

PUTNAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



117 Putnam Drive, Suite A ♦ Eatonton, GA 31024

Minutes

Friday, February 7, 2025 ♦ 10:00 AM

Putnam County Administration Building – Room 203

The Putnam County Board of Commissioners met on Friday, February 7, 2025 at approximately 10:00 AM in the Putnam County Administration Building, 117 Putnam Drive, Room 203, Eatonton, Georgia.

PRESENT

Chairman Bill Sharp
Commissioner Tom McElhenney
Commissioner Richard Garrett
Commissioner Steve Hersey
Commissioner Jeff Wooten

STAFF PRESENT

County Attorney Adam Nelson
County Manager Paul Van Haute
County Clerk Lynn Butterworth
Deputy County Clerk Mercy Fluker

Opening

1. Welcome-Call to Order

Chairman Sharp called the meeting to order at approximately 10:02 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 Commissioner Hersey, Seconded by Commissioner McElhenney.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Garrett, Commissioner Hersey, Commissioner Wooten

3. Invocation

Mrs. Robin Benton, First Baptist Church Eatonton, gave the invocation.

4. Pledge of Allegiance (TM)

Commissioner McElhenney led the Pledge of Allegiance.

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Regular Business Meeting

5. Public Comments

County Attorney Nelson read the rules of public comments.

Ms. Barbara Vargo commented on the Facebook Live-Streaming agenda item from the January 3, 2025 meeting.

6. Consent Agenda

- a. Approval of Minutes - January 3, 2025 Regular Business Meeting (staff-CC)
- b. Approval of Minutes - January 24, 2025 Called Meeting (staff-CC)
- c. Approval of Minutes - January 29, 2025 Called Meeting (staff-CC)
- d. Approval of 2025 Alcohol Licenses (staff-CC)

Commissioner Garrett requested to remove Item b.

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda, items a, c, and d.

Motion made by Commissioner Hersey, Seconded by Commissioner Garrett.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Garrett, Commissioner Hersey, Commissioner Wooten

(Copy of alcohol licenses made a part of the minutes on minute book pages _____ to _____.)

Motion to approve Consent Agenda, item b with the addition of the following sentence in Item 5: "Commissioners Hersey and Garrett made a case to hold public hearings, not necessarily with the intention to opt out but to give the commissioners and citizens the opportunity to further discuss an emergent and multi-faceted issue and to ensure the BOC's final decision is as informed as possible."

Motion made by Commissioner Garrett, Seconded by Commissioner Hersey.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Garrett, Commissioner Hersey, Commissioner Wooten

7. Appeal by Ann Foster of the Planning & Zoning Commission decision to grant sideline setback at 407 E. Riverbend Drive (staff-P&D)

Ms. Ann Foster from 409 E. Riverbend Drive presented her appeal and asked the board to override the sideline setback approval of the Planning & Zoning Commission and require them to take the structure out.

Mr. Dan Butler signed in but yielded his comments to Ms. Jennifer Bass.

Ms. Jennifer Bass from 407 E. Riverbend Drive distributed a handout and presented her case on why the appeal should be denied. The Commissioners agreed to give additional time beyond the three minute limit.

Planning and Development Director Lisa Jackson provided a summary of what had taken place so far and the Planning & Zoning Commission’s decision.

Motion to grant a 3.25 foot right side variance, being 11.75 feet from property line at 407 East Riverbend Drive, conditioned on the requirement that a retaining wall and any structures attached to the retaining wall be located within the variance.

Motion made by Commissioner Hersey, Seconded by Commissioner Garrett.

Commissioner Garrett requested to hear from Mr. Dan Butler.

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Mr. Dan Butler explained that he is the builder and admitted that they made a mistake by connecting the pool to the retaining wall but fixed everything within the conditions of the variance.

Chairman Sharp called for the question.

Commissioner McElhenney and Commissioner Wooten agreed to call for the question.

Commissioner Garrett and Commissioner Hersey wanted to continue discussion.

Chairman Sharp broke the tie by agreeing to call for the question.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Garrett, Commissioner Hersey

Voting Nay: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Wooten, Chairman Sharp

Motion Failed

Motion to table the Appeal by Ann Foster of the Planning & Zoning Commission decision to grant sideline setback at 407 E. Riverbend Drive to the March 7, 2025 Regular Business Meeting.

Motion made by Commissioner Garrett, Seconded by Commissioner Hersey.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Garrett, Commissioner Hersey

Voting Nay: Commissioner Wooten

(Copy of handout made a part of the minutes on minute book pages _____ to _____.)

Meeting recessed at approximately 11:18 a.m.

Meeting reconvened at approximately 11:27 a.m.

8. Authorization for Chairman to sign Acknowledgment of Memorandum of Understanding between the Putnam Development Authority and Harmony Road GA, LLC (BS)
Putnam Development Authority Executive Director Matt Poyner presented information about the PDA and commented on the Harmony Road project, including information about the home sizes, bond, and tax abatements.

Mr. Jim Stiff from Goodwill Industries/Helms College commented on the PUD for the Harmony Road project, their relationship with Matt Mills and Southeastern, and the residential portion compared to the commercial portion of the project.

Mr. Matt Mills from Southeastern presented information on the background of his company and the plans they have for the Harmony Road project.

Mr. Kevin Brown, attorney for the Putnam Development Authority, commented on a previous 20-year abatement for Rock Eagle Technology Park.

Ms. Connie Covington commented on the cost of rent for public workers, the abatement, traffic, and other subdivisions on Harmony Road.

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Mr. Bill Wilkinson commented on his concerns about the changes to the project, the lack of transparency, and requested more meetings with the public.

Ms. Erin Olson commented on the Code of Ordinances definition regarding tiny houses, the accuracy of the information given, property taxes, and traffic reports.

Mr. Eddie Wilkerson commented on Morgan and Greene Counties versus Putnam County, school tax exemptions, and low income housing.

Mr. Greg Stewart asked questions regarding the cost to taxpayers, the tax abatement, and the location of the project.

Mr. William Vargo commented on his concerns with the changes made to the proposal, the number of houses, the length of the abatement, and the agreement between Harmony Road LLC and Putnam County.

Ms. Libby Chapman commented on tax exemptions, established rentals, the tax abatement, the bond, and requested the board reconsider due to still having a lot of questions.

Mr. Donnie Chapman commented on the numbers and the abatement.

Ms. Susan Larson commented on the changes that would be necessary for the schools, including school buses, trailers, supplies, bus driver and teacher salaries, continued costs, and the intersections and roundabouts on Harmony Road and 44.

Ms. Barbara Vargo commented on the tax abatement, local builders, the contract, and other options including a water park, a convention center/motel, or rebuilding the jail.

Mr. AJ Williams commented on the purchase agreement, infrastructure and road maintenance, road access, and the value of property owners nearby.

Mr. Cameron Smith commented on the location, the lasting impact, mixed opinions, inflated numbers, and the implications.

Ms. Tracy Hall commented on her experience as a business owner, tax abatements, profit margins, and setting a bad precedence.

Mr. Jerry Swafford commented on the length of the abatement, zoning and size structure, property owners and voters, and requested the board to reconsider.

Ms. Jennifer Ray commented on Putnam County's growth, the length of the abatement, and the details of the MOU.

Mr. Billy Webster commented on what the agenda states versus what is presented on the signature page and the precedent that would be set.

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Mr. Rick McAllister, the author of the preliminary plat, addressed the question of “Why this?”, and commented on the goals presented to the county, job creation, quality housing, the variety of housing options, TRC negotiations, and the guidelines set up in the comprehensive land plan.

Mr. Tom Frey commented on his personal and business property, the natural changes as the plan progresses, the abatement, and Putnam County’s growth.

The following people signed in to speak but did not make comments:

- Mr. John Fox
- Mr. Tom McAdams
- Mr. Derick Austin
- Mr. Joe Arrington
- Mr. Nick Friedrich

Motion for Chairman to not sign Acknowledgment of Memorandum of Understanding between the Putnam Development Authority and Harmony Road GA, LLC.

Motion made by Commissioner McElhenney, Seconded by Commissioner Wooten.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Garrett, Commissioner Hersey, Commissioner Wooten

Motion to direct staff to schedule three town hall meetings, one in March, one in April, one in May, to discuss the proposed Memorandum of Understanding between the Putnam Development Authority and Harmony Road Ga, LLC.

Motion made by Commissioner Garrett, seconded by Commissioner Wooten.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Garrett, Commissioner Hersey, Commissioner Wooten

9. Authorization for Chairman to sign Resolution to Transfer Surplus Property to the Eatonton-Putnam Water and Sewer Authority (staff-CM)

County Manager Van Haute explained the resolution and that the property has already been surplussed.

Motion to authorize Chairman to sign Resolution to Transfer Surplus Property to the Eatonton-Putnam Water and Sewer Authority.

Motion made by Commissioner McElhenney, Seconded by Commissioner Wooten.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Garrett, Commissioner Hersey, Commissioner Wooten

(Copy of resolution made a part of the minutes on minute book page _____.)

10. Submission of Names for Appointment to the Hospital Authority-Post 4 (staff-CC)

Motion to submit the following names for appointment to the Hospital Authority-Post 4: Tom Thompson, Phillip Ethridge, and Rachel Deraney Harvey.

Motion made by Commissioner Garrett, Seconded by Commissioner McElhenney.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Garrett, Commissioner Hersey, Commissioner Wooten

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Reports/Announcements

11. County Manager Report

No report.

12. County Attorney Report

County Attorney Nelson refuted the public comment made earlier that Putnam County has nothing and expressed appreciation to the Board for their commitment, time, and effort.

13. Commissioner Announcements

Commissioner McElhenney: commented that he appreciates the community's input and involvement and is available anytime.

Commissioner Garrett: echoed Commissioner McElhenney’s comments and commented that he has tried to be transparent and responsive; encouraged all to attend “The Color Purple” at the Plaza; invited everyone to Butler Baker Alumni Project’s Annual Luncheon March 22nd at noon, tickets are \$40.

Commissioner Hersey: reported plans to request a public hearing for the second meeting in March to abolish PUD components of zoning.

Commissioner Wooten: commented that he appreciates the crowd here today, wishes it was this way all the time; has lived here 63 years and disagrees with the comment "Putnam County has nothing."

Chairman Sharp: commented that he has lived here 29 years; that Putnam County has the best sheriff, beautiful recreation centers, the tax commissioner & assessors do great, and the millage rate is lower than it was in 2019; appreciates the Commissioners and the work they do for the public.

Closing

14. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting.

Motion made by Commissioner Wooten, Seconded by Commissioner Garrett.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Garrett, Commissioner Hersey, Commissioner Wooten

Meeting adjourned at approximately 1:30 p.m.

ATTEST:

Lynn Butterworth
County Clerk

B. W. “Bill” Sharp
Chairman

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