



GEORGIA COUNCIL ON AMERICAN INDIAN CONCERNS MEETING MINUTES

Date: January 30, 2026

Time: 12:55pm

Meeting called to order by: Nealie McCormick

INVOCATION

Led by Royce McCrary

Council Members Present

Nealie McCormick, Chairman
Rhonda Bennett
Heidi Altman
Maureen Meyers
Royce McCrary
Paul Brannen
Oretta Kirkland
Christian Dane – Program Manager (non-member)

Guests Present

Meghan Mooney
Chief Vonnie McCormick
Jim Bennett
Gloria Kirkland
Anesha Slaton
Xavier Klutz

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The meeting minutes for the meeting on November 10, 2025, were distributed for review. Heidi Altman moved to accept minutes; Rhonda Bennett seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

TRIBE REPORTS

Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe: Provided by Chief Vonnie McCormick.

- Reported that at the NCAI November conference the tribe spent \$2,000+ to attend but was denied voting rights, with NCAI refusing Georgia's criteria for state-recognized tribes (impacting tribes in Georgia and Alabama).
- Continuing work on the Muskogee Vocational Rehabilitation Program (next 5-year grant) and maintaining an MOU with Georgia while negotiating an MOU with Florida to share clients.



- Highlighted community events: Cairo Christmas parade float, Family Fun Day, wild game dinner, a new 15-page newsletter, upcoming tribal youth camp (June 8–12), and powwow with Battle of 1000s reenactments for 8th graders and the public (Nov 20–21).
- Attended EEOC and State Independent Living Council meetings; emphasized the need for better education so tribal citizens understand EEOC and available services.
- Flagged a rezoning threat to a known site near Easy Street in Columbus, GA (FR-4) and requested follow-up research; also noted ongoing disputes with Creek and Cherokee representatives over treaty ownership and related Court of Claims findings.

Georgia Tribe of Eastern Cherokee: Provided by Tribal Council Chair Rhonda Bennett.

- Announced formal recognition/acknowledgment by the county and local historical society in Lumpkin County, where the tribe is building a museum and Heritage Center; Breedlove Construction has completed site plans.
- Described persistent political opposition from representatives of Oklahoma and North Carolina who lobby against the tribe's recognition and have interfered with speaking invitations.
- Reported successful efforts (with law student Jacob Row) to have Lamar Snead removed from NCIA records as leader and to protect the tribe from fraudulent claimants.
- Outlined museum support from Jason Wetzel, a military museum designer and author, who is donating extensive planning work and dedicating proceeds from his book "The Fire Still Burns" to the museum; his nonprofit and attorneys are helping protect the tribe's logo and IP.
- Described plans to expand membership beyond a small historic core: anyone locally who can document ancestry on 1817/1819 federal rolls with Cherokee heritage may be included, to recognize all legitimate Cherokee families and avoid exclusionary practices.

Cherokee of Georgia Tribal Council: Provided by Mr. Paul Brannen.

- Reviewed tribal origins around a removal-era camp at Fargo, where Muskogee and Cherokee people formed a community; original name was Cherokee Georgia Intertribal Council, later narrowed for state recognition.
- Discussed education/training funds long administered by the Florida Governor's Council, concerns that funds tied to Georgia should be handled in Georgia, and possible legal/strategic options to change this.
- Noted that tribal ID cards or letters significantly ease student access to funding by avoiding repeated submission of full historical documentation.
- Repeated plans to build small rental cabins on tribal grounds to generate income and provide emergency shelter for evacuees.
- Described work with two Boy Scout dance bands under contract so Native programs remain tribally guided and culturally appropriate and highlighted the need to better educate tribal citizens on EEOC and discrimination remedies.

PRESENTATIONS

- GCAIC Social Media Comments Draft: Christian Dane presented the document prepared by Council volunteer, Linda Lee Fagan.



BUSINESS

- A) Heidi Altman moved to approve the Social Media Comments Draft document to be used for the Council's social media platforms. Royce McCrary seconded. Motion carried unanimously.
- B) Heidi Altman moved to allocate \$5,000 to Georgia Partnership for Innovation for the PIN Summer Internship program as it relates to the Georgia Native Sites project. Paul Brannen seconded. Motion carried unanimously.
- C) A motion on the DNR project requests was tabled to allow Christian Dane to collect more specific information for the Council to review and act accordingly.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- A) Next Council meeting is March 24th.
- B) Annual planning retreat is Oct. 9-11 at Smithgall Woods State Park
- C) IRB (Institutional Review Board) work: Meghan Mooney, graduate student at Georgia Southern University under Heidi Altman, drafted IRB statement which Christian will circulate to Council for feedback.
- D) New South Archaeology Day (Native American focus): May 16th in Downtown Stone Mountain.
- E) Nealie and Vonnie spoke at the Georgia Department of Public Health (epidemiology section) about Native issues.
- F) Maureen spoke at the Georgia Archives Native American symposium;
- G) Heidi spoke to the Emory Law students and will speak again to Emory Humphrey Fellows, who are in public health, about Native issues.

ADJOURNMENT

Paul Brannen moved to adjourn meeting. Motion seconded by Maureen Meyers. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 2:12pm.