

CITY OF CORNELIA
MINUTES OF MEETING
OCTOBER 7, 2025

The Cornelia City Commission met in a Workshop Session on Tuesday, October 7, 2025, 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: Janice Griggs, Mark Reed, Don Bagwell, and Tony Cook. Also present: City Attorney Steve Campbell, City Manager Donald Anderson, Finance Director Melanie Chandler, and City Clerk Debbie Turner.

Mayor Borrow opened the meeting and said that we were adding one more item to the agenda, and asked City Manager Anderson to explain. Mr. Anderson said that that the EPD has reduced our phosphorous limit at the Wastewater Treatment Plant by 85%, making it almost impossible to stay in compliance. He said that we would have to install a new filter system that would cost \$10 million to meet this new limit. Another option is to work with other communities on what is called Nutrient trading. He has contacted Laurie Hawks of Hawks Environmental, who is an expert in her field. She will work on our behalf to work with other communities that have a higher phosphorus allocation to see if they will loan or give us some of their excess phosphorus. The fee will be \$25,900 for her services.

Mayor Borrow asked if we knew of anyone coming to the regular meeting. Commissioner Reed said that Stewart Swanson was coming to talk about the Boy Scouts and the scout hut; he said that Walt Crowder's family would be present as well. Commissioner Reed said that he would like to get a picture with them.

They discussed the vape shop ordinance. Mr. Anderson stated that it has been posted and there have been no comments for or against.

They also discussed the last of the Public Hearings on the Millage Rate. Mr. Anderson noted that we had the 2nd Public Hearing at 12:00 today, and no one from the public was there. He asked Melanie about the new HB 581: if you have a Homestead Exemption, it wouldn't matter what the county reassessment fee shows; it would have to be capped. She said yes, that is her understanding.

They discussed the MOU with the Boy Scouts and what they are requesting from us.

City Manager Anderson asked if anyone had any questions about the proposed budget. Mr. Anderson said that several years ago, you approved a 55/25 retirement plan for Public Safety. It has been a very valuable tool for recruitment and retention, so he asked GMA to complete a study on opening it up to all employees. The cost would be \$60,400 per year for the next 10 years.

Mayor Borrow asked how many would be eligible for it now. Mr. Anderson said that we only have one right now.

Commissioner Reed made a motion to exit the workshop and enter into Executive Session for Real Estate and Litigation, seconded by Commissioner Bagwell. Approved 4 - 0

Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to exit the Executive Session, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

No Action Taken!

Debbie Turner, City Clerk

John Borrow, Mayor

CITY OF CORNELIA
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OCTOBER 7, 2025

The Cornelia City Commission met in Regular Session on Tuesday, October 7, 2025, at 6:00 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: Janice Griggs, Mark Reed, Don Bagwell, and Tony Cook. Also present: City Attorney Steve Campbell, City Manager Donald Anderson, Finance Director Melanie Chandler, and City Clerk Debbie Turner.

Mayor Borrow gave the invocation, and Special Guest Kasen Hartson assisted Mayor Borrow in leading the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Commissioner Reed made a motion to approve the minutes from September 2nd as submitted, seconded by Commissioner Bagwell. Approved 4 - 0

Commissioner Reed made a motion to approve the minutes from September 23rd as submitted, seconded by Commissioner Cook. Approved 4 - 0

City Manager's Monthly Report

We have been working to find a resolution to our phosphorus limit reduction with our waste load allocation permit. We are looking to do what is called nutrient trading with one or more of the other Wastewater entities in the Chattahoochee basin that have a higher phosphorus limit than they currently need. We are also exploring potential stream bank restoration projects that will allow EPD to raise our phosphorus limit. The Urban Redevelopment Agency met with Tom Owens with Raymond James on September 12th. The purpose of the meeting was to explore funding resources for the construction of the amphitheater. The bond process will take approximately 75 days to complete. Since we plan to begin construction in May, we have some time but we will be starting the process soon to assure that we have the funding in place so the project will not be delayed. We also plan to apply for another ARC grant to help with the project if we can get the park finished in time to close out the current grant before the next application due date. Higgins has made a lot of progress on the park project. Most of the concrete has been poured. The restrooms are scheduled to be completed by October 17th, once these are delivered, he will be able to finish the concrete work. The landscaping will also begin as soon as the restrooms are installed. Georgia Power should begin installing the conduit for the lights next week. We have installed the power, water, and sewer for the restrooms as well as the water and power for the food truck alley. The only thing that we have left to do

is set the electric meter. The parallel parking on Clarkesville Street has been installed, and Grant Place and Martin Luther King have been paved. The artist is set to begin working on the mural that the Chamber of Commerce is paying for around October 20th. The mural will be a scene of Lake Russell looking down from Chenocetah Tower. The owner of Cornelia Pharmacy has given us permission to paint the mural on the side of his building. This report is made an integral part of the minutes.

Public Forum: No Comments were Heard

Old Business

Ordinance # 09-25-01, Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance

This ordinance will apply restrictions on Vape Shops similar to those for package stores. Vape Shops will not be allowed within 1,000 linear feet of a school or day care facility. They will only be allowed in the Highway Business District, Light Industrial, and Heavy Industrial zoning districts and there must be 1,500 linear feet of separation between businesses. Following the Public Hearing at the September 2nd Commission meeting, the ordinance was posted for public comment. To date no comments have been received regarding this ordinance. Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to adopt the amended ordinance, seconded by Commissioner Cook. Approved 4 - 0

Public Hearings

Public Hearing on Proposed Millage rate for 2025

The net tax digest for 2025 is currently \$339,023,847 which is an increase of \$37,980,587 from 2024. Of this increase 22% is due to inflation (reassessments) and the rest is from growth. If we keep the millage rate at 9.5 mills the increase to our revenue will be \$300,000, or 10.29%. Because the recommended rollback rate is 8.614 mills by keeping the millage rate at 9.5 it is considered a tax increase.

Mayor Borrow opened the Public Hearing and asked if anyone would like to comment on it. Sandra Andrews came forward, stating that as a senior, she can't afford any more taxes. She said that we should listen to seniors more and asked if there is any way to lower the taxes for people that live on fixed income. Ms. Andrews said that with the cost of groceries and drug cost sometimes You have to make a decision do you eat, or do you get the Medicine you need. Ms. Andrews said that if there is a tax increase, she wouldn't be able to live here anymore. City Manager Anderson said that we do have the homestead exemption, and it is \$10,000 of the assessed value, so keeping the current millage rate at 9.5 would take \$95.00 off your taxes. Mr. Anderson said we are not raising taxes. He said that the county is

responsible for reassessing your property. Mayor Borrow also stated that the county is responsible for assessing property values. He explained that the tax assessor's office operates under its own Board, which conducts the assessments. We sometimes agree with the assessment, and other times we strongly disagree. Larry Joab said that he is not opposed to raising taxes, but his taxes have doubled, and nothing has been done to add any value to his property. He stated that he has grown up paying taxes, and he knows that everything costs more now. He said he doesn't understand why his have doubled. Mayor Borrow said that if you go to a dollar store and your sales tax is seven cents, and now the dollar store is a \$2 store, then your sales tax is 14 cents. Even if the rate is the same, someone else says the value of the thing being taxed has gone up. Finance Director Melanie Chandler said that it is not tax-related, but we do offer a senior discount of 30% on your water/sewer bill; you just have to apply. Blaine Wadsen came forward, he said, with just some information. He said that he attended the County meeting, and they said they can only lower the tax so much because the School Assessment is so large. He said that his tax bill also came in much higher, and his wife went to the county and challenged it, getting it down from the original bill. Mayor Borrow closed the Public Hearing. Commissioner Reed made a motion to keep the millage rate at 9.5, seconded by Commissioner Bagwell. Approved 4 - 0

New Business

City of Ethics Resolution

Our GMA Certified City of Ethics Designation will expire on November 30, 2025. In order to maintain our status as a Certified City of Ethics, the Commission will need to approve this resolution pledging to conduct affairs according to the following principles:

- Serve Others, Not Yourselves
- Use Resources with Efficiency and Economy
- Treat all People Fairly
- Use the Power of Your Position for the Well-Being of Your Constituents
- Create an Environment of Honesty, Openness, and Integrity

Commissioner Bagwell made a motion for Mayor Borrow to sign the resolution, seconded by Commissioner Reed. Approved 4 - 0

Resolution to Enter into MOU with the Boy Scouts

This is a resolution authorizing the mayor to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Boy Scouts regarding the Boy Scout Hut. The MOU obligates the city to:

- Perform rough grading and tree removal around the Scout Hut

- Assist with water and sewer facilities to support long-term use by granting access to the city's sewer system
- Maintain landscaping around the Scout Hut
- Assist with site access for material deliveries and work staging
- Cover the costs associated with creating a new lease agreement for the property
- Agree to allow the scouts to use City Park for Boy Scout sanctioned camping events

The city manager recommended that that the mayor be authorized to sign the MOU. Commissioner Reed made a motion to authorize Mayor Borrow to sign the resolution, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

Mayor Borrow asked Stewart Swanson if he wanted to come forward and tell us about the Boy Scouts. Mr. Swanson said he was super excited to introduce you to Scoutmasters Jason Smith, Brad Trotter, and Adam Hartson. He said that Walt Crider's family is here tonight, and we would like to pay tribute to him. He said that Troop 24 is almost 100 years old and the scout hut is close to 75 years old. He said the building needs some serious repairs and they will start a fundraising campaign, and we are going to need a lot of help. The renovation will be overseen by the Scoutmasters and Kiwanis. We are very proud of the program. Mr. Swanson said that Walt Crider was a longtime Scout Council Member and that he had some great ideas for the Scout Hut and how the look could be tied into the Community House. Mayor Borrow said that Mr. Crowder was a force of nature whose energy and civic passion left a lasting mark. He passed away suddenly just days after meeting with the city concerning the Scout Hut. Mr. Swanson said that they have had many conversation with Commissioner Reed, Mayor Borrow, City Manager Anderson and with the help of Troop 24, Pack 24, Kiwanis and the city we are going to work together and make it a showcase. Mayor Borrow also thanked the Scouts for their growing membership and thanked them for coming tonight to be a part of government process where you can speak and share your ideas. Commissioner Reed attended high school with Mr. Crowder, and he told Mr. Swanson that he and his wife Diane would like to make the first Donation to kick off the fundraising project presenting him with an envelope. Mayor Borrow thanked him for coming.

Proposed Budget for FY 2026

The city manager stated that he and Mrs. Chandler have worked with the Department Heads to create a budget for 2026 that does not jeopardize the level of service that our residents are accustomed to and stays within our financial means. We have had to make some tough decisions regarding some much-needed equipment and capital projects by prioritizing what we must have versus what can be pushed to next year.

The budget that you have before represents what staff feels is necessary to keep up with the day-to-day operations of the city while protecting the health and welfare of our residents.

The General Fund Operating Budget is \$6,532,329 which is an increase of \$330,047 over 2025, 72% of the General Fund Budget is allocated to Public Safety. This increase is due in part to increased personnel costs and 911 radio maintenance fees. The budget does have 3 permanent part time firefighter positions which will bring us to 5 firefighters per shift. The cost for these 3 positions will be \$99,216.

The Water & Sewer Fund Budget is \$15,167,528, which is an increase of \$2,352,565 over 2025. Much of this increase is due to several large capital improvement projects to improve our water & sewer infrastructure. We do have \$2.5 million in grant funds to help with some of these projects. Capital Projects planned for 2026 include:

- Scott, Esta, Maple, and Short Avenue Water & Sewer Project - \$1,150,000
- Fieldale Hatchery Sewer Project - \$1,913,400
- BC Grant Lift Station Rehab Project - \$133,000
- Chenocetah Water Tank Pump Project - \$225,000

Other Water & Sewer Projects planned for 2026, which are not reflected in the budget include:

- The Old Reservoir Intake Project - \$1,100,00 (GEFA Loan)
- Wastewater Plant Expansion Project - \$40,000,000 (GEFA Loan & Water & Sewer Bond)

Hotel-Motel Tax Capital Improvement Projects Include: \$60,000 to finish paying for the Park Masterplan and \$8,000 to replace the Oak Street Park sign and Irvin Street Park sign.

SPLOST Projects Planned for 2026 include: the final payment on the 2 fire trucks and 15 patrol cars - \$300,000, Municipal Bond Payment - \$60,000, Paving Project - \$500,000, Downtown Parking Lot Design - \$255,000, Computer Software - \$30,000, Shade cover for the playground equipment at City Park - \$25,000 and expanding the fence at Jim Smith Park - \$27,000.

Stormwater Projects planned for 2026 Include the Scott, Esta, Maple, and Short Avenue Stormwater Project - \$400,000 and the Railroad permitting fee for the Front Street Drainage Project - \$60,000.

The budget does reflect a 2.5% cost of living increase despite the national cost of living being 2.7% and up to a 2.5% merit increase for

each of our full-time employees. The General Fund relies on interfund transfers of \$1,150,000, \$254,729 of our fund balance, and a \$300,000 increase in tax revenue by keeping the millage rate at 9.5. The Water & Sewer Fund relies on a 5.4% increase in water and sewer rates and \$295,014 of our fund balance.

The Draft Budget has been on our website and available to the public at City Hall for more than a month. We held a public hearing on it at the September 2nd Commission Meeting. We have not received any comments from the public on the proposed Budget. Therefore, I recommend that you adopt this proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2026. Commissioner Cook made a motion to adopt the 2026 budget, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

Proposal from Hawks Environmental for Assistance with Nutrient Trading

The EPD has informed us that our phosphorous limit will be reduced by 85% making it nearly impossible for the Wastewater Plant to stay in compliance. The only solution to this issue, other than installing a new filter system, is to see about working with other communities on what is called Nutrient Trading. What this entails is finding other communities that have a higher phosphorus allocation than what they need and see if they will allow us to use some of the excess. Laurie Hawks is an expert in this field and has successfully assisted other communities with this process. I reached out to Ms. Hawks to see what she will charge to assist us with this process. The cost for her assistance will be \$25,900, which I feel is a bargain since our engineers have estimated the cost for the filter system that we will need to install to meet this new requirement at \$10 million. Commissioner Reed made a motion to accept the Proposal from Hawks Environmental, seconded by Commissioner Bagwell. Approved 4 - 0

Executive Session was held in the Workshop. No Action Taken!

Commissioner Reed made a motion to adjourn at 6:50 PM, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

Debbie Turner, City Clerk

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.

John Borrow, Mayor, City of Cornelia

Sworn to and subscribed before me this
November 4, 2025

Notary Public