Effingham County Georgia
Board of Commissioners

Damon M. Rahn, Chairman at Large
Forrest F. Floyd, District 1
Roger Burdette, District 2
Jamie Deloach, District 3
Elizabeth Helmly, District 4
Phil Kieffer, District 5

# WORK SESSION MEETING MINUTES
# APRIL 21, 2026

The Board of Commissioners of Effingham County, Georgia, Mr. Damon Rahn, Mr. Forrest Floyd, Mr. Roger Burdette, Mr. Jamie Deloach, Ms. Elizabeth Helmly and Mr. Phil Kieffer, met in work session at 4:00pm on Tuesday, April 21, 2026 in the Commissioners Meeting Chambers at the Effingham County Administrative Complex located at 804 South Laurel Street Springfield, Georgia 31329.

## STAFF PARTICIPATION

Mr. Tim Callanan – County Manager, Mr. Edward Newberry – County Attorney, Ms. Stephanie Johnson – County Clerk, Ms. Tasheena Shiggs – Deputy County Clerk, Ms. Marie Todd – Executive Assistant, Ms. Pamela Melser – Director of Development Services, Ms. Akela Wright – Planning Manager, Ms. Kimberly Barlett – Senior Planner, Mr. Josh Moody – Building Official and Mr. Jack Burgin Jr. – Sr System Administrator.

## CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Josh Yeager.

## I - CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Rahn called the session to order at 4:04pm

## II- WORK SESSION TOPICS

## DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE EFFINGHAM COUNTY CODE OF ORDINANCES, PART II, APPENDIX C, ARTICLE III, SECTIONS 3.24, 3.25, AND 3.26 -NONCONFORMING (1):

Planning Manager Wright presented updates to the non-conforming section of the ordinance aimed at clarifying that property owners may maintain and repair their property without unnecessary hurdles. A key change includes increasing the allowed expansion of non-conforming structures to 50%, though Wright suggested a potential compromise of 35% based on Board feedback. This expansion is conditioned on the requirement that it does not exacerbate existing non-conformities, allowing for reasonable improvements while preventing uncontrolled growth. The overall intent of these revisions is to streamline the process for minor additions, such as carports or swimming pools, thereby reducing the administrative burden of frequent rezonings and variances for simple lot improvements.

The Board engaged in a lengthy discussion regarding the balance between encouraging property owners to bring lots into compliance and protecting their right to use their land. Chairman Rahn and County Manager Callanan noted past difficulties where rigid requirements forced residents through the rezoning process for minor changes, even when setbacks were met. Commissioner Floyd reminded the Board that zoning follows the property rather than the structure and noted the absence of a traditional grandfather clause. The conversation touched on the complexities of AR-1 districts, where historical zoning often created lots that do not meet modern acreage requirements, inadvertently creating barriers for residents wishing to build accessory dwelling units or secondary homes.

To address concerns regarding density and future development, Planning Manager Wright proposed language ensuring that any enlargement of a non-conforming structure must comply with current zoning standards to the maximum extent practicable. The Board emphasized the need for a clear, standardized definition of a "hardship" and a formal "test scale" for variances to provide better clarity for the public. While some members expressed concern over potential conflicts with existing ordinances or state law, the County Attorney noted that the Board must ultimately choose between a rigid or flexible framework. The discussion concluded with a recommendation to redline the proposed changes for further review and to schedule an additional workshop to refine the definitions of development and variances before moving forward.

## DISCUSSION OF THE UPCOMING SPLOST AND OTHER RELATED TOPICS (2):

County Manager Callanan explained the distribution of funds to cities based on tier two projects and population, and confirmed General Obligation (GO) Bonds would be issued, with borrowed funds distributed to cities and repaid through penny sales tax.

Project categories for the referendum include parks, roads, fire equipment, stormwater, and facilities. A suggestion was made to create a separate category for broadband or using grants for such projects.

## III – ADJOURNMENT

At 4:30 pm, being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Damon Rahn, Chairman

Stephanie D. Johnson, County Clerk

**APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**
**MAY 5, 2026**