HEARD COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION
May 4, 2026 – 4:00 P.M.

The Heard County Board of Commissioners held a work session on May 4, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. in the Commission Chamber of the Heard County Administration Building. In attendance at the meeting were Chairman Tracy McCormick, District 1 Commissioner Curtis Mock, District 2 Commissioner James Perry, District 3 Commissioner Iris Harris, District 4 Commissioner Larry Hammond, District 5 Commissioner David Walls, and Felicia Adams Director of Finance.

Chairman McCormick stated that this work session was called to review and discuss the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2026-2027.

Recreation Department Director Keaton Knowles introduced himself and provided an overview of departmental activity. He reported that over the past twelve months, the department registered more than 1,300 participants across all programs. Fall 2025 saw 351 registrations and Spring 2026 had 305, reflecting strong retention. He noted that middle school B-team programs continue to impact the 11–12 age group, but fall sports are expected to grow.

He reported $71,550 in registration revenue since January 2026 and described a new sponsorship program launched this year with seven sponsors to date.

Commissioners commended the improved condition of the recreation fields, including warning tracks and overall maintenance. Knowles stated that maintenance and repair costs should remain consistent, with most equipment purchased within the past year. The department currently operates five vehicles and continues to maintain Glover Road Park and trash pickup at Snake Creek.

He discussed the need for additional coaches and umpires due to growth in participation. Staffing challenges have required some coaches to manage multiple teams, and the department has begun using graduating high-school seniors to assist with younger age groups.

Telephone and internet costs were reviewed, including MiFi devices and system access for field lighting controls. Commissioners discussed prior upgrades to the lighting control panel.

Knowles reported ongoing irrigation issues due to collapsed underground wells, pump failures, and water pressure problems. Repairs are underway, and the county is evaluating pump replacements using SPLOST funds. Commissioners noted that irrigation repairs could reduce water bills by shifting usage away from county water.

Concession revenue is projected to meet the $80,000 budgeted amount. Prices were increased slightly for travel-ball weekends, and part-time staff continue to be paid from concession revenue. Travel-ball tournaments continue to generate significant activity, with 30–50 teams expected for the upcoming weekend.

Commissioners discussed sun-shade awnings, noting deterioration and the possibility of replacing them with metal structures for longevity. Foul-ball netting was also discussed for safety in areas where fields are positioned closely.

Knowles reviewed available acreage for future development, including areas originally planned for additional fields, restrooms, and concessions. He stated that no major budget increases are requested aside from water-related issues. He noted that staffing challenges persist, with two full-time positions open at $12.50 per hour, making recruitment difficult.

He outlined potential new or returning programs, including volleyball, football, girls flag football, softball tournaments, cornhole events, and expanded open-gym hours. Soccer remains difficult to sustain due to limited school participation.

Fuel costs were discussed, along with the installation of a new 150-gallon fuel tank at the park. Commissioners noted significant cleanup efforts at the facility and commended staff for improvements.

The Public Defender's Office presented its budget request. The Chief Public Defender Mary Ellen Simmons thanked the Board for its support and introduced staff assignments, including the return of

attorney Bill Gibson to Heard County and the continued use of a juvenile attorney from Carroll County.

She requested salary adjustments for two positions. The administrative assistant, currently at $40,000, would increase to $43,000. She explained the difficulty of hiring qualified administrative staff due to jail duties and client interaction. She also requested a $5,000 salary increase for the attorney position due to statewide parity legislation affecting public defenders and district attorneys. Including taxes and benefits, the total personnel increase requested is $14,248.

The Chief Public Defender discussed caseloads, reporting approximately 350 cases closed annually. She reviewed recent trials and plea resolutions and described the role of the state-funded investigator shared with Carroll County.

She emphasized the significant impact of mental-health-related cases, long wait times for state hospital placement (averaging 480 days), and the need for social-service coordination. She praised the Sheriff's Office for cooperation in managing jail populations and noted that quick case movement saves the county substantial costs.

Operating expenses remain unchanged. Commissioners requested a three-year caseload report, which she agreed to provide.

The Board discussed staffing levels, pay concerns, and the county's ongoing effort to implement performance evaluations. Commissioners noted that evaluations help with accountability but cannot currently be tied to raises until pay scales are addressed countywide.

The HR Director reviewed the summer college-student grant program, which provides $3,259.50 in funding at $15 per hour. One qualifying student employee is expected to be funded through the grant.

Chief Magistrate Judge Colton Caldwell presented caseload data from 2021 through April 2026, noting a steady increase. He informed the Board of recently passed state legislation raising the

Magistrate Court civil jurisdictional limit from $15,000 to $25,000 effective January 1, 2027. He anticipates increased filings but cannot yet quantify the impact on postage, supplies, or workload. He requested a $3.00 per hour raise for Deputy Clerk Rebecca Scott, who will reach five years of service in August and currently earns $15.50 per hour. He explained her responsibilities, including primary civil filings and public contact, and noted that the part-time clerk/judge currently earns $17.50 per hour.

He stated that the only potential budget reduction would be bailiff fees, but cutting them would require both clerks to remain in the courtroom, forcing the office to close during court sessions.

Judge Caldwell reviewed common case types, including credit-card debt, garnishments, dispossessory actions, and county ordinance violations. He discussed challenges in proving certain ordinance cases and noted that most defendants plead guilty and comply with cleanup deadlines.

Commissioners discussed workload comparisons, ordinance enforcement trends, and the potential need for future discussions on court operations.

The Board discussed salary equity across departments, noting long-term employees in some offices earn less than newer employees in others. Commissioners reiterated the need for a countywide pay-scale adjustment rather than isolated raises. Vacant positions were reviewed and the possibility of using T-SPLOST revenue to shift Road Department salaries off the General Fund, which could free funds for employee raises. Commissioners emphasized the need to plan for the six-year renewal cycle to avoid future shortfalls.

Finance Director Felicia Adams reviewed increases related to retirement participation and software costs. She noted strong employee interest in the ACCG retirement plan since the one-year eligibility rule was adopted. She stated Superior Court costs have increased due to more frequent court sessions under Judge Hightower, including quarterly grand juries and weekly court calendars. Jury summons postage and juror pay have increased accordingly. Court reporter fees remain set by statute.

The Board discussed the library's request for an additional part-time assistant. No other changes were requested. The Board noted that the Sheriff's Office budget remains stable aside from insurance and inmate medical costs. Commissioners discussed POAB and firefighter pension contributions and determined the county should not assume those costs due to turnover and long-term obligations.

The Finance Director projected a potential $600,000 revenue shortfall based on current trends but noted that the county historically spends less than budgeted. Construction activity at Plant Wansley and potential T-SPLOST approval could significantly increase sales-tax revenue.

The Board discussed millage-rate considerations, noting the intent to maintain the current rate. Commissioners acknowledged that growth in the digest may still trigger a "tax increase" designation under state law even without raising the millage rate.

Commissioners discussed long-term financial risks, including upcoming retirements of key elected officials and the potential impacts on county operations.

The next budget meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 11, 2026, at 4:00 p.m.

There being no further business, on a motion (Harris) and second (Mock), the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

The work session ended with no official action being taken.

End time 6:29 p.m.

Katrina Billingsley

County Clerk

Date 01/16/2026

Isaac McGarrah

Chairman

COMMISSIONER OF ROADS & REVENUE
SEAL
BOARD COUNTY, GA