**HEARD COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION**
**May 21, 2026 – 4:00 P.M.**

The Heard County Board of Commissioners held a work session on May 21, 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 Director of Finance Felicia Adams.

Chairman McCormick asked County Clerk Katrina Billingsley to open the meeting with prayer.

The Board of Commissioners held a budget work session to review departmental needs and discuss the county's financial outlook. District Attorney Sarah Japour attended to provide an update on the first full year of the new judicial circuit. She reported that the circuit split has been beneficial for Heard County, with improved case turnover and a reduced jail population. Her office has completed several major trials and continues to maintain a full case-processing cycle. She noted that although she is not requesting additional funding this year, statewide salary adjustments will require increased county contributions beginning in January 2027. She explained the expected salary gaps for attorneys and staff and emphasized that she wanted the Board to be aware of these future obligations. Commissioners thanked her for her work and the improvements in case management. She also introduced her daughter, who attended to observe the meeting. Victim Advocate Chan Holiday was also present.

The Board then moved into general budget discussions. ACCG insurance premiums decreased by approximately ninety thousand dollars, which will help offset other rising costs. Early projections indicate that the county may be able to operate without triggering a required public notice for a tax increase, depending on final digest numbers and the outcome of the floating homestead exemption legislation.

The Board reviewed the library budget and agreed to keep it at the current level. Usage data showed that computer access remains the primary service, and no justification was presented for an additional position. The only unavoidable increase is the regional fee adjustment based on population. The Public Defender's budget was also discussed, and the Board agreed unanimously to leave it unchanged based on caseload information and current staffing levels. The Magistrate Court's request for a raise will be addressed through the countywide increase.

The Board reached consensus on providing a two-dollar-per-hour raise for all county employees, both full-time and part-time. The raises will take effect with the second paycheck in December, once Road Department salaries are shifted to T-SPLOST. The total cost of the raises is estimated at one million dollars. Approximately six hundred thousand dollars in remaining T-SPLOST salary offset funds will be placed in reserve each year to prepare for the possibility that T-SPLOST is not renewed in six years. Employees receiving Social Security may decline the full raise to avoid benefit reductions. Vacant positions will continue to be budgeted as if filled to ensure adequate funding for Fire and EMS staffing.

The Finance Director reported that the county is projected to finish the year approximately four hundred thousand dollars in the red, an improvement from the prior year's deficit. Revenues are down by about two million dollars, but expenditures have also decreased. SPLOST reimbursements will help offset part of the deficit. Home valuations are expected to rise modestly but not enough to require a tax increase notice.

The Board discussed economic development opportunities, including the potential for data centers. Commissioners noted that significant misinformation exists and emphasized the need for multiple public meetings with subject-matter experts. They discussed water usage, closed-loop cooling systems, chemical treatment requirements, well testing, and regulatory oversight. They also discussed the importance of establishing clear ordinances to protect county resources. The Board acknowledged

that data centers could substantially improve county revenue but agreed that public education is essential before moving forward.

The Board also discussed industrial growth, including Jack Products' interest in expanding operations and constructing a new facility that could add ten to fifteen jobs. The Development Authority is working with the company on potential property needs. Additional discussion included the use of millings for road improvements, the need for a grinder, departmental training budgets, and part-time staffing considerations.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the Work Session.

The work session ended with no official action being taken.

End time 5:22 p.m.

Katrina Billingsley

County Clerk

Date 01/16/2026

Chairman