

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of October 1, 2024

Regular Commissioners' Meeting

6:00 P.M.

Present:

Greg Tapley, Chairman

Eddie Rowland, Vice-Chairman

Lamarcus Davis, District 1

John Ambrose, District 3

George Emami, District 4

Staff:

Jim Hedges, County Manager

Ben Vaughn, County Attorney

Richard Dumas, Public Information Officer

Janet Abbott, County Clerk

Lorri Robinson-Byrd, Finance Director/Asst. County Manager

Kelsey Fortner, Community Development Manager

Welcome

Chairman Tapley welcomed everyone in attendance.

Prayer

Reverend Keith Harris with Mount Zion Methodist 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 6:00 p.m.

Chairman Tapley read a Proclamation commemorating October 2024 as Breast Cancer Awareness month in Monroe County.

New Business

Approve Agenda

Chairman Tapley presented the agenda for approval adding Kim Stokes/Reedy Creek Road project and the Deer Creek project and moving item M up to item C.

Commissioner Emami motioned to approve the agenda as amended.

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

Approve Minutes-September 17, 2024, Regular Meeting and September 19, 2024, Called Meeting.

Chairman Tapley presented the minutes of the September 14, 2024, Regular Meeting, and the September 19, 2024, Called meeting for approval.

Commissioner Emami motioned to approve the minutes with the usual 30 days for changes.

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

Library

Commissioner Ambrose motioned for the county attorney to obtain the operating procedures for the library to research amending them so that if the controversial books are not moved the county has a say so in operations. Commissioner Ambrose stated he doesn't want to shut down the library, but he wants the books to be relocated to an appropriate age location.

County Attorney Ben Vaughn stated he doesn't have a problem researching this information, but we have to make sure we are not discriminating against anyone.

Commissioner Ambrose stated he is not discriminating; he just wants them to be put in an appropriate age section.

Commissioner Emami stated the Library Board was scheduled to have a review of the books in question but due to the recent hurricane they had to cancel the meeting. Commissioner Emami stated he would like to give our board a chance to review and see how they do with it. Commissioner Emami stated we have appointed that board, and we have given them a job to do.

Commissioner Ambrose's motion failed for lack of a second

Health Insurance Renewal

The 2025 cost to cost is flat and no increase is anticipated. The documentation attached reflects an increase of \$99,756, however, that calculation includes a laser liability of \$100,000.

Johnathan Shaw, our NFP insurance broker and consultant, presented the 2025 Health Insurance benefits program.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the 2025 Health insurance benefits program with the increased benefit option to lower the deductible from \$2500 to \$1500 and the co-pay from \$20 to \$10.

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

Commissioner Emami motioned to approve the increased dental plan benefit option.

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

Retirement Plan Amendment

A review of the county retirement plan, specifically, the multiplier was discussed at the Board of Commissioners' meeting on September 17, 2024, and was tabled pending a review of what other counties were doing, and adding an alternative tiered multiplier as requested by Commissioner Ambrose.

A request via email was posted on the ACCG Listserv group for all County Managers and Administrators, and 10 counties replied reflecting that most counties are using a multiplier of 2.0%.

With regards to obtaining information on the alternative tiered multiplier, ACCG Retirement Services has been contacted and they have passed our request on to their actuary service provider, and it could take months for a response.

The current tiered multiplier proposal will be recommended to be implemented December 31, 2024, with the understanding that upon receipt of the alternative tiered multiplier information will be presented to the BOC and if deemed cost effective and affordable, that option will be adopted. This course of action will enable those employees contemplating retirement an option to evaluate the ACCG Retirement Services proposed tiered multiplier and take action in their best interests.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the tiered rate for all current and future employees to be effective December 31, 2024, as presented, and to look at the additional rates requested from ACCG when they are presented.

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

Deer Creek Culvert Project

In November 2023, bids were taken for the repair of the Deer Creek culvert on Jenkins Road. Two bids were received ranging from \$450,000 to \$519,000 and were deemed to be too high. Recently, after the GDOT inspected culverts and bridges in Monroe County that the Deer Creek culvert had deteriorated, and emergency repairs were required as soon as possible to prevent further erosion. Griffin Grading &

Concrete LLC, who are currently the contractors for the Dan Pitts Road extension, were contacted and they have put forward a repair estimate of \$184,454.15.

Public Works Director, Kim Stokes stated he has been impressed with the work performed by Griffin Grading & Concrete at the recreation department and he recommends using them for emergency repairs to the Deer Creek culvert on Jenkins Road.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve contracting with Griffin Grading & Concrete for emergency repairs to the Deer Creek culvert on Jenkins Road.

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

Thornton Road/Montpelier Road Project

At our request, Lumin8 Transportation Technologies has prepared a Traffic Study of Thornton Road and Montpelier Road for Carter Engineering, both are TSPLOST candidates for improvements. The engineer is recommending adding a turn lane to Thornton Road exiting onto Montpelier for a right turn. They are also recommending a center turn lane on Montpelier to Thornton with a through lane on the outside.

Kim Stokes presented the findings included in the Traffic Study and recommended engaging Carter Engineering to begin the engineering process leading to bidding this project to an outside contractor. Commissioner Emami recused himself from the vote.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve contracting with Carter Engineering to begin the engineering process for the Thornton Road/Montpelier Road project.

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

Kim Stokes stated regarding the FDR project, which is part of the LRA grant, as of April 30, 2024 \$976,000 has been spent out of the \$1,586,000 which gives a balance of \$610,000. Mr. Stokes stated he did a cost to complete analysis of the projects we have remaining, which are Reedy Creek, McCommon, Boxankle, Faulkner and additional mobilizations which leaves \$856,000 remaining and he is requesting \$246,000 to complete the projects.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve.

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

Dan Pitts Sanitation Relocation

Following the discussion at the Board of Commissioners' meeting on September 17, 2024, relating to the damaged septic system and estimated cost to repair at the Recreation Department, Dan Wallace,

Triple Point Engineering, and Kim Stokes have evaluated at 30,000' the cost to install a sewer system and their estimate is in the \$3-4 million range.

Soil samples have been taken between the baseball fields and I-75 and the sample results are favorable for a septic system. Dan Wallace is developing an estimate for a septic system in that area.

Following a Board discussion with Kim Stokes regarding the septic system options, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve spending up to \$150,000 on repairs to a damaged septic system at the Monroe County Recreation Department.

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

UDO Amendment-Chapter 2 Section 2.02.02-Intermediate Care

Commissioner Davis motioned to enter a public hearing at 7:41 p.m. for all four UDO amendments being presented.

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

County Attorney Ben Vaughn and Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented an amendment to the UDO Chapter 2, Section 2.02.02, the Table of Permitted Uses for approval. The amendment is to the definitions stating: "Intermediate care home, nursing home, or personal care home" is now added as a Special Use in the C-1 district.

The Planning & Zoning Board recommended approval.

UDO Amendment-Chapter 2 Section 2.02.02-Commercial Landscape

County Attorney Ben Vaughn and Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented an amendment to the UDO Chapter 2, Section 2.02.02, the Table of Permitted Uses for approval. The amendment is to add Commercial Landscape Maintenance as a Special Use in the A-R district. The Unified Development Ordinance will be amended if approved as follows:

- A. In Chapter 1, Section 1.10.00, the definition of "Landscape Maintenance" is hereby added and defined as follows:
 - a. A business which operates to maintain lawns, trees, gardens, and other outdoor areas for commercial or residential property owners.

The Planning and Zoning Board recommended approval.

UDO Amendment-Chapter 1 Section 1.10.00-Pole Barn

County Attorney Ben Vaughn and Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented an amendment to the UDO. The amendment is to the definitions. The Unified Development Ordinance will be amended if approved as follows:

A. In Chapter 1, Section 1.10.00, the definition of “Pole Barn” is hereby added and defined as follows:

- a. A structure with no basement which is supported by at least four poles or posts and covered by a roof, not enclosed by walls but open on the sides, which is commonly used for agricultural, recreational or industrial purposes.

The Planning and Zoning Board recommended the definition be changed to allow permanent walls on some sides and support for the four poles or posts should be included in the definition. Ms. Fortner agreed to bring back an updated pole barn definition for review to the P&Z Board on Monday October 28, 2024.

UDO Amendment-Chapter 2 Section 2.02.02-Power Plant

County Attorney Ben Vaughn and Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented an amendment to the UDO Chapter 2, Section 2.02.02, the Table of Permitted Uses for approval. The amendment states “Power plant, private: to the Uses & Structures section and is hereby added as a Special Use in the M-3 district.

The Planning & Zoning Board recommended approval.

No one was present in opposition or in favor of the amendments.

Commissioner Davis motioned to close the public hearing at 7:45 p.m.

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

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to amend the definition of a pole barn to state “must be open on at least two sides.”

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

County Attorney Ben Vaughn stated he would make the change and bring back to the board.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve all four UDO amendments with the change to the pole barn definition.

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

P&Z Hearing/Oglethorpe Power Use/Rezoning

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to enter a public hearing at 7:48 p.m. for a Rezoning/Special Use/Variance in A-R and R-1.

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

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented a Rezoning/Special Use/Variance in A-R and R-1 applications to the Board. The property is located on Ray Hartley Road, map and parcels 080

025-175 acres, 080 040-155.9 acres, 080B 032-6.7 acres, 091 011-78.84 acres. The property owner and applicants are Oglethorpe Power Corporation (an Electric Membership Corporation) and the representatives are Bill Larsen (Martin and Snow Law Firm) and Josh Hubbard.

Mrs. Fortner stated the request is to rezone 080025, 080040, 080B032, 091011 to M-3, manufacturing-heavy. Power plant, private is a special use in M-3. Variance for building height (minimum of 75'), will not house human habitation. Variance for setback requirements to ensure extension of switchyard structures to transmission lines. Proposed 2-unit approximately 1,200-megawatt, facility will be built on land already owned by Oglethorpe Power, near Smarr Energy Facility, an existing natural gas-fired simple-cycle combustion turbine plant operated by Oglethorpe Power. This new state-of-the-art combined-cycle plant will be among the highest-performing, lowest-emitting and most efficient natural gas plants in the state.

The planning and zoning board recommended approval.

No spoke in opposition.

Oglethorpe Power representatives were present on behalf of the application.

Jan Knect, Boxankle Road resident, asked if this was safe for residential areas.

Commissioner Ambrose stated there were no homes located near the proposed plant.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to close the public hearing at 7:55 p.m.

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

Commissioner Emami motioned to approve the application.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion.

Commissioner Ambrose asked about the power the plant would be putting out.

Heather Teilhet, Senior Vice President of External Affairs with Oglethorpe Power responded, saying the power plant will generate electricity for 38 electric co-ops across the state.

The motion to approve was 5-0.

Public Comments

Boxankle Road resident Jan Knect asked the Board if the new High Falls Fire Station meeting room will be available for use as a community meeting room.

Commissioner Emami stated that was the vision for the area.

Ms. Knect then asked if the county was responsible for fixing a hole in the Big Peach parking lot. The board responded, telling Ms. Knect that it is private property, and the county is not responsible.

Mitchell Bunce, resident of 380 Strickland Loop Road, addressed the Board asking if there was an accurate county of homesites approved that have yet to be built on so that the school board knows how many additional students to plan for.

Mark Dagastino, resident of 94 Buck Creek Drive addressed the board regarding the County's retirement plan discussion. Mr. Dagastino stated he was curious what the county's turnover rate for employees is that would compel them to spend more on retirement benefits.

Laverne Hirsch resident of 40 Heron Cove addressed the board concerning the high falls property at the corner of High Falls Road and I-75. Mr. Hirsh stated if the proposed development is allowed it is going to kill High Falls State Park. Mr. Hirsh stated he was opposed to the warehouses.

Commissioner's Comments

District 1-Lamarcus Davis

Commissioner Davis thanked Oglethorpe Power and stated the citizens know we are growing but we are growing in the right way. Commissioner Davis stated the contractors had recently broke ground for the gym construction at the recreation department. Commissioner Davis stated he would like to commend the staff; he stated if you ride some of the roads in Monroe County you will see the county road department is doing a great job. Commissioner Davis stated he thanks the entire staff of Monroe County.

District 2-Eddie Rowland

Commissioner Rowland asked everyone to keep in mind the people impacted by the recent hurricane, he stated Monroe County was fortunate to have not been impacted and to keep those that were in their prayers.

District 3-John Ambrose

Commissioner Ambrose stated he would like to remind everyone that the county is making improvements to infrastructure, and the board is trying to get the retirement percentage up because the departments are having trouble hiring EMS and deputies. Commissioner Ambrose stated he couldn't ask for better opportunities to come to Rumble Road and wanted to remind everyone that if an application for warehouse were to come in for the north end of the county it would have to come before the board.

District 4-George Emami

Commissioner Emami stated he wanted to say Thank You to Oglethorpe Power and welcomed them.

Commissioner Emami stated Monroe County is very fortunate and he would like to give a shout out to the Development Authority because this was a huge win for them.

Commissioner Emami stated he would also like to thank the candidates running for District 4 and for showing up to the debate and to the meetings.

Commissioner Emami stated he was disappointed when he realized he would not be able to vote for the data center that is coming up in the November meeting. Commissioner Emami stated he has been on this board for seven years and having two events like these to come into Monroe County is a big deal and is encouraging the board to pass this.

Commissioner Emami stated being able to serve for these seven years and the amount of growth he has been able to experience due to working along side of the four men on the board, the county manager and staff has been an honor and a privilege, and he is grateful. He apologized for the mistakes and errors that he has made along the way. Commissioner Emami stated he would like to give a big thanks to everyone.

Chairman-Greg Tapley

Chairman Tapley stated there is no better example than Oglethorpe Power's plan, the fact that there was no one present in opposition to their request showed they did their due diligence with the surrounding community. Chairman Tapley gave props to Phil Ham for promoting Monroe County.

Chairman Tapley gave props to EMS Chief Matt Jackson and his team for their efforts during the hurricane, and for loaning Monroe County's generators to Toombs County for their water system.

County Manager-Jim Hedges

Mr. Hedges addressed Commissioner Emami stating the commissioners sitting on either side of him would not be voting for the data center therefore if this was voted on at the November 5th meeting as scheduled, there would be no quorum, but if a called meeting was held on November 4th prior to him leaving office there would be a quorum for the meeting.

Commissioner Emami asked why they would not be voting.

County Manager Jim Hedges stated they would be recusing themselves.

Commissioner Emami stated he would love for that to happen.

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 8:31 p.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

Janet Abbott, County Clerk