Putnam County Board of Commissioners

117 Putnam Drive, Suite A ◊ Eatonton, GA 31024

Work Session
Minutes
Tuesday, June 16, 2026 ◊ 9:00 AM
Putnam County Administration Building – Room 203

Opening

The Putnam County Board of Commissioners met for a Work Session on Tuesday, June 16, 2026 at approximately 9:00 AM in the Putnam County Administration Building, 117 Putnam Drive, Room 203, Eatonton, Georgia.

Present:
Chairman Bill Sharp, Commissioner Tom McElhenney, Commissioner Steve Hersey (arrived late), Commissioner Jeff Wooten

Absent:
Commissioner Richard Garrett

Staff Present:
County Attorney Simon Williams, Interim County Manager Byron Lombard, County Clerk Lynn Butterworth

1. Welcome - Call to Order

Chairman Sharp called the meeting to order at approximately 9:00 a.m.
(Copy of agenda made a part of the minutes on minute book page ___________.)

2. Approval of Agenda

Motion to Approve the Agenda.
Motion made by Tom McElhenney, Seconded by Jeff Wooten.
Voting Yea: Bill Sharp, Tom McElhenney, Jeff Wooten
Voting Nay: None
Motion Passed

Commissioner Hersey arrived at approximately 9:06 a.m.

3. Pledge of Allegiance (staff)

Chairman Sharp led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Work Session

4. Local Homestead Option Sales Tax (LHOST)

ACCG County Consulting Services Associate Alicia Vaughn presented Legislative Updates and information on SB 33/SB 566/LHOST/FLOST.

Discussion was held comparing the Floating Local Option Sales Tax (FLOST) and the Local Homestead Option Sales Tax (LHOST). County Manager Lombard presented information on the most recent 12-months of sales tax collections. Options concerning the best time to bring this before the voters were also discussed. No action was taken.

(Copy of presentation made a part of the minutes on minute book pages __________ to __________.)

5. Campaign Signs at Putnam County Administration Building

County Manager Lombard introduced a draft policy governing election signs and campaign activity at the County Administration property. The board agreed that some structure is needed but asked the County Attorney and County Manager to review and revise the proposed policy. No action was taken.

(Copy of draft policy made a part of the minutes on minute book pages __________ to __________.)

6. Putnam County Personnel Policy

County Manager Lombard advised that he reviewed the current Putnam County Personnel Policy and presented a redlined version to the board for review. Sections discussed included Casual Attire, a new Floating Holiday, converting from Sick Leave/Annual Leave to Paid Time Off (PTO), Pay Grade after Transfer, the possession of firearms, and the final reasonable interpretation of the policy. The proposed changes will be refined and presented to the board for approval at a regular meeting. No action was taken.

The meeting recessed at approximately 11:05 a.m.
The meeting reconvened at approximately 11:22 a.m.

7. Resolution in Connection with the Constitutional Carry Act

County Manager Lombard introduced a resolution regarding security arrangements for the County Administration Building and other county owned buildings in connection with the "Constitutional Carry Act." Discussion focused on aligning board policy with the state’s constitutional carry act. The Admin Building has no security screening; therefore, under the act, lawful carry is permitted for the public. Under this proposal, if adopted, employees exercising carry rights must submit a copy of their weapons carry license or a written attestation of lawful carrier status for personnel files. The conclustion was to place the resolution on the next regular meeting agenda for board consideration. No action was taken.

(Copy of resolution made a part of the minutes on minute book pages __________ to __________.)

8. Hospital Fee

In a discussion regarding funding for Putnam General Hospital, County Manager Lombard advised that the board can create a special tax district by adopting a resolution; a Hosptial fee would appear as a separate line item on annual tax bills. The fee would be per parcel, not limited to residences; intended to spread cost across all property owners. The rationale for a fee is because the hospital is a community asset; the fee approach balances burden versus millage-based funding that falls heavily on high-value properties. While there is no legal obligation for the county to fund the hospital; some cite moral obligations and commissioners agreed on the importance of the hospital to the community. Selling the concept to voters may hinge on demonstrating millage impacts. Next steps include coordinating with the Tax Assessors office if a fee is adopted to ensure proper billing setup. A sample resolution was provided. No action was taken.
(Copy of resolution made a part of the minutes on minute book page __________.)

Work Session recessed for lunch at approximately 12:11 p.m.
Work Session reconvened at approximately 12:54

9. Hospital Indigent Care Intergovernmental Agreement

An intergovernmental agreement was proposed to require the hospital to quantify the cost of indigent care provided to Putnam County residents. To qualify as county-funded indigent care, patients must be confirmed Putnam County residents and meet federal poverty guidelines. The hospital would be required to bill the county at reimbursable rates, such as insurance contract rates, rather than full private-pay rates. The hospital would provide an annual anonymous report detailing: residency verification, indigence qualification, and total dollar amount of qualifying care. The county would have audit rights under the agreement. The board viewed the agreement as a way to distinguish true indigent care costs from a general hospital operational subsidy. No action was taken.
(Copy of agreement made a part of the minutes on minute book pages __________ to __________.)

10. Solid Waste Fee

County Manager Lombard advised that solid waste service costs continue to rise and are currently funded through ad valorem property taxes, primarily affecting high-value property owners. The current solid waste cost is tied to the Special Service District (SSD) millage rate of approximately 0.6 mills. A proposal was discussed to replace the SSD property tax millage with a direct solid waste fee on residentially improved parcels. The fee would spread costs among end-users, including city residents if structured countywide. There was general agreement to move forward with a solid waste fee but the exact fee amount and budget figures must be confirmed. A proposed resolution was presented. No action was taken.
(Copy of resolution made a part of the minutes on minute book pages __________ to __________.)

11. Transportation Special Purpose Local Action Sales Tax (TSPLOST #3)

County Manager Lombard advised that a letter must be sent to the city regarding the TSPLOST process. A required meeting with the city cannot be held until at least 10 days after the letter is delivered. The earliest possible meeting date was identified as June 27, 2026, due to the 10-day notice requirement. The city manager has been asked to place the intergovernmental agreement on their agenda for the first meeting in July. The draft agreement includes a placeholder for the revenue split. Previous and current discussions referenced possible 75/25 and 80/20 splits, with 75/25 described as likely but not formally approved.

Motion to authorize the Chairman to sign a letter to the City of Eatonton regarding scheduling a TSPLOST joint meeting.
Motion made by Jeff Wooten, Seconded by Tom McElhenney.
Voting Yea: Tom McElhenney, Steve Hersey, Jeff Wooten
Voting Nay: None
Motion Passed
(Copy of letter made a part of the minutes on minute book page __________.)
(Copy of proposed IGA and resolution made a part of the minutes on minute book pages __________ to __________.)

12. Moratorium on Putnam County Code of Ordinances — Chapter 48 (Signs)

County Manager Lombard advised that the current sign ordinance was adopted on July 17, 2007. Commissioners noted that the county has changed significantly since then. Concerns included: excessive or permissive signage, impacts on rural character, impacts on commercial corridors, and safety issues involving banner materials. A 180-day moratorium on new sign permits was proposed while a new sign ordinance is drafted. No action was taken.

13. Putnam County Code of Ordinances — Chapter 18 (Buildings and Building Regulations)

The board discussed standards for nuisance and blighted properties. Commissioners emphasized the need for objective, clear standards, especially for vacant and unoccupied properties. Some occupied houses are in poor condition, but owners choose to live that way, raising enforcement concerns. The county has adopted the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC), but several provisions were identified as overly intrusive or impractical. Concerns were also raised about subjective language in the current ordinance. The current nuisance ordinance and IPMC may be difficult to enforce consistently and may impose practical or financial burdens, especially if demolition costs exceed property value. The board discussed using increased property taxes as an enforcement mechanism for vacant, unlivable properties. The board supports replacing the current nuisance and property maintenance framework with a more objective and enforceable ordinance based on constitutional authority. A public hearing will be required to repeal the current IPMC and nuisance ordinance. No action was taken.

14. Putnam County Code of Ordinances — Chapter 53 (Energy Creation, Energy Storage, and Digital Infrastructure)

The work session included a review of proposed changes to Chapter 53, addressing: energy creation, energy storage, and digital infrastructure. A notable change removed "whenever possible" from the closed-loop system requirement for data centers, making closed-loop systems mandatory. Battery storage language from a subject matter expert was sent to Adam in the attorney's office for review. Decommissioning was identified as a major concern because technology changes rapidly. A change was noted to increase the minimum setback to 1,000 feet. Chapter 53 revisions are ongoing, with further attorney review needed, especially for battery storage and decommissioning provisions. No action was taken.

Closing

15. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting.
Motion made by Tom McElhenney, Seconded by Jeff Wooten.
Voting Yea: Bill Sharp, Tom McElhenney, Steve Hersey, Jeff Wooten
Voting Nay: None
Motion Passed

Meeting adjourned at approximately 3:43 p.m.

ATTEST:

Lynn Butterworth
County Clerk

B. W. "Bill" Sharp
Chairman