

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of the September 19, 2023

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:

Natalie Sundeen, County Attorney

Jim Hedges, County Manager

Janet Abbott, County Clerk

Richard Dumas, Public Information Officer

Kelsey Fortner, Community Development Manager

Lorri Robinson-Byrd, Finance Director

Welcome

Chairman Tapley welcomed everyone in attendance.

Chairman Tapley read a memorial into record for former Commission Chairman William Frederick Harris and held a moment of silence in his memory.

Prayer

Pastor Bill Wilson of Russellville 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.

Monroe County All Abilities Baseball League

Keith Edge resident of 375 Oak Ridge Drive and former Recreation Director addressed the Board regarding the creation of the Monroe Champions youth baseball league for male and female athletes with disabilities. Mr. Edge stated the league provides an opportunity for Monroe County kids to participate without having to go outside the county. Mr. Edge thanked the Board for their blessing and for continued support.

Chairman Tapley asked to be added to the list for support.

Forsyth Bicentennial

Forsyth Convention and Visitors Bureau Director, Gilda Stanberry and Main Street Director Kimmy Childs presented an overview of the events scheduled for the upcoming City of Forsyth's 200th Bicentennial Celebration.

New Business

Approve Agenda

Chairman Tapley presented the agenda for approval with the deletion of Item C-Georgia State Patrol and to defer to the next meeting, item H-FIT Property, the addition of the Middle Georgia Aging Advisory Council, and executive session for personnel.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the agenda with said changes.

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

Approve Minutes-BOC Meeting-September 09, 2023, Regular Meeting

Commissioner Emami motioned to approve the minutes of the September 09, 2023, Regular meeting with the normal 30 days for changes.

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

Georgia State Patrol Request

This item was removed from the agenda and deferred to the next meeting.

Banking Update

Monroe County currently uses Truist Bank, and United Bank for our banking services. Finance Director, Ms. Robinson-Byrd stated we used Persons Bank prior to their merger with the Robins Federal Credit Union, which is not allowed to provide banking services to governmental organizations. Our finance staff has noticed a significant decline in customer service with Truist since the merger of BB&T and SunTrust.

Finance Director Lorri Robinson-Byrd is recommending moving away from Truist and engaging the new Bank of Dudley for some of Monroe County's banking.

Ms. Robinson stated the county has a total of sixty-one (61) banking accounts. The county currently utilizes United Bank and Truist Bank. Prior to last summer/fall 2022, the county also had bank accounts at Persons

Bank. When Persons Bank merged with Robins Federal Credit Union, Robins could not provide banking services for Monroe County, so all accounts that were located at Persons were moved to United Bank.

Currently we have a total of forty-four (44) banking accounts at United Bank, seventeen (17) banking accounts at Truist Bank. We would like to move our main operating account, General Fund Operating Account, Payroll Account, and Conference Center Account from Truist to the Bank of Dudley. The staff is dissatisfied with the customer service at Truist. Ms. Robinson stated we are only planning to move the bank accounts that involve cash deposits at this time. Fourteen bank accounts will remain at Truist and three will be with the Bank of Dudley. The interest rate or yield with all three banks is consistent with each other. An interest-bearing account is approximately .75%; money market accounts are as follows: less than \$1 million averaging 2.96% and over \$1 million is 4%. For the purpose of this we are only looking at interest bearing checking accounts. Monroe County already has money market accounts with the State of Georgia GF1 with which the yield is 5.21110 per July 2023 statement.

Commissioner Emami motioned approve to move the accounts.

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

Animal Services Citations

At the August 15, 2023, Board of Commissioners' meeting, the Board authorized the Animal Service Director, and Animal Service Officers to issue citations for various violations of the Animal Ordinance with the understanding Animal Services would develop a policy on the issuance of citations.

Animal Services has identified eight areas where citations may be warranted and include the following:

- Control of Dog
- Rabies Vaccinations and Identifications Tags
- Neglect
- Abandoned Animals
- Cruelty to Animals
- Nuisance Dogs
- Breeding
- Interference with an Officer

Becky Gifford presented the recommended citation policy.

Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the Animal Services Citation Ordinance.

Commissioner Rowland seconded the motion, the motion was carried 5-0.

Smarr Fire Station

Proform LLC has submitted the cost estimate of \$1,616,732, including a contingency of \$20,000 and design fees of \$59,800, for the construction of the Smarr Fire Station. This is slightly higher than the earlier estimate. If approved, mobilization would begin within 30 days with a completion date of March/April 2024, weather permitting.

Building Components:

- Three apparatus bays
- Six bedrooms
- Two bathrooms
- Kitchen
- Day Room
- Office
- Conference Room
- Classroom and Bathrooms

Cost

- Smarr Fire Station \$1,536,932
- Design Fee \$59,800
 - Subtotal \$1,596,732
- Contingency \$20,000
 - Total Option 1 \$1,616,732
- Deduct Classroom/Bathroom (\$31,114)
 - Total Option 2 \$1,585,618

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve Proform LLC proposal, Option 1, to build the Smarr Fire Station at a cost of \$1,616,732 with funding from the 2020 Bonds.

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

RV Fee Amendment

The Recreation Vehicle Fee Resolution that passed on the September 5, 2023, Board of Commissioners' meeting has been revised to include a discount from \$1000/year to \$750/year for owners over the age of 65.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the Recreational Vehicle Fee Amendment Resolution.

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

FIT Property-Conditional Use/Variance (Billboard)

This item was removed from the agenda.

Alcohol License

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented an alcohol license for approval. 4988 High Falls Road is changing ownership of Alcohol License. Tina Patel will be the new owner of this store. The new owner will be for AG 2611 DBA High Falls Market. Mrs. Fortner stated the ordinance requirements have been met, affidavit from the Monroe County Reporter has been received and the fees paid.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the alcohol license application for ownership change.

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

Remote Fuel Tanks

The concept of locating both diesel and gasoline tanks remotely from the Montpelier Avenue Public Works location has been discussed recently. Kim Stokes has negotiated with Walthall Oil Company, our supplier of both diesel and gasoline that is a very good, and low cost, proposal. Specifically, Walthall will install temporary double insulated tanks for both diesel and gasoline at no cost to the county. The county would invest \$21,078.52 for key fob and data tracking equipment that would enable Walthall to monitor each tank for refilling information, and to allow the county to evaluate for department charging purposes. Preliminary, tanks would be installed at the Johnstonville Road Fire Station to service the High Falls, Johnstonville Road, and Cabiness Fire Stations; the new Smarr Fire Station to service Bolingbroke, Smarr, and Russellville Fire Stations; the landfill, and the Sheriff's Office.

Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve.

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

AG Center Update

Commissioner Rowland presented the information to the Board for the AG Center to be located at the Recreation Department.

What are we going to build?

1. Covered arena-300' x 180.'

- Lighted
- Concessions
- Restrooms
- Sound System
- Scoring Booth
- Bleachers

- Arena Ring
- Presentation Display
- Cooling Fans
- Water System
- Proper Footing

2. Covered Stalls-2 Barns-200' x 60.'

- Lighted
- Electrical
- Fans

3. Other Needs

- Warm-up arena
- Wash down area.
- Shavings/dirt/manure storage
- Septic
- Covered walkways.
- Lagoon

4. 2,500 sq. ft. Extension Office

- Office Space
- Meeting/Board Room
- Restrooms
- Mechanical room
- Housekeeping room
- Storage rooms
- Break room

5. 5,000 sq. ft. Event Hall

- Lighting & HVAC
- Restrooms
- Sound System
- Commercial Kitchen
- Tables & Chairs
- Presentation display

6. Conservation Center (Outdoor Classroom)

- Native American (regional) exhibits in Event Hall
- Teaching green house
- Teaching-non-cultivated walking trail (near creek)
- Educational “cultivated for wildlife” plots along trail.
- Informative ornamental and grasses along trail
- Upgrades, improvements to pond to allow for boating, kayaking, canoeing, and fishing uses.
- Upgrade existing trails for birds, butterfly watching and plant identification.
- Camping platforms
- RV sites

7. Small Animal arena for calves, sheep, goats, and pigs.

- Stalls/staging area attached to event hall.
- Showing area inside event hall
- Add bleachers, removable grass carpet for showing stage.
- Add removable arena.
- Add removable stalls.
- Install concrete floor with washdown drains.
- Install electricity and water for each stall.
- Install washdown and trimming area.
- Lights with cooling fans

How much will it cost? Items 1-4 Arena, Stalls, Warm-up area, Extension Office.

Cost-\$3,750,000					
Arena		1,000,000		2-76 Barns	700,000
Extension Office		500,000		Stalls	100,000
Grading		300,000		Scoring Center	100,000
Utilities		200,000		Restrooms/Concessions	200,000
Miscellaneous		650,000			
Miscellaneous-\$650,000					
Tractor		40,000		Signage	5,000
Implements		10,000		Sound System	15,000

Fencing		10,000		Scoring System		10,000
Water		50,000		Shop/Storage		20,000
Electrical		50,000		Concession Equipment		10,000
Parking		100,000		Landscape		25,000
Stands		25,000				

How will we pay for it?

- Funds available-\$400,000
 - To be used for engineering, relocation of utilities, initial site plan, financing cost, etc.
- Step 1
 - Commit the current vehicle loan payment that ends in 2023-\$175,000/year.
 - Loan from ACCG for \$1,500,000 at 4% yield
- Step 2
 - Commit half of Energy Efficiency loan payment (ends 2024) $\$500,000/2=\$250,000$
 - Loan from ACCG for \$2,250,000 at 4% yield
- Final Step
 - Pass SPLOST in 2024 or 2025
 - Commit first six months of collections to payoff ACCG loan.

What if we get the Conservation Grant?

- Grant of \$3,000,000 with 50% match.
 - Match of \$1,500,000 is for items 1-4.
 - Grant funding for items 5-7 (Event Hall, Conservation Center, and Small Animal Arena)

Grant-\$1,500,000						
Event Hall		375,000		Tractor/Implements		25,000
Conservation Center		125,000		Water/Electrical		50,000
Grading		150,000		Parking		50,000
Utilities		100,000		Signs		5,000
Restrooms		100,000		Storage		10,000
Landscape		5,000		Security		10,000
Other/TBD						

Following an extensive Board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve proceeding with advertising for Request for Design/Build for the Ag Center.

Commissioner Emami seconded the motion for discussion.

Commissioner Emami stated this was an impressive presentation. He stated he likes this idea, and it fits the nature of our county; his concern is this is the first time seeing this as a commissioner and he is not comfortable voting to approve something he just saw, and the expense is 3.5 million dollars. He stated he needs a little more time to process and to talk to his constituents to make sure this is what we need to do. Commissioner Emami stated the second thing he is concerned about is the timing of this happening right before budget discussions. He stated this conversation needs to be had during the budget discussions. He stated he is for this project and for trying to make it work.

Chairman Tapley responded stating, some of these things were necessary prior to meeting with the Ag Commissioner and in order to apply for the grants that are coming up real soon to help fund this.

Commissioner Rowland stated the grant is due October 13th and a plan was needed to apply for it.

Commissioner Rowland stated the only thing being done today is advertising for a Request for Design/Build.

County Manager Jim Hedges stated this is no different that what was done with the Smarr Fire Station, this will come back before the Board for final approval.

Commissioner Emami stated he just wanted to ensure that before the trigger is pulled the Board has a chance to fully understand the commitment and the members of the Board agree this will be looked at in the context of the budget.

The motion was carried 5-0.

Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program Grant

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources is opening up the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program Grant that has a minimum award of \$500,000 to \$3,000,000 maximum. Monroe County would benefit from funding from this grant that would be applied to the development of the Agriculture Center at the Recreation Department.

Grant Specialist Tammy Selman stated the deadline for the application is October 13th. Ms. Selman stated the Vendor for the grant is the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and is used to provide stewardship, conservation and protection to state parks, state lands, local parks, trails, etc. Projects should be completed within two years. The minimum award of \$500,000 and \$3,000,000 maximum award. Ms. Selman stated the purpose is the Recreation Department will be asking for grant funds for creek area development and enhancement of conservation efforts to provide and improve natural habitats along the nature trails. There will be a general focus on significant natural resources along the trails and historical significance of Native

Americans in this region (Lower Piedmont) creating regional significance for park goers, travelers, and visitors to include schools. The trails will also incorporate strategies to include visitors who may be handicapped in some capacity. Camping platforms will also be built for camping. The grant will also consist of construction of a conservatory with an outdoor classroom to encompass the 4-H Extension office. A green house will also be adjacent to the conservatory. The conservatory will be used to house Indian relics and plant artifacts relevant to the nature trails, Monroe County, and this region. The conservatory will also be used to host events such as farm to table seminars, field trips, hunting workshops, and other events. The trail project will start around the pond and lead to the conservatory. Security cameras will be located throughout the trails to assist with safety for hikers and campers. The grant will also be asking for restrooms, parking, lighting, water, and electricity. Mrs. Selman stated the Recreation Department will be asking for a project total of \$3,000,000 in grant funds with a 50% or \$1,500,000 match from the county. After project completion, maintenance of the project will be required. Monthly water and power bills will need to be considered as usage. However, this project will also create a revenue stream for the county since there will be charges for camping and usage of the conservatory area.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve with a match up to 50%.

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

Middle Georgia Regional Commission's Area Agency on Aging Council

Commissioner Davis motioned to appoint Aretha Watts Thompson to the Middle Georgia Regional Commission's Area Aging Advisory Council.

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

Commissioner Comments

District 1-Lamarcus Davis

Commissioner Davis stated he would like to thank Commissioner Rowland for the hard work he put into the Ag Center. He stated the parking situation needs to be looked into at the Recreation Department.

District 2-Eddie Rowland

Commissioner Rowland stated he appreciates all the people that have been working on this very complex project, he has gotten a lot of great feedback. Commissioner Rowland stated he wants to let the rest of the county know if we complete this project parking and additional trails will be looked at.

District 3-John Ambrose

Commissioner Ambrose stated he wanted to recognize Kim Stokes for his hard work. Commissioner Ambrose stated roads are being worked on now more than the last five years. He stated he agrees the parking needs to be addressed at the Recreation Department.

District 4-George Emami

Commissioner Emami stated he would like to thank Commissioner Rowland for all of his hard work.

Chairman Greg Tapley

Chairman Tapley stated he would like to congratulate the City of Forsyth on their upcoming Bicentennial Celebration. Chairman Tapley stated he wanted to thank Richard Dumas for all of the hard work he has put into the celebration.

Public Comments

159 Towaliga Lake Drive resident Bronwen Morgan urged the Board to consider lowering the amount agreed upon for Recreational Vehicles.

217 Newton Drive resident Hugh Cromer thanked the Board for the nets that were installed at the Recreation Department, he stated they provide the maximum amount of safety. Mr. Cromer also stated the parking situation needed to be addressed at the Recreation Department.

Executive Session-Personnel and Real estate

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to move into executive session at 10:33 a.m. for Real Estate and Personnel. Commissioner Emami seconded the motion, and the motion was carried 5-0.

Commissioner Emami left the meeting at 10:50 a.m.

Commissioner Davis motioned to move out of executive session at 11:13 a.m.

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

Action from Executive Session

County Attorney Nathalie Sundeen stated there were two action items regarding real estate, the first item is to engage an appraiser for the appraisal of three two-acre tracts located at the corner of Fairview Church Road and Hwy 42.

Commissioner Rowland motioned to approve, Commissioner Ambrose seconded the motion and the motion carried 4-0.

The next item was to authorize the purchase of 2500 square feet of property located at the corner of Blount Road and Garr Road for the purpose of housing a pumping station for the connection of the county's north and south water systems.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the purchase, Commissioner Davis seconded the motion and the motion carried 4-0

Mrs. Sundeen stated the personnel action item was to reestablish an in-house IT department.

Commissioner Davis motioned to approve, Commissioner Ambrose seconded the motion and the motion carried 4-0.

Adjourn

Commissioner Davis motioned to adjourn at 11:17 a.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

Janet Abbott, County Clerk