

# COCHRAN CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION MINUTES

SEPTEMBER 3, 2026

Page | 1



## MINUTES

### CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION MEETING

SEPTEMBER 3, 2026

The Work Session Meeting of the Cochran City Council was held on September 3rd, 6:00 PM in the City Auditorium, 102 N Second Street, Cochran, Georgia with the following present:

Carla Coley, Mayor

Trecia Gardner, Councilmember

Lonnie Tedders, Councilmember

Angele Redding, Interim City Manager

Shane Savant, Mayor Pro Tem

Dianne Lester, Councilmember

Staff present: Mercedes Sanders-Billing Clerk, Willie Farrow-Public Works Director – Brock Wilcher, Fire Chief

**CALL TO ORDER:** The Meeting was called to order by Mayor Carla Coley at 6:00 PM.

### **PUBLIC HEARING – PROPOSED BUDGET**

Mayor Carla Coley opened the public hearing regarding the proposed budget. No members of the public came forward to speak. The public hearing was closed at 6:01 p.m.

**INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Prayer was led by Mayor Pro Tem Savant followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call: A quorum was established.

| Attendee's Name | Title                                       | Present | Absent |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------|---------|--------|
| Carla Coley     | Mayor                                       | √       |        |
| Shane Savant    | Mayor Pro Tempore, District Three, Post Two | √       |        |
| Trecia Gardner  | Councilwoman, District One, Post One        | √       |        |
| Gary Ates       | Councilman, District One, Post Two          |         | √      |
| Rufus Veal      | Councilman, District Two, Post One          |         | √      |
| Lonnie Tedders  | Councilman, District Two, Post Two          | √       |        |
| Dianne Lester   | Councilwoman, District Three, Post One      | √       |        |

**APPROVAL OF WORK SESSION AGENDA – September 3, 2026:**

Mayor Coley requested to add the following items to the Work Session agenda:

- GRAD Certification Application
- Connect Cochran Project

Mayor Pro Tem Savant made a motion to amend the agenda by adding the two items, seconded by Councilmember Tedders. The motion carried unanimously.

A motion was then made by Mayor Pro Tem Savant and seconded by Councilmember Lester to adopt the agenda as amended and motion carried unanimously.

**1. GMA CITY RETIREMENT PLAN**

Joshua Colley with the Georgia Municipal Association presented an overview of the City of Cochran's defined-benefit retirement plan, which was established in 1971.

Mr. Colley reviewed the plan's benefit calculation, eligibility requirements, vesting provisions, survivor benefits, disability benefits, and City-funded contributions. It was noted that the plan does not provide a cost-of-living adjustment.

The valuation effective January 1, 2026, was discussed. The plan was reported to have approximately \$6.1 million in assets and approximately \$5.3 million in accrued liabilities and was reported as more than 100% funded.

Council discussed potential changes to the retirement program, including reducing the current ten-year vesting period and the possibility of adding a 457(b) or 401(a) retirement savings plan. Council also discussed the potential implications of moving away from a defined-benefit pension plan in the future.

No changes to the retirement plan were approved.

**2. MUNICIPAL GAS AUTHORITY OF GEORGIA – REBATE PROGRAM**

Matt Wilbanks and Kevin Mixon presented information regarding a proposed Municipal Gas Authority of Georgia natural-gas rebate and financing program.

The proposed program would encourage the use of natural gas through customer rebates and 0% on-bill financing of up to \$10,000, with repayment terms of up to 60 months.

The representatives discussed marketing and administrative support associated with the program, including a proposed program fee of \$300 per month.

Council discussed anticipated costs, potential billing-system changes, customer eligibility requirements, and how the program could be utilized by residential and commercial customers.

No action was taken.

### **3. GRAD CERTIFICATION APPLICATION**

Andy Lucas discussed re-applying for Georgia Rapid Industrial Development (GRAD) certification to help market local property via state program's.

He explained that previous progress was paused due to other projects but infrastructure like water lines and sewage has since been extended near Jack Arts Road.

The IDA is seeking city assistance in completing documentation regarding utility capacity and public safety services by an ambitious October goal.

Discussion occurred regarding how successful industrial prospects would eventually necessitate annexation into city limits to utilize municipal utilities safely.

### **4. CONNECT COCHRAN PROJECT**

A presentation was made regarding the proposed Connect Cochran project, which would provide public Wi-Fi service within the downtown corridor.

The proposed system would include approximately ten access points, primarily along Second Street. The project would involve participation from the Industrial Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Development Authority, City of Cochran, and County.

Middle Georgia State University students were discussed as a potential resource for installation and ongoing maintenance of the network.

The estimated contribution was approximately \$7,170 per participating partner, which would include equipment and the first year of service. Ongoing service costs were discussed at approximately \$500 per month following the first year.

Council discussed public access to the Wi-Fi system, business network security, maintenance responsibilities, and the City's existing vendor network.

## **AGENDA ITEMS**

## **1. AUDITORIUM USE FOR COMMUNITY THEATER**

Council discussed the utilization of the city auditorium with the Chamber of Commerce for Community Theater and other events

## **2. UTILITY BILLING**

Council discussed concerns with utility billing, late fees and the cutoff procedure. Right now, there are no perimeters because all bills must be paid in full to avoid cutoff. Payment plans and extensions are available for customers. Council discussed setting an amount below \$15-20 to not be on the cutoff list.

## **3. STATE BANK LANE**

Council discussed a proposal to place approximately six tables and benches in State Bank Lane to provide additional seating for downtown visitors and customers of local restaurants. The proposal was originally considered when State Bank Lane was closed and designated for pedestrian use.

The proposed seating would provide an area for residents and visitors to purchase food or ice cream from nearby businesses and enjoy their meals outdoors, particularly during community events and on days with favorable weather. Council discussed the potential benefit of providing additional seating during events such as the Great Pumpkin Festival and encouraging visitors to patronize downtown businesses rather than relying solely on food vendors.

Several possible table and bench styles and color options were reviewed. The preliminary pricing reviewed was approximately \$1,000 to \$1,100 per table, with an estimated total cost of approximately \$7,000 for six units. Staff noted that additional vendors would be contacted to determine whether less expensive options are available.

Council discussed whether the project could be pursued as a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) initiative or whether the tables should be purchased and owned by the City. It was noted that the tables would likely be City property and that a funding source would need to be identified. Staff will research additional vendors and pricing and determine an appropriate funding source.

Council also discussed the need to evaluate the placement of the tables and benches, available space, shade, umbrellas, and the overall layout of the lane. Safety concerns regarding the use of State Bank Lane for pedestrian seating were also discussed, including the need to ensure adequate barriers or other protective measures are in place to prevent vehicles from entering the area. Existing concrete planters and other possible protective measures will be evaluated.

No formal action was taken. Council expressed general support for continuing to explore the proposal and requested that staff obtain additional pricing and information before making a final decision.

Council discussed a request from a downtown business owner regarding the possible use of State Bank Lane for a special event, such as an open mic night, comedy event, or similar business-sponsored activity.

Council discussed allowing businesses to utilize the lane for events in a manner similar to the City's existing process for use of other City spaces. It was suggested that an application or request form be developed specifically for use of State Bank Lane so that event details, requirements, and any applicable fees could be addressed.

Staff will review the City's existing facility or parking lot use application and determine whether it can be modified for events held in State Bank Lane. Council also discussed the possibility of establishing a reduced fee due to the smaller size of the area.

No formal action was taken.

#### 4. EVENT DISTRICT AND ALCOHOL ORDINANCES

Council discussed the proposed ordinances establishing an Event District and regulating alcohol within the Event District.

It was explained that the proposed legislation could be divided into two separate ordinances. The first ordinance would establish an Event District within the City of Cochran, while the second ordinance would address alcohol regulations. The proposed Event District would generally encompass the downtown area from **Ash Street to Dyke Street and First Street to Third Street**.

The Event District would provide a defined area in which festivals, concerts, markets, and other public events could be conducted under a consistent permitting process. The ordinance would establish procedures for event applications, including information regarding the type of event, boundaries, operation, and methods of service. The establishment of the district could also make the City eligible for certain funding opportunities.

Council reviewed provisions of the proposed Event District ordinance that referenced the possession and consumption of alcoholic beverages during approved special events. Council members expressed concern that including alcohol provisions in the Event District ordinance could create confusion regarding the purpose of the ordinance and could delay approval of the Event District.

It was discussed that the Event District ordinance could be amended to remove references to alcohol entirely, with alcohol regulations addressed separately in a subsequent ordinance. Council expressed support for establishing the Event District independently so that the City could move forward with the district and potential funding opportunities without delaying the matter due to disagreements or questions regarding alcohol regulations.

Council agreed that separating the two ordinances would allow the Event District ordinance to move forward more quickly while allowing the alcohol-related provisions to be considered separately.

Council discussed the history of the committee that had previously been established to consider the Event District and alcohol-related matters. It was clarified that the committee did not hold a formal follow-up meeting and did not take a formal vote.

Questions were raised regarding whether committee meetings are subject to the City's open meetings requirements, including requirements for public notice and advertisement. It was explained that the uncertainty regarding these requirements contributed to the cancellation or postponement of a previously planned committee meeting.

Council discussed the importance of clarifying the open meetings requirements applicable to City committees with the City Attorney so that future committee meetings can be properly scheduled and advertised.

It was also discussed that Council members should be included in the process when committees are considering matters that will ultimately be presented to Council. Council encouraged continued communication between the committee, the Downtown Development Authority, and City Council.

## **5. LAW ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM-ICE 287(g) Program**

Jeff presented information regarding the **ICE 287(g) Program**, which provides an opportunity for local law enforcement officers to assist the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in identifying individuals who may be wanted or otherwise subject to federal immigration enforcement.

The financial and operational benefits of the program were discussed, including a one-time payment of approximately **\$100,000 for vehicles following the first case**, quarterly funding of

approximately **\$7,500 per participating officer for equipment**, and access to facial recognition technology.

Council discussed several questions and concerns that would need to be addressed before moving forward, including whether officers would have sufficient time to complete the required training, whether the local jail could accommodate additional detainees given the current pod configuration, and whether there is a discrepancy between the costs described by federal representatives and the costs outlined in the memorandum of understanding.

## **6. GREAT PUMKIN FESTIVAL SPONSORSHIP**

Council discussed sponsorship opportunities for the **Great Pumpkin Festival**. The County has offered to split the **\$1,500 stage sponsorship**, with the City and County each contributing \$750. Council discussed whether the city should participate at that sponsorship level, select a lower sponsorship level, or decline to sponsor the event.

## 7. HANDICAP PARKING SPACE

A request was made by **Mule Barn** to have a handicap parking space painted near an existing handicap-accessible ramp.

## 8. COUNCIL RETREAT-FALL

Council briefly discussed the possibility of holding a Council retreat. It was agreed that information and potential arrangements would be compiled and presented to Council members outside of the regular meeting for their review and consideration.

## 9. ORDINANCE REVIEW-ADOPT FY 2026-2027 BUDGET

Council discussed the ordinances scheduled to be presented at the upcoming Council meeting. Council members were asked if they had any questions or concerns regarding the proposed ordinances.

It was noted that additional information would be compiled and provided to Council members for their review and consideration prior to the meeting.

No formal action was taken.

A motion was made by Councilmember Tedders and seconded by Councilmember Gardner to adopt the ordinance associated with the FY 2026-2027 Budget. There was no further discussion and the motion carried unanimously.

Council discussed whether an executive session was necessary. No executive session was held.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

The following upcoming meetings were announced:

- **Tuesday, October 8:** Called meeting regarding personnel at 5:30 p.m. in the conference room, followed by the regular Council meeting at 6:00 p.m. in the auditorium.
- **Monday, October 5:** Zoning Commission meeting at 6:00 p.m. Council members were invited to attend.

## COCHRAN CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION MINUTES

SEPTEMBER 3, 2026

Page | 8

- **September 17:** A called meeting at 5:30 p.m. to discuss the Zoning Commission's recommendations. Further discussion of the GRAD project or Connect Cochran may also be considered.

The Council also discussed the possibility of moving a future-called meeting to a smaller venue with improved acoustics to allow for better communication and discussion. It was clarified that the initial meeting called would address personnel matters, with a separate discussion regarding the meeting location to occur later.

### **ADJOURNMENT:**

Motion by Councilmember Gardner to adjourn the meeting at 9:06 PM; seconded by Councilmember Tedders and carried unanimously.