Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of the July 11, 2023

Regular Commissioners Meeting

9:00 A.M.

Present:

Greg Tapley, Chairman

Eddie Rowland, Vice-Chairman-Not present

Lamarcus Davis, District 1-Not present

John Ambrose, District 3

George Emami, District 4

Staff:

Benjamin 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.

Moment of Silence

Chairman Tapley stated the Governor had recently ordered flags to be flown at half-staff for Crisp County Deputy Tyee Brown that was recently killed in the line of duty. Chairman Tapley stated the flags would remain at half staff to honor recently deceased Forsyth City Councilman Melvin Lawrence.

A moment of silence was held in honor of both individuals.

Prayer

Reverend Cleveland Jarrell of Greater Fellowship Baptist Church 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 addition of Alcohol License as Item D, and Zoning Board Discussion as possible Item J.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the agenda with said changes.

Commissioner Emami seconded the motion and the motion carried 3-0.

Approve Minutes-BOC Meeting-June 04, 2023, Workshop and June 20, 2023, Regular Meeting

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the minutes of the June 04, 2023, workshop and the June 20, 2023, Regular meeting with the normal 30 days for changes.

Commissioner Emami seconded the motion and the motion carried 3-0.

High Falls/Smarr Fire Station Furnishings

County Manager Jim Hedges stated the restoration and addition to the High Falls Fire Station is well underway and the proposal for the Smarr Fire Station will be presented to the Board of Commissioners in August. Chief Jackson has developed a shopping list of required furniture, fixtures, and other equipment that will be needed in order to fully staff these two locations. The projected cost is $80,000 for both facilities and funding will be from the 2020 Bond issue.

EMS Chief Matt Jackson presented the request.

The list of items, quantity needed, and pricing is as follows:

Item	Quantity	Unit Price	Total
Bed Frame	12	$350	$4,200
Mattress	12	$330	$3,960
Bedroom Lockers	12	$320	$3,840
Gear Lockers	12	$1,867	$22,400
Nightstand	12	$340	$4,080
Recliners	12	$900	$10,800
End Tables	4	$300	$1,200

TV	2	$600	$1,200
Kitchen Tables	2	$800	$1,600.00
Chairs	6	$50	$300
Desk	3	$1,200	$3,600
Office Chairs	3	$150	$450
Refrigerator	2	$1,500	$3,000
Microwave	2	$250	$500
Kitchen Utensils	Various	$800	$800
Shelving	Various	$500	$500
Window Blinds	22	$1,300	$1,300
Dry Erase Boards	2	$400	$800
Washer/Dryer	2	$1,400	$2,800
Dishwasher	2	$550	$1,100
Ice Machine	2	$3,800	$7,600
Amp/Speaker	Various	$1,200	$1,200
Door Mats	20	$30	$600
Oven Hood	2	$200	$400
Various Supplies	Various	$800	$1,600
Air Compressor	2	$300	$600
Total			$77,050

County Manager Jim Hedges stated funding can come from two sources, the 2020 Bond expenditure or from the recent sale of the old Smarr Fire Station proceeds.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the request.

Commissioner Emami seconded the motion and the motion carried 3-0.

Alcohol License-Blanche Farm Meats

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented an application for Blanche Farm Meats located at 5959 Hwy 41 South, Macon, Ga, 31210. Mrs. Fortner stated owner Bernard Blanche was requesting to add Wine Pouring and Malt Beverage Pouring license to his existing license.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve.

Commissioner Emami seconded the motion and the motion carried 3-0.

Alcohol License-Habersham Winery

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented an Alcohol License Ownership change request. Ms. Fortner stated due to the death of owner Betty Clements, her daughter is requesting to take over ownership and would like to transfer ownership into her name.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve.

Commissioner Emami seconded the motion and the motion carried 3-0.

Juliette Water Project: Meters & Installation

County Manager Jim Hedges stated the installation of water mains associated with the Juliette Water Project are complete. Currently, there are 139 customers awaiting meter installation; however, the inventory of meters is short and an additional 106 meters and backflow preventers need to be purchased at a cost of $35,079. Additionally, H20 is short-staffed, and installation has fallen behind. In the past, we have contracted Consolidated Pipe Supply to install meters along the Juliette Water Project at a cost of $50 per meter. Approval is requested to again contract with CPS for the installation of the remaining 139 meters at a cost of $6,950. Funding for the purchase and installation of these remaining meters will be funded from the 2020 Bond issue.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the contract with CPS for the installation of the remaining 139 meters at a cost of $6,950 with funding to come from 2020 Bond issue.

Commissioner Emami seconded the motion and the motion carried 3-0.

Tax Bill Penalties, Interest, Fees & Refund

County Manager Jim Hedges stated Mr. Randy Osborn's property tax bill, parcel on Collier Road, Parcel No. 028 013, was delayed in being issued by the Monroe County Tax Commissioners, and it was sent to the wrong address in their system. Mr. Osborn is seeking a refund of $265.67 for penalties, interest, and other fees.

Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Emami motioned to deny.

Commissioner Ambrose seconded the motion and the motion carried 3-0.

Release & Indemnification-13719 Highway 87

Kim Stokes presented to the board a Release and Indemnification agreement for 13719 Highway 87 for property owners William and Janice Veal. William and Janice Veal requested work performed on the County Right of Way contiguous to the property of William and Janice Veal on Elbert Jackson Road. The agreement states William and Janice Veal indemnify and agree to hold harmless Monroe County's agents, contractors, and employees during the process of the removal of existing trees, vines, and undergrowth to allow access to the backslope of the roadway. The agreement states vegetation has intermingled with the existing fences and appears to be growing from under the existing barn foundation slab on the County Right of Way contiguous to the Veal property on Elbert Jackson Road. William and Janice Veal acknowledge they have been advised by the County that work on said right of way could cause damage to the nearby barn as the extent of the undergrowth cannot be determined prior to removal.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve.

Commissioner Emami seconded the motion and the motion carried 3-0.

Reedy Creek Emergency Bridge Repair

Kim Stokes stated there is "emergency repair" work required on the Reedy Creek Bridge. Mr. Stokes stated that he has investigated this issue, called bridge experts for consultation, and obtained two quotes for repairs. The lowest quote is for $162,899.50 from Southeastern Site Development.

County Manager Jim Hedges stated given that Kim Stokes declares this repair to be an emergency, we have not advertised and tried to obtain a third bid from Comanche Construction; however, they declined to bid given their work backlog.

Quotes for the bridge repair are as follows:

- Southeastern Site Development $162,899.50
- Massana $171,082.00
- Comanche Construction Co. Declined to bid.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to award the bid to Southeastern Site Development in the amount of $162,899.50 for emergency repair work on Reedy Creek Bridge.

Chairman Tapley seconded the motion and the motion carried 3-0.

2024 Budget Snapshot (Point out only)

County Manager Jim Hedges stated with the recent notification by the Monroe County Tax Assessors' office that the property digest will decrease by approximately $124 million stemming from a further cell shutdown at Plant Scherer and will result in a decrease in annual property tax of approximately $1.4 million. This decrease in revenue is compounded by expenditure increases in a number of areas.

Lorri Robinson and I have put together a plan for the 2024 budget that will not result in the need to increase property taxes, cover all expenses including the funding for the 34 vacant positions, full funding for capital expenditure requests including a new compactor at the landfill, and a modest salary adjustment for all employees outside of the Sheriff's office and MCES. This is possible by utilizing $3.5 million of unassigned reserved funds.

- **Assumptions**
  - Manpower and requested capital expenditures are a bottom-up estimate.
  - Revenues are projected by Lorri Robinson

  - Expenses are deemed to be constant with the 2023 budget, except where we know there are decreases, or fixed increases.
- **Highlights**
  - No tax increases.
  - All vacant approved positions funded.
    - Funding will be included in the Commissioners' budget as contingency and as positions are filled, funds will be reallocated to the department budget from the Commissioner's budget.
  - All requested capital items are funded.
  - $3.5 million of unassigned reserves will be required.
- **Expenditures Unknown**
  - Health Insurance
  - Retirement
  - Workers' Compensation
- **Summary**
  - Revenue Increase $390,152
  - Expenditure Increase $3,414,880
  - 2024 Deficit ($3,024,728)

Bank Balance-Reserves

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Beginning	14,497,349	17,112,835	21,668,404	28,512,849	36,159,086	33,456,045	30,891,721
Net Increase (Loss)	2,615,486	4,555,569	6,844,445	7,646,237	(2,703,041)	(2,564,324)	(3,500,000)
Ending	17,112,835	21,668,404	28,512,849	36,159,086	33,456,045	30,891,721	27,391,721
Reserved Fund Balance (3 months)	**RESTRICTED RESERVES**				(9,419,892)	(9,419,892)	(9,419,892)
Prepaid & Inventory					(447,963)	(447,963)	(447,963)
Accrued Liabilities-Admin					(1,210,083)	(1,210,083)	(1,210,083)

Commissioner Discretionary Funds					(236,174)	(236,174)	(236,174)
ACCG BBT Debt-Energy Efficiency					(1,470,368)	(1,470,368)	(1,470,368)
Encumbrances -prior year					(184,640)	(184,640)	(184,640)
Total Unreserved FB	**UNASSIGNED RESERVES**				(20,486,970)	(17,922,646)	(14,422,646)
							(23,842,538)

- **Summary**
  - Deficit ($3,024,728)
  - Vacant Positions -
  - Tax Increase -
  - Reserves $3,500,000
  - Contingency $475,272

County Manager Jim Hedges asked the Board if this is the way forward with the budget process.
Commissioner Emami stated for a first crack at the can, he thinks this is a pretty good start.
Chairman Tapley asked at what date would the decisions need to be made.
County Manager, Jim Hedges stated the millage rate approval would come before the Board in the middle of August, followed by a bottom-up budget presentation, the commissioners would get the first kick at the can on the budget in Mid-November with final approval in December.

Zoning Board Discussion

Commissioner Ambrose stated he is not happy with a remark that was made by a Zoning Board member, and in the past Zoning Board members were appointed by the Board of Commissioners from the district they lived in and the individual that made the comment does not live in the district he represents. Commissioner Ambrose stated the UDO has required a lot of extra time and work from the Board of Commissioners as well as the Zoning Board and recently the Zoning Board was given extra compensation to show appreciation. Commissioner Ambrose stated he was offended by the accusation from a Zoning Board Member that the extra compensation was a bribe. Commissioner Ambrose stated the Zoning Board only makes recommendations, the final decision on the UDO comes from the Board of Commissioners, therefore there was no basis for the accusation of a bribe. Commissioner Ambrose stated he thinks the guy should be removed, censured, or removed for making those types of comments.

Chairman Tapley asked Commissioner Ambrose if he was making a motion and just wanted to state that he would not vote on something that he had not had prior information for.

Commissioner Emami stated he had called Mr. Hunter and expressed his frustration and anger and let him know he did not appreciate the accusation. Commissioner Emami stated the hardest thing about being a public official is that every day your motives are questioned. Commissioner Emami stated this was a situation where the Board of Commissioners were asking the Zoning Board to do a lot more than their normal thing of coming in once a month for a meeting and make a recommendation on approval or denial of an application. He continued with, he thinks a little bit of a mistake was made in paying it out now instead of waiting until it was over, but he thinks by the time the process is over they are going to feel a lot more like "Thank God." He stated for the people questioning the $500 that was given, the amount is a small pittance compared to the work they are putting in, he stated it is not even minimum wage.

Commissioner Emami stated he had spoken with Mr. Hunter and even though he did not get a formal apology, Mr. Hunter did make a post online correcting the record, basically stating that is not what he meant.

Commissioner Emami stated he appreciates that he was willing to correct the record.

Commissioner Emami stated he doesn't appreciate his motives being questioned and he feels as though it would be catastrophic if every appointee came up and used the microphone in that way. He stated he does think some sort of reprimand is in order and that it was a "shot" at all five members of the Board of Commissioners that were elected by the public. He stated he wants to be forgiving and wants to be able to be bigger than being offended but at the end of the day we must be smarter than accusing people of a crime.

Commissioner Emami stated he asked Mr. Hunter if he felt as though it was bribery why did he cash the check.

Chairman Tapley stated two commissioners were absent and it there was a vote today he would abstain due to it being a last-minute agenda item. He stated more investigation is needed on whether they wanted to censure, suspend, reprimand or removal and a consultation with the county attorney was needed to get his opinion.

Chairman Tapley stated it is his opinion that all commissioners should be present for whatever decision is made because if Commissioner Ambrose and Commissioner Emami vote for it now and it is brought back to another meeting and three commissioners vote not to do it, it muddies the water.

Commissioner Emami stated all he is looking for is a public apology made in the same character and fashion as the accusation was made.

Commissioner Comments

District 3-John Ambrose-Commissioner Ambrose stated he appreciates the job Jim, Janet, Kelsey, Ben, and Richard are doing.

District 4-George Emami-Commissioner Emami stated he agreed with Commissioner Ambrose.

Chairman-Greg Tapley Chairman Tapley stated he agrees also and is very appreciative of staff.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Executive Session

There was no executive session.

Action from Executive Session

There was no executive session, therefore, no need for action.

Adjourn

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to adjourn at 10:30 a.m.

Commissioner Emami seconded the motion and the motion carried 3-0.

Respectively Submitted by:

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Janet Abbott, County Clerk