

## Meeting Template

### **Nov. 18 Agenda Setting Session**

**Date:** Nov. 18, 2025

**Meeting length:** 6:04 p.m.-9:39 p.m.

#### **Resources:**

Agenda:

<https://www.accgov.com/DocumentCenter/View/112778/November-18-2025-Agenda-Setting-Session-agenda->

Link to agenda and links/screenshots/photos of supporting documents.

#### **Attendance:**

District 1 Commissioner: Patrick Davenport

District 2 Commissioner: Melissa Link

District 3 Commissioner: Tiffany Taylor

District 4 Commissioner: Allison Wright

District 5 Commissioner: Dexter Fisher

District 6 Commissioner: Stephanie Johnson

District 7 Commissioner: John Culpepper

District 8 Commissioner: Carol Myers

District 9 Commissioner: Ovita Thornton

District 10 Commissioner: Mike Hamby

Planning Director: Bruce Lonnee

Auditor: Gavin Hassemer

Attorney: Judd Drake

County manager: Bob Cowell

Assistant managers: Andrew Saunders & Ilka McConnell

Clerk: Christine Howard

Mayor: Kelly Girtz

**Agenda/action items:**

2415 Jefferson Road: This is a proposal to request a planned development including two apartment complexes & 8 townhomes and partially demolish Homewood Village Shopping Center.

255 Smithonia Road: This is a request to rezone a landlot from A-R (agricultural-residential) to C-R (commercial-rural) in order to start construction for a new Connection Church Winterville site. The commission will vote on this rezone request during the Dec. 2 Mayor & Commission Regular Session.

**Community Perspective:**

Kristin Owens, Winterville, Georgia: Owens is concerned the church's acreage and building design will intrude with her pasture and the rural character of the surrounding land. She asks that the AMT decrease the size of the church's acreage or not build on the proposed site at all.

**Debate:**

Winterville resident Kristin Owens had a lengthy conversation with Chase Zech outside of the City Hall entrance. The conversation was confrontational and both members presented conflicting interests. Both reached an agreement to host a roundtable discussion with Winterville residents about the future proposed church with Chase Zech, posing a potential solution.

**Outcomes:**

Commissioners expressed confusion about the 255 Smithonia Road rezone request. Commissioner Tiffany Taylor said she would reach out to the Winterville residents that attended the agenda-setting session for more clarity prior to voting on the matter on Dec. 2, 2025.

**Scene:**

Around 25 audience members attended the beginning of the session, the audience began to dwindle as the meeting continued. The members that participated in the public input session expressed heated emotion, especially regarding the rezone request for 255 Smithonia Road.

**Summary:**

- There is lots of jargon used at the meeting. I found it difficult to follow along during the discussion of some zoning items.
- There is excitement felt throughout present members when a project passes that has the potential to bring the community together, such as the College Square Pedestrian Plaza project. The commission appeared excited about the project and plenty of direct quotes contained emotion.
- Other issues raised negative emotions, such as the rezone request for a new church site in Wintersville.

**First (lead) quote:**

“This structure takes the rural character from us while giving none,” said Winterville resident Mary Ann Cheatham.

## Potential new Winterville church site affects rural residents

Clara Lee



Kristin Owens shows her pasture lying above the blue line boundary to the Athens-Clarke County Commission on Tuesday, Nov. 18 at City Hall. Owens asked for the size of the church site to be decreased or for commissioners to not allow construction. Photo/Clara Lee

Athens-Clarke County commissioners heard conflicting interests during the public input section of their agenda-setting session on Tuesday, Nov. 18, regarding a rezone request in order to build a new Connection Church Athens location in Winterville, Georgia.

Chase Zech, civil engineer for Armentrout Matheny Thurmond (AMT), sought a rezone request to change from agricultural-residential to commercial-rural in order to allow construction for a new church on 255 Smithonia Road. Winterville residents expressed concerns that the proposed rezone request will negatively

impact their properties and the rural atmosphere of the proposed site by placing a large church and parking lot in a current rural land parcel.

“This structure takes the rural character from us while giving us none,” said Winterville resident Mary Ann Cheatham.

Winterville locals raised worries that the church will be a modern, boxy-style megachurch that will detract from the site’s rural nature. Winterville citizen Annie Cheatham said residents were under false impressions of the church’s design.

“There’s a difference between a county church out in a cow field and what I believe this church wants to build on this land,” said Cheatham.

Zech said the new church plans for 600 congregants but continues work on the sanctuary design.



Chase Zech, Armentrout Matheny Thurmond's civil engineer, stands outside of City Hall on Nov. 18. Zech discussed the church's rezone request with Winterville resident Kristin Owens outside of City Hall during the agenda-setting session. Photo/Clara Lee

Kristin Owens owns property on the border of the proposed church site. Owens said she was not opposed to a new church next to her property until she researched the designs of other Connection Church locations. Owens gave commissioners [photos of the other locations' designs](#).

"You know, it's one thing to see that sort of white painted old, 100-year-old church with a steeple that feels like it fits into kind of a rural community, and it's another to see something that looks kind of like a CVS," said ACC Mayor Kelly Girtz.

Commissioner Tiffany Taylor said she will reach out to speak more about the rezone request with the Winterville residents present at the meeting.

The current Connection Church Athens is located at 373 N Church St. in Winterville. The church seeks relocation due to the number of congregants

outgrowing the building, according to Zech. Zech said the current church's building can hold 210 people while 200 people attend the church regularly.

The Athens-Clarke County Planning Commission recommended approval with conditions of the rezone request in a 4-3 vote, [according to its document regarding the request](#).

ACC commissioners will vote on the rezone request at the next regular session meeting on Dec. 2.

### Why I Wrote The Story

I learned about current, newsworthy events that I was previously unaware of during this meeting. There was conflict and emotion expressed from both commissioners and locals which gave me a great foundation for a quick turnaround story. I learned preparation and organizational skills. The meeting template helped me organize my thoughts and the most newsworthy items discussed. This assignment was pertinent to my city-county government beat since it highlighted the planning and future outcome of local government affairs.