

CITY OF CORNELIA  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
JANUARY 6, 2026

The Cornelia City Commission met in a Workshop Session on Tuesday, January 6, 2026, at 5:00 PM in the Commission Conference Room, 181 Larkin Street, Cornelia, GA. Mayor John Borrow called the meeting to order, and the following Commissioners were present: Don Bagwell, Tony Cook, Mark Reed and Janice Griggs. Also present: City Attorney Steve Campbell, City Manager Donald Anderson, City Clerk Debbie Turner was absent.

Mayor Borrow invited the Department Heads to give their Annual Reports for 2025.

Community Development Director Jessie Owensby gave the numbers for plan reviews, sign permit applications and annexations. She spoke about the different conferences and summits that she attended. She also spoke about the special projects, special events and the Georgia Conservancy housing assessment needs that you will be updated on tonight.

Water/Sewer Superintendent Seth Glaze gave the Public Utilities Annual report. He said that the department has consistently provided high quality, reliable safe drinking water to the residents. They have met or exceeded all the state standards provided by EPD. No violations were identified from regular testing. Mr. Glaze said that he is very proud of his team because all the Johnson Railroad demo was done in house in preparation for the Amphitheater Project, as well as the splash park for it upgrade.

Public Works Director Clif McEnytire said all work orders were completed in a timely manner. Backdoor Sanitation routes were completed every week removing about 136 tons of garbage and all the Park restrooms were cleaned on a weekly basis. Flower beds were maintained downtown. The Community House was cleaned after every event which was 157. The leaf vac and chipper routes were completed. Repairs were made to the Board Walks in City Park. Any Storms that created damage was completed as well as street maintenance.

Public Safety Director, Chad Smith gave an update on the Public Safety Departments. Mr. Smith said that the Fire Marshal has been busy performing commercial inspections. He said these had not been done for several years. Calls for the Fire Dept have remained about the same as last year. They are working on the drone program and are now certified car seat technicians. Court Services are going great, however with the new Tyler Software it has been challenging but they are starting to get there. Building and Code Enforcement have been very busy and he thinks that this is going to continue. He Said that Paul has more certifications than probably any other inspector in the area and

that he has worked very hard on achieving this goal. In the Police Department the numbers that you see may not be correct due to the Tyler software, they are having some difficulty writing their reports. They have received their state certification, which means that they have been certified for the last 18 years. The car seat program is still going strong, and he talked about the Flock cameras and how they have helped to be able to find people quickly.

MIS Director Jeremy Dundore said that although we are not visible all the time we are always working to keep our software and devices safe from threats. He said that they manage 675 to 700 devices daily and our firewalls have blocked 3.5 million malicious attacks. He said that they process about 1200 emails every day. As for the website he said that 86,202 people used the site in 2025 which is an increase of about 19%.

All these reports are an integral part of the minutes.

Camp Investments, Mr. Lovell Camp introduced himself and his wife Mary. He said that he and his wife had worked together since their marriage, they first owned a tradeshow business which they after 30 years. He said he had a background in construction, so we decided to start a construction business. In 2009 we started lending money to customers who could not get funding in other ways. He said one of the first investments that they made was in Senoia County and it paid off immensely. He said they have done about 75 infill projects in College Park, and they built the Fairfield Inn in Cornelia. Now they would like to build a 30 to 40 room boutique Hotel in Downtown as well as some in-fill residential units. Mary Camp said that the Fairfield is ranked in the top 7 of the 1204 in the world. She said that is due to their management team but also the community. She said you should be very proud of your community. He said that he would like your feedback because he wants everyone to be on the same page. He introduced Sam, she is their attorney and works for them full-time and LeAnne manages the site developments. They gave the protentional sites they are looking at. They discussed it further and Mayor Borrow said that he thinks it is line with what they want Cornelia to go into the future. Mr. Camp thanked them for their time.

They discussed the items on the agenda.

The meeting adjourned at 5:57

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Debbie Turner, City Clerk

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John Borrow, Mayor

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Commissioner Cook gave the invocation, and Commissioner Reed led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Judge Wink Verdery administered the Oath of Office to Commissioner Griggs and Commissioner Bagwell.

Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Reed. Approved 4 - 0

Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to approve the minutes from December 6, 2025 as submitted, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the minutes from December 9, 2025 as submitted, seconded by Commissioner Bagwell. Approved 4 - 0

City Manager's Annual Report:

The City Manager reported that 2025 was another year of growth and prosperity for the City of Cornelia. We annexed 108 acres of property into the city. Of this 77.62 acres were zoned for commercial use, and 30.38 acres were zoned for residential use. We issued 85 building permits for new residences, 68 certificates of occupancy for new residences, and 38 new business licenses. Our tax digest grew by \$37,980,587. One thing that I am proud of is the fact that 61% of our tax digest is either commercial or industrial property. We take great pride in being the commercial and industrial hub of Habersham County.

We began 2025 with notice that we were awarded a Federal Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant in the amount of \$1,149,600. This program is aimed at trying to keep pedestrians from having to cross the railroad tracks. This grant is to be used to conduct a study to see if it is feasible to construct a pedestrian bridge over the tracks in downtown. Our engineers have begun the feasibility study to see where a bridge or

even if a bridge can be constructed downtown. This will be a multi-year project.

In February we completed the demolition of the Johnson Railway buildings and handed the property over to Higgins Construction to begin building the new park. We gave him a date of May 2<sup>nd</sup> to at least have the grading completed in time for the annual Music Festival. There was some doubt that he would make it but as you know he did complete the grading in time and we had a great event on May 17<sup>th</sup>. The construction of the park is nearing completion. It should be completed sometime in January or early February. Phase 2 of the project will be the construction of the amphitheater which is scheduled to bid in January.

We participated in the annual Sweep the Hooch cleanup event on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. We had approximately 15 volunteers pick up trash around the old reservoir.

In April we completed the installation of the new pumps and controls at the Splash Pad. We also installed a new building to house the equipment. This enabled us to remove the shed that we had been using since the facility was constructed in 2012. The new building matches the restrooms that have been installed at the new park.

In May we held the first event at our new park with the annual Cornelia Music Festival. Thousands of people flocked to downtown for the event and headliner Marty Stuart did not disappoint. He showed the crowd why he considered a country music icon.

We also held our annual Fire Hydrant decorating contest in May. Designs were submitted by students from Tallulah Falls, Cornelia Elementary, and South Hab Middle School. The winners were Adalyn Ledford from Tallulah Falls, Audrey Colburn from South Hab, and Kylee Cross from Cornelia Elementary. Their designs were painted onto fire hydrants at corner of Berry and Main Street, on Main Street across from the Fire Station, and on Main Street across from Dolson Street.

In June a bad storm blew through town causing significant damage to several city facilities, taking down trees, and knocking out power. All the damage was covered by our insurance company, and all the facilities have been repaired.

In July we completed our Audit for Fiscal Year 2024. Once again, we received a clean Audit and learned that our finances are in great shape. Our reserve funds once again grew.

Also, in July we agreed to sell the naming rights of the new amphitheater to Kinetic. The amphitheater will be named the Kinetic Amphitheater.

In August we received notice that we had once again been awarded a CDBG grant to help with the cost of replacing substandard water and sewer lines. The grant is \$1 million and will be used to replace asbestos water lines, replace sewer lines, and upgrade storm drainage on Circle Drive. The project is expected to go out for bid later this year.

In September we entered into an agreement with the Downtown Development Authority to allow them to sell the property at 33 Rosa Parks to Sweet Acre Farms. The new owners are in the process of having plans developed to renovate the warehouse into a multi-use facility which will include their winery. I am very excited to see the plans for the building and to see what this new business will bring to downtown.

In October we received notice that our application for a Vibrant Communities Grant had been awarded. The funds will be used to complete a mural project at Jim Smith Park. Once again Audrey Davenport will be the lead consultant and artist on this project. We are in the process of gathering input from the neighborhood about what they would like to see on the mural. We have until June to complete the project.

Also, in October an artist named Chyenne Renee painted a mural on the side of Cornelia Pharmacy. This mural is part of a nationwide project called the 50 in 50 Mural Project. Our mural was the 37<sup>th</sup> state in which she has painted a mural. This project was a collaboration between the city and the Chamber of Commerce.

In November the voters overwhelmingly approved SPLOST VIII. Collections will not begin until April 2027 and will last 6 years. The city will receive \$6,194,469 from this SPLOST to assist with the cost of Public Safety vehicles, road and sidewalk projects, upgrades to our municipal parks, and a new parking lot for the new park and amphitheater.

We kicked off the Christmas season with the opening of Christmas in the Park Thanksgiving and the annual downtown tree lighting on November 29<sup>th</sup>. We had approximately 100 people show up for the tree lighting ceremony.

We had 10,029 vehicles go through the Christmas lights at the park this year.

In December we passed a temporary moratorium on annexation applications. The moratorium will allow us time to analyze our annexation ordinance and procedures. We will also complete a study of our existing water and sewer capacity to use as a tool for future development. The moratorium is for 180 days, which will give us plenty of time to complete these tasks.

Looking ahead to 2026 we have capital projects totaling \$51 million planned. These projects include the much-needed expansion of our wastewater plant, the construction of the Kinetic Amphitheater, a major water and sewer upgrade project in Ward 1, the construction of a sewer line to Fieldale's Hatchery on Blair Road, a water line replacement project on East Walnut Street, and the long-awaited upgrades to the old reservoir. We have federal and state grants totaling \$2.5 million to assist with the cost of these projects.

The city manager reminded everyone that we will hold our second Town Hall meeting on the Vibrant Communities Project Thursday at 5:30 here at City Hall. It will also be broadcast live on our Facebook page.

Presentation on the Housing Needs Assessment This is a presentation by the Georgia Conservancy on the Housing Needs Assessment that was completed for the city.

Mayor Borrow said that we have talked about what we need to do to improve our housing needs in the last few years. Michaela Master with the Georgia Conservancy joined the meeting via Zoom, she said this is a summary of all the data and feedback that has been collected during the assessment. We sent out a questionnaire and held several town hall meetings. She said we looked at Building and Subdivision codes and requirements to understand where things are and to be able to visualize what is needed and what action needs to be taken to create this report for you. Involved in the report is Cornelia's population, economy and housing stock to provide a recommendation on policy findings. Ms. Master spoke about the community engagement and presented an overview of the meeting, housing workshop with the GICH Team and the final Housing Symposium. She said we had a little over 100 responses to the questionnaire, this was to understand what the residents what to see. Some of the data points in the report are land use change and development in and around Cornelia as well as regional data for the inland port coming to Hall County. As population grows so will housing, wages and income are a big concern in obtaining a home, she said you should never pay more than 30% of your income for housing and what income is needed to afford that. Housing supply and your zoning is an essential

part of that, She said I urge you to look at that when updating your zoning map because we all play an important role in that. Looking at design, this is just Georgia Conservancy putting on a design hat and what it could look like. Cottage Core, Mother-In-Law Suite all sharing greenspace. The goal is to give you a clear picture of some different types of housing conditions and landscape and what the needs are presented in the slides. Commissioner Bagwell said he would just like to comment on the report, as stated in the previous annexation meeting there was a lot of objections to higher density, particularly residential. He said he does like the idea of higher density downtown because it could be a great benefit. Mayor Borrow thanked her for her time.

#### Public Forum

Peter Madruga gave a presentation on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of the Big Red Apple on June 4, 2026. Mr. Madruga is the President of Habersham History, and their mission is to preserve the rich history of Habersham. I want to make a brief presentation on something very important, the upcoming 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Big Red Apple. He said that in 1926 there was noise about a big statue coming to Cornelia and they embraced it and this is when Cornelia became the Home of the Big Red Apple. He said that for almost 100 years people have been coming to see it and there are many stories about the apple. One story was told by a lady who said that FDR was coming, the school was closed and they all stood in front of the Big Red Apple to welcome him. She said it was one of the great honors of her life. He said he is also working on a documentary, and he knows that there are many more stories and would love your help in getting the word out if anyone has more stories. Mr. Madruga wanted to know if the city plans on selling a commemorative statue. Mayor Borrow said that he thinks that is a fantastic idea and the city would love to partner with him. Mayor Borrow thanked him as well as Commissioner Bagwell thanked him for all his work.

Old Business: None

Public Hearings: None

New Business:

#### Policy Regarding the Appointment of Member to City Committees

The city manager reported that one thing that we learned from the recent public outcry regarding the proposed annexation is that we need to do a better job of appointing people to serve on city committees. The Downtown Development Authority, Planning Commission, Urban Redevelopment Agency, and Water Authority have provisions of how members are appointed in their by laws or by ordinance. However, committees such as the Comprehensive Plan Committee that was formed for the 2024 Comp Plan update was hand-picked by staff. I feel going forward

we need a more formal process for how appointments are made to any committee that the city creates, even temporary committees such as this. This policy requires that anytime a committee is to be formed a notice will be run explaining the purpose of the committee and requesting applicants to serve. The City Commission will be responsible for the appointment of members to said committee. Commissioner Reed made a motion to approve the new Policy of appointments of members to city committees, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

#### Appointment of Mayor Pro Tem for 2026

Mayor Borrow said that he recommends that Commissioner Griggs be appointed to serve as Mayor Pro Tem for 2026. Commissioner Cook made a motion to appoint Commissioner Griggs as Mayor Pro-Tem for 2026, seconded by Commissioner Reed. Approved 4 - 0

#### Ordinance to Amend the GMEBS Defined Benefit Retirement Plan

This is an amendment to the employee retirement plan to allow all employees to be eligible for retirement at age 55 with at least 25 years of service. The pension plan was amended in 2024 to allow this benefit for our Public Safety personnel. This amendment will amend the plan to offer this benefit to all our employees. The increase to our annual contribution will be \$64,000. The increase for 2026 is in the approved Budget. The city manager recommended that the ordinance be posted for public comments. Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to post the ordinance for Public Comment, seconded by Commissioner Reed. Approved 4 - 0

#### Lease Agreement for Boy Scout Hut

This is a new lease agreement with Troop 24 for the property that the Boy Scout Hut sits on at City Park. This agreement will replace the original 1953 agreement for this property. The lease allows the Boy Scouts to use the property as long as they continue to use it for Scout purposes. Should they stop using the property the city can terminate the lease with 90 days written notice. Commissioner Reed made a motion to approve the lease agreement for the Boy Scout Hut, seconded by Commissioner Bagwell. Approved 4 - 0

#### Appointment to the Downtown Development Authority

We have an opening on the Downtown Development Authority to fill the vacant seat created by the resignation of Brentt Cody. The Board has nominated Matthew Vrahiotes to fill this vacancy. After reviewing his application, the city manager recommended that Mr. Vrahiotes be appointed to the Downtown Development Authority. Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to appoint Matthew Vrahiotes to the DDA, seconded by Commissioner Cook. Approved 4 - 0



Commissioner Reed made a motion to enter Executive Session for litigation and to discuss real estate, seconded by Commissioner Cook. Approved 4 - 0

Mayor Borrow opened the meeting back up. He said that following Executive Session the purchase of 1190 Old Cleveland Road and the abandonment of Cash Drive will be added to the agenda.

#### Purchase of 1190 Old Cleveland Road

City Manager Anderson said this is a tract of land owned by Higgins Construction that is needed for the expansion of the Wastewater Plant. We have negotiated a price of \$800,000. Mr. Anderson recommended that the sales agreement prepared by the city attorney be approved. Commissioner Reed asked if the property was around Soul Max, Mr. Anderson said yes, it is between there and 365 and is directly across from the entrance to the WWTP. Commissioner Reed made a motion to approve the purchase along with a budget adjustment to use Water & Sewer Capital Reserve Funds for the purchase, seconded by Commissioner Cook. Approved 4 - 0

#### Abandonment of Cash Drive

Mr. Anderson said that Cash Drive splits the property known as 283 Yonah Street and the owner of both sides has formally requested that we abandon the unopen street. Mayor Borrow asked if it has ever been used. City Attorney Campbell said you would not know there is a street laid out there and it has been that way since the beginning. Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to pass a resolution to abandon Cash Drive, Seconded by Commissioner Reed. Approved 4 - 0

Commissioner Cook made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 PM., seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

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Debbie Turner, City Clerk

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John Borrow, Mayor

CITY OF CORNELIA, GEORGIA

AFFIDAVIT OF PRESIDING OFFICIAL(S) FOR A CLOSED PUBLIC MEETING

While in Regular Session, the motion was made to enter an Executive Session to discuss certain matters in a closed session.

( ) To discuss with the council pending and/or potential litigation, settlement claims, administrative proceedings, or other judicial actions, which is exempt from the Open Meetings Act pursuant to O.C.G.A. Section 50-14-2(1).

( ) A meeting to discuss the purchase, disposal of, or lease of property; authorize the ordering of an appraisal related to the acquisition or disposal of real estate; enter into a contract to purchase, dispose of, or lease property subject to approval in a subsequent public vote; or enter into an option to purchase, dispose of, or lease real estate subject to approval in subsequent public vote, which is excluded from the Open Meetings Act pursuant to Section 50-14-3(b)(1)(C).

( ) A meeting discussing the appointment, employment, compensation, hiring, disciplinary action or dismissal, or periodic evaluation or rating of a public officer or employee, which is excluded pursuant to O.C.G.A. Section 50-14-3(b)(2).

( ) Discussion in Executive Session of Records that are otherwise protected from disclosure under the Open Records Act as pursuant to O.C.G.A. Section 50-14-3- (b)(4).

X The subject matter of the Executive Session of the Regular Session was devoted to matters within the exceptions provided by law.

\_\_\_ Because of events occurring during the closed session, I am unable to affirm the subject matter of the Executive Session of the Regular Session was devoted to only matters within the exceptions provided by law.

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John Borrow, Mayor, City of Cornelia

Sworn to and subscribed before me this

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Notary Public