



DRAFT MINUTES
February 10, 2026
Cochran City Council
Regular Session @ 6:00 PM

City Auditorium, 102 N Second Street, Cochran, GA 31014

City Council

City Staff

Carla Coley, Mayor	Richard Newbern, City Manager
Trecia Gardner <i>(District 1, Post 1)</i>	Candace Summerall, City Clerk
Gary Ates, Council Member <i>(District 1, Post 2)</i>	Jim Elliott, City Attorney
Rufus Veal, Council Member <i>(District 2 Post 1)</i>	
Lonnie Tedders, Council Member <i>(District 2, Post 2)</i>	
Dianne Lester <i>(District 3, Post 1)</i>	
Shane Savant, Council Member <i>(District 3, Post 2)</i>	

I. Call to Order by the Mayor

Mayor Carla Coley called the Regular Session of the Cochran City Council to order.

II. Invocation

Invocation was led by Fire Chief Brock Wilcher.

III. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mayor Carla Coley.

IV. Attendance

Mayor Coley noted all Council Members were present with the exception of Council Member Rufus Veal. Mayor Coley also noted the City Attorney was absent due to illness. Quorum was established.

V. Adopt Agenda/Minutes

Agenda Modifications

Add agenda item: GMA lease agreement police vehicles

Motion: Made by Council Member Shane Savant

Second: Council Member Gary Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval

Move Department Head Reports: from Item 6 to Item 4

Motion: Made by Council Member Gary Ates

Second: Council Member Shane Savant

Vote: Unanimous approval

Approve agenda as amended

Motion: Made by Council Member Dianne Lester

Second: Council Member Trecia Gardner

Vote: Unanimous approval

Approve Minutes from Regular Council Meeting January 13, 2026

Motion: Made by Council Member Shane Savant

Second: Council Member Gary Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval to TABLE minutes pending review

VI. Public Comments

1. **Melissa Barker**, Cochran–Bleckley Chamber of Commerce, provided updates on upcoming Chamber events and community activities.
2. **Michael Ware**, Deep South Construction, addressed Council regarding concerns related to payment timing and project coordination issues.
3. **Connie Webb** requested information regarding recycling services and whether data centers were being considered for development in the City. Mayor Coley requested Ms. Webb provide her contact information to the City Clerk for follow-up.
4. **Ken Land** provided updates on upcoming downtown and community events.

VII. Agenda Items

1. Proclamation recognizing National Black History Month in the City of Cochran

Mayor Coley presented a proclamation recognizing Black History Month. The proclamation was accepted by Gary Warner, President of the Bleckley County NAACP Chapter.

2. Award and recognition of Cochran Firefighters for their services in saving a life

Fire Chief Brock Wilcher recognized Cochran Fire Department personnel for life-saving actions during a structure fire on December 25, 2025

The following firefighters were recognized and presented awards:

Fire Service Commendation Award

- Firefighter McElroy
- Firefighter Angus

Life Saving Award

- Sergeant Colton Kleinfeld
- Firefighter Quang Nguyen
- Firefighter Thong Nguyen
- Firefighter Nicholas Mleczko

Chief Wilcher also recognized assisting agencies including Bleckley County Fire Department, Bleckley County EMS, Bleckley County 911, the Cochran Police Department, Bleckley Memorial Hospital, and other supporting personnel.

3. Employee of the Quarter

Fire Chief Brock Wilcher recognized the following employees as Employees of the Quarter:

- Quang Nguyen
- Thong Nguyen

Certificates and accompanying recognition checks were presented.

4. Department Head Reports

Fire Department

Fire Chief Brock Wilcher provided a Fire Department report. No questions were presented to Chief Wilcher.

Police Department

Police Chief Jeff Trawick provided an update on animal control operations, including current shelter capacity constraints and steps being evaluated to move toward a no-kill shelter model. Chief Trawick discussed staffing limitations, intake management, and partnerships needed to support long-term improvements.

Public Works Department

Public Works Director Willie Farrow provided updates on cleanup day planning, LMIG resurfacing progress, relocation of a water valve near the liquor store intersection, and planning efforts for the Peacock Drainage Project. Director Farrow also discussed ongoing coordination with engineers and contractors to address drainage concerns.

Code Enforcement

City Manager Newbern reported on enforcement activity related to vape shop ordinance compliance. Danny Smith, Code Enforcement Officer, advised that certified letters have been issued and that monitoring and follow-up inspections are ongoing to ensure compliance.

Finance Department

Finance Director Bonnie Raffield presented the City's financial report. No questions were presented to Ms. Raffield.

5. Public Hearing and consideration of a Conditional Use application from Elevation Worship Ministries, Intl.

Public Hearing opened: 6:47 PM

Mayor Coley presented the conditional use request for Elevation Worship Ministries, Intl. to operate at 123 N. Fifth Street as a place of worship and to operate an educational ministry serving girls in grades 4–7. City Manager Newbern reported that the Planning Commission held a public hearing on February 2, 2026, and voted unanimously to recommend approval.

No public comments were received.

Public Hearing closed: 6:48 PM

Council Action: Approval of the Conditional Use application

Motion: Made by Council Member Gary Ates

Second: Council Member Shane Savant

Vote: Unanimous approval

6. Presentation by Ryland Environmental and consideration of approval of their contract with the City

Ryland Environmental representative Michael McWhirter provided a presentation regarding rollout plans, route maps, service days, communication procedures, recycling sign-up process, and work order procedures. Council discussed courtesy go-backs during the transition period, cart replacement, and distribution of digital maps.

Motion: Made by Council Member Lonnie Tedders

Second: Council Member Trecia Gardner

Vote: Unanimous approval

7. Consider approving a proposal by the Bleckley County Tax Commissioner to increase the City's annual payment for property tax services

Council discussed the proposed increase in the City's annual payment from \$18,000 to \$25,000 annually, citing improved collection performance and administrative efficiency.

Motion: Made by Council Member Lonnie Tedders

Second: Council Member Gary Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval

8. Consider designating the Peyton Williams Center as a Community Resource Center and entering into an agreement with Cochran Helps

Council discussed community feedback, operational considerations, and service impacts.

Motion: Made by Council Member Lonnie Tedders

Second: N/A

Vote: Motion failed due to lack of a second

9. Consider approving the renewal of Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield health coverage for City employees

Council discussed renewal terms including a 3% premium increase for the upcoming plan year. Council voted to renew coverage and absorb the full estimated increase, preventing additional cost burden to employees. Council discussed estimated impacts ranging from approximately \$15 to \$45 per employee per pay period depending on plan selection.

Motion: Made by Council Member Shane Savant

Second: Council Member Gary Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval

10. Consider approving a proposal from the Heart of Georgia Regional Commission for planning services

Council discussed Comprehensive Plan update requirements and cost-sharing with Bleckley County. Approval was made contingent upon written confirmation of the proposed 60/40 cost split.

Motion: Made by Council Member Gary Ates

Second: Council Member Shane Savant

Vote: Unanimous approval

11. Consider approving the following two (2) proposals from Carter-Sloope Engineering to prepare plans for the City Water and wastewater systems

Council discussed EPD compliance requirements, five-year assessment cycles, and budgeting considerations for professional engineering services.

Motion: Made by Council Member Shane Savant

Second: Council Member Gary Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval

12. Consider adoption of CDBG Language Access Plan and Policies and Procedures for the 2025 CDBG project

Council discussed the required adoption of the CDBG Language Access Plan and related policies and procedures. Council noted the absence of a resolution for the policies and procedures and discussed deferring action.

Motion: Made by Council Member Shane Savant

Second: Council Member Gary Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval

VIII. City Manager Discussion/Items/Updates

City Manager Richard Newbern provided updates on the Peacock Street drainage project, noting the work is expected to begin soon and is anticipated to be fully funded through T-SPLOST.

City Manager Newbern also reported that bids were opened for the Willie Basby Recreation Improvements project at the Peyton Williams Center, including improvements such as a walking trail and equipment upgrades. He advised the City received an \$84,900 Land and Water Conservation Fund grant through DNR with an \$85,000 City match budgeted, and that seven bids were received and are under review.

City Manager Newbern also reported on Planning Commission training, noting Planning Commissioners Pam Lawson and Heather Allen attended training in Athens, and that Planning Commissioners attended the Georgia Association of Zoning Administrators (GAZA) conference along with Lisa Eisele and Danny Smith.

IX. Council/Mayor Discussion/Items

Council Member Gary Ates: No items.

Council Member Trecia Gardner: Council Member Gardner discussed her upcoming leadership speaking engagement. Mayor Coley recognized Council Member Gardner and congratulated her on the opportunity to represent the City and community.

Council Member Lonnie Tedders: No items.

Council Member Dianne Lester: No items.

Council Member Shane Savant: Council Member Savant discussed flu in area and wished Council Member Veal a speedy recovery

Mayor Carla Coley: Mayor Coley reviewed the retreat schedule and upcoming meeting announcements. Mayor Coley also discussed coordination efforts related to the recent rail closure and its impact on access to area subdivisions, including communications and timing related to the closure and ongoing coordination to address resident concerns.

X. Announcement of Upcoming Meetings and Events

Council Retreat – February 11–13, 2026

Next Work Session – Thursday, March 5, 2026 @ 6:00 PM

Next Regular Council Meeting – Tuesday, March 10, 2026 @ 6:00 PM

XI. Executive Session if needed

No Executive Session was held.

Adjournment 7:42 PM

Motion: Made by Council Member Lonnie Tedders

Second: Council Member Gary Ates

Vote: Unanimous approval

Minutes prepared and submitted by:

Candace Summerall

City Clerk