

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of October 15, 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:

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

Pastor Richard Jelly with Forsyth United Methodist 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 deletion of item K and the addition of executive session for real estate.

Commissioner Davis motioned to approve the agenda as amended.

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

Approve Minutes-October 1, 2024, Regular Meeting

Chairman Tapley presented the minutes of the October 1, 2024, Regular Meeting for approval.

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

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

Old Brent Road Replacement

After engineering and two rounds of advertising and bidding, the low bidder for the replacement of the Old Brent Road Bridge is McCoy Grading with a bid of \$1,753,423.68. Two other bids were received, Williams Contracting Co. LLC with a bid of \$1,813,959.56, and Gregory Bridge Company with a bid of \$2,088,928.48. North Georgia Concrete and Stone Enterprises/ Steel Erectors did not submit a bid. As a reminder, Monroe County received a \$796,000 grant on this project. Funds are available in the TSPLOST fund for the bridge replacement.

Joe Wood, Carter Engineering, presented the bid tabulations to the Board for approval.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve to award the bid to McCoy Grading in the amount of \$1,753,423.68.

Commissioner Emami seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0 with Commissioner Emami opposed.

Estes Road-Engineering for Reconstruction

Kim Stokes, Public Works Director, addressed the Board stating a traffic study had been conducted on Estes Road and the next large resurfacing project will focus on Estes Road. Mr. Stokes recommended engaging Carter Engineering at a cost of approximately \$95,000 to conduct a reconstruction and realignment analysis of Estes Road with funding from TSPLOST.

Mr. Stokes stated 7,770 vehicles passed down the road over a nearly 10-day period and nearly 21 percent of those vehicles were large trucks.

Commissioner Ambrose asked if it would be cheaper to install guardrails.

Mr. Stokes replied Estes Road is one of the most dangerous roads in Monroe County and we need to make it safer, and we need to do the engineering to determine what needs to be done.

Commissioner Davis motioned to engage Carter Engineering for the engineering work on Estes Road.

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

Monroe County Family Connection Update

During the second quarter of 2023, the State of Georgia defunded the Monroe County Family Connection, and Monroe County is the fiscal agent for this organization. Since the defunding, a new Family Connection Board has been established and has undergone required training. The Regional Family Connection Regional Manager, Marcell Johnson, provided an update as to the status of the Monroe County Family Connection activities.

Region 6 Managing Director Marcell Johnson stated the state has totally revamped family connection in Monroe County and she is here today to request the Board of Commissioners to once again become the fiscal agent as well as to hire a full-time executive director for Family Connection at a salary of just over \$56,000 with benefits. This position would also be supplemented by state funding. Ms. Johnson stated Family Connections is in all 159 counties. Ms. Johnson stated she is also recommending Ms. Selman be the liaison between the county and Family Connections.

Tammy Selman spoke, stating she served in that position for four (4) weeks, and it was a terrible experience but if done correctly good be a valuable position.

County Manager Jim Hedges asked the Board to table the request until the 2025 budget was a little further along.

Following a Board discussion, the board agreed by general consensus to table.

Lead Service Line Grant Update

Monroe County received a grant for the mandated inventory of every service line in our distribution system, including both the utility owned and customer owned service lines. Each must be categorized as either lead, non-lead, galvanized requiring replacement, or lead status unknown. The required systems must comply by October 16, 2024.

Trey Gavin of ESG Engineering gave an update to the Board.

Chairman Tapley thanked Mr. Gavin for bringing the information to the Board.

Pre-Application Land and Water Conservation Grant

Grant Specialist, Tammy Selman, asked approval from the Board to submit a pre-application for funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant if approved will require a 50% match.

Mrs. Selman stated it was determined the project will be the reconstruction and relocation of the basketball court at the recreation department. Ms. Selman stated it was taken down recently for the building of the new gymnasium. Ms. Selman stated it will cost an estimated \$425,000 to relocate the existing outdoor basketball courts to the rear of the facility near the new Dan Pitts Drive extension. Ms. Selman stated the pre-application must be submitted by October 31, and Monroe County will be notified in February 2025 if it has been approved to move on to the next round of the grant process.

Commissioner Emami motioned to approve Ms. Selman to submit a pre-application for funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant with a 50% match from the board.

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

Alcohol License Application

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner stated the Family Dollar/Dollar Tree Combination Store located at 5050 High Falls Road has requested a Beer and Wine Package License. All steps have been completed and its final step is for Board approval.

Commissioner Emami motioned to approve.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-1 with Commissioner Ambrose opposed.

Fixed Asset Criteria Fiscal Management Policy

Currently, the Fiscal Management Policy on Fixed Assets has a criteria of capitalization threshold of \$5,000. Lorri Robinson-Byrd is recommending this threshold be increased to \$10,000.

Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to raise the capitalization threshold to \$10,000.

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

Recreation Board Appointment

The District 4 appointment to the Recreation Board, Dr. Hambric Brooks, has moved out of the county and resigned from the Recreation Board. Commissioner Emami is recommending the appointment of Josh Ridley to serve out the remainder of Dr. Brooks' appointment which expires on December 31, 2024.

Chairman Tapley motioned to approve Commissioner Emami's recommendation to appoint Josh Ridley to the Recreation Board to serve the remainder of Hambric Books term.

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

MCES Consultant

This item was removed from the agenda.

2024 Budget Snapshot

County Manager Jim Hedges presented a snapshot of the 2025 Budget. The current draft budget projects an overall budget decrease of \$3.7 million, \$2.2 million in the General Fund, \$.9 million in Capital Expenditures, and \$.7 million in Special Funds.

In order to fund this draft budget, it will require, for the third year, funding from reserves of \$6.2 million. Mr. Hedges stated what is not included in the draft budget are excess SPLOST funds of \$2,028,088, salary adjustment of 4% (386K) for 1st Responders, and 3% (\$220k) for the remaining staff; nor does the draft budget include contingency funds. As we finalize the 2025 Budget, the Board will be asked to provide guidance on including, or excluding, salary increases and the addition of a contingency line item.

Mr. Hedges stated this is the 7th budget Lorri and I have put together and brought to the board.

Mr. Hedges stated he is looking for guidance from the board on the last two items.

Chairman Tapley stated contingency is important to have as well as salaries.

Commissioner Rowland stated both are important to have, there are things in the works that have the opportunity for people going up and down the interstate to help gain revenue. Commissioner Rowland stated he supports adding the last two items.

Commissioner Emami stated he supports adding the last two items as well and asked if there is a plan to taper down the budget over time.

The Board discussed the excess SPLOST funds and when they were expected.

Public Comments

Alan Gibbs, resident of 31 Zellner Road, addressed the Board to thank County Manager Jim Hedges for the work he did on the budget. Mr. Gibbs stated he would like to point out that the County Manager doesn't spend any money on his own, the Commissioners approve all of it. Mr. Gibbs stated that if the Board voted recently to decrease taxes this year with the intention of raising them next year, in his opinion this is despicable.

Commissioner's Comments

District 1-Lamarcus Davis

Commissioner Davis stated he thinks it would be valuable if someone had a question about the tax decrease to sit down with Mr. Hedges and discuss it with him. The tax decrease was a one-time deal and was the only way to use the excess SPLOST funds.

District 2-Eddie Rowland

Commissioner Rowland stated he doesn't think he ever heard the exact conversation and addressed Mr. Gibbs' term he used of despicable. He stated with the money you had two choices to reduce debt or to reduce the millage. Commissioner Rowland stated the county had reduced the debt and the excess left was used to reduce the millage and there was nothing despicable about it. Commissioner Rowland stated he doesn't think enough in-depth conversation was had to understand this would possibly come back.

Commissioner Rowland stated the Road department has been doing an awesome job and would like to see a graph from over the last 10 years of our annual paving miles, the TSPLOST and the amount of equipment and labor used to share with the public.

Commissioner Rowland stated he knows that most everyone appreciates the work the road department does but the county has a zero-tolerance policy for vulgar or abusive language for our employees and that extends to our road employees. Commissioner Rowland stated if you have a problem call your commissioner but leave the employees alone.

District 3-John Ambrose

Commissioner Ambrose stated the county only has one code enforcement officer and he needs help. Commissioner Ambrose stated he would like for a small portion of SPLOST funds to be placed in each commissioner's budget so that if they had small projects that need to be done they can do them. Commissioner Ambrose reminded everyone that today is the first day for early voting.

District 4-George Emami

Commissioner Emami stated he does want to commit to making sure he fully understands the rollback scenario and he will meet with the County Manager to further understand. Commissioner Emami stated he definitely feels an annual adjustment is needed for the staff.

Commissioner Emami stated he is grateful for seven years of service to Monroe County and he is very grateful for the relationships he has built with everyone that is in the room.

He stated he has a lot of hope and positive vibes for the county, he stated we have an incredible leadership team.

Commissioner Emami stated there are a lot of different dynamics on the board which makes it difficult to get things done sometimes but you have five different people being pulled by seven to eight thousand people each, but he feels as though this board has always worked for the entire county and he is excited about the direction the county is headed.

Commissioner Emami stated he would like to take a moment to thank his wife Denise, for her support and love during his time on the board.

Chairman-Greg Tapley

Chairman Tapley stated the board is here day in and day out and he wants to remind everyone about what he always people are down on what they are not up on and that is one of the problems that is faced is misrepresentation. Chairman Tapley stated inflation has made it really east to critique and throw stones, but he thinks everyone has done a good job.

Executive Session-Real Estate

Commissioner Davis motioned to enter Executive Session for real estate at 10:40 a.m.

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

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to come out of executive session at 10:52 a.m.

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

Action from Executive Session.

County Attorney Ben Vaughn stated the Board discussed real estate acquisition and no action was taken.

Adjourn

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to adjourn at 10:55 a.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

Janet Abbott, County Clerk