



GEORGIA COUNCIL ON AMERICAN INDIAN CONCERNS MEETING MINUTES

Date: June 27, 2026

Time: 2:08pm

Meeting called to order by: Nealie McCormick

INVOCATION

Led by Royce McCrary

Council Members Present

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

Guests Present

Chief Vonnie McCormick, Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe
Shay Johnson, Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe
Daesha McKorley., Partnership for Innovation
Jessica Young, New South Associates
Lucia McGrath, Partnership for Innovation
Caroline Beigel, Partnership for Innovation
James Clements, Georgia State Council of Machinists

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The meeting minutes for the meeting on May 5, 2026, were distributed for review. Heidi Altman moved to accept minutes; Oretta Kirkland seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

TRIBE REPORTS

Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe: Provided by Chief Vonnie McCormick.

1. Muskogee Vocational Rehabilitation Program
 - Program has been extended for another year.
 - Shift of authority from Department of Education to Department of the Interior; grant process still being worked out, so they have a year of extension while that's figured out.
2. Greenhouses
 - Greenhouses are operational and doing well overall, but they've learned which plants cannot survive the extreme heat (up to 130°F inside).
 - A second greenhouse was funded by Home Depot via gift certificates.



3. Statewide Independent Living Meeting

- Chief McCormick attended this meeting; focus is on getting the word out about a center that helps people with disabilities.
- The center supports areas like housing and a variety of other services.

4. Georgia Tech Collaboration

- Shay and Scotty Johnson went to Georgia Institute of Technology and worked in their greenhouse.
- This is part of broader collaboration/learning around greenhouse and agriculture work.

5. Powwow Planning

- The tribe is actively planning their powwow, scheduled for October 16–18, 2026.
- Weekly meetings held every Sunday leading up to it to ensure everything runs smoothly.

6. Social Stomps / Stomp Dance Training

- The tribe have begun social stomps every last Saturday of the month.
- Purpose: train people to stomp dance, especially girls and young women.

7. Records Solution & File Scanning

- Secure Record Solutions collected records on June 4th to begin the scanning/digitizing process.

8. Youth Camp

- Youth camp was successful, with 12 youth ages 6–14.
- Activities included:
 - Fishing and learning how to make a fish basket
 - Learning to start a fire and clean a fish (emphasis: teaching kids not just to fish but to fully feed themselves)
 - Working on a dugout canoe from a newly acquired cypress log
 - Muskogee language, pottery, weaving, archery
 - Traditional games: the original cornhole game, stomp dancing, and stickball every day

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

1. Museum grant

- They have officially submitted the first grant for the museum project.
- The University of North Georgia (UNG) is providing strong support:
 - Access to students in the art, music, and language departments.
 - Grant writers at UNG are actively helping with grant applications.

2. Planned formal partnership with UNG

- Rhonda is scheduled to meet with Mike Shannon in July to discuss a formal partnership between the tribe and UNG.
- Appalachian Studies program at UNG has been reinstated, and they want the tribe to be a major part of it.

3. Lumpkin County history project

- UNG is writing a book on the second 100 years of Lumpkin County.



- They plan to dedicate 2–3 chapters to the Cherokee, and Rhonda is working with them on this.
- 4. Historical Society collaboration
 - Working with the Historical Society to research:
 - Gold mining history in the area.
 - Events around the Cherokee in stockades and how that period unfolded.
- 5. Local officials & road renaming
 - In contact with Rhett Stringer, now chairman of the county commissioners.
 - Planning a ceremony to rename a section of a local road to “Cherokee Heritage Parkway.”
 - Rhonda will send invitations to local and state officials and inform the council so members can attend.
- 6. Military museum & early soldiers
 - Working with a military museum committee that is:
 - Supporting the Cherokee.
 - Writing a book that will include the Cherokee as some of the first soldiers in the area, with dedicated chapters.
- 7. Order of the Arrow
 - The Boy Scouts’ Order of the Arrow is coming to help with property cleanup and related work.
- 8. Youth program & returning student
 - Jacob Roe, a student at Stanford, will:
 - Arrive Monday and stay for nine weeks.
 - Help with youth program ceremonies, language, and broader youth engagement.
 - Aim is to strengthen youth involvement, especially engaging more young men.
- 9. Foundation governance
 - The tribe has voted in a board of directors for the Georgia Tribe Eastern Cherokee Foundation.
 - This board will:
 - Oversee how grant money is spent.
 - Provide oversight for projects and funding.

Cherokee of Georgia Tribal Council: No report provided.

GUEST SPEAKERS

- A) James Clements discussed the work of the Georgia State Council of Machisists.
- B) Jessica Young, Lucia McGrath, and Caroline Beigel provided an update on the Georgia Native Sites Project.
- C) Daesha McKorley and Shay Johnson provided an update on their work with the Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe’s greenhouses.
- D) Sean Bridges informed the Council on a potential burial ground in Muskogee County in which the Council would investigate.



BUSINESS

- A) Oretta Kirkland moved to approve the transfer of the Council's physical records to Georgia Archives. Royce McCrary seconded. Motion carried unanimously.
- B) Heidi Altman moved to support the social media expansion of the Birds Georgia project as proposed by Birds Georgia relative to the Significant American Indian Sites. Oretta Kirkland seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- A) Next Council meeting is August 4th.
- B) Atlanta Braves Game is August 15th.
- C) Smithgall Woods State Park – October 9-11, 2026

ADJOURNMENT

Heidi Altman moved to adjourn meeting. Motion seconded by Royce McCrary. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 3:20pm.