

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of December 17, 2024

Work Session

8:00 A.M.

Present:

Greg Tapley, Chairman

Eddie Rowland, Vice-Chairman

Lamarcus Davis, District 1

John Ambrose, District 3

Al Turner, 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

Work Session

County Clerk Janet Abbott called roll.

Chairman Tapley called the December 17, 2024, work session to order at 8:00 A.M.

Finance Director Lorri Robinson-Byrd presented the 2023 Popular Annual Financial Report.

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of December 17, 2024

Regular Session

9:00 A.M.

Present:

Greg Tapley, Chairman

Eddie Rowland, Vice-Chairman

Lamarcus Davis, District 1

John Ambrose, District 3

Al Turner, 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 Rufus Whatley gave the invocation.

Pledge

Chairman Tapley led the Pledge.

Oath of Office

Judge Donna Robins administered the Oath of Office for newly elected District 4 Commissioner Al Turner

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 the Development Authority appointment as item K.

Commissioner Davis motioned to approve the agenda with said changes.

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

Approve Minutes-November 19, 2024 & December 2, 2024

Chairman Tapley presented the minutes of the November 19, 2024, Regular Meeting and the December 2, 2024, Regular Meeting for approval.

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

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

2023 Audit Report

Justin Elliott, Mauldin & Jenkins, presented the Board of Commissioners 2023 Financial Report and Audit. Mr. Elliott stated this is another year of a clean audit without exceptions. Mr. Elliott stated the audit report received the highest level of assurance you can get. Mr. Elliott stated he would like to thank Ms. Robinson and her team for their assistance.

Commissioner Davis motioned to approve the 2023 Financial Report and Audit.

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

MCES Ambulance Purchase

Included in the 2024 Capital Budget for Monroe County Emergency Services was \$300,000 for the purchase of an ambulance. The procurement to specification was advertised and two bids were received as follows:

Ten-8	2025 Ford F-450	Delivery-October 2025	\$310,451
Custom Works	2025 Dodge 4500	14-18 Months	\$278,226

EMS Chief Matt Jackson's recommendation is for the purchase of a 2025 Dodge 4500 ambulance from Custom Works.

Commissioner Ambrose asked if the price was locked in. Chief Jackson replied the bid amount is good until the end of the year.

Commissioner Rowland asked where the money would come from.

Chief Jackson replied that the \$300,000 was allocated in the 2024 EMS budget for capital.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the purchase for the 2025 Dodge 4500 in the amount of \$278,226 from Custom Works.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion carried -

HB 581 Consultant

County Manager Jim Hedges stated at the November 19, 2024, Board of Commissioners' meeting, Alan Hornaday provided an overview of HB 581. 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 Robinson-Byrd, Bobby Gerhardt, and myself and it is recommended we engage Alan Hornaday as an HB 581 Consultant. The best estimate would be not to exceed 10-15 days of Alan's consulting services.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to dispense with the agenda item and to start the process to opt out of HB581.

Commissioner Davis stated he would like Mr. Gerhardt to explain to the citizens what the bill really is so they understand what they voted in, and the county is opting out of.

Commissioner Ambrose withdrew his motion.

Chief Appraiser Bobby Gerhardt stated the bill is a culmination of six bills with three major components. What has been voted on is the floating homestead exemption capped at inflation. Mr. Gerhardt stated the problem comes in regarding the Local Option Sales Tax, we will be asking our constituents to pay 9 cents on the dollar. Mr. Gerhardt stated he has not spoken with a Chief Appraiser that is in favor of staying in. Once the bill passed everyone was in and will have to opt out and there is a short amount of time to do so. Mr. Gerhardt stated the Secretary of State has to be notified by March 1st and three meetings must be held prior. Mr. Gerhardt stated he would be meeting with the city to get a feeling from them about what they choose to do. If one of the entities opts out, the city or the county, the deal is over. The Board of Education has an ELOST which makes them ineligible to participate. The

local delegation can hold a referendum at a later date on the homestead exemption, but his recommendation is to defer and see how it works in other counties and make a referendum later on. Commissioner Rowland asked Mr. Gerhardt if he was correct that certain portions of this bill would move forward.

Mr. Gerhardt replied yes there were procedural changes that would move forward.

County Manager Jim Hedges stated we have a small amount of time to advertise if the board chooses to opt out.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to start the process to opt out of HB581.

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

Turf Tank-Equipment Rental Recreation Department

Landon Sparks, Recreation Director, presented a recommendation to the Board for the lease of an autonomous robotic field painter. Turf Tank is an autonomous robotic field painter designed to mark all types of sports fields easier, faster, and more efficiently. Due to its autonomous design, Turf Tank can paint the entire field all by itself, making the line marking easier, saving hundreds of manhours.

Commissioner Ambrose asked Mr. Sparks if he had tried the equipment out.

Mr. Sparks replied he had used it on the football field, and it worked great.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the three-year contract for the lease of the robotic field painter from Turf Tank at an annual cost of \$16,000.

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

Building Permit Fees Clarification

County Manager Jim Hedges stated several meetings back, Jeremy Head with Charles Abbott & Associates came before the Board to amend the Building Permit Fee schedule. There is a need to clarify the schedule by Jeremy.

Jeremy Head with Charles Abbott & Associates stated the recent house bill changed the way building permit fees were calculated. Mr. Head stated the front sheet had flat fees and there were some adjustments to those fees and the residential plan review fees are capped at \$32.50 and he just wanted to make sure everyone was clear on those fees.

Alcohol License

Community Development Director Kelsey Fortner presented an alcohol license ownership change for approval. Mrs. Fortner stated 4946 High Falls Road is changing ownership at an existing store. Imran

Salim Shaimm is the new owner. All proper steps have been taken and they are applying for Malt Beverage Package and Wine Package.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve.

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

Old High Falls Fire Station-Surplus

The old High Falls Fire Station, Station No. 2, has been vacated. This station is the oldest fire station in Monroe County, built in 1980, and served initially as a volunteer station and is now surplus to MCES.

It is recommended that the BOC declare this facility as a surplus and authorize the sale, by auction, with the proceeds earmarked for MCES building improvements.

Following a board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to declare surplus and to sell with the condition the current building could be made into a residence or torn down and a house built.

Commissioner Rowland seconded the motion for discussion.

County Attorney Ben Vaughn stated the tract would need to be re-zoned before an auction could take place.

Following a board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose amended his motion to approve declaring surplus the Old High Falls Fire Station with the intention of selling the station at auction at a later date.

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

Smarr Fire Station Change Orders

Robert Muckenfuss, ProForm Construction, has notified Monroe County of the need for two change orders associated with the new construction of the Smarr Fire Station.

Septic Tank Design

The addition of a “dosing tank and pump” is required. A dosing tank is an add-on to the septic system that uses a pump mechanism to move the effluent to the drain field. This recommended change order is an additional \$4,235.00.

Generator

The original plan for the Smarr Fire Station called for a 3-phase 70 KW generator: however, the local EMS provider quoted a cost of \$35,000 to provide the site with 3-phase electricity. The lowest cost option was to upgrade to a single-phase 100 KW generator. This recommended change order is an additional \$10,472.00 and funds are available in the bond fund.

Summary

Collectively, the two change orders total \$14,707; however, there is \$35,000 savings offsetting the additional cost of the change orders.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the change orders.

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

Ashley Wilson Act"-1st Responders' PTSD Coverage

Ashley Wilson is a Gwinnett County police officer whose partner died in her arms after being shot in the line of duty. After winning her battle against post-traumatic stress disorder and accumulating \$20,000 in medical bills, she has been fighting on a new front to help her fellow suffering officers. After three years of setbacks, new legislation passed in the state House of Representatives to provide supplemental insurance for first responders dealing with occupational PTSD.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the PTSD supplemental insurance coverage for first responders.

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

2025 Holiday Schedule

County Manager Jim Hedges presented the following 2025 Holiday Schedule for approval:

January 1, 2025, New Year's Day

January 15, 2025, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

February 17, 2025, President's Day

April 18, 2025, Good Friday-Personal Time

May 26, 2025, Memorial Day

June 19, 2025, Juneteenth

July 4, 2025, Independence Day

September 1, 2025, Labor Day

November 11, 2025, Veterans Day

November 27, 2025, Thanksgiving Day

November 28, 2025, Day after Thanksgiving Day

December 24, 2025, Christmas Eve

December 25, 2025, Christmas Day

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the 2025 Holiday schedule.

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

Development Authority Appointment

Chairman Tapley stated he would like to reappoint Greg Head and Wendell Horne to the Development Authority as their terms expire at the end of the year and due to him leaving office a new commissioner would need to be reappointed in his place.

Commissioner Ambrose stated the appointments should wait until the first meeting in January when all appointments are made.

Commissioner Davis motioned to reappoint Greg Head and Wendell Horne to the Development Authority and to appoint himself as the Commissioner replacement.

Commissioner Rowland seconded the motion for discussion. Commissioner Rowland stated I do agree Commissioner Davis is the best candidate. I have seen his work ethic and the Development Authority deals with industrial and commercial business and not residential. Commissioner Davis has also been to economic development training. Commissioner Rowland stated Commissioner Davis, and I have been interested in economic development from the start and we recently met with Senator Kennedy and Public Works director Kim Stokes about help with funding for improvements on Rumble Road.

Commissioner Rowland stated he knew this would be contentious so he asked upcoming Chairman Alan Gibbs if he thought Commissioner Davis would make a good Development Authority appointment.

Alan Gibbs stated to be honest I would like to be on there myself. Mr. Gibbs stated he would like for the board to split up the vote and reappoint the two that needed to be appointed now and let the commissioner appointment wait until January.

Commissioner Rowland replied to Mr. Gibbs' comments stating he needs to focus on his Board duties when he first takes office and allow the more experienced Commissioner Davis to serve on the Board. Following an extensive Board discussion, the motion passed with a 3-2 vote with Chairman Tapley, Commissioner Davis, and Commissioner Rowland in favor and Commissioner Ambrose and Commissioner Turner opposed.

Greg Head addressed the Board thanking them for his reappointment. Mr. Head stated the Board of Commissioners, the Planning & Zoning Board and the Development Authority all play critical roles in Monroe County continuing to have smart growth in the coming years.

Public Comments

John Ricketson, resident of New Forsyth Road stated Rivoli Drive was just redone and repaved, but the concrete trucks and other large trucks are using it as a cut through and the road is not designed for this

type of traffic. Mr. Ricketson stated he has asked the Sheriff's Office to stay on top of this, but it is still a problem. Mr. Ricketson asked the Board to put a bug in the Sheriff's ear regarding the situation.

Commissioner's Comments

District 1-Lamarcus Davis

Commissioner Davis thanked the Board for trusting him to be on the Development Authority. He stated he wanted to welcome Commission Turner to the Board and wanted to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Commissioner Davis stated he would like to thank Chairman Tapley for the things he has taught him and for the time he has served.

District 2-Eddie Rowland

Commissioner Rowland stated he appreciates Mr. Heads' comments, and it is vital the Boards work together. Commissioner Rowland stated we have several board appointments coming in January and he asked if you are reappointed or have asked to be on a board that you agree to come to the meetings you agree to and to vote when you are supposed to vote. Commissioner Rowland stated it is an injustice to not do so and if you don't have the time just bow out.

District 3-John Ambrose

Commissioner Ambrose stated Chairman Tapley had done an excellent job during his time as Chairman. Commissioner Ambrose stated he had spoken with the Rock Quarries and with the sheriff's office regarding Rivoli Road. Commissioner Ambrose stated the appointment dates need to be changed because starting January 1st of every year we have no clerk or county attorney. Commissioner Ambrose stated he thinks those appointments need to be done today.

District 4-Al Turner

Commissioner Turner thanked the voters for electing him. Commissioner Turner stated he appreciates Mr. Heads' comments and would like to get to know Mr. Vaughn a little better. He stated his main goal today was just to listen.

Chairman-Greg Tapley

Chairman Tapley stated he would like to address Commissioner Ambrose's concern regarding appointments, so he asked the County Attorney, and he needs a motion to amend the agenda to proceed with the appointments.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to amend the agenda to add appointments.

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

Appointments

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to reappoint Ben Vaughn as County Attorney, Jim Hedges as County Manager and Janet Abbott as County Clerk.

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

Chairman Tapley stated it has been an honor and blessing to be Chairman for 8 years and to represent the county. He stated when you have the right people in the right place you have a great team.

Chairman Tapley thanked the people he has appointed to boards that have served. Chairman Tapley stated we have all butted heads on this board, but we don't take it personal, if we all agreed every time, we wouldn't need but one commissioner. Chairman Tapley thanked Richard Dumas for doing a great job, he stated it is very important we get the right information out to the community because people are down on what they are not up on. He stated it has been an honor to work with all of you, and he is glad to support Commissioner Turner. He addressed Mr. Gibbs, stating you have a big job, but I think you can handle it. He stated he has enjoyed serving with each of you and he enjoys being friends. Chairman Tapley ended with wishing everyone to have a great Christmas.

Executive Session-Personnel

Commissioner Davis motioned to enter executive session at 10:24 a.m.

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

Commissioner Davis motioned to come out of executive session at 10:35 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 an employment agreement for the County Manager and an action item was needed.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the County Manager contract with changes.

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

Adjourn

Commissioner Davis motioned to adjourn at 10:37 a.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

Janet Abbott, County Clerk