



Dade County Commissioners Address Public Safety, Infrastructure, and Policy Updates at October Workshop

Posted on October 2, 2025 by Carey Fauscett-Anderson

TRENTON, Ga. (October 2, 2025) — The Dade County Board of Commissioners gathered for their October workshop to review projects and policies touching nearly every aspect of county operations — from water and fire safety to animal services, development standards, and capital construction planning.

Chairman Don Townsend opened the session by amending the agenda to include several key items: appointments, proclamations, SPLOST funding requests, an ordinance review, and a new resolution authorizing a grant application.

Commissioners Bob Woods, Bill Pullen, Melissa Bradford, and Phillip Hartline joined Townsend in discussion throughout the evening.



Board Appointment and Proclamations

The board began with the appointment of Sandon Knight to the Alcohol Beverage Control Board, filling the unexpired term of longtime member and community leader Smokey Russell, who recently passed away. Commissioners expressed appreciation for Russell's years of service and extended condolences to his family.

The board also issued two proclamations designating October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month and recognizing October 5–11 as Fire Prevention Week in Dade County. The measures were adopted to promote community awareness and support public health and safety initiatives.

Infrastructure: Water and Fire Services

Commissioners approved two major SPLOST-funded projects aimed at strengthening public utilities and emergency response.

Elizabeth Zeller, Manager of the Dade County Water and Sewer Authority, presented a request for \$453,312 in SPLOST funding to replace a deteriorating backwash tank at the county's water treatment plant. The tank, in service since 1962, has begun leaking approximately 7,200 gallons per day. The replacement will increase capacity and ensure the long-term reliability of the water

system. Zeller noted that vendor cost savings and waived fees from American Tank Maintenance will reduce the overall expense of the project.

Commissioners also approved a joint request from the Davis and New Home fire departments to purchase a mobile air compressor for refilling self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) tanks during fire operations. The \$109,000 unit, funded jointly through the departments' SPLOST allocations, will provide critical on-site support for firefighters. Chief Mark Gibson, who now oversees both stations under the new Sand Mountain Fire Protection Services umbrella, explained that the equipment will enhance readiness and response across the northern and southern parts of the county.

Policy and Planning: Animal Control and Solar Development

County Attorney Robin Rogers presented a rewritten version of the Animal Control Ordinance, developed to consolidate prior amendments and align county regulations with Georgia law. Commissioners agreed to review the draft over the next month, with plans to revisit the proposal for possible adoption at the November meeting.

Discussion then turned to the issue of commercial solar panel setbacks. Local resident and Natural Resources Conservation Service Regional Director Stephen Bontekoe addressed the commission, recommending setback standards to protect property owners from industrial-scale solar installations. "We have some of the cheapest land and lowest taxes in northwest Georgia," Bontekoe said. "That can be a blessing, but it also means developers look to Dade County as a cost-effective place to build. It's our responsibility to make sure that growth happens in a way that protects our existing landowners."

Commissioner Bob Woods spoke in support of developing reasonable standards, citing his experience in agricultural operations and the county's existing setback requirements for poultry houses. Other commissioners agreed that while Dade County does not have zoning, establishing setback guidelines for solar development would help balance economic growth with environmental and aesthetic considerations.

Elections Building Project and Resolution R-40-25

The board also reviewed the latest progress on the Dade County Elections Building project, which remains in the design and pre-construction phase. Townsend explained that a new value-engineering proposal has reduced projected costs by approximately one million dollars. The building will be funded through SPLOST and constructed with a focus on efficiency, cost control, and long-term use.

Commissioners discussed upcoming geotechnical testing, possible schedule adjustments, and opportunities to complete portions of site work in-house. "The main thing is we don't start building until we know exactly what we're sitting on," Townsend said, reaffirming the board's commitment to a deliberate, cost-conscious process.

To close the session, commissioners introduced Resolution R-40-25, authorizing a grant application to pursue external funding for future county projects. Details will be made public as the grant process advances.

The October workshop reflected the board's ongoing focus on infrastructure investment, fiscal accountability, and policies designed to safeguard both public services and private property rights.

Individual articles detailing each agenda item discussed at this meeting will be published separately.