would also try to get some updates on the cost of paving the driving range. Commissioner Shearl asked if there was a way for them to waive the fees for the fire departments. Dean of Public Safety Training Curtis Dowdle said it would not fall under the fee waiver for the public sector.

**POSITION VACANCIES** – Commissioner Young asked if any board member had any issues with the current proposed budget. Commissioner Shearl asked about vacant positions. Ms. Keezer said they are approximately twenty vacant positions that are budgeted in

the current fiscal year with most of them being in the health department. She explained the recruiting process. Ms. Carpenter spoke about the financial side of vacant positions and how funds may be moved from salary and fringe to contracted services, especially for hard-to-fill positions where they can find a contract or temporary employee to fill the vacancy. Mr. Cabe recommended that we look at some of the vacant positions and how they are classified or budgeted and see if they need to be reclassified or allocated to other departments.

**MACON COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT** - Sheriff Brent Holbrooks asked to reallocate some funds that were in his budget for the transportation company contract. He said he learned last week that a transport company cannot be contracted to transport criminals, so he wants to reallocate part of those funds budgeted to add a new transport position, a deputy position at entry level. Major Jonathan Phillips said they would take the difference needed from their overtime budget. Commissioner Antoine made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields, to approve the position and the reallocation of funds as requested in the proposed budget. The vote was unanimous.

**Cullasaja Gorge Fire and Rescue** – Board Chair Jack Baird said his request has not changed, and he is still asking for an additional one-cent increase to cover the purchase of two new trucks due to the aging of current trucks and limited availability of parts for repairs. He said without this increase, they would have funding to operate for one year and then run into a shortfall the next year. Commissioner Shearl said he reached out to members of the community and did not receive support for the increase from anyone he spoke to, which is the direct opposite of what Mr. Baird previously stated in the May 22, 2025, continued session. Following a discussion about the pros and cons of purchasing a used truck, Commissioner Shields made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, to approve the requested increase of one-cent to their service fee. The vote was 4 to 1 with Commissioner Antoine, Commissioner Breeden, Commissioner Shearl, and Commissioner Young opposed and Commissioner Shields voting in favor of the motion. Commissioner Breeden made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, to approve a half-cent increase. During the discussion, Mr. Baird said he can buy the one truck with what they currently have, but it is going to be difficult and they will have to make some additional cuts and may have to cut one full-time paid employee. Mr. Cabe said they can prepare two budget ordinances, one with no increase and one with a half-cent increase and make the final decision at the June 10, 2025, regular meeting. Commissioner Breeden asked for three ordinance, one with no increase, one with a half-cent increase, and one with a one-cent increase and withdraw his motion to give the County Manager and Finance Director time to prepare the three ordinances and Commissioner Shearl time to speak with the community about the three options.

**BURNINGTOWN-IOTLA FIRE AND RESCUE (BIFD)** – BIFD Board Vice Chair Bill Duffle provided a handout of a summary and specifics of what has been done to resolve the current issues with the department. Vice Chief Kenneth McCaskill shared about their use of social media and a pamphlet about the department to help reach the younger population and assist with recruitment and communication. He said they are going to work with the local churches and other

initiate other campaigns to share needs and recruit members. Mr. Duffle explained training initiatives occurring regularly on Thursday nights, some training provided by SCC, and other in-house training. He said they have not been getting the support they need from SCC so they are going to increase in-house training, drills, etc. and will promote online FEMA training for incident command and online training through the Fire Fighters Association. Mr. Duffle stated that the delinquent reports should be submitted within a week and they propose submission of a progress report to this board at that time. He said the BIFD is asking for time and support to get the department back up to where it needs to be and during that time they will be looking at consolidation and the requirements. After a lengthy discussion, Mr. Cabe suggested extending the probationary period until July 31, 2025, and then terminate the contract if that is what the board wanted to do. He said splitting the service fee between BIFD and Cowee Volunteer Fire and Rescue would have to be an internal agreement between the two departments, otherwise, it would be very complicated on the county's end to split the service fee because of how it is allocated. Commissioner Breeden said the board's first concern is who is responding, who is properly trained, and whether life is being protected. The board asked Fire Marshal Jimmy Teem to make some comments, and he provided an update on the departments' membership and training. Commissioner Young said what the department presented today is what was needed last week and said he would like to set a date for a final decision, but he is worried about the small things and is not willing to give six months or a year. He stated that he feels if there is a merger it needs to be a planned and organized process with keys handed over, trucks provided, equipment, etc., to protect the members of the community. Commissioner Shearl stated his willingness to make a motion to extend their probation to July 31<sup>st</sup> allowing the boards to reach an agreement on how to compensate Cowee for the calls, and for Cowee to continue as the first response on all calls. Commissioner Breeden made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine to terminate the contract with BIFD, effective immediately. The vote was 2 to 3 with Commissioner Breeden and Commissioner Shearl voting in favor of the motion and Commissioner Antoine, Commissioner Shields, and Commissioner Young opposed. Commissioner Young made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields, to call for another vote on July 31, 2025. The vote was unanimous.

**Macon County Public Health** – Health Director Kathy McGaha said most of the current vacant positions are in her department and said she has met with Mr. Cabe and Ms. Keezer and discussed why those positions are remaining open and unfilled. She said in Environmental Health, the current staff are training new staff and she cannot overload those who are fully qualified with more staff to train until the current ones get their authorizations. Ms. McGaha said that the RFP for Animal Services is supposed to be going out soon and it makes sense for the current contracted positions to continue as temporary positions based on the possibility of Animal Services going in a different direction. She said she has every intention of keeping those positions staffed in the upcoming year, but she will use some other funding that she has to cover those positions. Mr. Cabe said it might be an option to have a sit-down conversation with the Board of Health like they do with the Board of Education to discuss some of these issues. Commissioner Young asked if we can talk about moving some of the permitting process to Code Enforcement. Mr. Cabe said ultimate authority has to fall to the health director by general statute


but duties can be delegated as has been done in other counties. Planning, Permitting, and Development Director Joe Allen made some comments about permitting fees and the new software being utilized by both departments. Commissioner Breeden said he would like to have a meeting with the Board of Health and requested a closed session to discuss personnel. Mr. Cabe said we can look at the calendar, reach out to the Chair of the Board of Health and see what dates work for them. Board members consented for Mr. Cabe to bring back a proposed date to the June 10, 2025, regular meeting.

**PLANNING BOARD** – Commissioner Shearl said the Planning Board meeting has been cancelled again, and he feels the Board of Commissioners needs to look at that board again because it is not functioning like it was intended. Eric made some comments about the BOC acting as the Planning Board or reducing the number of members on the Planning Board. Joe Allen said if the size is reduced he would recommend 7. Some discussion about taking out the members representing the Town of Franklin and the Town of Highlands. Commissioner Young suggested rebranding the Planning Board to look at and review facility needs and bring recommendations back to this board.

**COUNTY FACILITIES** – Commissioner Shearl asked if the Maintenance Department has identified what needs to be improved for county facilities. Mr. Cabe said they requested an HVAC package for county facilities, assuring the courthouse elevator operates on generator power, and ensuring back-up power for the administrative offices in the annex building. Commissioner Shearl said if the Board of Elections was moved, it would pay for itself. Mr. Cabe said he thinks we can review and address their issue over the next few months, utilizing fund balance, if needed. Commissioner Antoine said the Senior Services building is not adequate, and part of that is a safety issue, so he would like to look at a new facility for them. He said the sale of the current building will go toward the purchase price of a new facility. Commissioner Shearl said the justice center is much needed and we need to redo jail, provide in-house meals, etc. which would be a cost savings.

**COMMUNITY FUNDING POOL** – Commissioner Shields asked about funds in this year's budget. Mr. Cabe said the funds would rollover since the requirement for the Community Funding Pool Committee was to have thirteen members and as of today we have received nine applications.

**ADJOURN:** With no other business, at 12:15 p.m., upon a motion from Commissioner Breeden, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to adjourn.

  
Warren Cabe  
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board

  
Josh Young  
Board Chair