



**CITY OF WALESKA
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
June 9, 2025**

Present: Mary Helen Lamb - Mayor
Dennis Cochran - Pro Tem
Eddie Blackwell - Councilmember
Kristi Bosch - Councilmember
Peter Brown - Councilmember
Michael Greene - Councilmember
Logan Patrick - Councilmember
Kim Kirsch - City Clerk/City Manager
Chris Lumpkin - Water Director
Lamar Rogers - Engineer
John Meier - City Attorney

Absent:

Item 1: Call to Order
Mayor Mary Helen Lamb called the meeting to order, with a quorum present.

Item 2: Pledge of Allegiance/Invocation
Mayor Lamb led the Pledge to the Flag
Councilmember Greene gave the Invocation

Item 3: Five Minute Public Hearing
Mr. Thomas Weaver came before the council with concerns as to current Waleska municipal ordinances 12-84(b) and 22-182 (1) (b). After discussion between the mayor, council, and city attorney it was agreed that Mrs. Kirsch will work with Mr. Meier in updating these ordinances over the next several weeks. Mrs. Kirsch will bring these ordinances back to the council for a first reading by the end of July 2025.

Mr. Justin Page appeared before the council to inform them that he has decided to run for Cherokee County Commissioner. Mr. Page would be running for District 1, which includes the City of Waleska. He stated how he is looking forward to working with the staff, mayor, and council of the City of Waleska if elected.

Item 4: Consideration to Approve Regular Council Meeting Minutes May 19, 2025

Mayor Mary Helen Lamb asked for a motion to approve the Regular Council Minutes for May 19, 2025. A motion was made by Councilmember Brown, seconded by Councilmember Cochran, and approved by all members present.

Item 5: Grant Perry – Reinhardt University Chaplain

Mr. Perry introduced himself to the mayor and council and asked them to think of ways the students at Reinhardt University can serve the community of Waleska via service projects. Mr. Perry reminded the council that not all students have access to transportation so any tasks that could be thought of within the city limits could benefit both students and community. Councilmember Bosch recommended he contact Goshen Valley Boys Ranch as they have workdays and will transport volunteers to help with whatever projects they have going on.

Item 6: JAT Consulting Presentation

Ms. Bembry, Vice President, Government Services introduced herself to the mayor and council. Mrs. Kirsch had been referred to Ms. Bembry by another municipality in relation to the financial consulting duties of the city. Ms. Bembry stated that JAT Consulting had been in business for 30 years, the company has approximately 35 employees, her division which consist of three specially trained employees that specialize in local governments. Ms. Bembry and her staff do service cities the size of the City of Waleska. Ms. Bembry has over twenty years of experience working in numerous local governments. JAT would be able to assist with oversight of credit card and payroll transactions, monthly review of general ledger, prepare monthly financial reports, assist with budget preparation and actual performance monthly, recommend improvements for efficiency and effectiveness, and provide support during the audit process. Mrs. Kirsch pointed out that Ms. Bembry was the one that discussed investing SPLOST funds in GA Fund 1 to help with revenue. This has not been done in the city before and would be a great benefit. Ms. Bembry has some other ideas as to how to increase revenue for Waleska based on the research she has done thus far. The council asked if she was involved with personal tax services to which she answered no. She is only involved and works for government municipalities. Another question was had she worked with a small city like Waleska to which the answer was yes, and a couple of examples given.

Item 7: 2025 Update – Local Emergency Operations Plan/Continuity of Government Plan – Updated

Mrs. Kirsch had reached out to Cherokee County per Mr. Meier to have the language in the plan changed from Vice-Mayor to Mayor Pro Tem. Mayor Mary Helen Lamb signed the plan; Mrs. Kirsch will email this to Cherokee County tomorrow.

Item 8: Abbington Hall discussion on variance letter – update council

Mr. Coogle addressed the council about the need for a variance letter. Mr. Coogle and his engineer are working on addressing review comments laid out by the review team with Cherokee County. Mr. Rogers mentioned that two water meters will be needed as he did not want a fire meter servicing the entire property to which Mr. Coogle agreed. Mr. Rogers also asked how many trees will be taken out for the project. Mr. Coogle stated no trees will be taken out for this project. Mr. Rogers is finishing his review of this project which should be completed soon. Mr. Coogle has not completed the variance application with Cherokee County. That will happen after they address the review comments from the county and feel like they are ready to move forward. The county has questions about encroachment into 30' buffer, parking reduction, sidewalk (3-way stop), typical roadway cross-section, driveway radii, sight distance, right turn decal lane, parking space sizing, existing retaining wall. Councilmember Greene stated he will not be comfortable approving of anything until Mr. Rogers has completed his review and is satisfied that all issues have been resolved. Mr. Coogle agreed and assured the council he and his engineer are working diligently to complete the questions/concerns put forth by Mr. Rogers as well as the review comments by Cherokee County. Mr. Coogle stated that once they do receive the permit from Cherokee County kickoff construction should start within 30 – 60 days. Mr. Meier said once the county deems the project completed then it will come back to the City of Waleska to post signage and run in the newspaper. After the public hearing the city council can grant or deny a variance, but we must have guidance from Cherokee County per our IGA. Mr. Coogle was given contact information of a couple of employees in the building/permitting/P&Z departments in the county. This will help keep the lines of communication open. Councilmember Greene also confirmed with Mr. Coogle that the City of Waleska will no longer be responsible for sanitary sewer. Mr. Coogle also let the council know that the property will be on the historic register around October/November.

Item 9: Highpoint Discussion – Mr. Ledford – principal developer

Mr. Ledford, with Gateway, advised the council that his group is trying to revive a project that started in 2017/2018. His group made an agreement with the bank to try and resurrect the project. He admitted that Gateway has done a poor job of communicating with the City of Waleska since starting the project back up which has been close to thirteen months. They have taken the original concept from 69 homes to 63 homes due to the topography of the land. His company was under the assumption that the prior developer had received approval from the City of Waleska to provide water for this project. They are now aware after a conversation and email exchange with Mrs. Kirsch that this is not the case. They will continue to communicate with Mr. Rogers with Turnipseed Engineers and proceed with the review process. They do understand that they will be responsible for the review cost to Turnipseed Engineer. It was stressed by Mr. Rogers and Mrs. Kirsch that the developer will be required to purchase a pump station and that must also be approved

by Mr. Rogers. Mr. Rogers asked about fire-flow and how that would work. Mr. Bampfield with Hussey Gay Bell told Mr. Rogers his company had done at least three tests for fire protection. Mr. Rogers advised the city council that they must keep this on their radar as these plans, and this development makes its way through the review process. Mr. Bampfield advised Mr. Rogers he would run calculations for fire-flow and report back to him.

Item 10: Proposed Budget 25-26 Discussion

Mrs. Kirsch presented the proposed budget for 25-26 to the council. The surplus in the General Fund as it stands right now is \$11,298.52. A discussion was held about how to increase the surplus. A recommendation is to increase the mill rate/property taxes. The city is currently at 2.037% M&O. The decision was made to increase the mill rate/property tax rate to 3.00%. The mill rate has not increased in the last fifteen years so this is something the city must do to have increased revenue in the General Fund. Unfortunately, there are not many places in the General Fund where revenue can be increased. Mrs. Kirsch had a chart of all other local municipalities mill rates and Waleska has been historically low. Councilmember Greene recommended that the city not go as high as Ball Ground as the City of Ball Ground does have more amenities for the community. A motion was made by Councilmember Greene, seconded by Councilmember Bosch, and approved by all members present to increase the mill rate to 3.00%.

A discussion was held about increasing the cost of streetlights. We are currently at \$5.00 a month, which is paid for by 136 customers in the city limit. The city's bill from Georgia Power is double what the city currently takes in in revenue. The decision was made to increase streetlights to \$9.00 a month per resident. Next year we can increase another \$9.00 to break even on the power bill. A motion was made by Councilmember Greene, seconded by Councilmember Cochran, and approved by all members present to increase streetlights monthly amount to \$9.00 from \$5.00 a month per resident.

Mrs. Kirsch discussed the surplus of \$643,169.49. This includes an increase in the water rate of \$8.00 a month for residential properties. With a \$5.00 increase a month for residential properties that would inject an extra \$109,860.00 into revenue. Councilmember Cochran suggested that Mr. Rogers and Mr. Lumpkin coordinate with maintenance at Reinhardt University and the Fire Department to test each fire hydrant meter and water meter on campus, see what buildings are fed by what meter and see if there are any issues that we don't know about currently that could be part of the city's water loss. Another suggestion by Mr. Lumpkin and Mr. Rogers is to have the City of Canton complete a backflow test on the meter that Waleska shares with them located at Chestnut Hill. Mrs. Kirsch will reach out to the engineer at the City of Canton to request this be done as it was pointed out by Mr. Rogers that Waleska's water purchase agreement with the City of Canton states we can request them to test their backflow once a year (every 12 months) on that meter. Mr. Lumpkin did have the city's backflow tested yesterday on our side

of this meter and it is working properly. Mrs. Kirsch will also send out an email to Mr. Dale with Reinhardt University, Mr. Lumpkin, and Mr. Rogers about setting up a time for the three of them to test all meters at Reinhardt University Campus. Mr. Rogers reminded everyone that after this has been completed the city will need to send out a boil-water notification. Councilmember Cochran also suggested that we have levels of base rates for our nineteen commercial customers. Currently that base rate is \$21.84. Councilmember Blackwell suggested a flat rate/fee because we are not certain where the leaks are. Mrs. Kirsch assured the council that the need to install new lines and replace the old blue poly lines would be paid for with the surplus in the water fund.

Councilmember Greene suggested keeping the water rate as it is after hearing Mr. Rogers and Mr. Lumpkin discuss a plan for the Chestnut Hill meter and researching Reinhardt University fire hydrant meters and all meters on camps. The budget can be amended if needed and a rate increase can also be implemented if need be after we have solid information to present to the council at the next meeting.

Mrs. Kirsch also suggested investing \$1 million in SPLOST funds into GA Fund 1. Based on current interest rates for GA Fund 1 if the city could leave that money in that account the interest for the year would be around \$47,000.00. This would be a great asset to the city when it comes to revenue and utilizing those funds for new projects and water system improvements.

The council will take another look at the proposed budget at the next council meeting.

Item 11: Discuss sick carryover time for Chris Lumpkin

Mrs. Kirsch advised the council that she needed a motion for Mr. Lumpkin to carry over 11.5 hours of sick time per Mrs. Bracken. Mrs. Kirsch had sent a text to the council when the policy changed so that only 20 hours of sick time could be carried over and they did approve the carryover of the 11.5 hours of sick time in that text. A motion was made by Councilmember Greene, seconded by Councilmember Brown, and approved by all members present to allow Chris to carry those 11.5 hours of sick time over. Mrs. Kirsch will let Mrs. Smith know so she can adjust the payroll system and have documentation for the auditor.

Item 12: Derelict and Blighted Property – Attorney Update Version, First Reading

Mr. Meier and Mrs. Kirsch presented an updated copy to the council that Mr. Meier had edited to reflect the City of Waleska. Everyone on the council was happy with the edited version so it can proceed to a second reading at the next council meeting on June 23rd, 2025.

Item 13: Water Report

- Mr. Rogers let the council know that the drinking water project will kick off on June 19th. Mr. Lumpkin will be the point of contact for this project. The ETA for completion is 60 -90 days.
- Mr. Rogers dug into the water loss. He stated the city should not be looking at gallons lost but percentage of loss as that is the industry standard. Waleska was at 39% water loss, however in the last 12 months that percentage has dropped to 24%. Mr. Rogers stated this is nothing to jump up about, but it is a very good improvement. He would like to see the city at a 20% loss or even less but 20% would be the goal for the size of our water system. In the last 12 months the city has bought 2 million gallons less per month from CCWSA and the City of Canton than the prior year. He stated the numbers are jumping around and he cannot explain why they are jumping around but he has a couple of thoughts he is going to investigate. Mr. Rogers did a calculation based on the number of students attending, number of students in the apartment/dorms, number of cafeteria seats and came up with a daily usage of 79,236 gallons. The last 27 months the monthly use was 63,382, the last 12 months it was 76,481 which is closer to his calculations but that does not include irrigation.
- Councilmember Cochran mentioned fire hydrant meters at Reinhardt University. This was notated in the budget section of these minutes. He wants to know if a meter is cut off and they still have water in a building then where is that water coming from.
- On the meter located at Chestnut Hill the original number of houses that were to be supplied by that location is 109 homes. Mr. Lumpkin added that he has been doing research and found that according to the Omni meter specifications we should have 30" of straight pipe leading into this meter for an accurate reading. On this meter there is an immediate 90° angle which could cause the meter to read less, which means we are selling less to Canton. Mr. Rogers suggested that Mr. Lumpkin find out if this would make a small percentage difference or a significant difference.
- Mrs. Kirsch provided the council with a copy of the water purchase agreement from the City of Canton and CCWSA. She has saved those electronically and a paper copy.

Item 14: City Manager's Report

- Mrs. Kirsch let the council know that Mrs. Setser has been saving old minutes from 1946 – 1960 electronically. She requested that someone with a large safe store these documents as there is not adequate space in the safe at city hall. Councilmember Brown volunteered to store them in his safe.
- Mrs. Kirsch requested that the gazebo be painted white. There is some small termite damage, but those boards will be replaced. The council was happy with this suggestion.
- Mrs. Kirsch let the council know that Mrs. Setser suggested the city have a community garden on the lot next to city hall. Mrs. Kirsch also asked the council to think about a pumpkin patch or egg hunt. The council was open to all these suggestions.
- Mrs. Kirsch asked the council to review a couple of house plans. One was located at 758 Darby Road and 371 McCurry Trail. The council agreed that these can proceed to Cherokee County for their review and we can sale them a water meter.
- Mrs. Kirsch let the council know that SPLOST increased by over 7% last month, which is always good news.
- Mrs. Kirsch let the council know that the staff had received numerous complaints about customers not receiving their bills. Mrs. Kirsch completed a complaint form online with the post office. That complaint was sent to the incorrect post office, so Mrs. Kirsch submitted another complaint. Mrs. Kirsch told the council she would like to hand out the number to the Palmetto Post Office branch to give to customers next month if things have not improved with mail delivery. The city pays a good bit of money for postage and customers should be receiving their bills on time. The council was okay with staff handing out the number to the Palmetto branch.
- Mrs. Kirsch has been in contact with govdeals.com about selling the pump station that has been in the city hall parking lot for some time now. There is a fee of 12.5% fee that the buyer must pay. Mrs. Kirsch is also waiting on an email from GMA to verify there isn't any other paperwork that needs to be done before this is advertised with govdeals. The council was okay with selling the pump station off as a whole or in parts.

- Mrs. Kirsch told the council she reached out to Mr. Morton with Cherokee County to thank him for all the work Mr. Ralston and his staff have done for the city as far as repaving Grady Street (east) and Byers Street. Mrs. Kirsch contacted LMIG about the payment procedure for these projects. LMIG will pay \$40,041.62 and the City of Waleska will be responsible for the 30% match of \$8,689.76. Part of that \$40,041.62 is zero match. The city must spend its FY23 LMIG \$9,710.24 quickly or it will be clawed back. LMIG money will only be available for three years. Mr. Morton with the county will be sending a bill soon for payment and Mr. Ralston will have these streets and speed bumps painted as soon as the weather allows.
- Mrs. Kirsch requested that the council switch financial consultants from Welch Walker & Associates to JAT Consulting. This is based on several factors, the main one being having someone available monthly throughout the year, also to meet deadlines, the city is out of audit extensions. If a city runs out of extensions, which Mrs. Kirsch has been told Waleska has, then the city can no longer qualify for grant money. A motion was made by Councilmember Greene, seconded by Councilmember Bosch, and approved by all members present to change the city's financial consultant from Welch Walker & Associates to JAT Consulting.

Item 15: City Attorney's Report

- Mr. Meier informed the council that it would be beneficial to review recently passed laws and compare them to the city's municipal code. Mrs. Kirsch would like to schedule a workshop for the council to review all ordinances.
- Mr. Meier will review Mr. Weaver's request to amend a couple of ordinances in municode. These will be brought to the council by the end of July as this will require some research.

Item 16: Mayor's Report

None

Item 17: Council Remarks

None

Item 18: Adjourn Regular Council Meeting

APPROVED THIS 23rd DAY OF June, 2025.

Mary Helen Lamb

Mary Helen Lamb, Mayor

Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kim Kirsch", positioned above a horizontal line.

Kim Kirsch, City Clerk