

**Monroe County Board of Commissioners**

**Minutes of December 02, 2024**

***Regular Commissioners' Meeting***

**6:00 P.M.**

**Present:**

Greg Tapley, Chairman

Eddie Rowland, Vice-Chairman

Lamarcus Davis, District 1

John Ambrose, District 3

Vacant, District 4

**Staff:**

Jim Hedges, County Manager

Ben Vaughn, County Attorney

Brandon Bowen, 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 Rufus Whatley 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.

## **New Business**

### **Approve Agenda**

Chairman Tapley presented the agenda for approval, with the addition of item H discretionary funds/Commissioner Davis.

Commissioner Davis motioned to approve the agenda.

Commissioner Ambrose seconded the motion, and the motion passed 4-0.

### **P&Z Hearing Rezoning-L.N. Energy 9**

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to enter a public hearing at 6:03 p.m. for a rezoning/variance application for a Bitcoin Farm located on Ivey Circle, map 049 parcel 014F.

Commissioner Rowland seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented a rezoning request in A-R to C-1 for the proposal of a Bitcoin Farm. Mrs. Fortner stated the variance request is for the lack of acreage required for this type of data center. The property owner is Shannon Gunter, and the applicant is LN Energy 9, LLC, Yishon Su.

The scope of work for the proposed request is to utilize the existing parcel adjacent to the existing electrical substation to develop a Bitcoin Farm. The Bitcoin Farm is comprised of approximately 12 containers and 12 water towers.

- The containers contain approximately 210 miners.
- The overall dimensions of the Water Tower Cooler: 19'-7" (L)x7'x8" (W)x9'-6" (H) (excluding the cage ladder).
- The overall dimensions of the shipping container: 19'-7" (L)x7'-8" (W)x9'-6" (H).
- Total power consumption: 12 megawatts/hour
- Method of power: Transformers (2600kva)-source (substation)
- Water cycle-Water pumped from the well cools the miners and returns to the water cooler and evaporates. There is no discharge.
- The system is self-contained. After construction, the system does not require trucks, containers, delivery etc. for transport. Essentially after construction there is no traffic.

The site intent is to create a pad of gravel surrounded by a 72" privacy fence to install the containers and towers.

The containers, water towers and transformers will be installed on concrete pads at grade. The source of water will be derived from onsite wells-size and number to be determined. If permissible, the location will be shown on the plans.

The plan is to install/erect the containers and associated water tower (cooler) at grade in the fashion shown.

The Planning and Zoning Board recommended denial.

The applicant spoke on behalf of the application. The water would be contracted through the county. The applicant stated there is a similar facility located in Meriwether County which will be completed next month and invites everyone to visit.

The following people spoke in opposition:

Mark Dagostino, resident of 94 Buck Creek Drive, spoke in opposition. Mr. Dagostino stated a water capacity study needs to be done and this should be a no go until that is understood.

Paul Pruden, resident of 911 Lassiter Road, stated he was concerned about the water usage. Mr. Pruden stated the facility would take 1.5 tons of water per hour, which equals 116 thousand gallons per day.

Mr. Pruden stated the Monroe County water, nor an aquifer can support this, and spot zoning is a big concern for us in the area.

Jim Peters, resident of 475 Blue Ridge School Road, stated according to the future land use plan this doesn't belong in this area, and he is requesting the board to vote no.

Monroe County resident Tiffany Crutchfield stated she is concerned with the sound. Ms. Crutchfield stated these run 24 hours a day and there are no city noises to drown out the noise from the facility.

Michael Murray, resident of 822 Mayfield Road stated Ga Transmission built the substation to help the northern end of Monroe County and he is concerned about power usage. Mr. Murray stated he is also concerned about the noise.

Claudette Dumas, resident of 143 Freeman Road stated this sounds like a gambling outfit, and according to the land use map this doesn't fit in the area.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to come out of the public hearing at 6:21 p.m.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to go with the P&Z Board's recommendation and deny both parts of application.

Commissioner Rowland seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

A 5-minute break was called in order to allow citizens that were present for the hearing to leave and the residents waiting for the next hearing to come in.

**P&Z Hearing Variance-Kimley-Horn & Associates-Buc-ee's**

Commissioner Davis motioned to enter a public hearing at 6:28 p.m. for a Special Use and Variance request for wall signs and interstate signs exceeding the maximum amount allowed and for the size of the building located on Rumble Road.

Commissioner Ambrose seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented a Special Use and two Variance request in Commercial for Map 079 Parcel 011 and 080 022E on Rumble Road. The property owners are MCOC Holdings, LLC, Evans Cliff M. Jr. ET AL. The applicant is Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc. Mrs. Fortner stated the wall signs, and the Interstate signs exceed the maximum amount allowed in the Unified Development Ordinance and the Special Use for the size of the building exceeding the 45,000 square footage maximum allowed. The proposed development is Buc-ee's.

Mrs. Fortner stated for variance #1, the development is proposing wall signage on them main building for 285 sq. ft. maximum per side and there will be three sides for a total of 855 sq. ft. for the main building. Additionally, this development proposes three (3) signs per canopy at 51 sq. ft. per sign, with four (4) canopies totaling 612 sq. ft. for the fuel canopies.

Mrs. Fortner stated for variance #2, the development is proposing a pole sign with a face of 616 sq. ft. (including circle and rectangular face sign) and 125' in height.

Mrs. Fortner stated for the Special Use request the development is proposing for the structure to be approximately 74,000+/- square feet which exceeds the 45,000 sq. ft. minimum. The proposed development is Buc-ee's.

Mrs. Fortner stated the project will permit with GDOT and make significant improvements to Rumble Road & the Interchange to ensure efficient traffic flow.

On-site lighting design utilizes LED fixtures that are fully shielded, 100% cut-off, and downward directed.

Buc-ee's exceeds best management practices (BMP) for fueling areas.

The project is currently working with the Army Corp for permitting, to minimize impacts of the project.

The project has utility capacity.

The Planning & Zoning Board did not have a recommendation.

Stan Beard, Director of Real Estate and Development for Buc-ee's, spoke on behalf of the application.

Mr. Beard stated Buc-ee's will bring at least 200 full-time jobs at a starting pay of at least \$17 per hour and generate approximately \$30 million in sales tax revenue.

Commissioner Rowland stated he really liked the road that was being built in front of the Bu-cee's in Brunswick, he stated his question is about the roundabout. Commissioner Rowland asked, does the Brunswick location have a roundabout and does GDOT require it.

Mr. Beard replied we produced a traffic impact study based on methodology and decided on the best option with GDOT. Mr. Beard stated we were asked to assess a roundabout compared to a signal intersection and the roundabout was much more efficient.

The following people spoke in opposition:

Debra Hammond, resident of 35 Gose Road, stated the roundabout is a good idea but it's not going to get the traffic back on the interstate when it is backed up. Ms. Hammond stated the Warner Robins location is perfect, but Rumble Road can't handle the traffic.

Russ Edge, resident of 1168 Edge Road, stated his concern is in regard to the building size. Mr. Edge stated he is worried this will overtax the public utilities and existing streets. Mr. Edge stated if everything that was presented tonight is done and the expansion of the on and off ramps are completed prior to the project's completion he would not have a problem with it.

Monroe County resident Cliff Boone asked who is footing the bill for the road improvements.

Stan Beard replied no taxpayer funds will be used for road improvements, we pay for road improvements.

Zach Thomas, resident of 414 Plantation Drive, stated he has the vending contract for the rest areas, and he is concerned about how this will affect his business and other small businesses in the area.

Michele Tolleson, resident of 61 Buckhead Lane stated she is concerned about the wetlands in the area of development and that she moved out here because it was quiet.

The following people were indifferent in their discussion:

Erin Carr, resident of Jenkins Road, asked what kind of tax abatements Buc-ee's is receiving and if there would be extra lighting in the area

Chairman Tapley responded Buc-ee's has reached an agreement with the Development Authority for a \$2.4 million property tax abatement for 8-years and stated there is no abatement that will be given to Buc-ee's regarding sales tax.

Brian Deitsch, Engineer for Kimberly-Horn and Associates, stated we are currently working with the Army Corp of Engineers and there will be very little impact on the wetlands. Mr. Deitsch stated Buc-ee's always exceeds the water quality best management practices (BMP) for fueling areas.

Shannon Lewis, resident of 925 Jenkins Road, stated her concern is the on and off ramps for Rumble Road are short and asked how this would be addressed.

Commissioner Rowland stated that it would be a GDOT question and will have to be addressed.

Mr. Deitsch stated the exit ramps are proposed to be extended, and the DOT is very stringent.

Harry Edge, resident of 1544 Stokes Store Road, stated he feels this may be a safety issue.

Resident of 347 McCowan Road, Mike Waites stated Rumble Road is experiencing a rapid amount of growth in a short amount of time and asked how many fuel pumps Buc-ee's plans to have.

Mr. Beard replied, Buc-ee's will have 60 fuel pumps and 120 fueling positions.

The following people spoke in favor of the request:

Ray Wilson, resident of 3803 Rumble Road stated this is a great community and growth is coming. Mr. Wilson stated he doesn't understand the uproar and is excited about the jobs that will be coming in. Mr. Wilson stated we need to open our minds and trust our leadership. Mr. Wilson welcomed Buc-ee's Terry Roberson resident of Hardin Road stated he is in favor of the application, stating this will help compensate for losing Georgia Power.

Madden Perry, resident of 620 Mitchell Road, stated he is in favor. Mr. Perry stated this will improve land value and bring jobs.

Mark Dye resident of Forsyth Landing Drive and member of the Board of Assessors stated he speaks in favor of Buc-ee's. Mr. Dye stated schools, fire trucks, recreation depts, and operations cost money. Mr. Dye stated we need new sources of revenue. Mr. Dye stated Buc-ee's is minimally invasive and the bottom line is your taxes will go up if this isn't put in.

Dale Woodward resident of 640 Kinney Road stated water and sewer capacity will have to be increased. Mr. Woodward asked if jobs will be transferred in from other locations.

Mr. Beard stated typically 4 or 5 store management team members will come from an existing Buc-ee's operation but beyond that the rest of the hires are local hires.

Mark Beach, resident of Jenkins Road, stated he thinks Monroe County has won the lottery.

Mitchell Bunce, resident of 380 Strickland Loop stated with all the residential growth Monroe County is experiencing we need commercial development to balance it out.

Matt Turner, resident of 1350 Rumble Road, asked if Buc-ee's representatives had been in touch with the DOT regarding the new truck lanes that will be built.

Mr. Deitsch replied all traffic improvements will be made to account for future conditions.

Lindsey Evans, resident of Rumble Road, asked if Buc-ee's would still improve the Rumble Road interchange if Commissioners don't grant the special use for the 74,000 square-foot building.

Mr. Beard replied, Buc-ee's would not locate to Monroe County if the 74,000 square foot building is not approved.

Thomas Vanhuss resident of Rumble Road asked that the development have respect for down-cast lighting.

Mr. Beard stated we respect our surrounding community, and all of our lighting is downcast. Mr. Beard stated the lighting package in Brunswick is turtle friendly

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to come out of the public hearing at 7:59 p.m.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

Commissioner Davis motioned to approve application as submitted with the additional condition that the road work meets DOT requirements.

Commissioner Ambrose seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

A 5-minute break was taken to allow citizens in attendance that did not want to remain for the remainder of the meeting to leave.

#### **P&Z Hearing Variance-Williams & Sibley-Miller**

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to enter a public hearing at 8:10 for a variance request located on Maynards Mill Road.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion carried

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented a variance request in Agricultural-Residential to parcel out a 10-acre tract out of 52-acres without immediate road frontage. The request is to construct a home with a 30' access easement for ingress and egress to Maynard's Mill Road. The property is located on map 069 Parcel 002 and map 069 Parcel 002A. The owner of the property is Brandon Elmore. The applicant is Pete Williams and Sibley-Miller Surveying.

Ms. Fortner stated the Unified Development Ordinance section 4.01.02 states landlocked properties must have a 60' easement for ingress and egress.

The Planning and Zoning Board recommended approval.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to come out of the public hearing at 8:12 p.m.

Commissioner Rowland seconded the motion and the motion carried 4-0

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the variance request.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

### **P&Z Hearing Variance-Stroud**

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to enter a public hearing at 8:13 p.m. for a variance application located on Moreland Avenue.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

A variance application was on the agenda to place a manufactured home in R-1 with a dedicated easement that was recorded in 1986. The Unified Development Ordinance only allows manufactured homes in A-R, R-3, and R-4. The property is located in Moreland Ave., map 042 Parcel 018C. The owner of the property is Michael Stroud. The applicants are Michael Stroud and Tyeisha Stroud. Attorney Brandon Bowen stated this needs to be rezoning application and not a variance request. The applicant was not present.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to close the public hearing at 8:15 p.m.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

The Board agreed by general consensus to table the application to allow Ms. Fortner to speak with the applicant regarding the request.

Attorney Brandon Bowen left the meeting at 8:16 p.m.

### **2025 Budget**

#### **2025 Budget Background**

- A 2025 Budget snapshot was presented to the BOC on October 15<sup>th</sup>.
- Budget books were available to the BOC on November 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Advertisement in the MCR on November 13<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.
- Detailed 2025 Budget Public Hearing held on November 19<sup>th</sup>.
- Today's presentation is a highly abbreviated overview of the 2025 Budget for approval.

#### **Interesting Facts**

- 61 different revenue accounts.
  - Property tax represents 37.5% of General Fund Revenue.
- 33 departments with separate budgets.
- Over 2,200 budget line items.
- Complex operations



## 2025 Budget

|                  |  | 2024       |  | 2025       |  | I/(D)       |
|------------------|--|------------|--|------------|--|-------------|
| General Fund     |  | 43,858,260 |  | 42,888,797 |  | (969,463)   |
| Capital Projects |  | 2,586,454  |  | 1,629,370  |  | (957,084)   |
| Enterprise Fund  |  | 5,444,859  |  | 5,675,538  |  | 230,679     |
| Special Fund     |  | 3,135,873  |  | 2,262,958  |  | (872,915)   |
|                  |  | 55,025,446 |  | 52,456,663 |  | (2,568,783) |

2025 Budget is a decrease of 4.7% for 2024.

## Manpower Staffing Plan

- Elected-11
- Fulltime-307
- Part-Time-77
- Vacant-30
- Total-425

## Staffing Highlights

- Salaries and Benefits for 2025 total \$26,292,9879; or 50% of the combined 2025 Budget.
- Budget includes a 4% increase for First Responders.
- A 3% increase for all remaining staff.

## Summary

- General Fund decreased by \$969,463
- Capital Expenditures decreased by \$957,084
- Special Fund Expenditures decreased by \$872,915

Overall Budget decreased by \$2,568,783

County Manager Jim Hedges stated the way forward is the recommendation to approve the overall 2025 Budget of \$52,456,663.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the 2025 Budget and resolution as presented.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

### **Griffin-Spalding Regional Airport Project Representative**

County Manager Jim Hedges stated he has been appointed to the Griffin-Spalding Regional Airport Project and he knows nothing about airports or airplanes. Mr. Hedges stated he is requesting that Chairman Tapley be appointed to represent Monroe County on this project as he is a licensed pilot. Commissioner Ambrose motioned to appoint Greg Tapley to the Griffin-Spalding Regional Airport Project.

Commissioner Rowland seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

### **HB 581 Consultant**

County Manager Jim Hedges stated at the November 19, 2024, Board of Commissioners' meeting, Alan Hornaday provided an overview of HB581. There were a number of surprises regarding how this legislation is to be implemented. Following the Board meeting, Bobby Gerhardt and I met, and we had more questions than answers. Additionally, Tax Commissioner Lori Andrews received a packet from the Georgia Department of Revenue relating to HB 581 and to say the least, it is very complicated. Bobby and I kicked around the idea of engaging Alan Hornaday as a consultant that would work with us during the implementation process and Bobby reached out to Alan and he is available at a cost of \$750/day.

I envision several meetings that will involve Lori Andrews, Lorri Boinson-Byre, Bobby Gerhardt, and myself and it is recommended we engage Alan Hornaday as a HB581 Consultant. The best estimate would be not to exceed 10-15 days of Alan's consulting services.

The Board agreed by general consensus to table to allow for more research on consultants.

### **Culloden Municipal Court**

The City of Culloden request Monroe County Board of Commissioners to enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement to furnish municipal court services. Specifically, Monroe County shall furnish municipal court services to the City of Culloden through the officers, employees, and facilities of the Magistrate Court of Monroe County for the enforcement of traffic laws and/or ordinances. All fees, fines, and other revenue attributable to the Culloden Municipal Court activities shall be paid directly to Monroe County.

Chief Magistrate Court Judge Frank "Buck" Wilder is in agreement with this IGA.

Commissioner Rowland motioned to approve the IGA.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

### **Alcohol License**

Community Development Director Kelsey Fortner presented an alcohol license ownership change. Mrs. Fortner stated Erika A Ramirez is opening a Mexican Restaurant at 4248 Alexander Court, Macon, Ga. This is the location of the previous Marrow 41. New ownership requires board approval. All proper steps have been taken. They are applying for Malt Beverage Pouring/Package, Wine Pouring/Package, Distilled Spirits/Restaurant.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the alcohol license ownership change.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

### **Discretionary Funds**

Commissioner Davis requested to use \$2,500 of his district's discretionary funds for the purpose of buying new televisions for the patient rooms at Monroe County Hospital.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the request.

Commissioner Rowland seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0.

### **Public Comments**

Russ Edge, resident of 1168 Edge Road, stated he attended the P&Z meeting, and it seems a lot of their decisions result in no decision and a significant volume of citizens came for no decision. Mr. Edge stated the people appointed to that board should be making decisions so that there is some value to that board.

Mitchell Bunce, resident of 380 Strickland Loop Road, stated he just wanted to say thank you to the Board. He stated sometimes all we hear is what the media prints and we don't get to see behind the scenes. Mr. Bunce stated we are seeing growth and hopefully the budget numbers will change.

### **Commissioner's Comments**

#### **District 1-Lamarcus Davis**

Commissioner Davis thanked everyone in attendance and thanked the staff that worked on the budget as well as all the county employees.

Commissioner Davis stated on December 21<sup>st</sup> the annual toy drive and anyone that would like to volunteer or donate will be appreciated. The toy drive will be from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m.

#### **District 2-Eddie Rowland**

Commissioner Rowland stated he was riding his 3-year-old granddaughter on his side by side, and she said look how pretty that trees and he replied God made that tree. Commissioner Rowland stated it made him think everyone needs to be reminded the Christmas season is about Jesus.

**District 3-John Ambrose**

Commissioner Ambrose thanked Jim Hedges, Lorri Robinson-Byrd and Janet Abbott for their work on the 2025 Budget. Commissioner Ambrose thanked Richard Dumas for keeping up the audio.

Commissioner Ambrose stated in the last few meetings the board has made decisions that will benefit the county for years to come and the county is going in the right direction.

**Chairman-Greg Tapley**

Chairman Tapley stated he was very proud of the crowd tonight and the civil conversations that were had. Chairman Tapley stated we live in a great community.

Chairman Tapley reminded everyone of the upcoming holiday events and parades around the county.

**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 8:39 p.m.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion was carried 4-0.

Respectively Submitted by:

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Janet Abbott, County Clerk