

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of February 04, 2025

Regular Meeting

6:00 P.M.

Present:

Alan Gibbs, Chairman

John Ambrose, Vice-Chairman

Lamarcus Davis, District 1

Eddie Rowland, District 2

Al Turner, District 4

Staff:

Jim Hedges, County Manager

Ben Vaughn, County Attorney

Janet Abbott, County Clerk

Richard Dumas, Public Information Officer

Welcome

Chairman Gibbs welcomed everyone in attendance.

Prayer

Reverend Marilyn Tucker gave the invocation.

Pledge

Chairman Gibbs led the Pledge.

Roll Call

County Clerk Janet Abbott called roll.

Call to Order

Chairman Gibbs called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Speaker Appearance-Russ Edge

Mr. Russ Edge, 1168 Edge Road, has requested to address the Monroe County Board of Commissioners, requesting the Board prioritizes efforts to have Parcel 091 017 go before the Planning and Zoning Board for a Special Use Permit.

Mr. Edge asked the Board to direct the County Manager to prioritize efforts to get Parcel 091 017 to Planning and Zoning Meeting for a Special Use Permit and if the property/business owner refuses then code enforcement takes all available action under the law to bring the parcel into compliance. Mr. Edge stated he is requesting this action as the commercial traffic and harm to the environment that this business is causing needs to be addressed.

New Business

Approve Agenda

Chairman Gibbs presented the agenda for approval with the moving of item L, M, and N up on the agenda after C and the addition of litigation for executive session.

Commissioner Davis motioned to approve the agenda with said changes.

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

Approve Minutes-January 7, 2025, and January 16, 2025, Called Meeting/Public Hearing

Chairman Gibbs presented the minutes of the January 7, 2025, Regular Meeting and the January 16, 2025, Called Meeting/Public Hearing for approval.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve with the normal 30 days for changes.

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

HB 581 Public Hearing

Commissioner Davis motioned to enter a public hearing to opt out of HB 581 at 6:18 p.m.

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

County Manager Jim Hedges stated this is the second of three public hearings and the HB 581 Timeline is as follows:

- November 5, 2024: Statewide question on Constitutional Amendment.
- January 1, 2025: HB 581 takes effect, if approved.
- March 1, 2025: Deadline for local governments to opt out of homestead exemption. Additionally, there is another house bill (HB 92) that will extend the deadline until May 1st due to so many municipalities having questions.

The Statewide question is as follows:

“Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to authorize the General Assembly to provide by general law for a state-wide homestead exemption that serves to limit increase in assessed value of homesteads, but which any county, consolidated government municipality, or school system may opt out of upon completion of certain procedures?” Mr. Hedges stated this question was silent about adding a 1 cent additional sales tax.

County Manager Jim Hedges stated HB 581 passed with 62.9% of the voters in favor and 37.1% opposed. HB 581 became effective January 1, 2025, and all county, municipalities, and school board systems are automatically “opted-in”. Each governmental agency has until March 1, 2025, to “opt-out”! HB 581 allows the Board of Assessors to appeal the sales ratio study directly instead of requiring local government to appeal on their behalf. Every parcel in the county must be appraised at least every three years.

HB 581 implements a statewide floating homestead exemption for all local governments. A floating homestead is a special type of homestead exemption designed to offset or reduce increases in taxable value to the property.

The effect of HB 581 homestead exemption is that the taxable value of a home may only increase at a rate of inflation each year, essentially controlling this will control how much the value of a home increases annually. Non-homesteaded property will continue to be valued at fair market value.

Any governing authority may elect to opt out of the floating homestead exemption created by HB 581 provided they follow the procedures.

A FLOST (Floating Local Option Sales Tax) is created by HB 581 which requires approval of a referendum of voters. The funds must be used exclusively for property tax relief.

The following people spoke during the public hearing:

Russ Edge, resident of 1168 Edge Road, stated he is in favor of staying in. Mr. Edge stated he met with Commissioner Rowland and reviewed the numbers. He stated the state mandated reassessment of properties every three years will drive up the value of properties.

Patrick Greg, resident of 4601 Johnstonville Road, spoke asking if we don’t opt in what does it look like going forward. Commissioner Rowland replied stating the county can opt in later, but it would be difficult because it requires a two-thirds majority of the Georgia General Assembly to allow a county referendum.

Bill Waldrep, resident of 2716 Hwy 42 North, stated he is in favor of staying in. Mr. Waldrep stated this was not a split vote in Monroe County. Mr. Waldrep stated Monroe County's budget has increased from \$21 million in 2014 to \$52 million in 2025, a much greater increase than the 14 percent growth during that 11-year span. Mr. Waldrep stated other Georgia counties such as Peach County, are increasing their homestead exemption.

Mike Harold, resident of 332 Oxford Road stated he was in favor of staying in.

Commissioner Davis stated I am a homeowner, and I am not going to sell my house for the assessed value. Commissioner Davis stated HB 581 would make property valuations in the county unequal between long term residents and new homebuyers.

Commissioner Ambrose stated he thought this was a win-win for Monroe County and he voted for it also, but afterwards he realized Monroe County is going to have to raise the millage rate to get our money back.

Commissioner Rowland stated Commissioner Davis and himself have worked to try to get answers.

Commissioner Rowland stated all I'm looking for "is this bill going to allow me in my retirement to stay in my house."

Commissioner Ambrose stated he would rather the Board freeze property taxes for property owners over the age of 65 and imposing impact fees.

Commissioner Turner stated when the voters voted for this thing, and being ill informed is a problem for some people, my voters voted to stay in. Commissioner Turner stated his opinion is my voters want to stay in.

Chairman Gibbs asked how many in the audience want to stay in, several citizens present raised their hands. Chairman Gibbs then asked how many were undecided, again several citizens raised their hands. Chairman Gibbs stated I'm undecided due to many unknowns right now.

Harry Edge, resident of 1544 Stokes Store Road, asked if Monroe County implemented impact fees like Butts County had, what would it do for Monroe County.

Following an extensive Board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to come out of the public hearing at 6:49 p.m.

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

Alcohol Ordinance

Commissioner Davis motioned to enter a public hearing at 6:58 p.m. for the Alcohol Ordinance.

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

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented the proposed drafted alcohol ordinance that went before the Planning Commission on January 27, 2025.

Ms. Fortner stated the Planning and Zoning Board recommended approval of the draft with a few changes.

1. Convenience Stores/grocery staying at current charge.
2. Retail Package Stores have an annual charge of \$4,500 to stay in line with restaurants.

Mrs. Fortner stated the update on this alcohol ordinance went through an extensive rewrite. The new ordinance with the updates will also allow retail package stores in the unincorporated areas of Monroe County.

Commissioner Ambrose stated he doesn't agree with the fees that are proposed. Commissioner Ambrose stated good restaurants are not going to pay those fees. Commissioner Ambrose stated he thinks the Board should table and look at the fees compared to surrounding counties.

Commissioner Rowland stated he agrees with Commissioner Ambrose to table and feels Monroe County should be consistent with the fees of surrounding counties.

Commissioner Davis motioned to come out of the public hearing at 6:57 p.m.

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

Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to table the Alcohol Ordinance.

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

Subdivision Plat

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner present Subdivision Plat-HWY 42S/WTF Dispositions-Robert Woodford. Mrs. Fortner stated Mr. Woodford has requested the creation of a private road off of Hwy 42 South. GDOT has approved their portion of the curb cut should the Board of Commissioners approve the creation of the private road. Mrs. Fortner stated all other tracts meet UDO criteria and have no reason to be in the request. The request is only for the 60' private road.

County Attorney Ben Vaughn stated each deed needed added the road is a private road and not county maintained.

Commissioner Davis motioned to approve with the County Attorney's recommendations to be added to the deed.

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

P&Z Hearing-Rezoning-Stroud

Commissioner Davis motioned to enter a public hearing at 6:50 p.m. for a rezoning application located at Map 042 Parcel 018C.

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

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner stated the request is for a rezoning in R-1 to R-3 to place a manufactured home. The property owner/applicants are Michael Stroud and Tyeisha Stroud. Ms. Fortner stated a dedicated easement has been granted to access this property and there are no issues with road frontage due to the dedicated easement.

Mrs. Fortner stated the surrounding areas have both stick build and manufactured homes.

Mrs. Fortner stated the Planning and Zoning Board recommended approval.

No one was present in opposition

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to come out of the public hearing at 6:52 p.m.

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

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the application.

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

Mike Weldon Tax Penalties & Interest Refund

Mr. Mike Weldon purchased land in Monroe County in 2021 and every year since the purchase, the annual tax bill has been sent to an address in Barnesville, 1741 Wilmot Road, Barnesville, Georgia, that he has never lived. He is seeking a refund of \$3,373.98 relating to penalties and fees.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to deny Mr. Weldon's request.

Commissioner Rowland seconded for discussion.

Commissioner Rowland stated he disagrees with Commissioner Ambrose stating a lot of mistakes were made through this process.

County Attorney Ben Vaughn stated his recommendation has always been to deny.

The motion to deny was approved 5-0.

Old Indian Springs Road-Jack Preston Water Line Request

Mr. Jack Preston, 737 Old Indian Springs Road, is a licensed utility contractor and install pipe, valves and hydrants. He is requesting water service (2) at this location and has offered to provide installation services if the county will provide the material. The county water main on Old Indian Springs Road stops approximately 400' from Mr. Preston's property and when Mr. Preston consulted with Jeff

Dorough, Jeff suggested Mr. Preston install 1,000' of water main to maintain hydrant spacing correct and get the county 600' of water main. Mr. Preston agreed.

The cost of the materials is estimated at \$33,510 for 1,000' including one hydrant.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to deny. Commissioner Davis seconded the motion for discussion. Commissioner Ambrose stated other county residents have had to pay to have water lines run to their homes.

Commissioner Turner asked would other homeowners benefit from the waterline.

County Manager Jim Hedges replied that Mr. Preston's home was the only home affected at this time but if new homes were built, they could tie on to the line.

Commissioner Rowland stated this would be a good deal financially for the county.

Following an extensive board discussion, Commissioner Davis rescinded his second to the motion.

Commissioner Rowland motion to approve Mr. Preston's request.

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

GEMA Grant-Hazard Mitigation Plan Grant

EMS Chief Matt Jackson stated every five years, FEMA/GEMA requires an update to the county Hazard Mitigation Plan. This update is funded 75% by the federal government, and 25% by the local government. Total cost for this update is \$28,000 with \$21,000 being the federal government's share, and \$7,000 being Monroe County's share. The Middle Georgia Regional Commission will manage the plan update.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve.

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

2025 LMIG Projects

Kim Stokes presented his recommendations for the 2025 LMIG projects. For the new Commissioners, LMIG stands for Local Maintenance Improvement Grant is annual funding from the state and is calculated based on centerline miles and is allocated on state-wide basis. The grant requires a 30% match, which can be paid from TSPLOST funds. The deadline for submitting our recommended projects to the state is February 1, 2025.

Mr. Stokes stated the estimated total expenditure of \$5,697,388.

Finance Director Lorri Robinson-Byrd has estimated \$5.3 million from TSPLOST and \$752,850 from LMIG. This is a total funding of \$6 million.

The miles worksheet has a summary of the roads and miles completed, including 2025, from 2021. If this is approved, we will have completed 65.74 miles of roadway.

The following estimate worksheet is my calculation for the estimates per road:

District	Road	Begin	End	Length feet	Miles	Total
1	Town Creek	SR-83N	20-00	2000	.38	\$201,390
2	Old Macon	Rumble	Industry	7100	1.34	\$600,272
2	Maynards Mill Road	Hopewell	SR-42	10,540	2.00	\$666,301
3	Pea Ridge Road	I-75	St 151+65	15,165	2.87	\$956,908
3	Taylor	SR 87	Pea Ridge	14,390	2.73	\$909,091
3	Whittle	Estes	Macon/Bibb	11,225	2.13	\$711,560
4	Lassiter	Freeman	SR-83	26,200	4.96	\$1,651,866
Total					16.41	\$5,697,388

Mr. Stokes stated the way forward is to authorize going to bid for base preparation with funding from TSPLOST, with bid approval by the Board of Commissioners and authorization to proceed.

Mr. Stokes stated Monroe County has resurfaced a total of 20 miles of county roads over a three-year period between 2021-2023. Mr. Stokes stated with using Monroe County's Road resurfacing crew for some projects we were able to resurface 29.33 miles of county road in 2024.

Following an extensive Board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to authorize going to bid for base preparation for the LMIG projects listed with funding to come from TSPLOST.

Commissioner Rowland seconded the motion and stated he would like to include putting crush and run and installing cross drains on Treadwell Road.

Commissioner Ambrose amended his motion to include Commissioner Rowland's request to add Treadwell Road.

Commissioner Rowland amended his second and the motion carried 5-0.

Building Permit Applications

County Manager Jim Hedges stated the Community Development Department issues building permits, and I'm told it is not uncommon for the building permit application to wait a considerable amount of time in picking up and paying for the building permit. This causes dilemmas on the budget end in finance.

The current building permit is \$75, and the recommendation is to double the fee to \$150 if the applicant does not collect and pay for the permit within 7 days of issuance.

Following a Board discussion Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve doubling the permit fee to \$150 for permits not picked up within 7 days of issuance.

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

ACCG County Legislative Coordinator

The county's ACCG Legislative Coordinator is Greg Tapley, and a new county representative is required. As previously pointed out, the primary responsibilities are to relay pertinent information about current legislation to county commissioners and county management and to maintain an open line of communication with ACCG to ensure county-specific information is readily available for legislators. Commissioner Davis motioned to appoint Commissioner Rowland as the ACCG County Legislative Coordinator.

Commissioner Turner seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0-1 with Commissioner Rowland abstaining.

Development Authority Appointment

County Manager Jim Hedges stated Tom Baugh, current Chairman of the Development Authority of Monroe County, term expires on February 16, 2025. Mr. Baugh has said he would appreciate your consideration and would very much like to be reappointed. This is a four-year term.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to reappoint Tom Baugh to the Development Authority of Monroe County for a four-year term.

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

Commissioners' Discretionary Funds

The Commissioners' Discretionary Fund currently has a balance of \$144,357.78. As information, this balance is a carryover from previous years and the last funding to this account was in 2021.

Commissioner Rowland has asked to discuss the way forward on liquidating these funds.

Commissioner Rowland stated all five Commissioners used to receive \$25,000 annually to spend in any manner they choose in their district. Commissioner Rowland stated this was stopped a couple years ago. Commissioner Rowland stated he would like to donate his remaining \$23,946.32 to the Monroe County Extension Office.

Commissioner Rowland stated it had been the intention of former Chairman Greg Tapley to disperse his discretionary funds prior to leaving office but the Board did not have time to vote on the on the funds.

Commissioner Rowland stated it was Chairman Tapley's intention to dedicate \$20,000 of his remaining \$59,486.20 to the Forsyth Convention and Visitors Bureau with the CVB dispersing \$5000 each to Bolingbroke, Juliette, High Falls and Culloden for annual events in those communities. Commissioner Rowland stated former Chairman Tapley also intended to give \$1000 to each county department with the remainder to be given to Monroe County Emergency Services and for the Recreation Department to use the \$1000 to erect a sign for Phil Walker.

Chairman Gibbs stated he will honor former Chairman Tapley's request with his discretionary funds. Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Davis motioned to disperse all discretionary funds leftover by the end of the year.

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

Public Comments

Resident of 1168 Edge Road, Russ Edge, addressed the Board concerning properties owned by HOA's being valued at \$100. Mr. Edge stated examples of these properties are the Equestrian Center in Riata Subdivision, the Club House at River Forest and 40 acres of land on the Ocmulgee River.

Chief Appraiser Bobby Gerhardt responded, stating the property has no value because it belongs to an HOA.

Commissioners' Comments

District 1 Lamarcus Davis

Commissioner Davis stated he wanted to say thank you for everyone's input for HB 581. Commissioner Davis asked everyone to keep the families of Frank Redding and Phil Walker in their prayers due to their recent passing.

District 2 Eddie Rowland

Commissioner Rowland thanked Russ Edge for his comments and stated there is not a church in Monroe County that is taxed. Commissioner Rowland stated the land on the Ocmulgee River that Mr. Edge is referring to was donated to the County by FEMA due to it being in the flood plain and the county can't do anything with this property.

Commissioner Rowland stated since he is the ACCG Legislative Coordinator he would like to give an update on the latest legislation.

District 3 John Ambrose

Commissioner Ambrose stated HB 581 is still a spider web and a slippery slope and there are still a lot of things that need to be sorted out.

Commissioner Ambrose stated he has received phone calls from several people regarding putting a new roof on the High Falls Legion Hall and if they could put a community garden behind it.

County Manager Jim Hedges replied yes, they could.

Commissioner Ambrose commended Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner, telling her she has done a good job.

District 4 Al Turner

Commissioner Turner thanked Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner, telling her she has done a tremendous job. Commissioner Turner thanked County Clerk Janet Abbott, Commissioner Rowland for his work on HB 581 and the Board.

Chairman Alan Gibbs

Chairman Gibbs thanked everyone for staying late stating he had received a handful of calls regarding the UDO and HB 581. Chairman Gibbs stated he hasn't made a decision on how he is voting he is still reviewing it.

Executive SessionLD JA 8:36 5-0

Commissioner Davis motioned to enter executive session at 8:36 p.m. for litigation.

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

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to come out of executive session at 8:52 p.m.

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

Action from Executive Session

County Manager Jim Hedges stated a litigation matter was discussed and no action was needed at this time.

Adjourn

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to adjourn at 8:54 p.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

Janet Abbott, County Clerk