Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of October 21, 2025

Called Meeting/Public Hearing

Millage Rate

6:00 PM

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

Janet Abbott, County Clerk

Lorri Robinson-Byrd Finance Director/Deputy County Manager

Welcome

Chairman Gibbs welcomed everyone in attendance.

Prayer

Commissioner Davis 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 pm.

New Business

Approve Agenda

Chairman Gibbs presented the agenda for approval.

Commissioner Davis motioned to approve the agenda.

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

P&Z Hearing-Amendment-Curb Cut Strickland Woods Phase II

Community Development Manager Kelsey Fortner presented application 2025-19 for a curb cut amendment. The property owner/applicant is Brian Wesley, and the location is Strickland Loop (entrance of Phase II Strickland Woods) map 052 parcel 018.

Mrs. Fortner stated the property owner requests an extra curb cut on Strickland Loop for Phase II of Strickland Woods. The conditions were placed on the plat in 2021 for nine curb cuts. The developer must request a tenth curb cut for the entrance of Phase II. The original plan presented must be amended.

Ms. Fortner stated in 2021, plans were to relocate lot 18 on Strickland Loop to become the entrance of Strickland Woods Phase II. An agreement cannot be made-the developer is requesting an additional curb cut to access Phase II.

Should the proposed be approved the development would have a total of 10 (ten) curb cuts. 7(seven) cuts on Strickland Loop and 3 (three) cuts on Sutton Road.

The Board of Commissioners placed these conditions on this plat; it requires Board approval to amend this request.

The Planning and Zoning Board recommended denial 4-1.

Mrs. Fortner stated a public hearing is not necessary as this vote was deferred from October 7, 2025, Commissioner's regular meeting in which a public hearing was held, and the vote was a tie vote.

County Attorney Ben Vaughn instructed the Board at that meeting that the application would need affirmative action and would need to be tabled until the next meeting when the board would have a full quorum.

Kelsey Fortner, Community Development Manager, gave the presentation from the previous hearing.

Chairman Gibbs stated this is not a public hearing, but he has questions due to not being at the last meeting and would like to hear input.

Chairman Gibbs clarified the shared driveway in question was not actually a shared driveway, stating it would be a county approved road.

Attorney Warren Tillery spoke on behalf of the applicant addressing the questions regarding the shared driveway stating to put a little context is the application went through two rezonings initially and all of the lots with the exception of lot 18 have shared driveways. This has always been a planned road and will be the access to phase 2 of the subdivision. Mr. Tillery stated the request is actually for one additional curb cut to build out phase II.

Chairman Gibbs stated the section in question is not actually owned by lot 18 and is owned by the property in the back and will meet county standards for a road.

Commissioner Ambrose stated initially the driveway was going to share with the road and this was a mistake made when lot 18 was sold, he continued you will come back in a few months asking for an additional curb cut.

Attorney Tillery passed out a plat to the Board. Mr. Tillery stated in response to Commissioner Ambrose the driveway for lot 18 has already been built and will not require them to come back.

Realtor Chrissy Ham stated another curb cut will not be requested because the driveway in question will be turned onto the road.

Tara Bunce resident of Strickland Loop opposed the issue stating this has been fought from day one and the issue is what is considered right in the UDO. Ms. Bunce read the definition of a curb cut considered by GDOT.

Rob Law, resident of Lassiter Road, stated his recommendation at the last hearing was to table this and for someone to negotiate with the builder. His opinion is that the builder has blatantly abused what the county has asked for, and this will make a mockery of the county if approved.

Chrissy Ham stated the road was put in prior to lot 18 and she spoke to the homeowner about their driveway being turned onto the new road instead of lot 18 and they denied.

Mr. Tillery stated he would like to point out Ms. Bunce is the wife of the Chairman of the Planning and Zoning Board, and he would like to address her comment regarding Mr. Wesley not being in attendance. Mr. Tillery stated he has been here on multiple other occasions and he has four different representatives present.

Mitchell Bunce spoke stating his job as Chairman of Planning and Zoning is to make sure there is a fair hearing. Mr. Bunce stated they had not used all of their curb cuts when they sold lot 18. Mr. Bunce stated the planning and zoning board was a 4-1 vote for denial due to members' view that the developer "lacked a good reason" for delayed negotiations. Mr. Bunce stated he can separate himself from his wife's emotions and he consults the county attorney regarding every decision he makes.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to deny.

Commissioner Turner seconded the motion for discussion.

Commissioner Turner asked for clarification on the Planning and Zoning Boards denial.

Commissioner Davis stated one of the Planning and Zoning Board members lives on Sutton Road and she voted in favor.

The motion to deny failed 1-4 with Commissioner Ambrose voting in favor of denial and Chairman Gibbs, Commissioner Davis, Commissioner Rowland and Commissioner Turner opposed to denial.

Chairman Gibbs motioned to approve the amendment.

Commissioner Rowland seconded the motion, and the motion carried 3-1-1 with Chairman Gibbs, Commissioner Davis and Commissioner Rowland in favor, Commissioner Ambrose opposed and Commissioner Turner abstained to vote.

Public Hearing -2025 Millage Rate

At 6:44 pm., Commissioner Ambrose motioned to enter a public hearing for the 2025 millage rate; seconded by Commissioner Davis, motion carried 5-0.

Overview

Finance Director/Deputy County Manager Lorri Robinson explained the reason the millage rate hearings are being redone is because there are specific rules regarding the notifications in the newspaper, one of the specifications is the ad must be a minimum of 30 square inches, and the newspaper did not run the proper size ad even though specific instructions were sent. The Monroe County Reporter reran the ads at no cost to the county and this time the ad was ran at 50 square inches.

The Board of Education has to redo their hearings as well because the ad cannot be run in the legal section and was in fact ran in the legal section of the Monroe County Reporter.

Finance Director/Deputy County Manager Lorri Robinson 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.
- **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, 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:

- Al Crusan, resident of Lakeshore Drive, asked do we need extra taxes on property, why were the taxes deferred on Buc-ee's, Oglethorpe Power and the Data Center?

Chairman Gibbs stated in response, the Development Authority has that power not us.

- Rob Law, resident of Lassiter Road, thanked the county for going back through the process.
- Carol Edge, resident of Stokes Store Road, asked what the county normally does with leftover SPLOST funds.

The Board explained to Ms. Edge there are strict rules on what can be done with leftover funds from SPLOST and last year that is what was done, the county paid off debt and rolled back the millage rate.

Commissioner Davis motioned to close the public hearing at 6:55 p.m.

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

Commissioner Rowland motion to approve the 1.2 mill increase.

Commissioner Davis seconded for discussion.

Commissioner Rowland responded to Mr. Crusan explaining the 1.2 mills added back was due to excess SPLOST funds and the state dictates how that money can be used.

Commissioner Rowland amended his motion to state his motion is to set the 2026 millage rate at 11.976 mills.

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

Public Comment

Mitchell Bunce, resident of Strickland Loop, stated he would like to applaud the Board on what they have worked on in the last three years getting commercial growth into the county so we can eventually lower the property taxes.

Rob Law, resident of Lassiter Road, stated he would like to say thank you to Mr. Stokes for the culvert on Old Cabiness Road. Mr. Law stated Butts County has a proposal for a data center on back end of High Falls Lake and 12 plus-story hospital and requested the board to send a letter to Butts County that we dislike this and rather it didn't happen.

Commissioners' Comments

District 1 Lamarcus Davis

Commissioner Davis thanked everyone for attending stating the Board tries to make the best decisions for our county.

District 2 Eddie Rowland

Commissioner Rowland thanked Mitchell Bunce, stating Mr. Bunce studied the UDO and understands it and does a great job with Planning and Zoning. Commissioner Rowland stated we were elected to do a job and the board can't always make a decision that 30,000 people are going to agree with and if anyone has any question they can call.

District 3 John Ambrose

Commissioner Ambrose stated the public was informed that the 1.2 mill rate that was reduced for 2025 would come back in 2026.

Commissioner Al Turner

Commissioner Turner thanked everyone for attending and stated he wished a lot of the constituents looked at things like Mitchell Bunce does. Commissioner Turner stated he hates raising taxes, but it has to be done to get to the other side.

Chairman Alan Gibbs

Chairman Gibbs thanked Mitchell Bunce for his professionalism and the way he carries himself. Chairman Gibbs stated Zoning is the hardest thing he has come across. Chairman Gibbs stated the last thing he wanted to do when coming into office was to raise taxes, but it has to be done.

Executive Session

There was no executive session.

Action from Executive Session

Adjourn

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to adjourn at 7:21 p.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

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Janet Abbott, County Clerk