

The regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Newnan, Georgia was held on Tuesday, January 13, 2026 at 2:50 p.m. in the Richard A. Bolin Council Chambers of City Hall with Mayor James Shepherd presiding after being sworn in.

**PRESENT**

Mayor James Shepherd: Council members present: Scott Berta, Jim Thomasson, Jennifer Morrison, Cynthia Jenkins, Paul Guillaume and Dustin Koritko. Also present: City Manager, Cleatus Phillips; Assistant City Manager, Hasco Craver; Assistant City Manager, Meg Kelsey; City Clerk, Megan Shea and City Attorney, Brad Sears.

**SWEARING IN CEREMONY**

James Shepherd (Mayor, At Large) was sworn in by Judge Emory Palmer. Jennifer Morrison (District 2, Post A) and Scott Berta (District 2, Post B) were duly sworn in by the City Attorney and Jennifer Morrison was also ceremoniously sworn in by Pastor Matt Sapp.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Shepherd called the meeting to order and Reverend Elizabeth Pollard delivered the invocation.

**ELECTION OF MAYOR PRO TEM**

Motion by Councilman Koritko, seconded by Councilwoman Morrison to elect Councilman Scott Berta as Mayor Pro Tem for 2026.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

**APPOINTMENTS - DEPARTMENT HEADS**

Motion by Mayor Shepherd, seconded by Councilwoman Jenkins to accept the department heads as listed in the agenda.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

**APPOINTMENT - CITY ATTORNEY**

Motion by Mayor Shepherd, seconded by Councilwoman Jenkins to accept the city attorney as noted in the agenda. Opposed: Berta, Thomasson, Morrison, Koritko and Guillaume.

**MOTION FAILED. (2-5)**

Mayor Shepherd made a nomination for Vernon Strickland and Councilwoman Jenkins seconded. Councilman Koritko asked for clarification, as there had just been a vote for Vernon Strickland since his name was on the agenda already. Mayor Shepherd said that vote was to accept the agenda item and now he is nominating Vernon Strickland.

Councilman Thomasson asked for a point of order, he said there was a motion and vote for department heads and then a motion and vote for city attorney and thought that was voted down 2-5. Mayor Shepherd stated that the first vote was for the agenda item and now it will be to debate the nomination of Vernon Strickland.

Councilwoman Jenkins said she thinks Mr. Strickland is a good nomination. He has experience and a love for Newnan. Mayor Shepherd said he had sent an email to council earlier in the day because of some procedural irregularities and legality of the most recent ordinance amendment to the appointment for city attorney. Councilman Koritko said he did not receive the email.

Councilman Thomasson said that the way that Mr. Strickland has been presented is not the way he thinks they should go about appointing a new city attorney. The vetting of a city attorney should be open to everyone and should be discussed in private. He stated for the benefit of stability for the city, as there has been a lot of turnover, that to force another turnover, is not in the best interest of the city of Newnan at this time. Mr. Sears will retire in the future and there should be a process for looking at candidates. Councilman Thomasson said his vote is not against Vernon Strickland, it's a vote against the timing and he thinks is best for the city of Newnan.

Mayor Shepherd asked if Councilman Thomasson had objections to Mr. Strickland's credentials? Councilman Thomasson said he has objections with the fact that Mr. Strickland has not been properly vetted. Mayor Shepherd said that the email he sent to council stated that there are irregularities in how the ordinance was passed and per Georgia law the charter controls in city law. If Council does not decide to move forward with Mr. Strickland, then the appointment should be suspended and put before a court to give a declaratory opinion on whether the ordinance was rightly passed. Mayor Shepherd said under the current statute the mayor has the right to nominate, and Council can appoint but not nominate. If Council wants to suspend this decision, they will need to find outside counsel. Councilman Koritko asked what the charter states? Mayor Shepherd said the charter states Council appoints and the ordinance that is valid states Mayor nominates and Council approves.

Mr. Vernon Strickland addressed Council. He gave a brief overview of his experience, representing municipalities and counties, as well as large brand companies. He said he is honored for the opportunity and that the city of Newnan would be his client if appointed. He asked Council to trust him to help advise them and lead them forward in the best way possible.

Mr. Drake Strickland addressed Council and asked Councilman Thomasson what he meant when he talked about a properly vetted process? Councilman Thomasson said he is more than happy to discuss his opinions. He would like to have a group consensus on the next step. He doesn't have all the details figured out but he has been through search committees and the search processes. He would like anyone who is interested to be able to apply. Then from there they would vet down and find the most qualified candidate.

Mayor Shepherd asked Councilman Thomasson how the city attorney appointed had been done in the past. Councilman Thomasson said he thinks the nomination was made by Councilman Rhodes Shell the past two years. He then asked if the Charter section regarding the city attorney could be read. Mayor Shepherd said it is unclear to him under the charter whether the ordinance, as it was before the December 9, 2025 meeting, conflicted with the charter or articulating the process for the charter. He

further said that the charter was not followed in the passage of the ordinance amendment on December 9, 2025, therefore it is void and the current process of the mayor nominating an appointment and Council consenting to that is what stands.

Councilman Thomasson stated that the charter should take precedent. He said that even Mr. Strickland said that at the previous meeting. Mayor Shepherd said he thinks reading the charter is out of order, since that is not the only piece in question. Councilman Guillaume stated they are out of order and not obeying the charter by allowing public input into a nominee and a vote should have been taken to allow that. Council discussed the ordinances in conflict and what going to court would accomplish.

Councilman Koritko said in the interest of saving money on going to court, they could take a vote on the nomination of Vernon Strickland and then look at reconsidering the ordinance amendment from December and put it on the next agenda.

Mayor Shepherd said he did not nominate Vernon Strickland just to have more change. He truly believes that when it comes to attorneys in Newnan, he has the expertise that the city needs. He wants someone that he knows and trusts in their legal work. The city is much bigger than it was 40 years ago, and in a different legal, economic and demographic position. He feels he is the right person for the job.

Councilwoman Jenkins asked to call the vote into question. Mayor Shepherd asked for a roll-call vote. Councilman Berta - Nay, Councilman Thomasson - Nay, Councilwoman Morrison - Nay, Mayor Shepherd - Aye, Councilwoman Jenkins - Aye, Councilman Koritko - Nay, Councilman Guillaume - Nay.

Mayor Shepherd stated that the city attorney appointment was suspended. Councilman Thomasson asked that until Mr. Sears is replaced, he continues to act as city attorney and Mayor Shepherd said yes except, he would need to recuse himself on this topic.

#### APPOINTMENT - MUNICIPAL COURT SOLICITOR

Motion by Councilman Koritko, seconded by Councilwoman Morrison to re-appoint Danielle Sewell as Municipal Court Solicitor for 2026.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

#### APPOINTMENT - MUNICIPAL PUBLIC DEFENDER

Motion by Councilman Koritko, seconded by Councilwoman Morrison to re-appoint Jim Strickland as Municipal Public Defender for 2026.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

REPORTS OF BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

C. 1 Appointment - Christmas Commission, 3-year term

Continue to next agenda.

D. 1 Appointment - Convention Center Authority, 3-year term

Continue to next agenda.

E. 1 Appointment - Development Authority, 4-year term

Continue to next agenda.

F. 2 Appointments - Ethics Commission, 2- year terms

Continue to next agenda.

G. 1 Appointment - Keep Newnan Beautiful, 3-year term

Motion by Mayor Pro Tem Berta, seconded by Councilman Koritko to re-appoint Arden Avery for another term.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

H. 3 Appointments - Planning Commission, 3-year terms

Motion by Mayor Shepherd, seconded by Councilwoman Jenkins to appoint Janet Marie Gunnels to the Planning Commission.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

Motion by Councilwoman Jenkins, seconded by Councilman Thomasson to re-appoint Alton West for another term.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

Motion by Councilwoman Morrison, seconded by Councilman Koritko to appoint Clay McEntire to the Planning Commission.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

I.1 Appointment - Tree & Parks Commission, 3-year term

Continue to next agenda.

REPORTS ON OPERATIONS BY CITY MANAGER

J. Schedule City Floating Holiday for 2026

Mr. Phillips stated that there are 10 traditional holidays and then a floating holiday annually. The recommendation for 2026 is President's Day, February 16<sup>th</sup>.

Motion by Councilman Koritko, seconded by Councilwoman Morrison to accept the recommendation of February 16<sup>th</sup> as presented.

MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)

REPORTS AND COMMUNICATIONS FROM MAYOR

Mayor Shepherd thanked everyone for coming and said that after 32 years there is change happening in the city of Newnan. He said he moved here in 1998 when the city's population was a third of what it is now. He is grateful to the citizens who have been supportive of him and the city. He hopes to do the best he can. He hopes that the citizens will support Council as they move forward. He is grateful to the city staff, police and fire.

NEW BUSINESS

K. Public Hearing – Application for Alcohol Beverage License – Ito Ramen Bar – Retail on Premise (Pouring) Sales of Distilled Spirits, Malt Beverages and Wine – 1067 Bullsboro Dr. Suite D. – Reason: New Business

Mayor Shepherd opened a public hearing on the application for a Retail On Premise (Pouring) Sales of Distilled Spirits, Malt Beverages and Wine for Ito Ramen Bar at 1067 Bullsboro Dr. Suite D.

A representative of the applicant was present for the hearing. No one spoke for or against the application. Mayor Brady closed the public hearing. The City Clerk advised that all the documentation had been received and everything was in order.

Motion by Councilman Koritko, seconded by Councilman Guillaume to approve the application for a Retail On Premise (Pouring) Sales of Distilled Spirits, Malt Beverages and Wine.

MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)

L. Consideration of an Ordinance to Provide for the Adoption of a Budget, Its Execution and Effect for the Fiscal Year Beginning January 1, 2026 and Ending December 31, 2026

Ms. Kelsey said the budget was presented at a public hearing on December 9, 2025, and contains a general fund budget of \$43.4 million and a sanitation fund of \$5.6 million. The budget is balanced and there are no reserves used in the preparation of the budget. There are 12 funds that account for \$24.1 million. The city is financially stable.

Motion by Councilman Koritko, seconded by Councilwoman Morrison to adopt the ordinance as presented.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

**M. Consideration of a Resolution to Amend the 2026 Pay Plan**

Ms. Kelsey explained that the pay scales have been amended to include a 2% increase to the minimum and maximum of the scale.

Motion by Councilman Guillaume, seconded by Councilman Koritko to adopt the resolution as presented.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

**N. Consideration of a Resolution in Support of Funding Request for Additional Phases; Jefferson Street Roundabout**

Michael Klahr, City Engineer, explained that the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) has called for project funding and the roundabout project at Jefferson Street is already in the works. The preliminary engineering phase has been funded, and a concept is before the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). The next phases would be right-of-way, utilities and construction and this is an opportunity to ask the ARC for federal funding for those phases.

Motion by Councilman Thomasson, seconded by Councilwoman Jenkins to adopt the resolution as presented.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

**O. Consideration of Streets Proposed for Maintenance and Paving, FY2026**

Mr. Klahr said these are streets that were planned for 2027, but additional funding has been received from GDOT, so the program can be accelerated. The program is rolling so more streets will be brought to council after another assessment is done. This analyzes streets block by block.

Motion by Councilman Koritko, seconded by Councilman Thomasson to approve the list as presented.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

**P. Consideration of Request from Integrated Science & Engineering (ISE) for Additional Professional Services Fees – Newnan Crossing Blvd & Stillwood Dr. Roundabout Design**

Councilman Thomasson recused himself due to an indirect interest with ISE related to leasing of office space.

Mr. Phillips explained that ISE submitted a request for a change order and it exceeds the amount per city policy and needs to be approved by council.

Mr. Dan Davis, owner of Integrated Science & Engineering (ISE), said they have been working on this roundabout for about four years. The project was paused when a large development was proposed at Poplar Rd. and that had to go through the Development of Regional Impact (DRI) process. They worked with the engineer on the project and looked at ways to connect the development to the roundabout. The design was finalized and put out to bid. ISE is finalizing their accounting for this phase.

Mayor Shepherd asked what the driving force was for the additional costs? Mr. Davis said it was the DRI process, they had to look at multi-lane instead of single lane and the possible widening of Newnan Crossing Blvd. It was an extensive effort.

Mr. Phillips said that there was a condition placed on the rezoning for the Poplar Place development, that the developer would pay for the extension. The city thought the development was going to go ahead immediately and that ISE's costs would be funded by the developer. The development has not gone forward. Mayor Shepherd asked if this has happened before? Mr. Phillips said no, there is a good relationship with ISE and staff manage the contracts well and there have been very few change orders.

Motion by Councilman Guillaume, seconded by Councilwoman Morrison to approve the request as presented.

**MOTION CARRIED. (6-0)**

**VISITORS, PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS & COMPLAINTS**

**Q. Request from Summergrove neighborhood to post banners at the entrances for 2026 events**

Motion by Councilman Koritko, seconded by Councilwoman Jenkins to approve the request as presented.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

**MOTION EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Motion by Mayor Pro Tem Berta, seconded by Councilman Koritko that we now enter into closed session as allowed by O.C.G.A. Section 50-14-4 and pursuant to advice by the City Attorney, for the purpose of discussing legal and real estate and that we move, in open session to adopt a resolution authorizing and directing the Mayor or presiding officer to execute an affidavit in compliance with O.C.G.A. Section 50-14-4, and that this body ratify the actions of the Council taken in closed session and confirm that the subject matters of the closed session were within exceptions permitted by the open meetings law at 3:55PM.

**MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)**

RESOLUTION/MAYOR'S AFFIDAVIT FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion by Mayor Pro Tem Berta, seconded by Councilman Thomasson to adopt the resolution authorizing the Mayor to execute the affidavit stating that the subject matter of the closed portion of the Council was within the exceptions provided by O.C.G.A. Section 50-14-4(b).

MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)

DIX CLAIM

Motion by Councilman Thomasson, seconded by Councilman Koritko to deny the claim as presented.

MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)

BLACKMON CLAIM

Motion by Councilman Thomasson, seconded by Councilman Koritko to deny the claim as presented.

MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilman Thomasson, seconded by Councilman Koritko to adjourn the Council meeting at 4:10pm.

MOTION CARRIED. (7-0)

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Megan Shea, City Clerk

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James Shepherd, Mayor