

**Monroe County Board of Commissioners**

**Minutes of the March 19, 2024**

***Regular Commissioners Meeting***

**9:00 A.M.**

**Present:**

Greg Tapley, Chairman

Eddie Rowland, Vice-Chairman

Lamarcus Davis, District 1

John Ambrose, District 3

George Emami, District 4

**Staff:**

Ben Vaughn, County Attorney

Jim Hedges, County Manager

Janet Abbott, County Clerk

Richard Dumas, Public Information Officer

Kelsey Fortner, Community Development Manager

**Welcome**

Chairman Tapley welcomed everyone in attendance.

**Prayer**

New Providence Baptist Church Senior Adult Pastor Nathan Jackson gave the invocation.

**Pledge**

Chairman Tapley led the Pledge.

**Roll Call**

County Clerk Janet Abbott called roll.

**Call to Order**

Chairman Tapley called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M.

## **New Business**

### **Approve Agenda**

Chairman Tapley presented the agenda for approval with the removal of item I and Item J and the addition of Chelsea Ogletree and an announcement from Commissioner Emami.

Commissioner Davis motioned to approve the agenda with said changes.

Commissioner Ambrose seconded the motion, and the motion passed 5-0.

### **Approve Minutes-BOC Meeting-March 05, 2024, Workshop and Regular Meeting**

Commissioner Emami motioned to approve the minutes of the March 05, 2024, regular meeting with the normal 30 days for changes.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion passed 5-0.

### **Chelsea Ogletree Building Permit**

Ms. Chelsea Ogletree stated she has applied for a commercial building permit and would like an update on the process. Ms. Ogletree asked the Board to assist in speeding up the process so that she could open her restaurant, Your Majesty Kitchen, in its new location.

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner stated Ms. Green's first meeting with the City of Forsyth for the original application didn't include signed and stamped architectural plans. Ms. Fortner stated Ms. Ogletree submitted the plans on March 12<sup>th</sup> and they are allowed ten days to review and respond. Commissioner Emami asked if there were any major changes since the original plans were first submitted. Ms. Fortner replied yes.

Ms. Ogletree stated her first hearing on January 26<sup>th</sup> was with the City Zoning Official, Utilities, Charles Abbott and Associates and at this meeting they did not state she needed signed and stamped architect plans. Monroe County Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner said she was not present at the "first step" meeting but said Charles Abbott and Associates Inspectors Jeremy Head and Kyle Golberg were there. Mrs. Fortner stated Mr. Head and Mr. Golberg told her that Ogletree was informed then that she needed an architectural plan.

### **2026 SPLOST Projects (1<sup>st</sup> Review)**

County Manager Jim Hedges stated it is time to begin the development of projects that will be included in the 2026-2031 SPLOST. The process is for the Board of Commissioners to agree on the projects to be included, holding a joint meeting with the municipalities, agreeing to an Intergovernmental Agreement, passing a Resolution calling for a Referendum, and submitting the IGA and Resolution to the Registrar. All this needs to be concluded by May/June 2024 and the Referendum will be on November 5, 2024. Should it fail, a second Referendum will be held in November 2025.

Mr. Hedges presented a proposed list, developed with input from the Department Heads.

Snapshot:

|               | Share  | 2020-2025  | 2026-2031  | I/(D)      |
|---------------|--------|------------|------------|------------|
| Monroe County | 83.20% | 21,255,184 | 33,278,900 | 12,023,716 |
| Forsyth       | 15.01% | 3,827,091  | 6,003,300  | 2,176,209  |
| Culloden      | 1.79%  | 417,725    | 717,800    | 300,075    |

Projection of a 57% increase in collections.

Proposed Projects, by Category:

| Category                | Amount     |
|-------------------------|------------|
| Water                   | 2,000,000  |
| Roads                   | 3,900,000  |
| Building                | 6,320,000  |
| Rolling Stock           | 9,450,000  |
| Miscellaneous Equipment | 2,600,700  |
| Recreation              | 9,008,200  |
| Total                   | 33,278,900 |

By Department:

|                |            |
|----------------|------------|
| Water          | 2,000,000  |
| Roads          | 3,900,000  |
| Automotive     | 1,000,000  |
| Public Works   | 2,430,000  |
| MCES           | 4,976,700  |
| Landfill       | 700,000    |
| Recycling      | 1,474,000  |
| Sheriff        | 5,620,000  |
| Animal Control | 1,000,000  |
| Recreation     | 10,178,200 |
| Total          | 33,278,900 |

Water-\$2,000,000

- \$2,000,000 is proposed to close dead-end water mains.
  - Shi Road
  - Rumble Road

Roads-\$3,900,000

- \$650,000 per year for 6 years, or \$3,900,000, primarily to cover the annual LMIG match and small road maintenance projects by Public Works.

Automotive Shop-\$1,000,000

- \$1,000,000 allocated for a new Automotive Shop building.
- Ray White estimates the existing Automotive Shop is 50-55 years old.
- Lacks climate control.
- Mezzanine built for parts storage.
- External shed used for tire storage.
- Building in poor condition per Ray White.

Public Works-\$2,430,000

- \$210,000 for 3 new shop service trucks at \$70,000 each.
- \$940,000 for 4 tandem dump trucks at \$235,000 each.
- \$100,000 for a new backhoe truck.
- \$200,000 for a low-boy tractor truck.
- \$400,000 for a Gradeall.
- \$230,000 for a water truck.
- \$350,000 for a new Motor grader.

MCES-\$4,976,700

- \$2,450,000 for 7 ambulances at \$350,000 each.
- \$450,000 for 6 staff vehicles at \$75,000 each, including equipment.
- \$1,000,000 for Hazmat equipment. This is a new service for MCES; the nearest Hazmat team is in Macon and callout time is unacceptable.
- \$672,000 for 84 portable radios at \$8,000 each.
- \$400,000 for a station buildout, probably Popes Ferry to provide emergency services to the southeast part of the county.

Waste-\$2,174,000.

- \$300,000 for an Excavator at the Landfill
- \$400,000 for a Dozer replacement at the landfill
- \$300,000 for a second grapple truck for recycling
- \$780,000 for 12 compactors at \$65,000 each for Recycling.

- \$144,000 for 20 roll-off containers at \$7,200 each for Recycling.

Sheriff-\$5,620,000

- \$3,120,000 for Patrol Vehicles; 8 vehicles per year at \$65,000 each.
- \$2,500,000 to buildout the vacant building space at the Monroe County Jail.

Animal Control-\$1,000,000

- \$1,000,000 for a new and larger Animal Control Building

Recreation-\$10,178,200

- \$3,000,000 for a new horse arena.
- \$2,332,200 for clearing, grubbing, erosion control, grading, drainage, utilities for 25 acres.
- \$1,248,300 for grass and lights for 3 soccer/football fields.
- \$2,028,000 for grass, lighting, fencing, dugouts for 2 200' baseball fields.
- \$400,000 for asphalt parking for a 199-space lot.
- \$1,170,000 for restrooms, concessions, press box.

Timeline

- March 19<sup>th</sup>-Project rollout.
- April 16<sup>th</sup>-Finalize project list.
- May-Joint meeting with municipalities and sign IGA.
- June-BOC approves Resolution calling for the SPLOST Referendum.
- August-Resolution to Registrar.
- November 5<sup>th</sup>-General Election

Following a board discussion, no action was taken.

**Sheriff's Office Access Control Upgrade**

The Access Control System, key fob access, at the Sheriff's office is approximately 24 years old, is outdated, and has reached its end-of-life. Boyd Elrod has researched alternatives and will recommend a system upgrade to a cloud-based access control system that provides maximum security with real-time updates at a cost of \$35,661.

Commissioner Davis motioned to approve the Access Control System upgrade at a cost of \$35,661 and to also include the Courthouse and Care Cottage.

Commissioner Ambrose seconded the motion, and the motion was carried 5-0.

### **Bunn Road Speed Limit Change**

Commissioner Rowland requested that the Public Works Department review the traffic flow and speed limit on Bunn Road due to safety concerns from residents and businesses in this area.

The Public Works Department recommends reducing the speed limit from 45 mph to 35 mph due to the following concerns:

1. Bunn Road is utilized as a shortcut from SR-18 (Dames Ferry Road) to SR-41 for access to Monroe County Schools: T.G. Scott Elementary, Monroe County Middle School on Thornton Road, and Mary Persons High School entrance on SR-41.
2. Increased traffic due to additional residences being constructed on Bunn Road, Sr-18, Jenkins Road, Edge Road, and other developments on the east side of Monroe County.
3. Bunn Road is primarily a rural, farm type collector road with slow moving farm equipment traversing the road; along with construction vehicles, and trucks entering from partially concealed driveways.
4. Traffic commonly exceeds the current posted speed limit of 45 MPH to the 55 MPH citation threshold of 55 MPH.
5. Bunn Road's width from the Gose Road split to SR-41 is 18 feet, too narrow for 45 to 55 MPH traffic.

The Monroe County Public Works Department recommends that the Monroe County Board of Commissioners approve the reduction in the posted speed limit from 45 MPH to 35 MPH for the safety of the residents, businesses, and the traveling public.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve reducing the speed limit from 45 mph to 35 mph on Bunn Road. Commissioner Rowland seconded the motion and the motion carried 5-0.

Public Works Director Kim Stokes stated a notification will run in the paper and signs will be posted notifying the public of the change.

### **English Road Right of Way**

Title Attorney Michael Bledsoe has determined that the English Road right-of-way adjacent to the property now owned by 5 Strand Investments are in the name of Monroe County. Kim Stokes made a site visit and determined that the topography of the land with the rock outcroppings would make the intended road realignment cost prohibitive.

Mr. Stokes recommends the right-of-way be considered surplus and offered to the developers for fair market value or abandoned by the County.

This property does not have any potential development value to Monroe County.

Commissioner Emami motioned to surplus the unused county right-of-way on English Road with plans to sell it to 5 Strand Investments for \$4,000.

Commissioner Rowland seconded the motion and the motion carried 5-0.

### **Dan Pitts Extension & Equestrian Grading**

Following discussions by the Board of Commissioners to create an alternative exit from the Recreation Department, and the decision to locate the new gymnasium at the site of the current horse arena, advertisement for bids will be opened on March 14, 2024, and presented to the Board.

Work will include the extension of Dan Pitts Drive from the Monroe County Recreation Center through property owned by Monroe County to Fairview Church Road, approximately 3'400' of new unpaved road. The work includes grading for the future Equestrian Facility +/- 61,000 cubic yards. Related work includes utility relocation coordination, testing, erosion/sediment control and final stabilization.

Dan Wallace with Three Rivers Engineering presented six bids with supporting documentation. The low bidder was Buxton Construction, LLC with a total bid of just under \$1.9 million.

Other bids were received from:

- Appling Brothers Construction
- Helix Grading & Utility, LLC
- Peed Brothers, Inc.
- Renfro Construction
- Summit Construction & Development, LLC

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve awarding the bid to Buxton Construction with the asphalt paving to be done in house.

Commissioner Emami seconded for discussion.

Commissioner Emami questioned whether the county should spend the money on grading and paving if the future cost of expansion due to the problems with the soil would be expensive. Commissioner Emami asked the board to table and allow him to further review the bids.

Commissioner Rowland stated due to the cost, he would be ok with tabling the decision to allow Commissioner Emami to review the bids.

Following an extensive board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose withdrew his motion and the Board agreed by general consensus to table it for two weeks and bring it back to the board.

Commissioner Davis motioned to move the existing horse arena to the multipurpose field area so the gymnasium project could get started.

Commissioner Emami seconded the motion and the motion carried 5-0.

## 2024 Budget Update

Finance Director Lorri Robinson-Byrd has reviewed the financial results through February 2024, along with actions taken by the Board of Commissioners, and will recommend amending the 2024 Budget.

| General Fund 101                                  | Original budget | Anticipated | YTD          | %     |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------|-------|
| General Fund Revenue Totals                       | 41,569,733      | 41,436,531  | 3,233,163.54 | 7.80  |
| General Fund Expenditure Totals                   | 41,569,733      | 41,436,531  | 7,357,930.28 | 17.76 |
| Budget Amendments already approved by the BOC     |                 | (276,817)   |              |       |
| Budget Amendments that need to be approved by BOC |                 | (283,753)   |              |       |

Mrs. Robinson-Byrd presented a budget amendment for approval to the board for the following adjustments:

- Tax Comm Salary adjustment per ACCG \$4635
- Superior CT Salary adjustment per ACCG \$17,748
- Probate Salary adjustment per ACCG \$4,433
- Coroner Salary Adjustment per ACCG \$764.00
- Magistrate Salary Adjustment \$13,298
- EMS 7 new hires/5 terms \$68,216
- Library PT children's coordinator \$15,444
- Total salary adjustments \$140,138
- SO, Vehicle Insurance Proceeds \$141,615
- Animal Control/Recreation Contributions \$2000
- Total \$143,615
- Total Budget Amendment \$283,753

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the budget amendment in the amount of \$283,753.

Commissioner Emami seconded the motion and the motion carried 5-0.

## Non-Profit Policy Update

This item was removed from the agenda.

## Conference Center Non-Profit Rates

This item was removed from the agenda.

## See/Click/Fix Contract Renewal

In May 2023, the Board approved a "one" year contract with CIVICPLUS for the See/Click/Fix software, with the understanding we would review after one year. The contract expires on May 25, 2024, and we have a 60-day notice period of cancellation.

Public Information Office, Richard Dumas recommends extending the contract with SEE/Click/Fix for at least one additional year. Mr. Dumas stated we have only had it available to the public for three months and while we don't have a lot of people enrolled yet, the citizens who are using it are getting a lot of use out of it.

Commissioner Emami approved to renew the See/Click/Fix contract.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion was carried 5-0.

### **Towaliga Accountability Court**

County Manager Jim Hedges presented a request from DA Jonathan Adams on behalf of the Towaliga Accountability Court for \$100,000 and an IGA between Monroe County and the Towaliga Accountability Court for consideration.

The Towaliga Accountability Court is requesting a short-term loan of \$100,000 from the county contingency fund pending receipt of the Employee Retention Tax Credit. The court applied for an Employee Retention Tax Credit with the IRS last year and has yet to receive the refund.

Steve Giglio, Towaliga Accountability Courts Director, reported that in the April/May timeframe of 2023 when we initially learned of our ERTC eligibility, and Innovation Refunds gave us our estimated tax refund paperwork of approximately \$248,000.00, our board allocated \$100,000.00 of this anticipated ERTC funding for our FY2024 budget. Mr. Giglio's request stated the court has moved money around for the better part of 9 months in the current fiscal year and has come to the end of their options financially. There is enough funding to continue full operations through March 31, 2024. After that time, only full-time staff and basic utility services will be funded until we receive additional funding.

Commissioner Emami motioned to approve the IGA and the request for \$100,000.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion was carried 5-0.

### **Commissioner Emami announcement-resignation**

Commissioner Emami read a letter of resignation to the Board. Commissioner Emami stated he was submitting his letter of resignation to the Governor's Office and had not yet settled on an effective date. He stated he will be working with the County Manager and other commissioners on an exit plan and will provide an effective date of resignation soon. He stated an election will be held in November to replace his district seat.

Commissioner Emami stated he is proud of his time and accomplishments while in office and cited "it has become difficult over the last year or so to try to run local small businesses while working for the county. He continued that in the last few months, his businesses and members of his family have been the victim of several malicious and horrifically deceitful online threats and attacks."

Commissioner Emami stated "In the end, I feel that I have been forced to choose between honoring my commitment to the county or having to do right by my family, my business partners, and my employees. As of

today, I have chosen to seek the latter's interests over my political career. The county can find someone to replace me, my family and businesses cannot."

Commissioner Emami continued to read his resignation letter finishing up with "I have truly enjoyed my time as a public servant. I can't thank the good people of Monroe County enough for giving me this chance. It's been an incredible experience and something I will cherish and take with me for the rest of my life. Serving with you, my fellow commissioners (John, Eddie, Greg, and Lamarcus0, and our staff (Jim, Lorri, Kelsey, Janet, Richard, Ben, Natalie, Jeff and Kim), along with the entire team of department heads and county employees, has been the honor of my life this far. I'll never forget everything I've learned from you. I'm a better person because of you."

#### **Public Comments**

No public comments

#### **Commissioners' Comments**

##### **Commissioner Lamarcus Davis**

Commissioner Davis thanked Commissioner Emami for his kind words and for a heads up regarding his resignation. Commissioner Davis thanked the board and the recreation staff for their hard work on the recreation project.

##### **Commissioner Eddie Rowland**

Commissioner Rowland stated Monroe County is better for having Commissioner Emami involved. He stated at times we have only had each other to rely on.

##### **Commissioner John Ambrose**

Commissioner Ambrose stated Commissioner Emami is a great asset to the county. He stated the county is in good standing as a direct result of Commissioner Emami being part of it.

Commissioner Ambrose thanked Kim Stokes for taking actions immediately on road problems.

##### **Commissioner George Emami**

Commissioner Emami stated he appreciates the Boards comments, but he wants to make it clear for a number of reasons this is the right time for him, he stated he wishes it could be at the end of his term but now is the time.

##### **Chairman Greg Tapley**

Chairman Tapley stated Commissioner Emami's announcement was a huge surprise. He stated he appreciates Commissioner Emami's service, and he has done a great job.

Chairman Tapley thanked Forsyth-Monroe County Chamber of Commerce for a great Forsythia Festival.

Chairman Tapley thanked Phillip Bunn for hanging an America flag over ensign road as a farewell salute to the local National Guard Troop for their deployment.

**Executive Session**

There was no executive session.

**Action from Executive Session.**

There was no executive session, therefore no action.

**Adjourn**

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to adjourn at 10:53 A.M.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion passed 5-0.

Respectively Submitted by:

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Janet Abbott, County Clerk