

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of February 18, 2025

Regular Meeting

9:00 a.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

Natalie Sundeen, County Attorney

Janet Abbott, County Clerk

Richard Dumas, Public Information Officer

Welcome

Chairman Gibbs welcomed everyone in attendance.

Prayer

Pastor Brian Moore with New Providence Baptist 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 9:00 a.m.

New Business

Approve Agenda

Chairman Gibbs presented the agenda for approval with the addition of a UDO discussion, Impact Fees, and Executive Session for real estate.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the agenda with said changes.

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

Approve Minutes-February 4, 2025, and, February 13, 2025, Called Meeting/Public Hearing

Chairman Gibbs presented the minutes of the February 4, 2025, Regular Meeting and the January 13, 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.

BRECC Presentation

The Monroe County BRECC (Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities) Committee has been active for the past year and is scheduled to travel to Washington, D.C. to make a presentation relating to Monroe County. Tammy Selman, Grant Writer and Richard Dumas, Public Information Officer presented their presentation as a dry run. The current BRECC Team Members are:

- Tammy Selman-Chairman
- Eddie Rowland-Co-Chairman
- Mark Dye
- Greg Boike
- Jim Edwards
- Betsy McGriff
- Lamarcus Davis
- Richard Dumas
- Joyce White
- Joe Evans
- Cassandra Cox
- Roy Fickling

Blue Star Marker Relocation

County Manager Jim Hedges stated since he has been County Manager, he has asked the Board to assist with an Eagle Scout project that placed two MIA memorial chairs and repairing the eternal flame at the

courthouse and now he is coming to them on behalf of the Garden Club to help in relocating the Blue Star Marker to the Courthouse Square. Mr. Hedges stated Ms. Jan These, Blue Star & Gold Star Markers Chairman, The Garden Club of Georgia, Inc., has reached out to the Monroe County Board of Commissioners requesting consideration to relocate the Blue Star Memorial Marker that is currently located at the former American Legion Post No. 34 at 86 W. Main Street in Forsyth to the Veterans Memorial Park that is in front of the Monroe County Courthouse.

The Blue Star Program honors all men and women that serve in the United States Armed Services. This program began with the planting of 8,000 Dogwood trees by the New Jersey Council of Garden Clubs in 1944 as a living memorial to veterans of World War II. In 1945, the National Council of State Garden Clubs in (now NGC, Inc.) adopted this program and began a Blue Star Highway system that covers thousands of miles across the Continental United States, Alaska, and Hawaii. Blue Star Memorial Highway Markes were placed along the way. The Blue Star was adopted because it had become an icon in World War II and was seen on flags and banners in homes for sons and daughters away at war as well as in churches and businesses.

If the Board approves this request, there will not be a cost to the County as all costs associated with the relocation will be borne by the City of Forsyth Public Works Department.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve moving the Blue Star Marker to the courthouse square near the eternal flame.

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

Alcohol Ordinance

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented the amended Alcohol Ordinance to the Board. Mrs. Fortner stated with the adoption of this alcohol ordinance the following things need clarification:

- Fee Schedule
- 45 days instead of 20 days (time for background checks, fingerprinting and advertising)
- Zoning Classification-C-1 with a special use or C-2 with a special use.
- Approval of new ownership of existing stores being administratively approved should they meet all requirements stated by the ordinance.

Mrs. Fortner stated the proposed alcohol ordinance went before the Planning and Zoning Board on January 27, 2025, and they recommended approval of the draft with the following changes:

- Convenience Stores/grocery staying at current charge.

- 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 updates will allow retail package stores in the unincorporated areas of Monroe County. Mrs. Fortner stated other changes that were made are package stores are added as a special use in the C-1 zoning district, new package stores will not be permitted within 500 feet of an existing package store, it allows 45 days for advertising and enables Monroe County Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner to approve alcohol license renewals without coming before the Board of Commissioners.

Mrs. Fortner stated the current fees are as follows:

- Convenience stores, grocery stores
 - Retail: \$750 beer package/\$750 beer pouring/\$750 wine package/\$750 wine pouring
Total \$3000
- Restaurant
 - Consumption on premises: \$750 beer package/\$750 beer pouring/\$750 wine package/\$750 wine pouring/\$1500 distilled spirits Total \$4500

Mrs. Fortner stated the proposed fees are as follows:

- Restaurant
 - As it stands right now it appears that restaurant consumption will remain the same \$4500
- Convenience Stores
 - New fees would decrease the fee by \$1000
- Retail Package Stores
 - Retail package stores would increase the revenue, one-time fee of \$4300 with an annual fee of \$2250.
- The yearly retail package would be less than the restaurant annual fee by \$2050.

Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Rowland motioned to approve a \$3,500 start-up fee and renewal fee, for retail package license for beer, wine and distilled spirits; convenience stores should pay up to \$1000 annually for beer and wine; and restaurants, clubs, and bars to pay up to \$2500 annually.

Commissioner Ambrose seconded the motion for discussion.

Following additional discussion, the motion carried 3-1-1 with Commissioner Ambrose opposed and Commissioner Turner abstaining.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the alcohol ordinance.

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

Hospital Demolition

During the past six years there have been several discussions on the demolition of the old Monroe County Hospital. Casey Fleckenstein, Monroe County Hospital Administrator, is actively moving forward with the removal of asbestos located in the old hospital and has approached us regarding the demolition and removal of the debris to the county landfill.

Commissioner Lamarcus Davis recommended to the Board of Commissioners that once the asbestos is removed, the Public Works department, using the county's manpower and equipment, will demolish the old hospital building and remove the debris to the county inert landfill at no cost to the hospital.

County Attorney Ben Vaughn has opined there are no issues with the County removing buildings or doing work on the land owned by the Hospital Authority of Monroe County.

Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Davis motioned to direct Public Works Director Kim Stokes to direct his team to demolish the old hospital building as well as the vacant office building just north of the current main facility and to remove the debris to the county landfill.

Commissioner Ambrose seconded the motion for discussion.

Commissioner Ambrose stated he wished the Hospital Authority would pay the tipping fees at the landfill because of the amount of debris that would be put out there.

Public Works Director Kim Stokes stated the plan is for tipping fees to be waived to assist the Hospital Authority. Mr. Stokes stated it has turned out to be a bigger project than we thought but it is ok. Mr. Stokes stated the plan is to start the demolition within the next few weeks in order to get it completed before paving season starts. Mr. Stokes stated he would keep up with the cost so the county can know how much was spent on the project.

The motion carried 5-0.

Sheriff Truck Surplus/Trade in

County Manager Jim Hedges stated the sheriff has requested approval to trade-in his 2023 Ford F-150 Super Crew pick-up for a new truck. This action requires the Board of Commissioners to declare this truck as surplus and authorize the Sheriff's Department to trade in the truck towards the purchase price of a new truck. In the past trade-in values have been advantageous to the county. Mr. Hedges stated funds are available in the 2025 Capital Budget.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the surplus of the 2023 Ford F-150 Super Crew and authorizes the trade in towards the purchase of a new truck.

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

Water/Sewer Rates

County Manager Jim Hedges stated the Macon Water Authority increased their water rates by 31.25% effective January 1, 2025. Our 2025 water budget reflects that this Enterprise Fund is barely breaking even, and the General fund is paying \$700k plus annually towards the Juliette Water Bond.

The MWA 2025-2029 Capital Improvement Plan includes significant investments to address aging infrastructure and to support continued growth. To fund these efforts, MWA issued a \$102.7 million bond in October 2024, and a potential second bond issuance of \$300 million is scheduled for 2026.

Together, these bonds will enable upgrades and expansions that enhance service delivery, ensure compliance with regulatory standards, and improve system resilience. The wholesale rates for utility customers in Monroe County, Jones County, and the City of Byron are based on the retail rates for Macon-Bibb County customers.

Mr. Hedges stated the MWA rate increase necessitates a rate increase for Monroe County.

Macon Water Authority Water/Sewer Rate Increase:

- Effective January 1, 2025
 - Water Rate \$4.28 to \$5.61 per 1,000 gallons
 - 31.25% increase
- Sewer Rate \$4.59 to \$5.92 per 1,000 gallons
 - 29.15% increase

Why the increase?

- MWA 2025-2029 Capital Improvement Plan includes significant investments to address aging infrastructure and to support continued growth.
- And, to fund these efforts, MWA issued a \$102.7 million bond in October 2024.
- And there is a potential second bond issuance of \$300 million that is scheduled for 2026.

Summary

	Minimum	10% Uplift	15% Uplift	20% Uplift	25% Uplift
MWA	450,635	450,635	450,635	450,635	450,635
Uplift	-	156,100	236,998	314,525	392,052
	450,635	606,735	687,633	765,160	842,687

		10%	15%	20%	25%
	Minimum	Uplift	Uplift	Uplift	Uplift
Rate per 1,000 Gal for 1001-4,000 Gal	17.6%	21.9%	24.1%	26.3%	28.5%
Rate per 1,000 Gal for 4,001-10,000 Gal	14.9%	20.1%	22.7%	25.3%	27.9%
Rate per 1,000 Gal for > 10,001Gal	12.9%	18.8%	21.7%	24.6%	27.5%

Mr. Hedges stated the residential recommendation is as follows:

- Eliminate the seasonal rates effective immediately
- Implement the “minimum” rate increase effective immediately
- Consider implementing a rate increase for the uplift portion of water rates, at the Board’s discretion.

Commissioner Rowland motioned to eliminate seasonal water rates and increase residential water rates to the minimum amounts proposed by the County Manager to offset Macon Water Authority’s increase. Commissioner Turner seconded the motion, and the motion carried 5-0.

Commercial Water Rates

Commercial-Current		MWA	Uplift	Total
Base Charge for 0-1000 Gallons				75.00
Rate per 1000 Gal for 1,001-4,000 Gal		4.28	3.31	7.59
Rate per 1000 Gal for 4,001-10,000 Gal		4.28	5.38	9.66
Rate per 1000 Gal for >10,001Gal		4.28	6.76	11.04

Commercial-Recommended		MWA	Uplift	Total
Base Charge for 0-1000 Gallons				75.00
Rate per 1000 Gal for 1,001-4,000 Gal		5.61	4.34	9.95
Rate per 1000 Gal for 4,001-10,000 Gal		5.61	7.07	12.68
Rate per 1000 Gal for >10,001Gal		5.61	8.86	14.47

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the recommended commercial water rates.

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

Macon Water Authority-Sewer Rate Increase-January 1, 2025

- Sewer Rate \$4.59 to \$5.92 per 1,000 gallons
 - 29.15% Increase
- 4” Commercial
 - \$250 minimum
 - 2,000 gallons
 - \$7.59 per 1,000
- 6” Commercial
 - No Minimum
 - 2,000 gallons
 - \$6.55 per 1,000
- 8” Commercial
 - No Minimum
 - 2,000 gallons
 - \$6.55 per 1,000

Mr. Hedges stated Monroe County’s current sewer customers are Five Below, the Department of Transportation, and Georgia Transmission Corp.

Recommended Sewer Rates

- Current sewer rates are not based on increasing block rates.

Recommended		MWA	Uplift	Total
Base Charge for 0-1000 Gallons				100.00
Rate per 1000 Gal for 1,001-4,000 Gal		5.92	4.56	10.48
Rate per 1000 Gal for 4,001-10,000 Gal		5.92	6.81	12.73
Rate per 1000 Gal for >10,001Gal		5.92	8.88	14.80

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the recommended sewer rates.

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

HB 581 Resolution

County Manager Jim Hedges stated three public hearings have been held regarding HB 581 and he can report there is considerable action in the Georgia House of Representatives to provide for related matters, and to repeal conflicting laws and for other purposes.

The current opt out date, by law, is March 1 2025: however, House Bill 92, which is currently being evaluated by the House of Representatives has a proposed opt out date of May 1, 2025, and the update on the General Assembly webpage on Sunday, February 9th had the deadline for local governments to opt out as March 31, 2029; however, that language is no longer available on the General Assembly webpage. Representative Clint Crowe has informed Commissioner Eddie Rowland that the official deadline, as of now, is March 1, 2025.

It is my recommendation that the Board vote to opt out and I will hold the documentation required by the Secretary of State until Tuesday February 25, 2025, and if there is no additional official action taken and approved by the Governor, those documents will be released.

Chairman Gibbs stated no one knows how HB 581 will affect local governments long term. He stated Commissioner Rowland has worked numbers but there is no way they can be accurate because there is too much in play and they don't consider growth. He stated this has been a hard decision to vote on. Commissioner Davis stated he doesn't feel comfortable locking Monroe County citizens long term into a law that even the state doesn't understand. Commissioner Davis stated this puts the tax burden on rental property and commercial businesses. Commissioner Davis stated that most of the citizens that he had spoken to who voted in favor had done so because they thought they would be losing their homestead exemption.

Commissioner Ambrose stated several large cities in Georgia had already opted out of HB 581.

Commissioner Ambrose stated he would rather let it play out and opt in at a later date after all of the details get worked out. Commissioner Ambrose stated he would rather freeze property taxes for citizens over the age of 65.

Commissioner Turner stated he wants to do what is best for Monroe County as a whole and asked Chairman Gibbs what he thought was best. Chairman Gibbs responded, "we don't know, I'm still questioning, we don't know how this is going to pan out."

Commissioner Rowland stated Chairman Gibbs is 100% correct about the figures and other variables coming into play, every variable is a guess. Commissioner Rowland stated he hasn't been fighting this bill he has simply been trying to understand it. Commissioner Rowland stated he thinks state legislators had good intentions with the bill and is confident that they will continue working to find something that will help Georgians lower their property taxes. Commissioner Rowland stated he would prefer to freeze everyone's property values where they are and forget the ups and downs and as long as you live in that home that would be your number.

Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the resolution for Monroe County to opt out of House Bill 581.

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

UDO Discussion

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to impose a 120-day moratorium on all building permit applications that have not already been submitted until the UDO can be modified. Commissioner Ambrose stated he wants to make sure Monroe County is not growing too quickly.

Chairman Gibbs seconded the motion for discussion.

Commissioner Davis stated the Board of Commissioners as well as the Planning and Zoning Board had worked on the UDO extensively and both boards knew they were going to have to do altering.

Commissioner Rowland stated he does not agree with imposing a moratorium. Commissioner Rowland stated he encourages all commissioners to participate in the March 7th zoning class the Community Development Department is hosting.

Following a Board discussion, the motion failed 1-4 with Commissioner Ambrose in favor and Chairman Gibbs, Commissioner Davis, Commissioner Rowland, and Commissioner Turner opposed.

Impact fees

Commissioner Ambrose asked the Board to reconsider imposing Impact Fees. Commissioner Ambrose stated Monroe County residents are paying higher property taxes because of out-of-town developers putting in expensive subdivisions.

Chairman Gibbs stated he would like to learn more about whether impact fees will work in Monroe County.

Commissioner Turner stated he is in favor of imposing impact fees.

Commissioner Davis stated he is fine with the Board revisiting due to two of the commissioners on the board being new.

Following a board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve revisiting impact fees in Monroe County using current information we already have.

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

Public Comments

Carriage Drive resident John Ricketson stated at the most recent GOP meeting the main topic was the recent disbursement of discretionary funds after the former Commission Chair had left office. Mr.

Ricketson stated the money should have gone back into the general fund. He stated people were confused and upset because it did not seem right and should have been corrected.

Commissioners' Comments

District 1 Lamarcus Davis

Commissioner Davis stated he wanted to reiterate he can't make a decision on something the state doesn't understand. He stated many hours have been spent in the back room trying to figure it out.

District 2 Eddie Rowland

Commissioner Rowland stated the state may solve HB 581 for us, we just have to wait until the session ends. Commissioner Rowland addressed John Ricketson stating he appreciates his question, but he encourages anyone confused to go back and hear the entire discussion. Commissioner Rowland stated the Board discussed thoroughly why we did what we did.

District 3 John Ambrose

Commissioner Ambrose stated we need to look out for the citizens and the board needs to look at freezing property values for homeowners aged 65 and over.

District 4 Al Turner

Commissioner Turner stated he is in favor of impact fees and thanked everyone in attendance.

Chairman Alan Gibbs

Chairman Gibbs responded to John Ricketson stating he wished Tapley had made the request while he was in office however the places Tapley was donating the money to were good places and that's where he would have wanted it to go to. Chairman Gibbs stated there was nothing under handed done.

Chairman Gibbs stated he is glad HB 581 is behind us.

Executive Session-Real Estate

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to enter executive session at 10:55 a.m. for Real Estate.

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

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to come out of executive session at 11:04

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

Action from Executive Session

County Attorney Natalie Sundeen stated a Real Estate matter was discussed and the Board instructed the County Attorney to enter negotiations for real estate.

Adjourn

Commissioner Davis motioned to adjourn at 11:05 a.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

Janet Abbott, County Clerk