Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of August 28, 2025

Called Meeting/Public Hearing

Millage Rate

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

Amy Cowan, County Attorney

Janet Abbott, County Clerk

Richard Dumas, Public Information Officer

Welcome

Chairman Gibbs welcomed everyone in attendance.

Prayer

Commissioner Rowland 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

Public Hearing -2025 Millage Rate

At 9:00 a.m., Commissioner Ambrose motioned to enter a public hearing for the 2025 millage rate; seconded by Commissioner Davis, motion carried 5-0.

Overview

County Manager Jim Hedges focused on the financial challenges facing Monroe County, particularly the setting of the 2025 millage rate, the county's revenue shortfall, and the depletion of reserves. Two millage rate options were presented for consideration, along with a discussion of future revenue streams and the county's financial outlook.

Key Points Discussed

1. Historical Context

- **Millage Rate:** The millage rate has decreased by 19% over the past 8 years.
- **Inflation:** Inflation has risen by 27% during the same period, increasing financial strain.
- **Revenue Loss:** The county has lost $11.8 million in revenue due to:
  - Lower millage rates.
  - Property tax loss from Plant Scherer.
  - Reduced water revenue from seasonal water rates.

2. Current Financial Status

- **Unassigned Reserves:**
  - $18.6 million of unrestricted reserves were used to balance the budget over the past three years.
  - Only $7.7 million remains in reserves, which are projected to bottom out in 2026.
- **2025 Budget Shortfall:**
  - Income was short by $7.4 million (13.5%) compared to expenses, requiring reserves to supplement the budget.

3. Future Revenue Streams

- **Buc-ee's:**
  - Property tax (5% of value) starts in 2027, with a 12-year abatement.
  - Sales tax revenue expected in late 2026.
- **Oglethorpe Power:**
  - Property tax begins in 2030, with a 12-year abatement.
  - Sales tax revenue is expected mid-to-late 2029.

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- **Prologic and Rumble Technology Campus:**
    - Revenue potential remains uncertain.
- **Plant Scherer Unit Four:**
    - Awaiting Georgia Power's decision to return it to the tax digest.

4. Millage Rate Options for 2025

Two options were presented for the 2025 millage rate:

- **Option 1: Rollback Rate (10.763 mils):**
    - Designed to maintain property tax revenue at the previous year's level despite reassessments.
    - Generates $643,927 in additional revenue.
    - Leaves a deficit of $7,354,079, requiring cuts to capital expenditures, contingencies, and reserves.
- **Option 2: Rollback Rate Plus 1.2 Mils SPLOST Adjustment (11.963 mils):**
    - Adds back the 1.2 mils reduction from 2024 due to excess SPLOST collections.
    - Generates $2,750,811 in additional revenue.
    - Reduces the deficit but still requires adjustments to reserves and expenditures.
    - Considered a tax increase, requiring three public hearings.

5. Sales Ratio Study Concerns

- The county's sales ratio may fall below 38%, which could result in financial penalties and adjustments to the tax digest. This issue will be monitored closely.

6. Future Financial Outlook

- **Revenue Growth:**
    - Significant revenue expected from Buc-ee's, Oglethorpe Power, and Prologic starting in 2027.
    - General fund revenue is projected to grow steadily through 2035.
- **Challenges:**
    - Managing the transition from 2026 to 2027 without depleting reserves.
    - Addressing immediate budget deficits while awaiting future revenue streams.

Action Items

1. Finalize the 2025 millage rate during August 19, 2025, Board of Commissioners meeting.
2. Conduct public hearings if the rollback plus 1.2 mils SPLOST option is selected.
3. Monitor the Sales Ratio Study results and address any potential consequences.
4. Develop strategies to bridge the financial gap until new revenue streams are realized.

The following citizens spoke during the public hearing:

- Rob Law, Lassiter Road
- Bill Waldrep, Hwy 42 North
- Pat Corley, Stokes Store Road
- Candy Mountain, Bar None Road

Citizens cited the following concerns:

• Quality of Life Issues: Residents express concerns about rising taxes affecting their quality of life, especially among retirees on fixed incomes.

• Need for Business Growth: Discussion on attracting businesses to increase sales tax revenue and alleviate property tax burdens.

• Concerns about Spending: Calls for reduced spending and better management of county funds.

Commissioner Davis motioned to come out of the public hearing at 9:51 a.m.

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

Public Comments

There were no additional public comments

Commissioners' Comments

District 1 Lamarcus Davis

Commissioner Davis thanked everyone for coming and stated the board is trying everything they can to help the citizens.

District 2 Eddie Rowland

Read Richard's post regarding road department.

District 3 John Ambrose

Commissioner Ambrose stated the citizens are down on what the county is doing but the county is in the best financial shape since County Manager Jim Hedges and Finance Director Lorri Robins came. Commissioner Ambrose stated the road department recently received a lot of complaints about paving, but the citizens have to way until the job is completed. Commissioner Ambrose thanked the road department for the work they do.

Commissioner Al Turner

Commissioner Turner thanked everyone for coming out and reminded everyone of the 6 pm public hearing. Commissioner Turner stated the road department is doing an excellent job.

Chairman Alan Gibbs

Chairman Gibbs stated the board went over a lot of numbers and it's hard to wrap his head around. Chairman Gibbs stated he would like to point out the rollback plus a mil equates to an additional $130 a year on a $100,000 home. Chairman Gibbs stated he understands growth is inevitable, but he prefers Monroe County 1997, but it is a catch 22 because the county needs growth to remain financially stable.

Adjourn

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to adjourn at 10:01 a.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

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Janet Abbott, County Clerk