

CITY OF CORNELIA
MINUTES OF MEETING
October 6, 2026

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

Mayor Borrow opened the meeting and said that City Manager Anderson would not be here because he is sick. Mayor Borrow also said that we have a couple of changes to the agenda, we would not have the city managers' monthly report and the proposal from the DDA to amend the alcohol ordinance to allow downtown restaurants to have a happy hour would be removed but that DDA Chairman Frank Wolf would speak at the meeting and take any questions you have. Commissioner Reed asks if this is just a request from the DDA? Mayor Borrow said yes. City Attorney Steve Campbell said that the alcohol ordinance has very strict rules in place and there is no ordinance to consider. Mayor Borrow said that Audrey Davenport wanted to speak at the meeting tonight about funding for an art project in 2027. Finance Director Chandler said there was still \$10,000 in a grant for this year and that she had reached out to her about dates that she could meet with her about closing out the grant, but she has not got back with her. Ms. Chandler stated that Ms. Davenport has been paid almost \$20,000 this year. They did comment on some negative comments that Ms. Davenport had made on the new Donald Anderson Park, and she had said that nobody in her ward liked the new park. Commissioner Cook said that is not what he has heard. They discussed the ordinance on Accessory Buildings and Mayor Borrow said he thinks we finally have got it right. Finance Director Melanie Chandler went over the proposed budget for 2027. Ms. Chandler explained all the cuts that have been made and that we still have a deficit of \$788,769. She talked about the insurance that has gone up 15% as well as fuel cost. She presented a power point of the budget at a glance, and they talked about the millage rate and that if we increase the millage rate from 9.5 to 11.5, we will still have a deficit of \$133,697 which can easily be covered with fund balance. They discussed some of the items in the budget. Mayor Borrow went over the remaining items on the agenda. They discussed the proposal for assistance in setting up a Historic District and the Mayor said it seems high and that the area is so large he is afraid it will not qualify. Commissioner Cook wanted to make sure that Shady Grove Church was protected. After some discussion they thought it would be best for Commissioner Cook and City Manager Anderson to work together to look at the area and maybe reduce the size proposed. Mayor Borrow asked if anyone else had any questions or concerns. Mayor Borrow closed the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:57 PM

Debbie Turner, City Clerk

John Borrow, Mayor

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The Cornelia City Commission met in Regular Session on Tuesday, October 6, 2026, 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: Mark Reed, Don Bagwell, Tony Cook, and Janice Griggs. Also present: City Attorney Steve Campbell, and City Clerk Debbie Turner. City Manager Donald Anderson was absent.

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

Mayor Borrow opened the meeting and explained that we've got a couple of changes to the agenda. First of all, number three on the agenda, you may notice that our city manager, Mr. Donald Anderson, is out tonight. He's sick, this is the first time I've seen him out in six and a half years as mayor. So, we won't have the city manager's monthly report for August and then also we have number 12 down under new business which is a request from the downtown development authority, the DDA, to amend the alcohol ordinance. We've got Mr. Frank Wolf who will be addressing us earlier in the meeting rather than that. So, commissioners, I don't think we've got any other changes so I will entertain a motion to approve the amended agenda.

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

Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to approve the September 1st minutes as submitted, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

City Manager Monthly Report - City Manager was absent for the meeting.

Public Forum

I'm Audrey Davenport and to my understanding, you have my request to be on the public forum and did you read it.

Mayor Borrow said yes, ma'am you are on the agenda and of course we read it.

The brush strokes of change panels have been up on the fence for about two months now. They have been fading; you may or may not know that it sits in the sun all day. There is actually hardly any shade, hardly any

trees over there on that side. So, over the last couple of months, what I have been doing in my personal time was trying to paint back some of the faded areas that were more prevalent than the other ones. After some research from my consultant, Mural Arts Philadelphia, I was told that there is a UV coating sealer that can go on those panels. Mr. Anderson and I talked about what they needed, and I talked to Cliff about it, but it's also been probably a month now since then, and they haven't actually put any sealant on it. There is a sealant that I have been putting on, maybe three or four coats of sealant. Looking at your budget, I don't see anything in the budget that speaks to any type of additional beautification in terms of murals or projects that would lead to those types of things even though you have an ordinance for it. I think it is something that the City of Cornelia wants to do, but I don't see any budget items in your budget for that. So, my question is this. in reference to the fading of that panel that you did invest in, that maybe you want to figure out if there's some money that you can put in to preserve it. I don't know if one time UV coating is going to last. I don't know what the life of that is, but I would guess that it would probably be something that you do yearly, because you don't really want to have to try to repaint it every time. I would like to propose that you think about putting that in your budget for 2027 and moving forward maybe on a yearly basis for a while.

Commissioner Bagwell asked, "Have you looked into what reproductions of those panels would cost?"

Ms. Davenport, I can tell you that the face of Miss Sallie's lunchroom on the café, that is four by six and that was about \$1200. Those panels are 4x10s and there are 12 of them, so roughly \$1200 each panel.

There was some discussion on the paint and Ms. Davenport said It is a specialty paint, but it does not stand up against the sun.

Commissioner Bagwell said that now that this artwork's been created, it needs to be preserved for all time. So, some preservation effort needs to be made, whether it's high-resolution photography or whatever, so it could be reproduced because of just over time there was just no way to protect.

Ms. Davenport asked, "do you want me to come up with a number then provide that to you for you to consider for the budget?"

Commissioner Bagwell said I think that would be a good number to have.

Mayor Borrow said this year, "I don't think it could be added to the budget.

Finance Director Chandler said that we did find it in the budget, even though it was not a budget item for 2026. The money for the UV sealant has been approved, and the cost is almost \$600.00 so you should see that completed soon.

Ms. Davenport said, "I know that you said you were looking to get in a plaque of the history of Mr. Jim Smith for the park. And you did put a foundation for the existing plaque on the ground, and it did raise it up a little bit and keep it from sinking. Mr. Anderson said that you are getting a quote for more substantial, this shows a little bit more history. Did you get a quote?

Mayor Borrow said yes and it's around \$10,000.

Ms. Davenport asked, is that a budget item?

Mayor Borrow said no, it's not right now.

Ms. Davenport wanted to know what the next steps were, if it would be considered or is it just on hold.

Mayor Borrow said it comes down to when we sit down and go through the budget with a fine-toothed comb, we have to justify, do we need police officers, a fire truck, sidewalks or a plaque or whatever it is? We're making some very strong cuts right now, like over a million dollars.

Ms. Davenport said I also want to say was that the grant that we got from Georgia Council for the Arts is called Red Clay Creative Cohort, I had to get people from the community to be a part of the group. So, we had to do five projects. What I'm not sure of is, are you aware of the projects that we did, even though I sent the scope of work to Mr. Anderson, but I don't know if the council members get a chance to see it. Do you know about it?

Mayor Borrow yes, we're familiar with it. I couldn't tell you what they are off the top of my head, but he told us about all of it.

Ms. Davenport said now what I don't also see is that Cornelia is taking those projects or the work that I do in terms of vibrant community grants into account when they look forward to the next year. How do you expect, or have you given any thought to creating other projects, community projects or art projects or mural projects for 2027? Is that something that you don't have budget for?

Mayor Borrow said I don't think we've got anything for mural projects in the 2027 budget, but there are always grants out there and we're grateful for the work that you have done, painting and doing the legwork for getting the grants and making a difference.

Ms. Davenport said The Georgia Council for the Arts sent a film crew to the Big Red Apple Festival. I didn't know if you were aware of that. Actually, it's the Georgia Department of Economics and they came to interview me and Mr. Anderson, basically based on the Brushstrokes for Change Project, but also because we got that one grant that only five in the state got. So, I just wanted to point out to you that my goal was to make Cornelia a pilot town, like what rural towns are able to do with grants in regard to murals, and I did that. So, they came and they interviewed me. Also, I want to let you know that my name has been submitted to the Atlanta Journal Constitution for the Brush Strokes of Change Project, and that I've been interviewed and photography came here from Atlanta Journal Constitution also for that project. So, I just wanted to make you aware of the things that my small business does to bring visibility to Cornelia.

Mayor Borrow said we're grateful for it. Thank you very much.

Mayor Borrow introduced Frank Wolf Chairman of the DDA

Mr. Wolf came forward and said that as part of what they do is visit business downtown to see how they can support and help them. He said that a Happy Hour has been brought up several times, and right now in Habersham County you can only have a special for all day. All of the restaurants on Hodges and Irvin Street have requested to have a happy hour, this will target the demographic of 31 years old. It will keep them coming here and spending money instead of going out of town. He

said that he is requesting that you entertain the idea of a new ordinance.

Mayor Borrow asked City Attorney Steve Campbell if he could look into what is legal for the very structured Alcohol laws. Mr. Campbell said yes he would and maybe have something for the next meeting.

Old Business

Ordinance # 06-26-01 Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance

Mayor Borrow read the following -

This amendment will make it so that accessory storage buildings will not be permitted in the side yard in residential zoning districts. The ordinance also creates a definition for an Accessory Storage Building. This ordinance has been posted for public comment; we have received a letter from James Merck at 318 Dolson Street opposing the amendment. We have responded to his questions regarding how the proposed change came about and whether it will pertain to existing storage buildings.

Commissioner Reed made a motion approve the ordinance, seconded by Commissioner Cook. Approved 4 - 0

Public Hearings

Proposed Budget for 2027

Finance Director Melanie Chandler said we have posted the draft budget for 2027. It's available at City Hall on our website and of course mayor and commissioners all received a copy of it we cannot finalize our budget until the millage rate is set because it is dependent on what we have currently it does not include an increase in property taxes. We just left it and there's no use of fund balance. So, you'll see that we're projecting a shortfall of \$788 thousand dollars which we do have to find and answer for, we've already cut over a million dollars from the budget. Our total budget citywide is 28 million dollars. That is an increase of around three million from the year before, some of that is due to the increase of costs such as insurance costs they go up every year there's also some new grants that we're getting that are included in that increase.

Mayor Borrow asked if we could pause for a second, when you say you get new grants, he said for example. We have a grant from the federal government for a million dollars to address the railroad crossing. So, we have to spend the money a million dollars, but the money's coming in but when you say the budget is increased by three million dollars, it's offset by money that's already coming in so the taxpayers aren't bearing the burden of it somebody from the federal government is.

Ms. Chandler said our overall cost goes up but it's being offset by revenue. Yes, because the grants are a hundred percent reimbursable so there's no expense to the city on that railroad crossing elimination grants.

Ms. Chandler said the biggest change is our general fund, the budget is increasing by two million dollars compared to the year before but again there's a million-dollar railroad grant in there so we increased our transfer from water sewer by \$500,000, and we're going to start repayment on the bond for the amphitheater project. So those are included in there as well as some of the increased personnel costs like the rising cost of insurance. Some of the cuts we made were cutting three permanent part-time firefighter positions and we've restructured and eliminated a Major position in the police department to try to balance this budget and to come up with ways of decreasing our expenses. The fire department needs some repairs to the ladder truck. It's a replaced engine and unfortunately, it's a \$50,000 expense that we're going to have to budget for so those are some of the big items that we have in there. For personnel we're looking at a 2.5 percent cost of living increase and that's based on the rate of inflation, but it's also based on what the other local governments are doing we try to be fair and keep up with them. We do plan for up to a 2.5 percent merit raise as well for employees, but not all employees get this, it's not across the board. For fee changes we are planning to increase sanitation fees by 5%. That's because our costs go up 5% as well and for water sewer fees. We do have a budgeted increase of 5.5% for those as well and that's based on the rate schedule that was adopted last year which we had to do to be able to fund the wastewater treatment plant expansion so that's overall budget. Mayor Borrow said there would be no action regarding the budget right now.

Commissioner Bagwell said I would say there's been such an earnest effort of getting this closer.

Mayor Borrow said there has been an earnest and aggressive effort to cut back any unnecessary items going forward because nobody wants their taxes to go up. I think citizens probably feel as I do we also don't want to give up any

services that we have become accustomed to like trash pickup, leaf and limb pickup, police and fire protection and roads. Those sorts of things and so I think the budget is about as lean as it's possible for a budget to be given the fact that our expenses are rising with inflation and other things that we have to meet those to protect our people that do this work on a daily basis. Mayor Borrow closed the Public Hearing. No Action Taken!

Shelly Landrum came forward and said a 2.5% raise? I'm not given that yearly that seems kind of a lot to me and then a merit increase. So, are you going to give yourselves 5% increase? 2.5% for a merit.

Mayor Borrow said we are not giving ourselves a raise. The reason for the raises for our employees is necessary to keep our employees because we have to compete with other municipalities and even Hall County to keep our police, firefighters and good employees. Mayor Borrow thanked her.

I am Evelyn McClain. I have been away from business for quite some time now, so I don't know what's popular and what's happening now. But I agree with the young lady who just spoke about merit increases. I certainly understand the 2.5% cost of living increase. However are merit increases common amongst other city governments? Is that something that other businesses do nowadays? Offer merit increases? I would suggest that you do some research to see if we are out of the norm in offering merit increases. Mayor Borrow thanked her.

Public Hearing on Millage Rate
Finance Director Melaine Chandler read the following -

Due to negative inflationary growth to our tax digest in the amount of \$1,639,450 our rollback rate is higher than our current millage rate. This also equates to a reduction in revenue of \$100,000. This, coupled with the increased cost of providing services to our residents, is the reason why the millage rate needs to be increased. We have already cut over \$1 million out of the draft budget and increased the transfer from the Water & Sewer Fund from \$1 million to \$1.5 million and still have a deficit of \$788,769. I also want to caution that we will not be able to rely on the Water and Sewer Fund as much in 2028 because of the debt service that we will have for the Wastewater Plant Expansion Project. Based on our tax digest, 1 mill is equal to \$327,536 so if you raise the millage rate from 9.5 to 11.5 it will bring the deficit down to \$133,697 which can be addressed by using some of our fund balance. If the Property Tax Relief Local Option Sales Tax passes, we will be able to lower the millage rate by approximately 3.61 mills based on revenue projections. On a property valued

at \$300,000 the taxes will be reduced by \$505.00

Blaine Wasden came forward to say that this is the topic I was planning to speak on. In my wildest imaginations I never thought I would be in favor of a tax increase. But I find myself in this very unusual position where I have been to meetings and I've heard information. To the best of my perception, it seems like our staff and our leadership have been really trying to control costs and trying to be wise stewards over the tax money so. I want to say I'm in favor of the millage rate increase. I can't believe I said those words, but I just said them. I want to also be respectful to my fellow neighbors in the city that there may be some that are not in favor. I respect them for that no one wants their taxes to go up but why I'm in favor is I trust and I've seen evidence that you guys have tried to be really careful and tried to get the most bang for the buck out of the tax that comes in.

Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to raise the millage rate to 11.5, seconded by Commissioner Cook. Approved 4 - 0

Annexation Request for 1190 Old Cleveland Road

This is a request by the City of Cornelia to annex 21.75 acres of land located at 1190 Old Cleveland Road to construct a solar dryer for sludge drying. The property is currently zoned Agriculture by Habersham County. The requested zoning designation will be Municipal Owned Property (MOP). The property is contiguous to our Wastewater Plant which is currently zoned MOP so this will not be considered spot zoning. The Unified Planning Board held a public hearing on this request on September 17th. Following this hearing the Unified Planning Board recommended approval of the application.

David Zavala came forward to state he acquired the nearby land as an investment and for a possible future home. He expressed concern about views, property values, and the proposed facility's effects on neighboring owners. He said a prior planning-board discussion had included a buffer and asked for a written commitment that the structures would not be visible from the road. Zavala said that the proposed use could proceed on agriculturally zoned land without annexation. He also questioned the extent of notice to surrounding neighbors. Those issues were discussed. Mr. Zavala asked Commissioner Reed if he would want this in his neighborhood. Mr. Zavala continued to ask Commissioner Reed about wanting it in his neighborhood and Commissioner Reed responding by saying I would move. Mr. Zavala said no that is not how that works. Commissioner Reed said you asked me what I would do.

City Attorney Campbell explained that the immediate matter was posting the annexation ordinance, while project design, buffers, and construction details were separate decisions. He noted that the engineers and city manager were absent and advised the commission to consider annexation separately while having staff address residents' concerns. Final adoption and zoning would come at a later meeting if the process continued.

Shelly Landrum came back to the podium and said I live right across the street and am concerned about the odor. Commissioner Bagwell said that that is a valid point and that we would look into that. Ms. Landrum asked if we could oppose it.

Mayor Borrow said you can, but we are just annexing land that we already own into the city. Mayor Borrow thanked her for coming.

The mayor asked City Clerk Debbie Turner to record concerns about appearance, setbacks, and buffers. He said the commission, city manager, and engineers would consider what was feasible and best for the parties involved.

Blaine Wasden suggested locating air intake nearer the road and exhaust farther from residences, with measures to prevent airflow back toward the street.

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

New Business

Proposal for Assistance Setting Up Historic Districts

This item was discussed in the workshop, and it was decided to remove from the agenda until they can gather more information.

Amendment to Chapter 18 of the Municipal Code Establishing a Court Technology Fee

House Bill 1549 authorizes the creation of a technology fee as a surcharge to all criminal and quasi-criminal fines paid to the Municipal Court in an amount not to exceed \$10.00. The funds must be kept in a separate account and can only be used exclusively to provide for technological needs of the Municipal Court of the City of Cornelia and the city's police department. Commissioner Reed made a motion to post the ordinance, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

Agreement with Carter & Sloope for 2027 Paving Project

The planned paving project for next year includes the resurfacing of Jones Street and Lee Street as well as the Jim Smith Park sidewalk. Carter & Sloope has submitted this proposal for engineering services associated with this project. The scope of work includes surveying, design, bidding assistance, and construction inspections. The cost for these services will be \$87,100. Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the 2027 paving project, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

The meeting adjourned at 7:18 PM

Debbie Turner, City Clerk

John Borrow, Mayor