

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of June 03, 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

Natalie Sundeen, County Attorney

Janet Abbott, County Clerk

Richard Dumas, Public Information Officer

Kelsey Fortner, Community Development Manager

Welcome

Chairman Gibbs welcomed everyone in attendance.

Prayer

Nathan Jackson New Providence Baptist Church 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.

New Business

Approve Agenda

Chairman Gibbs presented the agenda for approval with the addition of property tax discussion as item C and item G County Manager.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the agenda with said changes.

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

Approve Minutes-May 20, 2025

Chairman Gibbs presented the minutes of the May 20, 2025, Regular meeting for approval.

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

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

Property Tax Discussion

Commissioner Rowland addressed the recent property tax increases, property tax percentages and the valuation process. Commissioner Rowland stated the drastic increase is a result of this being the first residential valuation in 17 years. Commissioner Rowland stated the Board of Commissioners set the millage rate but has no say so in property valuations, the Georgia Department of Revenue establishes valuation standards for the Tax Assessors and property tax appeals are heard by the Board of Equalization.

Commissioner Rowland then stated he has been working on a solution that would be agreeable with the citizens and the county budget. Commissioner Rowland stated the Georgia Department of Revenue will allow a county to freeze valuations for one year at the previous years value. Commissioner Rowland stated if the Board decides to do this then in 2026 the Board can opt into House Bill 581 which would cap increases of the taxable value at the rate of inflation based on the Consumer Price Index. At that point the 2025 residential values would take effect in 2026 and from that point on values can only increase at the rate of inflation.

Commissioner Rowland stated the Board of Commissioners, and the Board of Assessors must both agree to do this.

County Manager Jim Hedges suggested the Board hold off on voting on this until the Board of Assessors meets the next morning.

Commissioner Rowland then stated once a countywide revaluation is performed in the next two years on commercial, industrial, and agricultural property the county will be able to lower the millage rate.

The Board discussed the property tax increase at length and allowed for public comment.

Russ Edge, resident of Edge Road, stated the citizens need to be notified of the Board of Assessors meetings and he urges the Board of Commissioners to reduce the millage rate. Mr. Edge stated he wanted to remind the Board that the River Forest Clubhouse does not pay property taxes.

Fannie West resident of Watson Road stated her taxes went up 100% and this is unfair to seniors on a fixed income.

Al Crusan, resident of Lakeshore Drive stated he had a 60% tax increase, and he is on a fixed income. Mr. Crusan asked the Board, how do you expect me to pay for that? Mr. Crusan stated the Board should do away with school taxes for seniors.

Nipper Bunn, resident of 274 Frank Bun Drive stated he was curious if the Board freezes the values at the 2024 values how it will affect the percentages for utilities.

Alan Hornaday, Senior Technical Manager of Technical Appraisal Services of Georgia, responded stating recording the fair market value will be necessary for ensuring that the utilities continue to pay property taxes at the 40 percent assessment value.

Nathan Jackson, resident of Hwy 41 South stated his home value increased 80 percent this year. Mr. Jackson stated the problem is that the values are based on comparable sales, which affects long-term residents that have no intention of selling their homes.

Yvonne Stuart, resident of Hwy 41 South stated her grandkids aren't going to be able to afford to live here. Mrs. Stuart stated there should have been some type of advanced warning given to property owners. Ms. Stuart stated the high values are a result of newcomers from other surrounding counties. Ms. Stuart stated affordable housing is needed to balance out the mini mansions that populate Monroe County which are causing smaller home values to rise. Ms. Stuart stated if any large landowners are allowed to get payment plans then every property owner should qualify for a property tax payment plan.

Stan Stuart, resident of Montpelier Road, stated he chose to live in a rural area that doesn't have the amenities of a gated community like River Forest. Mr. Stuart stated he drives down a road that is filled with potholes every day and shouldn't be paying the property taxes that transplants are paying.

Jenny Sykes, resident of Woodland Way, asked how much Technical Appraisal Services was paid to perform the countywide residential valuation and whether they received an incentive for raising values. Chief Appraiser Bobby Gerhardt replied they were paid \$205,000 for the valuation and they received no incentives for the results.

Ms. Seitz then asked how quickly valuation appeals would be resolved and why some residential homes have been revalued four or five times in the last decade.

Ashley Cohran, resident of Hickory Road, stated her home has been revalued every year since 2021 when she moved in. Ms. Cohran stated she feels like she is being penalized for living in an area of High Falls where sales have been frequent over the past few years.

Graham Jones, resident of Sydney Woods Drive, stated this has been educational and he understands a little better how it works. Mr. Jones stated ad valorem taxes might not be the best form of taxation for Monroe County anymore and the biggest issue was the sudden value increases.

Candy Mountain, resident of 582 Bar None Road, stated she lives in a 45-year-old house and would like to know what homes hers was compared to.

Following the extensive discussion, Commissioner Rowland stated there are three large projects coming to Rumble Road within the next few years, Buc-ee's, Oglethorpe Power, and a data center.

Commissioner Rowland stated all three projects are expected to provide long-term property tax relief for property owners in Monroe County. Commissioner Rowland stated the data center alone is projected to bring in annual tax revenues that are double the county's current budget.

Chairman Gibbs thanked the residents for their comments, and stated the Board hears their concerns and are working on a solution.

Chairman Gibbs called a five-minute break at 7:52 p.m.

Chairman Gibbs called the meeting back to order at 7:58 p.m.

Water Bill Appeal

Ms. Charlene Frame, 109 Loraine Woods Drive, is appealing her water bill for February, \$1,573.22 with 152,670 gallons of usage, and for March, \$1,517.88 with 130,550 gallons of usage. Water usage at this rate is indicative of a running garden hose or an irrigation system with a leaking valve. Ms. Frame was scheduled to be on May 20, 2025, BOC agenda but did not receive the email notification.

Interesting, Emilio Chavez, the inspector engaged by Ms. Frame is not listed by the Secretary of State as a licensed plumber in Georgia, nor is the company, EC Remodeling a registered company in Georgia. Additionally, the address given for EC Remodeling at 780 Orange Terrace in Macon does not exist in qPublic.

Ms. Frame spoke, stating she has lived in her home for 20 years and has never had a water bill over \$200. Ms. Frame stated if she had a leak causing that much water usage, there would be visible standing water somewhere on her property and there wasn't any.

Commissioner Rowland asked how we are going to address this equitably for everyone, stating we are hearing this a lot.

Commissioner Rowland stated in the future if someone with a high-water bill wants us to adjust their bill, they should pay the county to test their water meter and if found to be defective the county will reimburse them and adjust their bill but if not, the user should have to pay for the inspection costs as well as the cost of water usage. Commissioner Rowland stated it's not fair for other taxpayers to bear that cost. Commissioner Rowland stated the money is not free because the county pays for it, you are the county and that money comes out of your pockets.

County Manager Jim Hedges stated that the typical resolution for water customers who incur high bills without a known cause is that the county calculates the customer's average use for the past six months and the customer pays the amount to cover the county's cost of excess usage beyond the customers' normal average.

After extensive discussion, the Board agreed by general consensus that the county would pay the \$250 cost of testing Ms. Frames water meter.

Mr. Hedges told Ms. Frame to continue to pay her normal water bill and said he would get back with her on a payment plan regarding the amount owed once her water meter results are back.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve allowing County Manager Jim Hedges and Finance Director Lorri Robinson, along with the assistance of the water department, to develop a policy for determining how water meter tests and water bills indicating high usage are to be handled.

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

Senior Center Vehicle Purchase

Commissioner Lamarcus Davis was contacted by representatives of the Monroe County Senior Center requesting the county provide them with a passenger van to enable attendance and participation in events outside the Forsyth area. Commissioner Davis has discussed a 50%-50% shared purchase with the City of Forsyth and the city's initial reaction was highly favorable.

Commissioner Davis has located two potential passenger vans as follows:

- Volume Chevrolet-2021 Chevrolet Express LT 12-passenger van located in Columbus, Ohio with 60,263 miles at a price of \$32,900 plus taxes and fees. Volume Chevrolet offers free life-time oil changes and either a 3-year or 36,000-mile powertrain warranty.
- Hutchinson Ford-2020 Ford Transit-350 15-passenger van located in Forsyth, Ga. With 90,566 miles at a price of \$28,993. No discussion of an extended warranty.

The Senior Center would provide a licensed driver and ACCG, our insurance provider, has confirmed the driver with the County's permission to drive the vehicle would be covered under the County's

insurance. Gasoline and maintenance would be provided by Monroe County. Funding would be from the budget contingency.

Commissioner Davis motioned for the county to pay half of the van cost for the senior center with funding from contingency and the county have ownership.

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

Board of Assessors' Appointments

Mark Dye has resigned from the Board of Assessors effective May 19, 2025. Bobby Gerhardt, Chief Tax Assessor, was contacted by Jim Rollins volunteering for a position on this Board and Mr. Gerhardt states Mr. Rollins would be an excellent choice. If appointed, Mr. Rollins would serve out Mr. Dye's term, which would expire on April 3, 2026.

Robert Watson's term expires on July 31, 2025, and it is recommended that Mr. Watson be reappointed to a new three-year term.

Commissioner Ambrose nominated Greg Phillips to the Tax Assessors Board to serve out the remainder of Mark Dye's term which will expire on April 3, 2026.

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

Planning & Zoning

UDO Amendment-Special Use Definitions

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to enter a public hearing for a UDO amendment and special use application at 8:26 p.m.

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

Mrs. Fortner stated in a previous meeting the Board of Commissioners decided to have an amendment in the A-R zoning for a special use to be placed in the UDO for private mechanical shops.

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented an amendment to the UDO for approval as follows:

Section One

- In Chapter 2, Section 2.02.02, the table of use is hereby amended as follows:
 - "Mechanical Repair Shop, private" is added to the uses & structures section and is hereby added as a Special Use in the A-R district.

Section Two

- In Chapter 1, Section 1.10.00, the definition of "Mechanical Repair Shop, private" is hereby added and defined as follows:

- A mechanical repair shop, private, is specific for an agricultural related business for the repairing of the real property owner's mechanical equipment, including but not limited to tractors, trailers, and other commercial vehicles provided that they are utilized in an agriculture related business. All environmental and safety precautions must be taken. In the case of using a county road, the Monroe County Road superintendent must approve ingress, egress. In case of using the state highway, the Department of Transportation must approve ingress, egress. Areas of property that holds the mechanical repair shop must be kept clean and lawful.

Ms. Fortner stated the Planning and Zoning Recommended approval 4-1 with the condition of following the proposed ordinance, following EPA rules and regulations with the disposal of waste, oil, etc., and should compressors be outside of the main business operations-air compressors shall be kept in a 6' high "L" shaped, solid structure to help as a sound barrier.

Commissioner Rowland motioned to approve the UDO amendment for private mechanical shops. Chairman Gibbs seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-1 with Commissioner Ambrose opposed.

P&Z Hearing-Special Use-2415 Dames Ferry Road

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented a special-use application in Agriculture located at Dames Ferry Road, Map 078 Parcel 026F. Mrs. Fortner stated the application is a private mechanic shop servicing his business trucks. The property/owner applicant is Deer Creek Farm, Scott and Amy Edwards.

Mrs. Fortner stated the owners would like to comply with Monroe County's ordinance. The Department of Transportation has approved the curb cut for this business on Hwy 18.

Russ Edge resident of Edge Road stated he support the request, but he thinks when applicants submit an application that requires a UDO amendment the applicant should be responsible for the legal fees and other cost required to make the change.

Candy Mountain, Resident of Bar None Road, stated she doesn't understand why the property is zoned agricultural, but the building is considered commercial. Ms. Mountain stated she thinks they both should be the same.

Commissioner Rowland replied, stating that it is not uncommon for them to be different.

Commissioner Davis motioned to come out of the public hearing at 8:39 p.m.

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

Chairman Gibbs motioned to approve the special use application with the condition that the only vehicles that can be serviced are personally owned.

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

County Manager

County Manager Jim Hedges announced he will retire January 31, 2026. Mr. Hedges stated he started his career on June 15, 1970, with Amoco Corporation and has been working in various organizations for the past 55 years. Mr. Hedges stated he recently heard the average retirement age is 65 years old and the life expectancy is 78 and he turned 78 this year.

Commissioner Ambrose stated social media has constantly downgraded the County Manager, but the county was a disaster prior to him coming here. Commissioner Ambrose stated the County Manager has done an outstanding job and he can't say enough about how he appreciates him and the job he has done for our county. Commissioner Ambrose stated he doesn't know who we can hire because there is not a man in the world with the knowledge Mr. Hedges has.

Chairman Gibbs stated he has only worked with Mr. Hedges for the past six months, but he is amazed at Mr. Hedges knowledge and how well the County Manager keeps up with the details of the county government. Chairman Gibbs stated it will be very difficult to fill his shoes.

Commissioner Rowland stated he did not know Mr. Hedges until he became county manager, and he didn't really know what a county manager was supposed to do until Mr. Hedges came. Commissioner Rowland stated he has learned more about how county government is supposed to work from Mr. Hedges than from the training classes he has taken through ACCG.

Commissioner Davis stated Mr. Hedges has helped him from the first day on the board. Commissioner Davis stated Mr. Hedges is a humble man and will give you the shirt off his back. Commissioner Davis stated the county manager introduced him to leaders in the community he probably would never have met otherwise. Commissioner Davis stated he appreciates everything the county manager has done for him and Monroe County, and he is going to miss him.

Commissioner Ambrose encouraged the board to move swiftly, hiring a replacement for the County Manager so they could have time to work alongside Mr. Hedges before he leaves.

Commissioner Rowland stated he intends to stay out of the County Manager hiring process because he has an interest in the position. Commissioner Rowland stated he has not decided for certain if he will apply but he will remain out of the process in case he decides to submit his application.

Chairman Gibbs stated if Commissioner Rowland decides to apply, he will not receive any type of special treatment because he is a current commissioner.

Commissioner Ambrose stated he would like for it to be mandatory for the next county manager to either be a county resident or be willing to move to Monroe County.

Chairman Gibbs stated he didn't think you could require the county manager to reside in Monroe County.

Commissioner Davis stated he thinks if this was a requirement the county would be responsible for living expenses.

Public Comments

Russ Edge, resident of Edge Road, spoke stating applicants take directions from Planning & Zoning for solutions for limitations on the UDO. He stated he understands the Planning and Zoning Office may not be able to make the appropriate determination to fit what the Commissioners want but the Commissioners should be flexible to allow a conditional determination. Mr. Edge stated from the time the Stroud's submitted their application in November of 2024 until it was heard by the Board was 71 days. All of this time holds up people's lives.

Mr. Edges stated the county has been able to operate solid waste without going into debt. He asked if there was a requirement for the landfill to operate in the positive, then stating no there isn't. Solid Waste services are an essential function for the county and if there are not enough funds then cuts need to be made elsewhere. Mr. Edge asked if the commissioners know of any landfills that operate with a positive income when not including property tax, Macon-Bibb County includes calculations in their property taxes.

Carol Edge, resident of 1544 Stokes Store Road, asked the Board when they would be having a meeting to discuss the UDO and what type of meeting it will be and will the public be allowed.

Ms. Edge stated the county needs to reconsider impact fees.

Commissioners' Comments

District 1 Lamarcus Davis

Commissioner Davis had no additional comments.

District 2 Eddie Rowland

Commissioner Rowland had no additional comments.

District 3 John Ambrose

Commissioner Ambrose stated a date needs to be set up for the UDO meeting allowing public involvement and the tipping fees at the landfill need to be looked at. He stated he agrees with impact fees and business license.

Chairman Alan Gibbs

Chairman Gibbs stated the landfill discussion keeps coming up and he knows it cost the county money, but it is a service we provide county citizens, and he is all about finding a way to keep the landfill open.

Chairman Gibbs stated 71 days is a long time for a zoning meeting he agrees.

Chairman Gibbs stated the board is trying to work on dates for the UDO meeting.

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 9:05 p.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

Janet Abbott, County Clerk