

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of April 07, 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

Mike Jones led 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 following change:

- add item J Workforce Development Center

Commissioner Rowland motioned to approve the agenda with said change.

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

Minutes-March 17, 2026, Regular Meeting

Chairman Gibbs presented the minutes of the March 17, 2026, Regular Meeting for approval.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the minutes of March 17, 2026, Regular meeting with the normal 30 days for changes.

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

Data Center Ordinance Amendment

Community Development Director Kelsey Fortner presented a Resolution for consideration of an ordinance amending the Monroe County Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to update standards for siting, developing, and operating data centers.

County Attorney Ben Vaughn stepped away from the dais during the Data Center discussion.

Chairman Gibbs asked Community Development Director Kelsey Fortner to read the Data Center Ordinance for review.

The amendment:

- Limits data centers to the M-1 zoning district as a Special Use (SU).
- Restates UDO 4.02.23 with development standards, including: 75-ft building height cap; 50-ft front/side/rear setbacks; minimum 110-ft frontage and width; minimum lot size of 900 acres.
- Requires 500-ft minimum building setback from any property line plus a 200-ft vegetative buffer (retain at least 100 ft of natural buffer where present).
- Screens HVAC/mechanical equipment when within 100 ft of adjacent property lines; orients front façades toward street fronts unless >500 ft away or not visible.
- Allows private roads (built to county standards) and certain accessory structures (e.g., guard houses at entrances).

- Utilities: Public water/sewer required; electric service at transmission level (≥ 115 kV); prohibits diesel/gas generators as primary power; permits backup generators only for emergencies/testing.
- Generator standards: Tier 4-compliant; enclosed; routine testing 10:00 AM–4:00 PM (Mon–Fri, excluding holidays); ≤ 65 dBA at property line during operations/testing; requires third-party acoustical study pre-CO.
- Lighting: Requires plan protective of nighttime skyline; tentative approval at land disturbance; final approval after on-site inspection when all lights are on; paved parking lot; lighting must meet plan.
- Sound: Ongoing operation ≤ 65 dBA at external boundaries; County may require a sound study ~6 months post-CO and enforce UDO §10.04.00 for violations.
- Contains severability, repeal of conflicting ordinances, and effective-date provisions.

Mrs. Fortner stated the following suggested revisions from the March 12, 2026, Board of Commissioners meeting had been added:

- Vegetative buffer at least 200 feet wide contained within the setback, and where a natural vegetative buffer exists, at least 100 feet of the natural buffer shall be retained in its natural condition.
- Routine testing of generators shall be restricted to normal business hours (10:00 AM to 4:00 PM, Monday through Friday). Except Holidays
- Generators shall not exceed 65 decibels as measured at the property line. With the exception of short-term emergency power outages.
- A county public works representative will tentatively approve the plan for lighting. Final approval will occur once all lights can be turned on and a visual inspection is completed. The lighting plan and parking lot details must be submitted to public works.
- Sound should not exceed 65 decibels measuring at the adjacent external property boundary between the Data Center Development and any property line.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the Data Center Ordinance as written and presented.

Commissioner Davis seconded the motion; the motion passed 5-0.

Commissioner Davis motioned to lift the moratorium on data centers.

Commissioner Ambrose seconded the motion; the motion passed 5-0.

County Attorney Vaughn returned to the dais.

MGRC Aging Advisory Council Appointment

Middle Georgia Regional Commission (MGRC) established the Middle Georgia Aging Advisory Council to provide critical input to the aging and disabled. Each county in Middle Georgia appoints one member for a two-year term. The current Monroe County Member is Aretha Thompson, and her term ends this month. She is a member in good standing and to the MGRC's knowledge she is eligible for re-appointment.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to reappoint Aretha Thompson to the Middle Georgia Aging Advisory Council.

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

Utility Work Permit-SNG

County Attorney Ben Vaughn and Public Works Director Kim Stokes have been working on a utility work permit application for SNG, South Natural Gas Company. Mr. Vaughn and Mr. Stokes would like the Boards approval for this to become the county's standard application moving forward.

Mr. Vaughn presented the revised permit to the board.

Public Works Director Kim Stokes stated the permit was just matching state law.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the utility work permit and to allow it to become the county's standard application moving forward.

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

Public Works Asphalt Paving Machine

Public Works Director Kim Stokes request approval to purchase an asphalt paving machine. Mr. Stokes stated four (4) bids were received with the lowest bid coming in at \$504,900 from TEC for a Vogele 1700-3i with an 8' to 15'7" paving width, with a 36/3000-mile warranty and is available for delivery.

Bids received were as follows:

Asphalt Paver Comparison

Dealer	Make	Model	Price	HP	Paving Width	Delivery	Comments
TEC	Vogele	1700-3i	\$ 504,900	173	8'to 15' 7"	Available	36/3000 Warranty, No Charge for Call Out or Milage
Cowin	ASTECC	RP175	\$ 558,002	173	8' to 15'	120 Days	
Yancey	Cat	AP655	\$ 625,365	173	8'to 15' 6"	90-120 Days	36/5000 Warranty, Travel & Milage Included
Yancey	Cat	AP555	\$ 587,542	148	8'to 15' 6"	90-120 Days	36/5000 Warranty

Mr. Stokes' recommendation is to purchase the Vogele 1700-3i from TEC for \$504,900 with funds to come from TSPLOST.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the purchase of the Vogele 1700-3i from TEC for \$504,900 with funds to come from TSPLOST.

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

Water Meter Tap & Boring Cost

At a recent Board meeting a discussion came up about whether boring costs should be included in the meter tap fee regardless of whether a bore is required. Currently boring costs are added only when needed. If the boring cost were incorporated into all meters, an estimated weighted average would need to be added to each meter tap fee.

Options for Board consideration are maintaining current rate structure-only add boring charges when a bore is required. Or, add a flat-weighted-average boring cost to all meter installations.

Average boring cost:

- A weighted average would add an additional \$225.81 to the meter cost
 - Based on current boring cost:
 - 2" Bore for 3/4" and 1" meter \$1,175
 - 2 1/2" Bore for 1 1/2" and 2" meter \$1,575

Current Meter Tap Fees

With Meter Box		Without Meter Box	
3/4"	\$1,000	3/4"	\$2,000
1"	\$1,200	1"	\$2,400
1.5"	\$1,450	1.5"	\$2,900
2"	\$2,100	2"	\$4,200

Any meter of 2" TBD by Contractor

If Bore is needed, then boring cost will be added to the meter cost

Boring-Current Fees

Standard Rate is \$750 but, in some cases, has been as high as \$1,900.

Commissioner Ambrose stated:

- He thinks it's unfair that neighbors across the road from each other pay very different amounts:
 - One pays a normal tap fee (same-side line),

- The other pays hundreds or more extra for a bore.
- Said that in 2019 (Juliette project) the county intentionally averaged bore costs so “the bore was included” regardless of side of road.
- Believes the change made in 2024 to separate out boring cost was a mistake / “misunderstanding” of what was intended.
- Emphasized that:
 - The county is not trying to make money on taps, just roughly break even.
 - Charging extra just because someone is unlucky enough to live on the opposite side of the road will cause resentment.

Commissioner Rowland:

- Pointed out that in 2024 the board knowingly voted to change the structure — it wasn’t an accidental misunderstanding.
- Stressed that we already:
 - Charge different prices for:
 - With box vs. without box
 - Different meter sizes
 - Different bore sizes
 - We are already billing “by the job” in many ways.
- Concerned that:
 - Bore jobs are a small minority (about 15% of installs), so averaging effectively makes most people subsidize a few.
 - The share of bore vs. non-bore installs changes from year to year, so an average would either:
 - Be wrong from day one, and
 - Force the county to recalculate and reset the fee every year.
- Principle: “Pay for what you need.”
 - If your tap requires a bore, you pay for it.
 - If it doesn’t, you shouldn’t be charged for a bore you don’t use.

Chairman Gibbs compared it to electric service:

- If you build a house far off the road, you pay more to get power back there; similarly, a longer or more complex water connection reasonably costs more.

Commissioner Rowland motioned to keep the Water Tap & Boring cost as is currently.

Chairman Gibbs seconded the motion; the motion carried 4-1 with Commissioner Ambrose opposed.

iW0rQ Systems Proposal

Public Works Director Kim Stokes along with Public Information Officer Richard Dumas is recommending Monroe County contract with IWORQ Systems, Inc. on a three-year basis to provide citizen communication and internal work order communication software for the Public Works Department. The IWORQ Systems software will serve as a replacement for the See Click Fix Software that Commissioners opted to cancel last year.

This software will give us the opportunity to better map the county's road and water system infrastructure, including detailed GIS maps featuring the locations of all county road signs, water hydrants, etc.

The total cost of contracting with IWORQ Systems, Inc. in year 1 is \$13,000, which includes a first-year implementation and setup fee of \$1,000. IWORQ Systems has agreed not to increase the county's per-year cost over the first three years of the contract. This agreement is good until April 30, 2026.

Richard Dumas presented.

Commissioner Rowland motioned to approve the IWORQ Systems contract.

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

Dangerous Dog Declaration Policy

Monroe County Animal Services has expressed a need for an appeal hearing process for dangerous dogs within Monroe County.

Two procedural options are available for conducting the hearing:

1. Board Hearing: Hold the hearing during a regular or special meeting of the Board of Commissioners, with the Board rendering the final decision.
2. Hearing Officer: Appoint a hearing officer to conduct the hearing and submit a proposed decision for the Board's review and approval.

Chairman Gibbs:

- Asked for clarification of what a "dangerous dog declaration" means and whether it implies the dog has already bitten someone, or if it's anticipatory.

- Expressed concern that the process sounds very similar to a court case, with evidence and factual determinations, and questioned whether such matters really belong in front of the Board instead of a judge.
- Focused on the practical structure of the policy:
- Asked procedural questions:
 - Confirmed that the Board's decision could still be subject to court review or civil lawsuits.
 - Worked with staff to make sure the hearing date and notice for the current case will meet the statutory deadline.

Commissioner Ambrose:

- Spoke from prior experience, noting the Board dealt with a serious dangerous dog case about 10 years ago.
- Strongly emphasized public safety during appeals:
 - Argued that once a citation is issued for a dangerous dog and the owner appeals, the dog should not be allowed to "run loose".
 - Called for adding clear language that during the appeal:
 - The dog must be quarantined or tightly contained, and
 - There should be significant fines if the dog gets out and causes further harm.
- Opposed paying for an outside attorney to act as hearing officer:
 - Believes most cases are factually straightforward (e.g., clear bite with puncture wounds).
 - Felt the Board can apply the ordinance and state law without extra-legal expense.
- Worried about risk to staff:
 - Mentioned not wanting Code Enforcement or Animal Control officers "getting bit again."
- Asked whether the existing county ordinance or state law already requires confinement/quarantine during the appeal and urged that any gaps be fixed.

Commissioner Rowland:

- Initially preferred not to have the full Board hear appeals:

- Worried about the political and emotional pressure, noting that dog issues are often “*worse than children*” in terms of community emotion.
- Concerned all five commissioners would be “hated” by one side or the other; suggested a single hearing officer might diffuse that.
- Suggested a district-commissioner hearing officer model:
 - The commissioner for the district where the incident occurred could act as the hearing officer.
 - If that commissioner had a conflict, they could ask another commissioner to handle it.
 - Proposed that the Board Chair review the commissioner’s reasoning to make sure the logic is sound, then pass the final paperwork through the County Manager.
- After hearing from the County Attorney that state law ultimately places the decision with the Board and that any hearing officer’s recommendation is not binding, Eddie shifted:
 - Concluded that, if the Board must decide anyway, there is little value in paying an outside attorney.
 - Agreed the entire Board should handle appeals.

Commissioner Davis:

- Participated more on the procedural and fairness aspects than on the structure of who hears the case.
- Asked what happens after the Board declares a dog dangerous:
 - Wanted clarity on next steps and penalties if an owner does not appeal but also does not comply.
- Raised the issue of liability and future bites:
 - Questioned whether owners are being adequately notified about:
 - Quarantine or containment expectations, and
 - The consequences if the dog injures someone again while under a dangerous dog designation or during appeal.
- Confirmed with staff and the attorney that:
 - State law and the existing ordinance already cover most of the conditions and remedies for dangerous dogs.

- Owners can take disputes further to higher courts (e.g., superior court) if they choose.

Following the discussion, Chairman Gibbs motioned to adopt option 1 and to hold the hearing at the next board meeting on April 21st at 9:00 a.m.

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

Workforce Development

Commissioner Davis stated that, following the passing of former Commissioner Larry Evans, there had been prior discussion about naming a county facility in his honor. He noted that Commissioner Evans had played a significant role in the establishment of the Monroe County Workforce Development Center and requested that the facility be named for him and a portrait be hung in his honor.

Chairman Gibbs made a motion to name the Monroe County Workforce Development Center after former Commissioner Larry Evans.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Turner and the motion passed 5-0.

Commissioner Davis further mentioned the possibility of placing a portrait of Commissioner Evans in the courthouse and atrium of the administration building, consistent with the recognition given to other former officials

Public Comment

Candy Mountain (582 Barnone Road)

- Thanked the board for adopting the new public-works reporting system with time-stamped requests.
- Explained they have been trying for three months to get a buried culvert opened on their road.
- Noted there are two culverts on their road they have repeatedly reported.
- Said there is no formal documentation reflecting how long they've been reporting it, other than Commissioner Al's involvement.
- Mentioned Kim Stokes recently tried to reach them to look at the issue, but they weren't home at the time.
- Emphasized that when the prior "SeeClickFix"-style system was used, issues got resolved more quickly, and that three months for this culvert is "kind of crazy."

- Reiterated appreciation for the new, time-stamped system because it should help track and resolve problems more reliably.

Kerry Osborne (122 River Shoals Drive)

- Commented on the new asphalt paver purchase:
 - Asked whether the county already has the equipment needed to haul a machine that large.
- Commented on water meter tap fees and growth impacts:
 - Noted that many other counties use impact fees tied to projected usage.
 - Gave the example that a large industrial user (e.g., “Buc-ees”) might pay around \$10,000 as an impact fee, while residential users would pay a much smaller amount.
 - Suggested that those impact-fee revenues should be earmarked for capital improvements to the water system driven by increased usage from new development.

Commissioner’s Comments

Commissioner Lamarcus Davis – District 1

- Thanked everyone for attending the meeting.
- Praised staff and departments for their day-to-day work, much of which “goes unseen,” calling employees the county’s greatest asset.
- Highlighted the Buc-ee’s groundbreaking as a “great day” for Monroe County and thanked Kelsey, Kim, and their teams for the work involved.
- Thanked fellow commissioners for the time and hours they put into county business.
- Noted that the 2026 legislative session was important and emphasized that Monroe County’s voice was heard in Atlanta regarding several bills.
- Thanked the county’s state delegation (representatives and senator) for being responsive to calls and concerns.

Commissioner Eddie Rowland – District 2

- Reflected on the Buc-ee’s groundbreaking:
 - Noted the Buc-ee’s owner said they look for business-friendly communities, and that Monroe County is seen that way.

- Emphasized the county was not always viewed as business-friendly, especially nine years ago when he started as commissioner.
- Said the county comprehensive plan (about 10 years old) and his own early campaign material both stressed the need for commercial and industrial development along the interstate to help pay county bills.
- Expressed pride in:
 - Buc-ee's,
 - Oglethorpe Power, and
 - The prospective data center project.
- Acknowledged he has received criticism for supporting business growth but does not apologize, stating he has done exactly what he campaigned on.
- Predicted that in a few years, citizens “won’t have to pay a property tax bill” because of the commercial/industrial tax base being built.

Commissioner John Ambrose – District 3

- Defended Commissioner Al Turner:
 - Mentioned social media criticism of Al.
 - Stressed that Al is very active behind the scenes, especially on:
 - Impact fees,
 - High Falls issues,
 - And other problem areas.
 - Said Al frequently calls him to discuss county problems and solutions.
- Praised staff leadership (Janet, Kelsey, Lorri) and described the county as a team:
 - Emphasized that those staff members “make our job easy.”
 - Expressed appreciation in a joking, informal way while being clear he values their work.

Commissioner Al Turner – District 4

- Explained his quieter style:
 - Thankful to God for giving him two ears and one mouth so he can listen before he speaks.
- Addressed the culvert issue raised in public comment:

- Confirmed he and staff have been out there “three or four times” but have not been able to clearly identify the specific culvert in question each time.
- Asked that the resident give at least one day’s notice before a future visit so they can coordinate and meet on site.
- Reiterated they would return to the location and try again to fix the problem.
- Reiterated support for the new reporting / IWORQ System:
 - Believes it will be a significant benefit, especially for Public Works and Water.
- Praised the Buc-ee’s groundbreaking, again noting:
 - Buc-ee’s cited Monroe County’s business-friendly environment and community as reasons for choosing the site.
- Thanked the board and county staff for their work.

Chairman Alan Gibbs

- Confirmed that impact fees have been discussed multiple times:
 - Said it is not a dead issue and should be revisited, particularly for new buildings (not just water taps).
- Publicly recognized Commissioner Al Turner’s certification:
 - Read a letter from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government (UGA) and ACCG stating Al completed all courses required to be a Certified County Commissioner.
 - Noted this was done very quickly, acknowledging the time and dedication Al invested.
- Praised the Buc-ee’s groundbreaking event and said:
 - It was a great experience.
 - He believes Buc-ee’s will be a good neighbor for Monroe County.

Executive Session-Personnel

Commissioner Davis motioned to enter into executive session for personnel at 7:27 p.m.

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

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to close executive session at 8:10 p.m.

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

Action from Executive Session

County Attorney **Ben Vaughn** stated that:

- The Board had discussed **two matters involving personnel** during executive session.
- There was **no action** to be taken in public related to those discussions at that time.

Adjourn

Commissioner Davis motioned to adjourn at 8:12 p.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

Janet Abbott, County Clerk