



Commission Reviews Building Code Enforcement Policy and Procedures

Posted on September 8, 2025 by Carey Faussett-Anderson

TRENTON, Ga. (Sept. 8, 2025) — The Dade County Commission reviewed Building Code Enforcement Policy and Procedures during its September meeting, with presentations from Building Code Enforcement Officer Stacy Stephens, Certified Licensed Electrical Contractor Doug McBryar, and Natural Resources Conservation Service Director Stephen Bontekoe.

The discussion follows a February 2025 workshop where local contractors were invited to share input. Attendees agreed that building codes should be enforced in Dade County. The Commission set a goal of beginning enforcement of Soil Sedimentation Control and Electrical Codes on January 1, 2026.

Commissioner Woods noted that code enforcement has not been a consistent practice in the county. *“The Board of Commissioners has decided that it is time to make sure that we are,”* Woods said.

County Executive Don Townsend emphasized that the county’s intent is to enforce ordinances already on the books rather than adding new ones or hiring additional staff. *“If we don’t want to enforce the codes then let’s repeal the ordinance, but when people’s houses start burning and they start coming to us asking why we don’t have code enforcement, then what do we do?”* Townsend asked. *“I don’t want more. We haven’t added any more codes, and I’m not proposing that we add any more.”*

Stephen Bontekoe, Director of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), spoke on the importance of soil and sedimentation control. He explained that the laws date back to the Dust Bowl era and the work of Hugh Hammond Bennett, the founder of the soil conservation movement.

“Those laws are in place in order to protect people from the effects of sedimentation,” Bontekoe said. He pointed to examples like Georgia’s “Little Grand Canyon,” which was created through erosion. *“Wetlands act like sponges and filters, cleaning the water. If you fill in that floodplain or swamp, then you have faster-moving water and more water in places you don’t want it. These laws are in place to keep bad things from happening to good people because someone else infringed upon their liberties.”*



Bontekoe also connected the issue to recent events, saying that failure to enforce these rules can worsen flooding disasters like those seen during Hurricane Helene.

Building Code Enforcement Officer Stephens explained that Dade County lags behind neighboring counties such as Walker, Hamilton, and Catoosa, all of which enforce building codes. He recommended implementing a three-step power system — Temporary, Moderate, and Permanent Power — which would provide documentation needed by banks and real estate agents for home purchases and construction loans.

Certified Licensed Electrical Contractor Doug McBryar, who has worked in Dade County since 1979, spoke strongly in favor of enforcement. *“The first page of the National Electric Code says the code is the minimum requirement, and Dade County has less than a minimum requirement; they have none,”* McBryar said. He described jobs where homeowners narrowly avoided house fires due to electrical issues and added, *“I 100% back having to be licensed.”*

Commissioner Hartline pressed for clarity on enforcement, raising concerns about consistency across all areas of construction. *“If we’re going to start enforcement January 1 then it needs to be all areas across the board,”* Hartline said. He emphasized that residents and contractors alike need to know whether enforcement will be based on state law, local ordinances, or both.

Commissioner Melissa Bradford noted that much of the public confusion stems from differences between state laws and local ordinances. She said she receives frequent calls from residents about building code enforcement.

The Commission also discussed permit fees. McBryar pointed out that Trenton charges \$85 for an electrical permit and Walker County charges \$175, while Dade's fee is only \$35. *"The safety and assurity a job's done right doesn't come cheap,"* McBryar said. Woods responded by clarifying, *"To make this clear, we aren't looking to raise the cost. I'm just saying that the cost here in Dade County is very inexpensive compared to other places."*

Townsend explained that the purpose of permit fees is to cover the costs of enforcement rather than generate revenue. *"The reason for a permit fee is not to get rich off of it but simply to break even so as to not cause an extra expense to the general taxpayer,"* he said.

Stephens explained that the county has already implemented temporary and permanent power steps but not the moderate stage. He stressed that if Dade does not respond to enforcement matters, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) will.

Townsend agreed, saying, *"If we don't handle it our way, on the local level, then EPD will handle it their way. We are the local issuing authority and as such we are the buffer between citizens and the EPD."*

Public Works Director Billy Massengale echoed this sentiment: *"If we can handle it locally then we can help, help people get over the problem. If the EPD comes then there are big fines. It's better to help people than to punish people. If you keep local control, you keep the state out — nobody wants bigger government here."*

Stephens will work with the Department of Public Health to determine the procedures necessary to begin enforcement by January 1, 2026. Commissioners agreed that clear policies must be in place to ensure fairness and consistency for all residents.

Hartline concluded the discussion by stressing the need for thorough preparation. *"I just want everyone to know that there's a lot more to this than just making a quick decision,"* he said.

(photos from the March 2025 Building Code Enforcement Meeting with Local Contractors)

