

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of April 29, 2025

Called 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

Chairman Gibbs 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

Commissioner Davis motioned to approve the agenda.

Commissioner Ambrose seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

HB 581/251/92 Discussion

Commissioner Rowland stated he requested the meeting to ratify the decision made in March to opt out of HB581 or to reverse the decision. Commissioner Rowland stated if the decision is made to reverse, the deadline is tomorrow March 30, 2025, to have the proper documentation to the Secretary of State. Commissioner Rowland stated the Board would need to begin immediate negotiations with the City of Forsyth for FLOST distribution, FLOST would then need to be added to the ballot for the voters in Monroe County to vote on. Commissioner Rowland stated HB 581 will not affect the incoming budget and Monroe County will not start collecting until 2026 and the FLOST could bring in 5 million or so for each of the years. Commissioner Rowland stated his recommendation today is to rescind our decision to opt out and to opt in to HB 581. Commissioner Rowland stated we told everyone we were going to wait and see how this plays out and look at it again next year and people will say we don't stick to our decisions, but things have changed since we made the decision. If the sentiment of the county is to decide against the FLOST then we shouldn't opt in to HB 581.

Commissioner Rowland motioned to rescind the Boards decision to opt out of HB 581 and to opt in to HB 581.

Chairman Gibbs seconded the motion for discussion.

Chairman Gibbs stated when this was initially voted on, he was the only one that voted to opt in.

Chairman Gibbs stated so far 2/3 of the State of Georgia has opted in and he is curious how opting in is going to affect the tax bills and are we hurting anyone by doing this today.

Commissioner Rowland replied this will not affect the tax rate for this year or the budget we set this year for next year. Commissioner Rowland stated if we vote to opt in and the FLOST is approved in November, March 2026 will be when the collections will begin for businesses. Commissioner Rowland stated this will not affect the budget until 2027.

Commissioner Ambrose stated his feelings have not changed regarding HB 581. Commissioner Ambrose stated Chief Appraiser Bobby Gerhardt thinks we should opt out, and Alan Hornaday with

Technical Appraisal Services of Georgia has stated the logistics have not been worked out.

Commissioner Ambrose stated he does not agree with raising sales tax from 8 cent to 9 cent and the Board will have to raise the millage rate if the FLOST is not approved by the citizens. Commissioner Ambrose stated we can do the same thing this bill is intending to do when the new businesses come into the county. Commissioner Ambrose stated we initially voted to wait and see how the other counties do with this, and he thinks we should stick to that, there are too many ifs with this bill. Commissioner Ambrose stated he is not going to vote for opting in knowing how long it took to get TSPLOST passed. Commissioner Ambrose stated the lower income people in the county will have to spend 9 cents on every dollar they spend.

Commissioner Rowland replied stating Chief Appraiser Bobby Gerhardt had told him in an email on Friday that the county should opt in. Commissioner Rowland stated he sat down and talked with Mr. Gerhardt and the opinion from Alan Hornaday was that we should opt in. Commissioner Rowland stated his thoughts are that if this was a southwest Georgia county and the only sales tax collected was from dollar stores maybe, but we have 27 miles of interstate we collect sales tax from to compensate. Commissioner Ambrose replied stating his last email from Mr. Gerhardt was to continue to opt out. County Manager Jim Hedges stated Alan Hornaday's opinion was to opt-in, but Mr. Gerhardt's opinion was to opt out.

Commissioner Ambrose stated we made a decision let's stick with it.

Chairman Gibbs stated it was his understanding the voters were looking for a better homestead exemption.

Commissioner Ambrose stated if the FLOST doesn't pass, God help the homeowners because the millage rate will have to be increased.

Commissioner Rowland stated he had texted Mr. Gerhardt and the County Manager was correct. Alan Hornaday had said to opt-in, but Mr. Gerhardt said to opt-out.

Commissioner Davis stated the Board is still dealing with too many moving parts to meet the May 1st deadline. Commissioner Davis stated we haven't even started negotiations with the City of Forsyth. Commissioner Davis stated we need to get some of this together first and then look at possibly opting-in before March 1, 2026.

Commissioner Turner stated his vote is to wait until March 2026. Commissioner Turner stated we made a decision, and we need to wait for more clarity. Commissioner Turner stated we have a whole year to work things out.

Commissioner Rowland stated the only thing the FLOST money can apply to is for the reduction of property tax.

Commissioner Ambrose stated look at the income we are looking at down the road with the new businesses coming in. Commissioner Ambrose stated he has tried for 6 to 7 months to put a freeze on taxes for elderly people and for people that have lived in their house for 5 years or more. Commissioner Ambrose stated lets freeze their values, we can help better than the state can. Commissioner Ambrose stated the purpose of HB 581 was to assist the elderly and we can do that locally.

Chairman Gibbs asked if we opt-in now can we opt out later.

Commissioner Rowland replied stating no, once you are in, you are in.

Commissioner Ambrose replied, stating that's why we should wait.

Commissioner Rowland stated we could increase the homestead exclusively for seniors and veterans but keep it the same for everyone else.

Chairman Gibbs stated his biggest concern is if the Board is rushing by voting on this today.

Commissioner Davis asked will this affect our Tax Commissioner's office.

Commissioner Rowland replied, stating he didn't think so.

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

Public Comments

Candy Mountain, resident of 582 Bar None Road asked where counties get their money from that don't have property tax.

Commissioner Rowland replied from utilities.

Ms. Mountain stated she thinks it is a wise decision to hold your course, especially since you are locked in once you opt-in. Ms. Mountain thanked the Board for everything they do.

Commissioners' Comments

District 1 Lamarcus Davis

Commissioner Davis reminded everyone of the Town Hall meeting at Kynette Church on Saturday, May 3rd at 10:00 a.m. with him and City Councilman Charles Wilder.

Commissioner Davis stated he would like to donate \$5,000 of his discretionary funds to the Recreation Department to purchase a smart board to use for the Coaches.

The Board agreed by general consensus to allow the use of the discretionary funds.

District 2 Eddie Rowland

Commissioner Rowland stated he is glad the Board can have a discussion openly and have an honest discussion with the citizens listening. Commissioner Rowland stated there is a lot of uncertainty and we struggle to try to make the best decisions, and he felt as though this decision needed to be made publicly. Commissioner Rowland stated he has searched for an alternative option and there is none.

District 3 John Ambrose

Commissioner Ambrose stated he appreciates Commissioner Rowland for trying to find another option. Commissioner Ambrose stated in the near future we need to call a meeting to set up the UDO on major subdivisions and to discuss the requirements for the library.

District 4 Al Turner

Commissioner Turner thanked Commissioner Rowland for all of the hard work he has put into this as well as Commissioner Davis.

Chairman Alan Gibbs

Chairman Gibbs stated as being the only commissioner to originally vote to opt-in, my reasoning today is everything went so fast. Chairman Gibbs stated with 2/3 of the state voting to opt-in this will be a good test to see how this works. Chairman Gibbs stated Monroe County has a better homestead exemption than most counties in Georgia and his job is to do the best he can for Monroe County.

Executive Session

There was no executive session.

Action from Executive Session

There was no executive session, therefore, no action.

Adjourn

Commissioner Davis motioned to adjourn at 9:46 a.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

Janet Abbott, County Clerk