

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of October 21, 2025

Regular Meeting

9:00 AM

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

Lorri Robinson, Finance Director/Deputy County Manager

Jessica Haygood, County Attorney

Janet Abbott, County Clerk

Richard Dumas, Public Information Officer

Kelsey Fortner, Community Development Manager

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 am

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.

Approve Minutes-October 1, 2025, meeting, October 7, 2025, Workshop, October 7, 2025, Regular Meeting, and the October 13, 2025, Regular meeting

Chairman Gibbs presented the minutes of the October 1, 2025, meeting, October 7, 2025, Workshop, October 7, 2025, Regular Meeting, and the October 13, 2025, Regular meeting for approval.

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

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

Magistrate Court Public Defender Request

Magistrate Court Judge Buck Wilder is requesting the addition of a part-time Public Defender for the Magistrate Court. This will increase the Magistrate Court budget by \$12,500 annually.

Judge Wilder explained to the Board the challenges of sentencing without a public defender for indigent defendants and stated this will speed up the courtroom proceedings.

Assistant Magistrate Judge Margie Bittick provided an update on the court's case load, noting 1,500 lawsuits filed this year compared to 772 at the same time last year. Ms. Bittick stated the Monroe County Magistrate Court is in the top 10% ranking in the state for clearing cases once they are served.

Judge Wilder discussed the possibility of adding a court cost to help offset the expenses.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the addition of a part-time Public Defender for the Magistrate Court and to increase the Magistrate Court budget by \$12,500.

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

Commissioner Rowland stated he appreciates the work Judge Wilder does for Monroe County.

Judge Wilder responded, stating he is very proud of his staff.

Motion carried 5-0.

Hazard Mitigation Plan-Public Hearing

Greg Boike, Director of Planning & Public Administration for the Middle Georgia Regional Commission, was present to hold a public hearing to rewrite the Hazard Mitigation Plan. This public hearing is required by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Commissioner Davis motioned to enter a public hearing at 9:11 am for the Hazard Mitigation Plan review.

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

Greg Boike, Director of Planning & Public Administration for Middle Georgia Regional Commission; Brandon Fambro, Community Development Specialist; Keristen Layrock, Community Development Specialist; Alex Smith, Environmental and Land Use Planner; Raymond Pacheco, Hazard Mitigation Planner for GEMA; Mandy Juarez, GEMA/HS Field Coordinator; and Monroe County Fire/EMS Chief Matt Jackson were all present for the hearing.

The following items were discussed:

- Presentation on the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan and the need for updates every five years.
- Outlined program requirements, project funding (FEMA and local contributions), the planning and public participation process, and the necessity for community engagement to meet matching requirements.
- The Board confirmed it had applied for grant funding and described compliance and reporting requirements.
- Labor match forms distributed to those in attendance for in-kind match contributions.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to come out of the public hearing at 9:24 a.m.

Commissioner Davis seconded and the motion carried 5-0

Agricultural & Resource Center Recommendation

Commissioner Eddie Rowland has frequently advocated for an Agricultural & Resource Center to be located within the Recreation facilities. Commissioner Rowland presented and recommended a 20,000 square foot building that will house the Extension Offices and Elections as well as a large meeting area for a variety of events. Funding will come from the 2026-2031 SPLOST and the recommendation at this time will be for requests for Design/Build estimates. There will be no financial commitment until a final design and cost estimate is presented and approved.

Background

- County citizens voted by a 2/3rd majority for the 2014 SPLOST in 2012.
 - One project included was the construction of an AG Building.
- In 2019 the BOC revisited the project.
 - The vision for the project preceded the current Board but we wanted to attempt to pick it back up and proceed.

- In 2020, after reviewing funds and increased cost, it was determined we could not complete with available funds which were diverted to upgrading existing sports fields.

Funding

- The 2026-2031 SPLOST included \$3,000,000 for a covered arena: however, only \$1,000,000 is required leaving \$2,000,000 of SPLOST funds available for an AG Building.
- Additional SPLOST funds can be reallocated, i.e., \$250,000 for a new recycling center.

30,000' View

- New 20,000 sq. ft. building
 - Utilize existing parking lot
 - Combine septic system with arena
 - Utilize existing engineered footprint from the new gym building.
 - Existing lot is cleared, just needs to be leveled.
- Housing Elections & Extension Offices

Next Steps

- Approve advertising for Design/Build Request for Bids.
- No financial commitment until:
 - Final Design and cost estimate is presented and approved.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve advertising for Design/Build request for bids.

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

Alcohol License Violation Public Hearing-BP Rumble Road

On September 18, 2025, officers from the Monroe County Sheriff's office observed Marion Inez Martiny, an employee of the BP Station Rumble Road sold an alcohol beverage to an underage individual.

Georgia State law, O.C.G.A. Title 3, Article 2(a)(1) states "No person knowingly, directly or through another person, shall furnish, cause to be furnished, or permit any person in such person's employ to furnish any alcoholic beverage to any person under 21 years of age." Marion Inez Martiny was arrested by the Monroe County Sheriff's Deputies on a misdemeanor charge of furnishing, purchasing, and possession of alcoholic beverages by persons below legal age, a state criminal act, booked into the Monroe County jail, posted a bond, and awaiting a hearing with Superior Court.

In addition to the criminal act, the BP Station Rumble Road Licensee Sridhar Kamma's employee, Marion Inez Martiny, sold alcohol to a minor, which is a violation of the Monroe County Alcohol Ordinance, Section 3-134 which states "no licensee under this chapter shall furnish or cause to be furnished or permit any person in his employ to furnish any distilled spirit, wine and/or malt beverage to any minor. The licensee shall be held responsible for any such sale made by his employees or others in the licensed business premises."

In accordance with the Monroe County Alcohol Ordinance, Monroe County Board of Commissioners' Chairman, or his designee, Monroe County Deputy Sheriff Jeff Wilson, is empowered to place a notice in a place where it can be seen by the general public and notify the licensee or its agent on the premises that the alcohol license is suspended pending a hearing. This suspension of the alcohol license for Sridhar Kamma is a result of the following:

- Sale of alcohol beverage by Marion Inez Martiny, employee of Sridhar Kamma, licensee, to a minor.
- A public hearing will be held on Tuesday, October 21, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. at the Board of Commissioners' Administration Building, located at 38 W. Main Street, Forsyth, GA. 31029.
- License, and the general public, is put on notice that the licensee's permission to engage in the sale of distilled spirits, wine and/or malt beverages has been suspended pending the outcome of the hearing and any continuation of the business pursuant to the suspended license is a further violation of the Monroe County Alcohol Ordinance and state law.
- Monroe County Deputy Sheriff Jeff Wilson placed a notice in a place where it can be seen by the general public and notify the licensee or its agent on the premises that the alcohol license is suspended pending a hearing on Tuesday, October 14, 2025.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to enter a public hearing regarding an alcohol license violation at the BP located on Rumble Road at 9:40 am.

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

County Attorney Jessica Haygood addressed the licensee that was present regarding the alcohol violation explaining the reason for the hearing was alcohol was sold to an underage buyer.

The licensee spoke, stating he was very sorry this happened, it was the first time, and he accepts the mistake. The licensee stated we have systems in place to check ID and the employee had been working for them for five years and this has never happened and asked the board to please excuse them the first time

Commissioner Ambrose stated there was automatically a fine given to the employee that sold alcohol. Commissioner Ambrose stated I go to the service station and get carded for buying cigarettes, I'm not sure what happened that day.

Commissioner Rowland stated I understand having employees and making mistakes, but I understand people losing loved ones to drunk drivers also.

Commissioner Davis motioned to close the public hearing at 9:57 a.m.

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

Commissioner Rowland recommended a \$500 dollar fine and 30-day suspension minus the seven days already served.

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

Alcohol License Violation Public Hearing-Marathon Bolingbroke

On September 18, 2025, officers from the Monroe County Sheriff's office observed Dug Saeng Park, an employee of the Bolingbroke Marathon Station sold an alcohol beverage to an underage individual. Georgia State law, O.C.G.A. Title 3, Article 2(a){1} states "No person knowingly, directly or through another person, shall furnish, cause to be furnished, or permit any person in such person's employ to furnish any alcoholic beverage to any person under 21 years of age." Dug Saeng Park was arrested by the Monroe County Sheriff's Deputies on a misdemeanor charge of furnishing, purchasing, and possession of alcoholic beverages by persons below legal age, a state criminal act, booked into Monroe County jail, posted a bond, and awaiting a hearing with Superior Court.

In addition to the criminal act, the Marathon Station Alcohol Licensee Mi Ok Kang's employee, Dug Saeng Park, sold alcohol to a minor, which is a violation of the Monroe County Alcohol Ordinance, Section 3-134 which states "no licensee under this chapter shall furnish or cause to be furnished or permit any person in his employ to furnish any distilled spirit, wine and/or malt beverage to any minor. The licensee shall be held responsible for any such sale made by his employees or others in the licensed business premises."

In accordance with the Monroe County Alcohol Ordinance, Monroe County Board of Commissioners' Chairman, or his designee, Monroe County Deputy Sheriff Jeff Wilson, is empowered to place a notice in a place where it can be seen by the general public and notify the licensee or its agent on the premises that the alcohol license is suspended pending a hearing. This suspension of the alcohol license for Mi Ok Kang is a result of the following:

- Sale of alcohol beverage by Dug Saeng Park, employee of Mi Ok Kang, licensee, to a minor.

- A public hearing will be held on Tuesday, October 21, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. at the Board of Commissioners' Administration Building, located at 38 W. Main Street, Forsyth, GA. 31029.
- License, and the general public, is put on notice that the licensee's permission to engage in the sale of distilled spirits, wine and/or malt beverages has been suspended pending the outcome of the hearing and any continuation of the business pursuant to the suspended license is a further violation of the Monroe County Alcohol Ordinance and state law.
- Monroe County Deputy Sheriff Jeff Wilson placed a notice in a place where it can be seen by the general public and notify the licensee or its agent on the premises that the alcohol license is suspended pending a hearing on Tuesday, October 14, 2025.

Commissioner Davis motioned to enter a public hearing for an alcohol license violation at the Marathon located in Bolingbroke at 10:04 a.m.

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

County Attorney Jessica Haywood addressed the licensee that was present regarding the alcohol violation explaining the reason for the hearing was alcohol was sold to an underage buyer.

The licensee apologized stating this was a first-time offense.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to close the public hearing at 10:10 a.m.

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

Commissioner Ambrose recommended a \$500 dollar fine and 30-day suspension minus the seven days already served.

Commissioner Turner seconded the motion motion carried 5-0.

2025 Millage Rate Public Hearing

At 10:13 Commissioner Ambrose motioned to enter a public hearing for the 2025 millage rate; seconded by Commissioner Turner, motion carried 5-0.

Overview

County Manager Jim Hedges 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.

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.
- **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.

There were no public comments.

Commissioner Davis motioned to close the public hearing at 10:24 a.m.

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

Public Comment

Mandy Edge resident of 1168 Edge Road; Bill Waldrep; and Candy Mountain, resident of Bar None Road addressed the board regarding the proposed Agricultural Resource Center citing the following concerns:

- Current proposal is not an AG Center.
- Current space does not allow for growth.

- Emphasized the need for a livestock arena.
- Personal experiences showing livestock and the positive impact it had on their children's lives.
- The lack of progress since 2014, despite initial hopes and efforts.
- The need for proper livestock show facilities and planning for your programs.
- Suggested including alternative locations, phased approaches, and ensuring future expansion opportunities.
- Lack of available parking.
- Concerns of county offices being located within the same facility as ag center.

Carol Edge, resident of 1544 Stokes Store Road, stated she would like to make a suggestion for future subdivisions, Ms. Edge stated all subdivisions should have two entrance and exit points.

Commissioner's Comments

District 1 Lamarcus Davis

Commissioner Davis thanked everyone for attending stating it was a great meeting today and stated he would like to recognize Monroe County's employees because they are the greatest asset to Monroe County.

District 2 Eddie Rowland

Commissioner Rowland read an article from former Commissioner Jim Ham of what he wanted to do in regard to the Ag Center. Commissioner Rowland stated that all he is trying to do is finish what was started in 2012. Commissioner Rowland stated he has visited all of the ag centers and stated I can't build a five million dollar building but I can give the Ag Community something more than an open arena. Commissioner Rowland stated if the community will allow us to begin, we can eventually get to where you want to be but if you don't allow it to begin you will get nothing.

District 3 John Ambrose

Commissioner Ambrose stated he hoped the Ag Center project would be completed before three years is up and if we don't start this project, we will never do it. Commissioner Ambrose stated the project was being paid for out of SPLOST funds that can't be spent anywhere else. Commissioner Ambrose stated he agrees with Commissioner Rowland on this project.

Commissioner Al Turner

Commissioner Turner stated this project needs to be pushed through, he continued he has always enjoyed horses, and the county needs a place for people in livestock to show them. Commissioner Turner stated he looks forward to working with Commissioner Rowland on this project.

Chairman Alan Gibbs

Chairman Gibbs stated he has to agree, this may not be what we want or what we need right now but we have to move forward with something for the Ag Community.

Chairman Gibbs stated he would like for the County Attorney to bring back to the next meeting a series of recommendations on how to handle alcohol license violations.

Chairman Gibbs thanked County Manager Jim Hedges.

Executive Session

There was no executive session.

Action from Executive Session

Adjourn

Commissioner Davis motioned to adjourn at 10:51 a.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

Janet Abbott, County Clerk