

**Charlton County Board of Commissioners
Regular Meeting Minutes
Commissioners Conference Room
68 Kingsland Drive, Suite B
Folkston, GA 31537
Thursday, December 4, 2025
6:00 PM**

12/4/2025 - Minutes

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM.

Present was Commissioner Jesse Crews, Chairwoman Alpha Benefield, Commissioner Drew Jones, Commissioner James Everett, County Attorney John Adams, Director of Administrative Services Rebecca Harden, and County Clerk Madeline Nettles.

Absent was Vice Chairman Luke Gowen.

All guests are recorded hereafter.

Invocation and Pledge to the Flag

The invocation was led by Chairwoman Benefield.

Adoption of the Agenda

Commissioner Crews made a motion to Adopt the Agenda as Presented. Commissioner Everett seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Adoption of Minutes

1. Motion to adopt the November 20th, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Crews made a motion to Adopt the Minutes as Presented. Commissioner Everett seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Presentations

2. Presentation of Proclamation Recognizing John Atwater for His Contributions to Charlton County
Chairwoman Benefield introduced the resolution. County Clerk Nettles read the resolution.

Members of Mr. Atwater's family accepted the resolution on his behalf.

3. Presentation from Doug Davis, with The Farm at Okefenokee, on Phase III
Doug Davis, of Folkston, Georgia, was present.

Mr. Davis provided a brief overview of the project, known as The Farm at Okefenokee. Three years ago, Mr. Davis presented the preliminary plat. Over last three years, The Farm has completed Phase 1 and is nearing completion of Phase 2. Mr. Davis is hoping to have Phase 3 up and running in 2026, so they can begin sales and construction on the cabins.

Mr. Davis is asking for approval on Phase 3, with the existing Plat, with The Farm committing that the recommended 100ft set back will be met on future phases, beginning in Phase 4.

Commissioner Everett asked about the water and sewage. The Farm has its own water system that is permitted and tested frequently. The water system feeds all lots and amenities, including Phase 3. The Farm also uses a septic system that is different than a septic tank and drain field, and therefore does not have the same space requirements.

Commissioner Crews asked Joanna Powell, Director of Community Development, for her knowledge on the situation. Both the Permit Department and the Health Department would be fine if the board approved Phase 3 as presented. The board had previously approved 85 ft on the other 2 phases.

Commissioner Crews made a motion to Approve the resolution. Commissioner Jones seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Presentation from Tiffany Yearwood, Charlton County EMA Director, on the Memorandum of Understanding with The GEO Group

Tiffany Yearwood, EMA Director, was present.

Chairwoman Benefield formally introduced all members of the board to Director Yearwood before allowing the presentation.

The GEO Group asked for signature lines to be updated on the Memorandum of Understanding, due to changes in leadership. Director Yearwood highlighted areas that she felt the Memorandum needed further clarification, updates, or expansion.

Director Yearwood has asked for additional information from The GEO Group, and is currently waiting to receive it. Director Yearwood plans to take the additional information provided and begin updating the Memorandum with stakeholders present.

Public Hearings

5. Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Public Hearing

The public hearing opened at 6:25 PM. Chairwoman Benefield provided the rules of decorum, which included a 3 minute time limit per person.

Mr. Ron Williams stepped up to the podium to speak, but upon realizing that the comment section was strictly for the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, Mr. Williams declined to comment.

No comments were made.

The public hearing closed at 6:27 PM

Petitions

Purchasing Items

Grants and SPLOST Project

6. Accept KABOOM! Grant Award

Joel Shivar, Director of Parks and Recreation presented the Grant Award.

KABOOM! has partnered with the Atlanta Falcons for a community-based grant. Director Shivar applied for the grant earlier this year to assist the county with the financial costs associated with

putting in the pickleball courts at Deuce Lloyd. The county was awarded the grant and has received the funds at this time.

Agreements

Ordinances

Resolutions

Miscellaneous

7. Motion to Reschedule the January 1st, 2026 Regular Board of Commissioners Meeting

County Clerk Nettles presented two options for rescheduling the January 1st, 2026, Regular Meeting.

Commissioner Jones made a motion to Approve Option 1, which is to postpone the first meeting to January 8th and the second meeting to January 22nd. Commissioner Crews seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

8. Discuss and Consider the Appointment of an Interim County Administrator

Chairwoman Benefield stated that the board's consensus has been to seek an internal candidate for the position first. The board has consulted with ACCG and the County Attorney on the legal process of hiring an internal candidate.

The board has spoken with candidate, Becky Harden, on an individual basis and confirmed her interest in the position.

Commissioner Jones asked County Attorney Adams to confirm that they are in order procedurally. County Attorney Adams confirmed.

Commissioner Jones made a motion to Appoint Becky Harden as Interim County Administrator. Commissioner Everett seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comments

Public Comments are limited to 3 minutes.

Ron Williams came to provide an example of the situation they are dealing with in their residential neighborhood. Miranda Williams played a video demonstrating the dogs in question barking consistently throughout the video. Mr. Williams expressed his dissatisfaction with the noise, the smell, and the waste. Mr. Williams is asking the Board to assist them with getting their "way of life" back. Mr. Williams is asking that the board put a limit on how many animals can be on one piece of property, not including hunting dogs.

Doug Gowen, on behalf of the GEO Group, was present to discuss the Memorandum of Understanding. The GEO Group stated that currently there is not a Memorandum, as it has expired. The board is going to move forward with signing with the current draft of the Memorandum, and then Director Yearwood can begin the process of updating the Memorandum. Director Yearwood stated that the Memorandum was signed in April 2025 and should still be active. Commissioner Jones asked Director Yearwood a timeline for modifications. Director Yearwood stated that she expects it to be completed in the first quarter, but is dependent on getting all stakeholders at the table at the same time.

Gary Tippins provided an update on the new fire station. The septic tank in. A firewall inspection is planned for Monday. On behalf of the Board of Assessors, Mr. Tippins believes they have straightened

out the contract signature issues with GMASS, but they are working on meeting together to discuss further. Commissioner Jones asked about the covenant page and whether the county could be sued over it. Mr. Tippins has straightened up the issue and signed the last of the covenants today. The issue was in a lack of communication between the software used in the Tax Assessor's office and the software used in the Tax Commissioner's office, leading to the required signature and page to be missed. Tax bills will be sent out by the end of the year. Director Harden stated that they are hoping to send them out by December 20th, even with the issues with the covenants.

County Administrator Comments

Commissioners' Comments

Drew Jones talked about how dry it is and recommended not burning yard piles at this time.

County Attorney's Action Items

County Attorney Adams recommended an executive session to discuss litigation.

Commissioner Crews made a motion to Enter Executive Session. Commissioner Jones seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairwoman Alpha Benefield, Commissioner Jesse Crews, Commissioner Drew Jones, Commissioner James Everett, County Attorney John Adams, Director of Administrative Services Rebecca Harden, and County Clerk Madeline Nettles entered executive session at 6:56 PM

The board and staff exited at 7:11 PM. No action was taken.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on December 18th, 2025, at 6:00 PM in the Board of Commissioners meeting room.

Adjourn

Commissioner Everett made a motion to Adjourn. Commissioner Crews seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:13 PM.

Alpha Benefield, Chairman

Madeline Nettles, County Clerk

Proclamation Recognizing John Atwater for His Contributions to Charlton County

WHEREAS, he was born in Silco, GA in Camden County on June 11, 1932, and has been a resident of Folkston, GA in Charlton County for many years with his wife, Susie Atwater; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Atwater is an Army veteran of the Korean War, was employed at Hercules for 20 years, and after retiring, started his own business in the pulpwood industry, Atwater Salvage in Charlton County, which he dedicated another 30 years to; and

WHEREAS, he is blessed with eleven children, a host of grandchildren, great grandchildren, great-great-grandchildren and other relatives; and

WHEREAS, he is an honorable member of the Charlton County community, know for his compassion and understanding of others in need; and

WHEREAS, he is an active member of Greater Faith Missionary Baptist Church where he serves as Deacon and other civic organizations; and

WHEREAS, he has served on the Charlton County DFCS Board for more than 18 years, serving further as a faithful and committed leader during his tenure as Chairperson. Mr. Atwater has been described by others as a humble man who leads with his actions and genuinely loves people. He has always deeply considered the DFCS staff and constituents in his decision making and has prayed the most earnest prayers over the DFCS Board meetings; and

WHEREAS, he demonstrates his countless ways of dedication to the welfare of others by displaying love and kindness to all humanity and has earned the respect and affection of people from all walks of life and all ages, setting an example for others to follow and become beacons of service and compassion; and

WHEREAS, he has lived during the most eventful century of world history; and has been a force for good and a stabilizing influence on those around them during these turbulent years.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Alpha Benefield, Chairwoman of the Charlton County Commissioners, along with the Charlton County Board of Commissioners, do hereby deem it an honor and pleasure to extend this Certificate of Recognition to John Atwater, with sincere gratitude and appreciation for his dedication, service, and contributions to Charlton County.

IN WITNESS, I do hereby set my hand, and cause the seal of Charlton County, Folkston, Georgia be affixed, this ____ day of _____ 2025.

CHARLTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Alpha Benefield, Chairwoman

ATTEST:

Madeline Nettles, County Clerk



Georgia Playspace Refresh Fund

Congratulations to the 2025 Grant Winners!



Thanks to the generous support of the Atlanta Falcons Youth Fund and Georgia Power, KABOOM! has awarded grants of up to **\$25,000** to help communities in Georgia keep their playgrounds safe, vibrant, and ready for play! Whether you need to replace worn-out equipment, update your surfacing, or add creative touches that spark joy and imagination, this grant can help you bring your playspace back to life.

Congratulations to the 2025 Grantees

The following organizations were selected to receive grant funding to renovate their existing play structures through the Georgia Playspace Refresh Fund:

- Atlanta PAL – A.D. Williams, Atlanta
- Atlanta SMART Academy, Atlanta
- Avondale Elementary School Education Foundation, Avondale Estates
- Beyond the View Autism, College Park
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Lanier, Gainesville
- City of Cedartown, Cedartown
- Compton Elementary School, Powder Springs
- Dean Rusk Park, Atlanta
- Deuce Lloyd Sports Complex, Folkston
- Gateway House Inc DBA Gateway Domestic Violence Center, Gainesville
- Harmony Elementary, Monroe
- Ivy Preparatory Academy Charter School, Atlanta
- Memorial Day School Inc, Savannah
- Parkside Elementary School, Atlanta

Thank you!

This program is thanks to the generous support of the Atlanta Falcons Youth Fund and Georgia Power. We appreciate their support. Together, we can keep your playspace safe, fun, and full of life —because all kids need access to great places to play!



► 2025 Application Details



Sign up for our newsletter

Join our email list to learn more about our latest news and how you can help us end playspace inequity for good.

Last Name

example-email@email.com

SIGN UP



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