

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of March 03, 2026

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:

Lorri Byrd, County Manager

Ben Vaughn County Attorney

Janet Abbott, County Clerk

Richard Dumas, Public Information Officer

Kelsey Fortner, Community Development Director

Welcome

Chairman Gibbs welcomed everyone in attendance.

Prayer

Chairman Gibbs gave the invocation.

Pledge

George Emami 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 following changes:

- Flipping items C & D on the agenda.
- Adding a discussion on water rates/boring cost.

Commissioner Turner motioned to approve the agenda.

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

Minutes-January 20, 2026, Regular Meeting, February 3, 2026, Regular meeting and the February 17, 2026, Regular Meeting

Chairman Gibbs presented the minutes of the January 20, 2026, Regular Meeting, February 03, 2026, Regular Meeting and the February 17, 2026, Regular Meeting for approval.

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

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

Public Hearing-Data Center Ordinance Amendment

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to open a public hearing at 6:03 p.m. for the Data Center Ordinance Amendment.

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

Community Development Director Kelsey Fortner presented the Staff Report on the Data Center Ordinance and the current and proposed draft ordinance.

Ms. Fortner stated the Planning and Zoning Board recommended the following additions:

- Zoning Designation: Change zoning classification to M-1 instead of C-1
- I. Buffer Requirements: 500' Vegetative Buffer. If vegetation is not present on the land, in the case of raw land, a buffer that has been engineered and tested with proof of protection as natural vegetation would.
- B. Height Regulations. Buildings shall not exceed a height of 75', measured from structure pad level, including rooftop equipment and parapets. Height limitations shall not apply to accessory structures such as water towers.
- P. Utilities Section
- Q. Generator Standards-with hours of routine testing being restricted to Monday through Friday, 10 am-4pm.

- R. Dark Sky Language
- S. Sound
- T. Architectural Design and Aesthetic Standards
- U. Parking Lot
- V. In the event of conflict of other UDO provisions, this section shall govern.

Ms. Fortner's staff report was as follows:

- Buffer Requirement
 - Current-a minimum of 100 feet.
 - Proposed 200-foot buffer, this can be included in the required setback as it is and is required on property lines that abut residential and agriculture. A proposal made by the Commission is 500-foot-wide buffer.
- Utilities
 - Current-P. A Data Center Development is required to have access to public water and sewer
 - Proposed-Keep current plus "All operational power shall be provided by a regulated public utility. Electric service to the facility shall be provided at the transmission level (greater than or equal to 115kV) unless an exemption is granted by the County Utility Director due to system limitations or redundancy requirements. The use of permanent or semi-permanent diesel- or gas-powered generators as the primary source of power is strictly prohibited. Backup generators are permitted only for emergency and system testing.
- Generator Standards (proposed)
 - Q. Tier 4 final emission-compliant generators shall be permitted on site. Or greater.
 - All generators must be fully enclosed within the principal structure or within a purpose-built enclosure strategically integrated into the building footprint.
 - Routine testing of generators shall be restricted to normal business hours (8am-6pm, Monday through Friday)
 - A third-party acoustical noise study shall be submitted to the Monroe County Community Development Director prior to issuance of a certificate of occupancy.

- Generator operations, including testing, shall not exceed 65 decibels as measured at the property line.
- Lighting (Current)
 - Q. All exterior lighting at a Data Center Development shall be shielded to prevent light spillage by providing cutoff luminaires having a maximum 90-degree illumination.
 - Possible Provisions (Dark Sky Language)
 - Exterior illumination shall be shielded, downcast and of a luminosity designed to maintain the existing night sky darkness and to prevent light trespassing onto adjacent properties. In order to obtain that objective, the following criteria shall be met:
 - All light fixtures shall be full cut-off type fixtures;
 - Light poles shall be no taller than 25' in height;
 - All light poles must be set back a minimum of 10' from any exterior property line; provided, however, that light poles should not be located in any required buffer area;
 - Maximum foot-candles at the property line shall be 0.5. All exterior lighting shall be positioned so as not to create glare to any residential property or public street; and
 - A photometric lighting plan which shows conformity with these requirements may be required by the Community Development Director as part of any building permit application.
- Architectural Design & Aesthetics Standards
 - The following design standards shall apply to the walls of any data center facing and visible from the public right-of-way:
 - Exterior walls of all buildings must include high-quality, durable materials such as brick, stone, glass, architectural metal panels, or a combination thereof.
 - Each exterior wall must include multiple windows, doors, or other improvements, so as to break up the building exterior.

- Rooftop mechanical equipment must be fully screened from public view using parapet walls or screening panels integrated with the building's design.
- Parking Lot
 - The parking lot must be paved, and all lighting must follow all exterior lighting requirements outlined in this section.
 - In the event of any conflict between this section and Chapter 4 for parking standards, this section shall govern.

The following citizens spoke regarding the Data Center Ordinance Amendment:

Ida Smith, 295 Wadley Road

- Lives directly across from proposed data center site.
- Believes data centers belong in heavy industrial, not current zoning.
- Says hundreds of generators running equates to heavy industrial use.
- States she has customers who manufacture generators/buildings and has visited data centers; claims:
 - Noise averages around 80 dB at 500 ft.
 - Feels 500 ft is not nearly enough; says “five miles might be adequate.”
- Argues county already has two approved data centers; questions need for more.
- Cites concern that by 2029, ~40% of electricity and water could be consumed by data centers.
- Frames issue as part of automation/AI displacing human jobs and harming prospects for children and grandchildren.

Bronwen Morgan, Towaliga Lake Drive

- Not strictly “against,” but seeks ordinance changes.
- Repeats prior point from **Oct 2024** hearing:
 - Data centers are not appropriate in C1 Neighborhood Commercial, whose purpose is small-scale business serving local residential areas.
- Notes the original developer equated a data center to an office park and twice claimed office parks were permitted in C1, which she says is incorrect:
 - Office/business parks not defined/allowed in C1.

- Only small “business offices” (insurance, real estate, etc.) are allowed, not large server farms.
- Warns that approving Rumble Road data center created a legal precedent / “formula”:
 - Buy a big ag tract + a piece of C1, combine, rezone, then build a data center.
 - Says she’s identified several areas where that pattern could be repeated (High Falls, Johnsonville Rd, west of Forsyth near Hwy 41, and two areas in Juliette).
- Recommends following P&Z’s Oct 2024 advice: create a T1 Technology Zone, as county attorney Bowen has done elsewhere, so future data centers are limited to that zone.

Margo Kenirey, 379 Wadley Road

- Appreciates revisiting the UDO and extending buffers to 500 ft, but still sees gaps:
 - No maximum square footage per data center building, encouraging very large footprints and heavy grading.
 - No density controls (e.g., minimum spacing between buildings) to avoid clustering and ensure stormwater capacity.
 - No maximum campus area defined.
 - Unclear whether transmission lines must also remain outside the 500-ft buffer and on which side; worried that lines through residential streets undermine buffer esthetics.
- On generator standards, requests no testing on state holidays (Independence Day, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Juneteenth, Thanksgiving, Christmas).

Fletcher Sams, Brunswick Georgia

- Not strictly opposed to UDO changes, but suggests:
 - Clarify Section P: explicitly ban gas-powered RICE (reciprocating internal combustion engine) generators as primary sources.
 - Consider banning evaporative cooling methods (cites Jones and Spalding counties).
 - Consider outright ban on diesel backup generators as a public health win.
- Emphasizes adding “RICE” to definition to close loopholes.

Rob Law, Lassiter Road

- Praises Commissioner Davis and Kelsey for the extensive work and public engagement.

- Supports much of the draft but stresses:
 - Data centers should be Special Use in M1, not by-right, so every project must go through Planning & Zoning and BOC.
 - Warns against any situation where an M1 parcel could bypass public review.
 - Wants all ground-disturbing development and construction permits for data centers to come before P&Z and BOC:
 - Ensures public transparency.
 - Ensures all technical studies (geotechnical, hydrological, etc.) and mitigations are visible at construction/permitting stage, not just at initial zoning.
 - Proposes “obsolescence fees”:
 - Spread estimated demolition cost over 15 years, collected into escrow.
 - Prevents abandoned/blighted facilities like examples on Hwy 247 to Warner Robins.
 - Suggests parking be minimized and designed for permeability:
 - Tie parking counts to staffing on peak shifts (e.g., two-thirds of employees x 1.1, or maximum prime shift x 1.2).

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to close the public hearing at 6:26 p.m.

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

Commissioner Rowland gave a very lengthy presentation outlining the following:

- Personal stake / why he cares
 - His two grandkids live about 2 miles from the Rumble Road data center site.
 - Says he would never support something he thought would harm them, and that the board’s main job is to protect citizens’ health, safety, and welfare.
- Why data centers want Monroe County
 - Data centers look for:
 - Reliable power (the main requirement).
 - Water and sewer.
 - Fiber/internet.
 - Interstate access.
 - Large tracts of land.

- Some separation from neighborhoods.
- If you don't have guaranteed power, "you don't have anything" — they simply won't come.
- What the county is told are the benefits
 - Some good-paying jobs, though not a huge number of them.
 - No students added to the school system.
 - Minimal draw on typical county services.
 - Potentially very large property tax revenue — possibly enough to cover a big portion of the county's tax needs.
- Main worries he's heard and shares
 - How much power they'll use.
 - How much water they'll use.
 - Noise, especially from large numbers of backup generators.
 - Construction impacts.
 - Air emissions from generators.
 - Use of wells vs. public water.
 - The visual impact of very large buildings and equipment.
- Work he says the board has done on this
 - Multiple trips to the Washington, D.C. area to see data centers.
 - Meetings with:
 - Data center companies and end users (mentions Google).
 - Georgia Power leadership.
 - Lake and Water Authority leaders.
 - Public Service Commission.
 - Engineers and public works staff.
 - State and federal legislators.
 - Citizens (lots of emails, calls, and public meetings).
 - Participated in webinars, including ones with environmental groups.
 - Several P&Z and commission zoning hearings specifically on data centers.
- Says this is the basis for his recommendations, not just a quick decision.

- How he organized the issue
 - Created a list of about 19 different components to think through, including:
 - Zoning.
 - Building height.
 - Setbacks and buffers.
 - Road frontage and access.
 - Utilities and power.
 - Generators (noise, emissions, testing hours).
 - Lighting and dark-sky impacts.
 - Sound limits.
 - Architecture and esthetics.
 - Parking and impervious surfaces.
- His position on zoning
 - Data centers should not be allowed in C1 Neighborhood Commercial.
 - Supports moving them to M1 (industrial).
 - Wants them listed as Special Use in M1:
 - Every project must come back to Planning & Zoning and the County Commission.
 - Ensures public hearings and transparency each time.
- Buffers and setbacks
 - Acknowledges citizens are asking for 500-foot separations from homes.
- Likes the idea of:
 - A wide vegetative buffer (at least 200 feet of natural trees) where possible.
 - Additional setback distance beyond that.
 - Wants the ordinance to clearly spell out how far buildings and disturbance must be from residential and agricultural properties.
 - Recognizes the Rumble Road project is a bit unique (already approved and on a very large tract), but the new rules should guide future projects.
- Generator standards
 - Agrees generators should meet Tier 4 or better emission standards.
 - Says in the industry it's common to:

- Buy Tier 2 units and retrofit them to achieve Tier 4-level emissions, partly because Tier 4 units can have very long lead times (he mentions up to six years).
- Wants independent noise and emissions studies:
 - Noise capped at about 65 decibels at the property line.
 - Third-party acoustical study before a certificate of occupancy.
- Testing hours:
 - Favors limiting routine testing to Monday–Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m...
 - It is fine banning testing on holidays.
- Explains how they operate:
 - Generators typically test one at a time, not all at once.
 - The only time many might run together is during a true emergency, and even then, they ramp down as load stabilizes.
- Noise and decibels in real-world context
 - Says he personally measured around 74 dB on the nearby highway at roughly 4 a.m.
 - Warns that when the county sets a 65 dB limit, it has to:
 - Distinguish between noise the data center creates and existing background noise (like interstate traffic).
 - Write the rule so it's fair and enforceable — you can't hold a data center responsible for noise from the highway.
- Lighting
 - Supports using dark-sky standards (down-cast, shielded fixtures, height and brightness limits).
 - Notes staff brought in guidance from the UGA Institute of Government.
- Wants lighting controls that:
 - Protect night sky darkness.
 - Prevent light spillover onto neighboring homes and roads.
- Water and wells
 - Strongly favors no wells for data centers.
- Wants the ordinance to say clearly:
 - Data centers must have public water and sewer.

- If public water isn't already there, it's the developer's job (not the county's) to get it there.
- Mentions some cooling systems produce water that's too clean for normal sewer, which can cause its own issues, so some technical details may need more work.
- Power grid and electric rates
 - Shares what he was told by Kim Greene, CEO of Georgia Power:
 - Georgia is not set up like California and Texas; it's vertically integrated (same system responsible for generation, transmission, and billing), which helps planning.
 - She told him Georgia Power does not expect a shortage problem like other states have seen, even with data centers, under current planning.
 - There's a residential rate freeze, and big data center loads (which pay higher rates) can help hold or even lower residential rates per unit, possibly as soon as June.
- Uses a manufacturing analogy:
 - Once fixed costs are covered, extra production spreads those fixed costs over more units, lowering cost per unit — same idea with power plants.
- Citizens' more technical suggestions
 - Mentions some proposals he's received:
 - Very high reserve requirements (e.g., 50% reserve).
 - Other complex technical ratios.
- Says he doesn't fully understand all of them yet and doesn't want to "just say yes" to things he doesn't grasp.
- Wants time to study and discuss those with power and data center experts before making them law.
- Process / next steps
 - Emphasizes the board shouldn't try to rewrite everything on the fly at one meeting.
 - Recommendations:
 - Use this discussion to give clear direction.

- Have the county attorney take the P&Z recommendation plus the board's changes and redraft a full, clean ordinance.

Commissioner Ambrose:

- Throw out the wording regarding the exterior walls.
- Main road should meet county specs but interior doesn't have to be paved.
- Strongly favors true Tier 4 generators only, not Tier 2 retrofits, citing his industry experience and concerns about emissions compliance and enforcement.
- Pushes for explicit language that no wells are allowed for data centers.
- It should be built with existing water and high transmission power lines.
- Emphasizes they want the best, most modern, quietest, lowest-emission technology.
- Supports a 500-ft buffer but believes the existing trees prior to clearing would be sufficient, leaving at least a 100-foot buffer with additional setbacks.
- Agrees with no testing on holidays.

Commissioner Turner:

- Questions how generator retrofits are actually certified and enforced by EPD/EPAs.
- Expresses discomfort with relying on retrofits as a compliance path; prefers clear, verifiable standards.
- Agrees with Ambrose on demanding Tier 4 compliance and with others on eliminating wells for data centers.

Commissioner Davis:

- Explains EPD has to get approval to retrofit generators to tier 4 and certify the retrofitted generator emissions.
 - Commissioner Rowland replied stating the lead time for a tier 4 generator is six years.
 - Chairman Gibbs expressed his concern regarding retrofitting generators and whether the EPD was actually going to come test the generators.
 - Commissioner Davis stated they are retrofitted at the factory and are tier 4 compliant before actually being delivered to the property.
- Backs the move to M1, Special Use so data centers always require a full public process.
- Emphasizes clarity and wants the ordinance to explicitly state no wells and public water/sewer only.

- Supports 500-ft buffer as the default, with variances as the mechanism for unusual cases (e.g., along an interstate).

Chairman Gibbs:

- Agrees with fence being two feet from the property line.
- Agrees with Commissioner Rowland language regarding lighting
- Agrees with the removal of the exterior wall language.
- Reiterates that the board is taking data centers very seriously and not making a “light-hearted” decision.
- Agrees they need the county attorney to redraft the ordinance with all changes clearly captured before voting.
- Endorses:
 - M1, Special Use for data centers.
 - 500-ft setback from the property line written into the ordinance with 200 feet of planted vegetation, with variances if a future case justifies something different.
 - Explicit well prohibition and public water requirement (must use public water cannot use wells).
- Voices concern about how 65 dB will be measured and enforced relative to existing highway noise and wants that clarified in drafted language.

Attorney Brandon Bowen (on process)

- Advises that, given the number of substantive changes being discussed, the board should:
 - Give him direction tonight.
 - Let him bring back a clean, revised draft at a later meeting for a final vote, and the public hearing is already completed.

Commissioner Rowland motioned to table the data center ordinance/text amendment for two weeks and direct Attorney Bowen to return with a revised draft reflecting the board’s discussed changes.

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

Waiver of Claim to Insurance Proceeds-Jeff Thompson

County Manager Lorri Byrd stated the item presented was previously tabled from February 3, 2026, meeting so that the Board and Staff could gather more information and understanding.

Jonathan Shaw, County’s Insurance Broker, was present for the discussion.

Jeff Thompson is requesting \$101,000 waiver for an accident his wife Dana Thompson was in. The third-party administrator (TPA) has stated: “Per our subrogation matters. This is never recommended unless the vendor sees no potential recovery based on policy limits available to the case. By accepting to waive on the current settlement, the plan will be setting precedence to future cases. In cases like this one, the subrogation vendor can try and negotiate a reduction to benefit all parties. The self-funded plan will ultimately decide to accept or reject any reductions or waivers of any settlement offers.”

Jonathan Shaw (NFP, Employee Benefits Consultant)

- Reviews claims from Jan 2024 – Dec 2025 under the former **reference-based pricing** health plan (no contracted network; plan pays a percentage of Medicare; providers may “balance bill”).
- Explains:
 - The plan includes Balance Bill Defense: if employees forward provider bills/collections, the vendor (ClaimDOC) negotiates on their behalf.
 - In this case, large hospital bills (mostly Atrium Health) were **not** forwarded to ClaimDOC, so they were never worked through the defense process.
- States:
 - Under the plan design, member’s maximum out-of-pocket is:
 - \$2,500 for inpatient/outpatient in 2024.
 - \$1,500 for inpatient/outpatient in 2025.
 - Everything above those amounts is plan responsibility, not the employees.
- Commits to:
 - Obtain all relevant bills and collection notices.
 - Work directly with providers (primarily Atrium) to resolve all balance bills so the member owes nothing beyond the stated max out-of-pocket.
 - Target resolution within about 30 days given existing contact with Atrium leadership.
- Provides preliminary figure:
 - County has paid approximately \$183,000 over two years for Dana Thompson’s claims; it’s possible stop-loss coverage was never triggered on her case.

Attorney Kerry Howell for Jeff & Dana Thompson

- Clarifies there are two separate issues:
 1. Handling of provider balance bills – which Shaw has addressed.
 2. Subrogation claim against the \$100,000 uninsured motorist (UM) settlement held in attorney trust.
- Key points:
 - The Monroe County Employee Benefits Plan (self-funded by the county) has contractual subrogation rights to recover what it has paid from third-party recoveries.
 - However, the Board of Commissioners alone controls whether to enforce or waive those rights.
 - In this case, the \$100,000:
 - Comes from the Thompsons' own UM coverage, purchased and paid for by them.
 - The at-fault driver had no insurance.
 - Argues that given catastrophic injuries and limited recovery, the Board should waive its subrogation rights (in whole or part) so the Thompson family, not the plan, receives the funds.
 - Cites Georgia's "made whole doctrine":
 - Because this is a governmental (non-ERISA) plan, Georgia law applies.
 - Under that doctrine, the plan generally cannot enforce subrogation until the injured party is fully compensated, which he says is impossible here with only \$100,000 available.
- Requests:
 - A negotiated solution rather than an adversarial fight.
 - Board direction to allow some or all of the UM proceeds to go to the Thompsons rather than the plan.

Commissioners express:

- Sympathy for the family and recognition of the unusual severity vs. available insurance.
- Concern about setting a precedent if they waive subrogation in this case.

County attorney Ben Vaughn explains structure:

- The county and its stop-loss carrier have each paid for portions of the claims.
- Both technically have claims against the \$100,000 in trust.
- The Board decides whether to assert or waive the county's plan claim.

Jonathan Shaw notes:

- Given the approximate \$183,000 already paid by the county, and unknown or minimal stop-loss involvement, it's very possible the entire subrogation claim belongs to the county, not stop-loss.
- Waiver would not affect the ability to resolve provider balance bills.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the waiver of the county health plan's subrogation claim to the uninsured motorist settlement funds and allow those insurance proceeds to be released to the Thompsons.

Chairman Gibbs seconded for discussion.

Board members note on the record that:

- They view this as an extraordinary case, not a blanket policy change.
- They understand they retain discretion in future, similar cases.

The motion carried 5-0.

Public Hearing -Hwy 74

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to open a public hearing at 8:02 p.m. for a rezoning/variance request located at 10400 Hwy 74.

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

Community Development Director Kelsey Fortner presented an application number 2026-01 located at 10400 Hwy 74 Map 059 Parcel 005A for a rezoning/variance request. The property owner/applicant is Charles Childs, Jr.

Ms. Fortner stated the request to rezone A-R to C-2 with a variance. The 10-acres being requested for rezoning will be for Storage Units and Covered Parking Units. 40-50 covered parking units for boats, recreation vehicles, trucks and large equipment. 150-200 dry and cool storage units. Additional parking for boats, recreational vehicles, trucks and large equipment. Variance for placing the storage buildings in front of any principal dwellings on the lot that may or may not exist at the time of this ordinance.

Staff Report: Spot zoning, However, the properties 3000 plus to the east and the west have commercial type practices that predate zoning. Also, it has an existing cell tower.

Planning and Zoning Boards' recommendation was for denial.

The following people spoke in opposition:

Charles Lanford (Neighbor, Opposed)

- Lives at 10716 GA Hwy 74, one tract over.
- Opposes the rezoning “adamantly.”
- Main concerns:
 - Believes the facility will invite crime into a currently quiet area.
 - Fears decrease in property values for nearby homeowners.
- Defers further detail to his wife, noting she has prepared facts and figures.

Sherry Lanford (opposed)

- Co-owner of 10716 GA Hwy 74.
- Says when the owner approached her, he described a 5-acre RV storage area but did not mention all the individual storage units.
- After checking with Planning & Zoning, realized the plan includes a substantial self-storage component.
- Shares personal experiences:
 - Boat stored for one week at a facility came back missing batteries, life jackets, depth finder.
 - Personal storage unit was broken into in the second month; door bent and locks broken.
- Cites common misuses of storage units:
 - Processing and retail/wholesale sales.
 - Vehicle/boat/equipment repair without proper fluid disposal.
 - Frequent yard-sale style activity.
 - Illegal drug preparation and distribution.
 - In at least one case she found, storing explosives.
 - In places with water and power, some units have been converted to living spaces.
 - Says news reports show repeated stories of storage unit burglaries; smaller, isolated facilities are especially vulnerable.

- Highlights that this site would be:
 - Isolated, surrounded mainly by pine forest.
 - Not part of an existing commercial cluster, contrary to staff's suggestion of nearby industrial character.
- Notes many counties:
 - Restrict such facilities to commercial or light industrial zones with Special Use permits.
 - Impose requirements like:
 - 6–8 ft fencing.
 - Night-sky-friendly lighting.
 - Limits on outdoor storage (often $\leq 25\%$ of area).
 - 24-hour monitored entry/exit, with no access between midnight and 5 a.m..
 - Staffed office during business hours.
 - Adequate, safe access to main roads and parking.
- Emphasizes:
 - In 30 years living there, they have had no trouble or intrusions on their long, isolated driveway.
 - Fears, once criminals discover the facility, they'll then move from house to house.
 - Nearby landowners on Bagley Rd are buying large rural tracts expecting "country living," which this use will undermine.
- Argues this is classic spot zoning that:
 - Undermines the long-term plan for a rural area.
 - Harms nearby homeowners to benefit a single owner.

Rob Law Lassiter Road (opposed)

- States the county's comprehensive plan designates this area as plainly rural.
- Notes the only real "commercial-looking" use nearby is Davis's logging business, which has been there over 30 years.
- Calls this proposal clear spot zoning and warns:
 - If the county keeps approving such uses in rural areas, it will "end up like Spaulding County," with scattered, unplanned development.
 - This works against efforts to preserve rural character.

The applicant Charles “Bubba” Childs Jr. spoke on behalf of the application stating:

- Owns the property at 10400 Hwy 74 (same tract as proposed storage).
- Family background:
 - He is the fourth generation Charles Childs.
 - Great-grandfather, grandfather, and father all from Monroe County.
 - Grandfather bought this land shortly after World War II.
 - Parents have lived within about a mile of this driveway for nearly 64 years.
 - He and his family have hunted this property his whole life; always intended to retire and build a house on the hill between two creeks.
- Work/retirement goal:
 - Has spent 45 years managing others’ businesses.
 - Intends to build and personally run this storage business as his retirement.
- Project description and assurances:
 - Plans a business he operates daily, not an absentee owner situation.
 - Security and design:
 - Property entrance banks up from Hwy 74, then slopes down; visibility from the road is limited.
 - Facility itself will be about 5 acres within the larger tract.
 - A 6-ft security fence will fully enclose the storage compound.
 - Security gate with entry code.
 - 24-hour security lights and 24-hour security cameras.
 - He currently has a camper on site and comes down from Byron to work on the property; eventual plan is to build a home about 500 yards behind the cell tower area and live there.
 - The driveway into the storage area is the same as his driveway and the existing cell tower driveway.
 - States from the Lanford driveway, you cannot see the proposed storage area due to curves and distance (about half a mile away).
- Attitude toward decision:
 - Repeatedly says he will hold no ill will regardless of the board’s vote.

- Frames the neighbors' concerns as understandable protection of what they've worked for, not personal toward him.
- Emphasizes his Christian faith and that in the end "the Lord will determine my path."

George Emami (in favor)

- Identifies as a cousin by marriage to Bubba Childs.
- Offers character reference:
 - Describes Bubba as reliable, hardworking, and truthful; "if he says he's going to do something, he's going to do it."
- Notes:
 - The tracts directly east, west, and north of the proposed site are also owned by Childs family members and are large acreage parcels.
 - Provides an internal family buffer around the site, not a case of a storage yard immediately beside unrelated homes.
- Argues:
 - Who runs a facility matters as much as the use itself; absentee owners often lead to poorly maintained or misused properties.
 - Bubba plans to live there and run it himself, which should help keep it orderly and secure.
- Acknowledges:
 - Understands neighbors' concerns and respects whatever decision the board makes.
 - If he were on the board, it would be a tough vote, but he believes placing conditions on the application could address many concerns.

Bentley Cox Maynards Mill Road (In favor)

- Says Bubba is "as honest a man as I've ever met."
- Believes if he commits to running a secure, orderly facility, he will follow through.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to close the public hearing at 8:27 p.m.

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

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the application with the following conditions:

- The storage area must be fenced.

- Access must be through a coded/controlled security gate.
- The facility must have security cameras.
- Exterior lighting must comply with requirements and be downward facing.

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

Public Hearing-Circle Street

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to open a public hearing at for a rezoning request located at 137 Circle Street 8:38 p.m.

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

Community Development Director Kelsey Fortner presented application number 2026-02 located at 1137 Circle Street Map F04 Parcel 010 for a rezoning request. The property owner/applicant is Jeremy Causey/Apostolic Fellowship Tabernacle.

Community Development Director Kelsey Fortner stated the applicant is requesting to rezone 1.84 acres to RMF from R-1, for the operation of a nursery or day care center, utilizing it as an after-school facility, Monday through Friday.

Staff Report: Spot zoning but they utilize the existing building for church activities currently.

Planning and Zoning Boards' recommendation was for approval.

Rob Law Lassiter Road

- States he is not opposed but raises one practical issue:
 - Notes the facility might serve up to around 30 children (his suggested figure).
 - Urges the county to consider:
 - Whether there is sufficient parking on site.
 - How local traffic on Circle Street will be affected at pickup/drop-off times.
- Otherwise, does not object to the use or rezoning.

No other speakers were present in opposition.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to close the public hearing at 8:41 p.m.

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

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the application.

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

Public Hearing-Floyd Road

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to open a public hearing at 8:42 p.m. for a variance request located on Floyd Road.

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

Community Development Director Kelsey Fortner presented application 2026-04 located on Floyd Road Map 015 Parcel 026C for a variance request. The property owner/applicant is Gary and Stacy Nash.

Mrs. Fortner stated the variance is on the easement being used to parcel out 3-acres of 42.27-acres to use for an immediate family member. Proposed 3-acres will be located behind the parent parcel of 807 Floyd Road.

Staff Report: The lot is already legal non-conforming due to the lack of road frontage.

Planning and Zoning Boards' recommendation was for approval.

No speakers were present in opposition.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to close the public hearing at 8:44 p.m.

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

Chairman Gibbs motioned to approve the application.

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

Public Hearing-Cell Tower Ordinance Amendment.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to open a public hearing at 8:44 p.m. for a Cell Tower Ordinance Amendment

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

Community Development Director Kelsey Fortner presented the following amendment:

- The Unified Development Ordinance of Monroe County is hereby amended as follows:
 - Chapter 2, Section 2.02.02., the Table of Permitted Uses is hereby amended as follows: "Telecommunications Tower" is added to the Uses & Structures section and is hereby added as a Special Use in all districts.
 - Mrs. Fortner stated the amendment proposal can be located on the website, received by email or picked up at our office.

Staff Report: Approval needed.

Planning and Zoning Boards recommendation was for all zoning districts minus residential to be a special use and not allowed in residential.

Rob Law, Lassiter Road

- Clarifies his position:
 - Supports Special Use in all zoning districts, as written in Section 5.05.01.
 - Says this guarantees public hearings and transparency for every tower proposal.
- Warns:
 - If the Table of Uses excludes residential zones, it would conflict with the main code text and could create loopholes or confusion.

Chairman Gibbs motioned to close the public hearing at 8:48 p.m.

Chairman Ambrose seconded the motion and the motion carried 5-0.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to amend the UDO Table of Permitted Uses to:

- Add “Telecommunication Tower” under Uses and Structures
- Designate it as a Special Use in all zoning districts (countywide), consistent with Section 5.05.01.

Chairman Gibbs seconded the motion and the motion passed 5-0.

Sen. Ossoff Appropriations Request

County Manager Lorri Byrd along with Public Works Director Kim Stokes stated Monroe County along with the City of Forsyth are working together in applying for the Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) Appropriations. CDS projects are high-impact projects located in Georgia that can be jumpstarted or reach completion with assistance from the Federal Government. The County cannot apply for this grant due to our population and demographics. The city has agreed to apply for the appropriation. If awarded, the city will administer the grant. The County will fund the match portion of the grant.

The project that the County and City are applying for is the Monroe County Recreation Center Sanitary Sewer Extension. Monroe County is committed to contributing financial resources, in-house public works capabilities, project management, and any additional assistance necessary to ensure success of this project.

An intergovernmental agreement (IGA) is being prepared by our legal team for this project between Monroe County and the City of Forsyth.

Mrs. Byrd also provided the board with the Guide to FY27 Appropriations Request, a copy of the blank application, Monroe County Board of Commissioner’s letter of support, a map of the

project, a list of participating counties utilizing Monroe County Recreation Department and the cost estimate for this project.

Sanitary Sewer Extension Cost Estimate
Monroe County Recreation Center – Dan Pitts Drive
Updated: 4/4/25, 5:30 PM

Item	Description	Qty	Unit	Unit Price	Total Amount
1	8" Gravity Sanitary Sewer	3,980	L.F.	\$65.00	\$258,700.00
2	6" Gravity Sanitary Sewer Lateral	175	L.F.	\$50.00	\$8,750.00
3	4" Gravity Sanitary Sewer Lateral	980	L.F.	\$45.00	\$44,100.00
4	6" Sewage Force Main	1,425	L.F.	\$90.00	\$128,250.00
5	4" Sewage Force Main	5,750	L.F.	\$70.00	\$402,500.00
6	Jack and Bore Steel Casing	120	L.F.	\$350.00	\$42,000.00
7	Sanitary Sewer Manholes	12	Ea.	\$6,500.00	\$78,000.00
8	Cleanouts	6	Ea.	\$750.00	\$4,500.00
9	Sewage Pumping Station #1 Complete	1	L.S.	\$450,000.00	\$450,000.00
10	Sewage Pumping Station #2 Complete	1	L.S.	\$475,000.00	\$475,000.00
Subtotal					\$1,891,800.00

Additional Project Costs

Item	Description	Qty	Unit	Unit Price	Total Amount
11	Contingency (10%)	1	L.S.	\$189,180.00	\$189,180.00
12	Engineering (8.5%)	1	L.S.	\$160,803.00	\$160,803.00
13	Surveying/Environmental Documentation and GDOT Permitting (2.5%)	1	L.S.	\$47,295.00	\$47,295.00
14	Mobilization, Bonds & Insurance	1	L.S.	\$75,000.00	\$75,000.00

Total Estimated Project Costs: \$2,364,078.00

Note: Estimate does not include easement acquisition cost.

Mrs. Byrd stated this item was presented for information only, and the board did not need to take formal action.

Lowboy Tractor

Public Works Director Kim Stokes submitted three quotes to purchase a Lowboy Tractor with funds available to purchase in the TSPLOST fund.

Mr. Stokes reason for the request:

- Add to fleet
- Current Low Boy is a 1995 Mack
- Over 500,000 miles
- Major Engine overhauls due
- Smoking & Loss of Power
- Retain to haul landfill leachate

The three quotes obtained are as follows:

Dealer	Make	Year	Model	HP	Price
MHC	Kenworth	2026	T880	455	\$154,425
Peterbilt Atl	Peterbilt	2027	579	455	\$167,450
Nextran	Mack	2026	P164T	445	\$167,984
Budget	TSPLOST				\$200,000

Mr. Stokes request is to authorize the purchase of the Kenworth Low-Boy Tractor for \$154,425 with funds from TSPLOST.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the purchase of the Kenworth Low-Boy Tractor for \$154,425 with funds to come from TSPLOST.

Chairman Gibbs seconded the motion, and the motion carried 5-0.

Water Tap and Boring Fees

Commissioner Ambrose discussed the following with the Board:

- Recalls that 6–8 years ago (around 2019) the board agreed:
 - A single, flat tap fee (by meter size) would apply regardless of short or long side and regardless of whether a bore was needed.
 - Intent: avoid penalizing property owners on the opposite side of the road from the water line.

- States he spoke with former manager Jim Hedges, who also recalls this intent.
- Says current practice is:
 - Charging a base tap fee (e.g., \$2,000 for a ¾" meter), plus an additional \$750+ for a long bore.
 - This conflicts with what he believes the board originally decided.
 - Concerns about private boring under county roads
- Ambrose objects that a recent customer was told:
 - County would set the meter for the standard fee, but the customer could hire someone to do the bore.
 - That contractor then cut the county road, which Ambrose calls clearly wrong.
- He argues:
 - No private individual should cut or bore under a county road.
 - Only approved contractors (selected/cleared by the county, e.g., firms like Johnson Plumbing or Southern companies) should perform bores to county standards.
 - Otherwise, bores may be too shallow and later be destroyed by road work, leaving liability unclear.
 - Current written policy vs. old understanding
- Chairman Gibbs reads from the March 31, 2024, minutes/policy:
 - If Public Utilities determines a bore is required:
 - Customer pays a minimum connection (e.g., \$2,000 for ¾", \$2,400 for 1", etc.).
 - Plus, the cost of the bore, based on obtained estimates.
- County Manager Lorri Byrd notes that Jim's 2024 presentation shows:
 - Background: prior boards wanted one fee regardless of short/long.
 - But the process amendment actually adopted in 2024 still separates meter fee and bore cost.
- Commissioner Rowland points out:
 - They must go by what is in the adopted minutes/policy, even if the original intent was different.
 - Cost considerations

- Ambrose's rough numbers:
 - Short tap: around \$650–\$700 (labor + materials).
 - Long bore: adds about \$750.
 - With a \$2,000 connection fee, the county should not lose money even on a long bore.
- He argues:
 - The flat fee was intended to cover average meter + bore costs, short or long, not to generate extra profit from those on the far side of the road.

There was no motion or change to the fee schedule at this meeting.

- Consensus to:
 - Pull older minutes (especially around 2019) to confirm what was actually adopted then.
 - Compile recent bore invoices and actual meter/tap costs.
- Have the water department attend a future meeting to:
 - Explain current practice.
 - Compare it with the board's historical intent.
- Allow the board to decide whether to:
 - Continue with "tap fee + separate bore," or
 - Move back to a single all-inclusive fee by meter size.

Public Comment

Mitchell Bunce 380 Strickland Loop

- Thanks the board for granting the waiver to the Thompsons on the insurance subrogation issue.
- Notes his wife works in insurance and handles similar cases; they both felt:
 - The county could not be forced to pay back that money under law.
 - The decision was purely about taking care of long-time county employees in extraordinary circumstances.
- Commends commissioners for doing "a really good thing."

Rob Law Lassiter Road

- Offers compliments to the commissioners for "doing a pretty good job" overall.
- Criticizes the decision to approve the Hwy 74 storage rezoning:

- Says it doesn't reflect well on the county's planning and zoning process.
- Argues it undermines:
 - The land use plan.
 - Goals of keeping rural areas rural.
- Warns that continuing such approvals will push the county backwards in planning terms.

Nipper Bunn

- Echoes appreciation for the board's decision on the Thompsons' waiver, calling it the right thing.
- Acknowledges concerns about precedent, but points out:
 - The board retains discretion in future cases.
 - This situation was uniquely severe and justified an exception.
- Raises concern about the lowboy tractor purchase:
 - Notes the old truck is ~30 years old with 500,000 miles, but that averages only about 16,000 miles/year.
 - Questions whether a brand-new, \$154,000 truck was necessary.
 - Suggests a good 10-year-old used truck might have been cheaper and still served the county well.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Lamarcus Davis – District 1

Commissioner Davis said the following:

- To Jeff Thompson regarding the subrogation item:
 - He emphasized that he would never laugh at or make light of the situation.
 - He apologized if his demeanor or facial expression was perceived as disrespectful.
- He expressed appreciation for all county employees, from leadership to frontline staff.
- He thanked employees for their continued hard work and teamwork.
- He noted that the county team has worked efficiently to move matters forward, even meeting multiple times within the month to address issues.

Commissioner Eddie Rowland – District 2

- Commissioner Rowland commended Kim Stokes for his extensive work and involvement in county operations, noting that he consistently participates in engineering discussions, water-related meetings, and landfill matters and is often central to resolving issues.
- He expressed appreciation for his willingness to handle a wide range of responsibilities, even when tasks fall outside his primary role.
- Regarding the Thompson matter, he stated that although it would have been easy for the county to approve spending the \$100,000, the Board wanted to ensure it was making the correct decision with public funds.
- He emphasized that spending \$100,000 is a serious responsibility and the Board carefully considers such expenditures.
- Commissioner Rowland also discussed the importance of updating and working on the county's Comprehensive Land Use Plan.
- He noted that planning must account for changing development patterns, referencing areas such as Highway 74 that may be appropriate for certain types of growth.
- He explained that areas which previously had little development may now be experiencing growth, making long-term planning essential.
- He stated that strengthening the land use plan will help make future development decisions more predictable.

Commissioner John Ambrose – District 3

- He talked about the Comprehensive Plan / Land Use plan, saying he doesn't like that people can still get variances or special-use approvals even after the county sets rules.
- He suggested that on the county's Facebook page, they should not only post the meeting agenda, but also the same information Commissioners receive on Fridays, so people can understand what's being discussed.
- His goal is to make the county more transparent, so residents can decide if they want to attend meetings based on the agenda details.
- He thanked everyone for the raises given to county employees, noting that employees were very appreciative.
- He pointed out that county employees are not paid as much as in the private sector, but they still do an excellent job for the county.

- Commissioner Ambrose stated he and Commissioner Turner had qualified for re-election today.

Commissioner Al Turner – District 4

- Commissioner Turner expressed appreciation for everyone's participation and collaboration throughout the year.
- He emphasized his commitment to reelection, noting that he will not quit and is prepared to face challenges.

Chairman Alan Gibbs

- Chairman Gibbs expressed appreciation for Kim, noting that he handles far more than is visible, acts quickly on ideas, and writes exceptionally professional emails.
- He acknowledged that this was a tough meeting, especially regarding a funding request where everyone's instinct was to give the money.
- He emphasized that the board is spending public money and must be careful and responsible with each decision.
- He hoped attendees could see the board members' hearts and intentions in trying to make the right decision.
- He stated that the meeting involved healthy discussion and disagreement, leading to a good final decision.
- He concluded by saying he was proud of the board and the way they conducted the meeting.

Executive Session-Personnel

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to enter executive session for personnel at 9:15 p.m.

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

Commissioner motioned to close executive session at

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

Action from Executive Session

County Attorney Ben Vaughn stated the personnel matter discussed was regarding the County Manager contract.

Chairman Gibbs motioned to approve the County Manager contract.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion, and the motion carried 4-0-1 with Commissioner Turner out of the room during the vote.

Adjourn

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to adjourn at 9:28 p.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

Janet Abbott, County Clerk