



MCDUFFIE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Regular Session Meeting
Tuesday, March 17, 2026, at 6:30 PM
Government Complex Commissioner Room
MINUTES

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Chase Beggs, Chairman
Sammie Wilson Sr., Vice Chairman
Bill Jopling, Commissioner
Fredrick Favors, Commissioner
Steven Hollimon, Commissioner

COUNTY REPRESENTATION:

Brandon Burton, County Manager
~~Ashtyn Goodyear, County Clerk~~
Pam Workman, Finance Director
Robert Spurlin, IT Director
Trevor Welcher, Recreation Director
Paul Johnson, Coroner
Chief Sewell, FireEMS Director
Stacey Thomas, Tax Commissioner
Ruthie Thomas, HR Director

MEDIA: McDuffie Progress

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Project Azalea – Data Center on Randall-Hunt Road – Parcel 00710034

Chairman Beggs addressed the crowd to please keep comments to three minutes, and if the previous speakers have made the same point, please indicate that you support or disagree with the data center, unless you have new information.

The following people spoke either for or against Project Azalea:

- Charlie Newton – Mr. Newton addressed the Board with his opinion of some of the positive aspects of bringing a data center to McDuffie County. The positive aspects being that the data center could produce over \$13 million in property tax a year, and \$10 million in sales tax a year. The homestead pays \$6.2 million in property taxes each year, the fire fee is \$1.6 million each year totaling \$8.2 million in total. With these numbers, it would leave \$5 million left over to do things for the County. Mr. Newton stated that if the Data Center comes or not, there needs to be a lot of work done on the water/sewer system. If the data center does not come, these projects towards water/sewer will be funded with SPLOST dollars, but there will need to be more in addition to these funds, which would mean borrowing money to complete these projects. Mr. Newton said that over 20% of the water/sewer rate is debt service. If the data center comes, this number could be better, and if it does not come, that percentage could be higher. Mr. Newton stated that he heard a concern that the 120 workers will not come from McDuffie County, because we do not have qualified people to fill these roles. Mr. Newton stated that he believed that part of the Development Authority for the County was to try and bring higher and better jobs for the community, so the younger generation can stay home and find decent employment. Mr. Newton said he has done research on the Data Centers and believes he needs to speak up in support of this, because this is the biggest chance McDuffie County he has seen in his lifetime to give the tax relief the County desperately needs, and to have funding to make significant changes in this community.
- Ben Todd – Mr. Todd is in support of the Data Center.
- Courtney Eskew – Ms. Eskew stated that she believes Mr. Newton was correct in speaking on the tax relief other than she is unaware of any sales tax relief the data center would bring. She stated that GA Power is building these power centers, whether we have a data center or not, and that we will fill the cost of this power, and that is a fact. Ms. Eskew believes that 30,000 gallons is still a lot of

water for flushing toilets for 30 people, when a school system uses approximately 20,000 gallons of water and there are more students that are flushing toilets in a school system. Ms. Eskew said the employment will be wonderful for construction workers, and that the reality of data centers is that they will need workers for security, cleaning, technicians, engineers, and people to maintain the servers – most of these jobs being able to be remote or hybrid. She believes that whoever owns the servers is who will dictate the employees of the data center. Ms. Eskew believes that if this is truly a great location can we just wait and see how these other data centers play out – that if we are a perfect location right now that we will still be a perfect location in a couple of years.

- Franklin Palmer – Mr. Palmer stated that he believes it's important to look at the future generation and the impact this data center could have financially. His opinion is he does not want this opportunity to pass away based on negativity and facts that we may or may not know – and that we will not know these facts until we build it and give it a chance. Mr. Palmer stated that this is an opportunity to bring more revenue without bringing more traffic to the County.
- Larron Pilgrim – Mr. Pilgrim wanted to revisit the 30,000 gallons of water daily. He does not understand how the loop system will be in place, and 30,000 gallons of water will still be used daily. Mr. Pilgrim asked if the loop system is drained, how does this affect the ground water? He asked about radiation, because he read that it can cause radiation in .5 miles radius. He stated that he worries about the health of his grandchildren in the future. He asked if the data center comes will taxes truly be done away with, that could and if are very important words that are being used with this statement. Mr. Pilgrim asked the developers had either of them been ingenious with the Planning Board, Board of Commissioners, and the citizens – the developers stated no they had not. Chairman Beggs he will address the developers later in the meeting to address his concerns with the water drainage and radiation.
- Solana Rivera – Ms. Rivera that her focus is the uncertainty that we cannot afford. Her concern is not knowing the final user and what they will decide to do with the data center – for example it is being stated that 30,000 gallons of water will be used now, what if the end user spikes that to 100,000 gallons. Ms. Rivera stated she does not think we will benefit from this with the uncertainty it brings.
- Gail Fulbright – Ms. Fulbright asked what happens once it is built – that she heard \$25 million will be generated for the County, and that if this is double the tax income, what will be done with the extra money? She asked if this would begin after the project is finished in 7 years, or when they first start construction. She asked where the \$13 million number is coming from that was mentioned earlier in the public hearing. Her concern is also that the County will be paying for the road damage from heavy trucks during this 7-year period of construction, and that this road will take priority in being paved over the roads that citizens live on and pay tax dollars on. Ms. Fulbright stated there are leaks all over the County and city and that she personally has had a leak for over a year that has still not been fixed. She stated she doesn't believe the city has the manpower to take on a job like this. She believes that these stipulations should be put in paper.
- Kim Silva – Ms. Silva believes the citizens in McDuffie County and all over the United States are being blindsided by these data centers. She is 100% opposed due to environmental issues and medical issues. She believes there will be a time when data centers will not have to be so big. Ms. Silva said that she does not know of one county where a data center has come to that has relieved property taxes. She states she wishes a better grocery store would come rather than a data center. Ms. Silva said a data center would ruin everything.
- Joey Allen – Mr. Allen is for the data center.
- Gloria Thompson – Ms. Gloria is 100% for the data center. She stated it will not bring a lot of jobs; however, it also will not bring a lot of traffic to our roads, it will not require a lot of law enforcement, and that it is not going to require a lot of our services. She believes that everything it

is bringing is positive and will be in a great area. Ms. Gloria stated that she was on the Development Authority and Commission for 8 years, and this opportunity is something the County has not seen in her entire lifetime. She said there may be negatives that come up – but that the positive that it can bring outweighs the negative.

WELCOME & CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Beggs called the meeting to order and acknowledged a quorum of commissioners present and welcomed everyone in attendance.

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Pastor Jim Martin from Second Baptist Church offered the invocation followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC INPUT

- Carl Axon – Mr. Axon has not seen any data from the developers on other cities or counties, that we are just listening to what they say. He wishes this would be built on Warrenton Hwy if it must come to McDuffie County. There are already water/sewer and roads paved here. This data center will be 2 miles from his house, and he is not looking forward to it at all. He stated that people can make promises, but standing behind it is what matters.

APPROVALS

2. Agenda (Current)

Chairman Beggs asked if there were any corrections to the current agenda or minutes. A motion was made by Chairman Wilson to approve the current agenda as written and was seconded by Commissioner Jopling and passed unanimously.

3. Minutes

Called Regular Session – March 2, 2026

Work Session – March 2, 2026

Executive Session – March 2, 2026

Data Center Listening Session – March 10, 2026

Chairman Beggs asked if there were any corrections to the minutes. Commissioner Jopling made a motion to approve the minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Favors and passed unanimously.

INFORMATION & ANNOUNCEMENTS

4. Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR)
5. Adult Softball (Church League)
6. 12U Girls Basketball Team – Director Welcher gave awards to the 12U basketball team and acknowledged the parents and team for such an outstanding job.
7. Open Gym Hours (Pickleball and Basketball)
8. The Library Grand Re-Opening will be March 26th from 10am-4pm
9. Spring Trash Amnesty Day – March 21st from 8am-12pm

STAFF REPORTS

10. County Manager Report –

County Manager Burton updated the Board on a few matters. The Department of Agriculture has completed their inspection of the Animal Shelter – the animal shelter passed this inspection. Brandon has met with the Corp of Engineers with their annual inspection of Raysville Campground – the campground also passed their inspection. There has been a Notice to Proceed issued for the Raysville Fire Station. There have been solicitation documents submitted for the Restroom damage at Big Hart from Hurricane Helene and for median cut work.

11. Financial Report –

A copy of this report can be found in the agenda packet.

12. Budget Report -

A copy of this report can be found in the agenda packet.

NEW BUSINESS

13. Consideration to Approve a Special Exception for a Data Center on Parcel 00710034, Randall-Hunt Road

Leslie Walker gave the background on the data center. The applicant is requesting a Special Exception to allow the development of a data center on Parcel 00710034. The applicant is requesting approval to develop a large-scale data center campus commonly referred to as "Project Azalea." This project has been submitted for regional review under DRI #4602 and has been forwarded for Planning Commission consideration and recommendation to the Board of Commissioners. The recommendation from the Planning Commission is that the Board of Commissioner's evaluate the potential economic benefits, environmental impacts, infrastructure demands, and any other public effects associated with the proposed development. The Board of Commissioners should weigh these factors, along with public input, prior board actions, and consistency with the County's Comprehensive Plan, zoning ordinance, and long-term planning objectives, in making its determination.

THE CONDITIONS:

1. The development site shall only be used for commercial/industrial purposes of the special exception and as permitted by the zoning regulations applicable to it.
2. The development shall comply with all applicable local, state, and federal environmental regulations.
3. Prior to issuance of an LDP, the applicant shall provide a Letter of Service Availability from the electrical provider confirming capacity and acknowledging that the applicant will bear the cost of any required electrical infrastructure improvements.
4. The applicant shall apply for an LDP within one (1) year of final zoning approval, unless an extension is granted by the Board of Commissioners.
5. A minimum 300-foot undisturbed buffer shall be maintained where the subject property adjoins parcels 0060139, 00710001F00, 00710027A00, and 00710027. All other property boundaries shall maintain a minimum 50-foot buffer.
6. All heavy construction traffic and oversized loads shall utilize one of two designated routes: Interstate 20 > Georgia State Route 17/ US Highway 78 > Boneville Road > Randall Hunt Road or Interstate 20 > Georgia State Route 223 > Boneville Road > Randall Hunt Road. No other local roads are allowed for use.
7. Prior to issuance of the LDP, the owner shall submit a \$1.5 million bond guaranteeing the maintenance and end condition of approximately 4.5 miles of Boneville Road and the improved Randall Hunt Road
8. All infrastructure serving the development, including but not limited to roadway and utility system improvements, shall be constructed at the sole cost and expense of the developer and shall be designed, permitted, and inspected in accordance with County and utility authority requirements.

9. The developer shall include in the LDP submission plans for the design and construction of roadway improvements consisting of the paving and upgrading of approximately should be approx. 1.5 miles of Randall Hunt Road extending from Boneville Road to the project entrance. The expansion of this road is to be on the development side of the road as much as practicable. This is to meet McDuffie County Road Design and Construction Standards. Upon completion of the improvements, final inspection and acceptance by the County, the improved section of Randall Hunt Road shall be dedicated to McDuffie County for public maintenance. In addition, the developer shall extend the public water system from the existing 8-inch water main located on Boneville Road along Hampton Davis Road looping back to Old White Oak.
10. No groundwater withdrawal wells shall be permitted for the development or operation of the facility.
11. Water service installation for the site must tie into the Boneville Road water main and be routed down Hampton Davis Road.
12. All drains and sewers shall be connected with the public sewers of the City of Thomson/McDuffie County shall be made in accordance with the provisions of the City of Thomson/McDuffie County Codes, as amended.
13. The developer shall coordinate with the City of Thomson's Water and Sewer Utility to make necessary improvements to the sanitary sewer system to accommodate the development.
14. The facility shall include fire protection and suppression systems for both interior and exterior portions of the development in accordance with applicable local, state, and federal codes.
15. All structures, including any accessory buildings, shall be designed in a unified architectural style and be unified spatially.
16. No loading docks or areas shall be constructed or located fronting any street or within any setback areas.
17. The site shall be landscaped between all property and building lines within six months of completion of construction. Landscaping may include lawns, trees, and shrubs. If landscaping materials are destroyed or die, they shall be replaced as soon as practicable during the next suitable planting season. All steep banks or slopes shall be maintained with suitable grasses, trees, and shrubs to prevent erosion, exposure of dirt and clay, and an unsightly appearance.
18. All buildings, structures, and improvements constructed after the special exception has been approved shall be constructed and maintained in accordance with the following standards:
 - a. No wood frame structures will be permitted except for office space, and provided the exterior is finished with brick.
 - b. Exterior walls of all buildings and structures shall be finished with brick, tilt-up concrete, concrete panels, or their equivalent. There shall be no metal walls.
 - c. The color of all exterior walls, including those that are resurfaced or repainted, shall be compatible with the color scheme of the buildings and structures constructed on the site.
19. Erosion and sediment controls shall be installed by the developer of the site. The developer of the site shall be required to provide adequate drainage facilities, including controls of stormwater runoff resulting from precipitation. The amount of controls shall be at least sufficient to accommodate the estimated change in rate of stormwater runoff resulting from the placement of buildings and parking areas, and shall be discharged in a manner consistent with commonly accepted engineering practices and County requirements.
20. All generators shall be located, as much as practicable, within the interior of the site.
21. Noise generated by the facility during normal operations shall not exceed 70 dB measured at the exterior property line of parcels 0060139, 00710001F00, 00710027A00, and 00710027. A professional acoustic study shall be submitted with the Land Disturbance Permit (LDP) application and updated prior to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy (CO). Any required mitigation, such as berms, landscaping, sound walls, or acoustic enclosures, shall be installed prior to CO issuance.
22. All generators shall meet Tier IV emissions standards or equivalent and shall be screened or positioned so they are not visible from parcels 0060139, 00710001F00, 00710027A00, and 00710027. Generators shall operate only during emergencies, except for testing, limited to Monday—Friday, 9:00 am—5:00 pm Eastern Time.

23. All exterior lighting shall be shielded and directed downward to prevent spillovers onto adjacent residential properties. A photometric lighting plan shall be submitted with building plans for County review and approval.
24. Buildings shall be limited to a maximum height of two (2) stories. All rooftop equipment shall be screened from view from parcels 0060139, 00710001F00, 00710027A00, and 00710027 through vegetation, parapet walls, architectural screening, opaque fencing, or a combination.
25. Signs on the site shall comply with the following requirements:
 - a. Sign wording shall identify only the corporate name, trademark, and/or trade name of the owner and street address. No other advertising is permitted.
 - b. No sign casement (box) shall exceed eight feet in height nor ten feet in width.
 - c. All signs shall be set back a minimum of thirty feet from the street pavement.
 - d. No sign shall exceed a height of ten feet as measured from the base grade to the top of the casement.
 - e. There shall be no extensions or projections attached to or protruding from the sign casement.
 - f. There shall be no moving parts (including light reflecting tabs) associated with the sign.
 - g. All signs shall be internally lighted and no sign will be permitted to be intermittently lighted (i.e. no flashing or blinking signs).
 - h. All signs shall have a brick or masonry/stucco base.
26. Following completion of construction and commencement of operations, the owner shall continue Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) inspections for a period of two (2) years.
27. The owner/lessee of the site will be responsible for the maintenance, cleaning, and safety of the land, building, landscaping, exterior lighting, parking areas, and all other improvements, including the prompt removal of all trash, rubbish, lawn mowing, tree and plant trimmings. During construction, the developer shall ensure that access roads, public streets, and the construction site are kept free of unsightly accumulations of rubbish and scrap materials, and that construction materials, trailers, and the like are kept in a neat and orderly manner.
28. Owners/developers/lessees of the site shall not permit their employees, vendors, visitors, or tenants to park on access streets to the site. Parking areas in the site must be concrete, asphalt, or similarly surfaced off-street parking and driveways in conformance with all zoning regulations and all other applicable laws and regulations.
29. No new materials, supplies, waste, or rubbish shall be stored in any area except inside an enclosed building, unless screened by a wall, or other appropriate screen six feet in height or rising two feet above the stored material, whichever is higher. Storage of products on the site shall conform to zoning regulations and all other applicable laws and regulations.
30. The applicant shall submit, prior to issuance of any building permit, a Decommissioning Plan for County approval detailing procedures for the orderly shutdown of operations; removal of all above-ground and below-ground equipment, including servers, generators, fuel systems, batteries, and associated infrastructure; lawful disposal of materials; and environmental remediation, if necessary. The facility shall be deemed abandoned if operations cease for a continuous period of twelve (12) months. Upon abandonment, the property owner shall, within twelve (12) months, remove all data center-related equipment and improvements not intended for reuse, properly close and remove fuel systems, address any environmental conditions in accordance with applicable regulations, and restore the site to a condition suitable for future industrial or comparable lawful use. The County may require the posting of a performance bond, letter of credit, or other acceptable financial assurance, based on a third-party cost estimate, to ensure completion of decommissioning activities, and may require periodic updates to such estimate.

Each of these conditions shall run with the land, and breach of any one of them may be enjoined, abated, or remedied by the developer, its grantees, and their successors and assigns, or any other person who has an interest in the site, by such remedies as are provided for in law or in equity. These conditions shall be binding on the developer, their heirs, successors, devisees, or assigns.

Commissioner Jopling made the motion to approve the special exception with the planning zoning recommendations and Board of Commissioners conditions. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Wilson who then called for a roll call vote.

ROLL CALL:

Commissioner Hollimon – No

Commissioner Favors – Yes

Commissioner Jopling – Yes

Vice Chair Wilson – Yes

14. Hurricane Helene Timber Relief Program – February 2026 Report

Tax Commissioner Thomas asked for approval to refund \$200.54 for timber tax relief from Hurricane Helene from the 2nd Quarter of 2025.

Commissioner Jopling made a motion to approve this refund. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Wilson and passed unanimously.

15. ACO Report for February 2026

Tax Commissioner Thomas asked for approval to remove \$12,601.63 from the property tax digest. This decrease is due to the property tax digest appeals being settled from 2025. There were no changes to the mobile home digest.

Commissioner Jopling made a motion to approve removing \$12,601.63 from the property tax digest. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Favors and passed unanimously.

16. Consideration to Approve Revision of DOT Purchasing Policy

County Manager Burton went over the changes in the DOT purchasing policy. DOT had changes in how they structured their thresholds – into a micro and macro threshold in their new policy. DOT asked if we update ours to stay congruent with their policy. This does not change any business practice; it is basically internal definitions. In order to remain eligible for grant funding, they ask we update our policy to reflect their amended policy.

Commissioner Favors made a motion to approve the DOT purchasing policy. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jopling and passed unanimously.

17. Consideration to Award Audit RFP

County Manager Burton went over the RFP's received for Audit Services. CKH had the highest score ranked by 3 proposal reviewers of 89.3. CKH had this high score due to their past experience in a whole, and dealing with local and Georgia government, the size of the firm, the ability to keep up with their continuing education, and the qualifications of the staff itself. This company works with surrounding Counties. CKH is located in Sandy Springs.

Commissioner Favors made a motion to award this audit RFP. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jopling and passed unanimously.

18. Consideration to Approve New Time Attendance System

County Manager Burton stated that we have been using a local company, PayChex, however, we have outgrown the abilities that they can offer. The physical time clock systems are about \$2,500-\$3,000 when they break or become unserviceable. TMS is who the County used to use and now offers mobile

apps that employees can have on their phones. TMS also has the capability to have the app downloaded on a tablet, and the tablets are much less expensive to put in each location would require one. The mobile app can be geofenced, so you can't be in Augusta and clocking in to work. For people who are on call or called in after hours – they can still clock in, but the supervisor can go in and verify and approve this. Going with TMS would allow us to track leave request through the system and eliminate the step of having to keep up with paper. The city is willing to switch to this system as well. IT has approved this system. This is in the budget.

Commissioner Jopling made a motion to approve TMS as the new time attendance system. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Wilson and passed unanimously.

19. Consideration to Approve Hyper-Reach Agreement

Chief Sewell presented this agenda item. We are currently using Code Red as a notification system for weather alerts and other emergencies. Code Red has begun having issues. We have had this program for years and have not looked at any other agreements. Hyper-Reach is being used by Columbia County, 911 Director is very used to this system. This system will also provide an updated internal communication system for employees. The city would like to contribute some funds towards this as well. This is a year-to-year purchase. The public can sign up and receive text messages and emails to be aware. \$5995 is what this cost, and it is budgeted and less than what we would have paid for Code Red this year.

Vice Chair Wilson made a motion to approve the Hyper-Reach Agreement. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jopling and passed unanimously.

EXECUTIVE SESSION – PERSONNEL

Enter: Vice Chair Wilson made a motion to enter executive session at 7:50pm. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jopling and passed unanimously.

Exit: Commissioner Jopling made a motion to exit executive session at 8:11pm. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Favors and passed unanimously.

ACTION FROM EXECUTIVE SESSION (if any)

No action was taken.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Vice Chair Wilson to adjourn the regular meeting at 8:12pm. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Favors and passed unanimously.

MCDUFFIE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS


Chase N. Beggs, Chairman

ATTEST: 
Ashtyn L. Goodyear, County Clerk