

Monroe County Board of Commissioners

Minutes of the August 20, 2024

Regular Commissioners Meeting

9:00 A.M.

Present:

Greg Tapley, Chairman

Eddie Rowland, Vice-Chairman

Lamarcus Davis, District 1

John Ambrose, District 3

George Emami, District 4

Staff:

Ben Vaughn, County Attorney

Jim Hedges, County Manager

Richard Dumas, Public Information Officer

Janet Abbott, County Clerk

Lorri Robinson, Finance Director/Assistant County Manager

Welcome

Chairman Tapley welcomed everyone in attendance.

Prayer

Commissioner Davis gave the invocation.

Pledge

Chairman Tapley led the Pledge.

Roll Call

County Clerk Janet Abbott called roll.

Call to Order

Chairman Tapley called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M.

New Business

Approve Agenda

Chairman Tapley presented the agenda for approval moving the library discussion up on the agenda to Item C.

Commissioner Rowland motioned to approve the agenda with said changes.

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

Approve Minutes-BOC Meeting-August 6, 2024, Regular Meeting

Commissioner Emami motioned to approve the minutes of the August 6, 2024, Regular Meeting with the usual 30 days for changes.

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

Library Discussion

Commissioner Rowland stated he appreciates everyone in attendance for the library discussion.

Commissioner Rowland stated the library is an important topic to many Monroe Countians.

Commissioner Rowland stated the responsibility of managing the library is under the purview of the library staff, the Monroe County Library Board, and the regional Flint River Regional Library System.

Commissioner Rowland said the Board of Commissioners is an organization of process and it's important that the Board of Commissioners are involved in the discussion because we represent the county's taxpayers, who significantly fund the library.

Commissioner Rowland stated this is the general opinion he is getting from the citizens he has spoken with. He thinks there are about 15 to 20 percent of citizens who are opposed to moving or removing any books from the county's library and wants the Board of Commissioners to stay out of it. He stated there is also about 15 to 20 percent of county citizens who want the 30 or so LGBTQ+ books removed and are willing to have the library defunded in an effort to do so. Commissioner Rowland stated he thinks there are also about 60 to 70 percent of the county's citizens who would be in favor of moving the books to an adult area of the library or an area that is not within public view and is not accessible to young children. Commissioner Rowland stated the issue could be placed on a referendum but it's too late to place a referendum on this November's general election. Therefore, he said he decided to invite the public to Tuesday's meeting to give feedback on the controversial books.

Commissioner Rowland stated the 60 to 70 percent in favor of moving the books to another location are basically saying three things. 1.) Mamas and Daddys need to be Mamas and Daddys and be responsible parents and monitor your children. 2.) This is Monroe County not Washington DC, we can solve

problems without name calling, threats and outright intolerance. We can be responsible and more disciplined citizens, media, government officials, and candidates. 3.) To the Library board we the 60 to 70 percent are not book burners or book banners. You have that authority, but we are not asking we are simply asking for the books to be moved to an adult section or to a section that if a person wants information on LGBTQ+ they can ask for it.

Commissioner Rowland stated another option that was brought up yesterday was for a non-traditional section to be created in the library which would also probably include the bible.

Commissioner Rowland stated he would like to hear from the citizens and asked that everyone but respectful.

Chairman Tapley asked Natalie Sundeen, County Attorney if a special section could be created in the library legally.

Ms. Sundeen responded the Board must be cautious not to discriminate against protected classes in any decision they might make regarding the books. Ms. Sundeen stated this issue is not specific to Monroe County it is happening all over the state.

Chairman Tapley then opened the meeting to public comments.

Fannie Watson West, Watson Road resident stated she was hurt by Commissioner Ambrose's comment about closing the library. She stated her main concern was the ones that would be hurt by the closing of the library would be grandmothers and children. Ms. West stated children need the library for computers and to do their homework.

Al Turner, resident of 111 Aaron Court stated he doesn't want the library shut down or to ban the books but asked that the books be moved to a different section and to close this issue.

Darren Latch, resident of Morningside Drive, stated he thinks there should be a reduction in the amount of people on the library board. Mr. Latch asked Christians how they can support the LGBTQ+ books as this is a form of grooming. Mr. Latch stated the library is a valuable resource for everyone.

Libby Robinson, resident of 60 Todd Creek Court stated the vast majority of the library's LGBTQ+ books are not pornography. Homosexual children exist in Monroe County. And taking away the ability to access books or moving the books to a separate section is in fact discrimination. Ms. Robinson stated the library is open to everyone and parents should monitor their kids in the library and teach their kids their values at home.

Alan Gibbs, resident of 31 Zellner Road stated he doesn't agree with Commissioner Rowland's numbers completely, he thinks he is a little low on the 60 to 70 percent. Mr. Gibbs stated the LGBTQ+ books in

the library do not fit Monroe County as a whole. Mr. Gibbs stated they need to be moved to a section that kids can't get a hold to them. Mr. Gibbs stated he had a meeting with Jennifer Hudgins and Monroe County is not the only entity funding the library, the state and federal government is funding it as well. He stated he proposes moving away from their funding and the county fully fund the library and run the library on our own so that the county has more control. He stated this is one of the things he ran on in his election and he does not want to defund the library, but he will if that's what the choices are.

Carolyn Nickel, resident of 1531 Pate Road read the definition of a library stating, "a public library is a repository of knowledge available to every single person in America." Ms. Nickel stated Mr. Gibbs posted on Facebook urging all Republican Christians to come support his cause today. Ms. Nickel stated she is a Democratic Christian who is here to say, "please keep your hands off of my library". If parents exercise due diligence, you won't have a problem.

Joseph Edwards, resident of 1492 Maynards Mill Road, stated he is not for banning books, but he is for separating the books.

Yvonne Stuart, resident of 2095 Hwy 41 South stated it breaks her heart that we have a situation where the county is considering defunding our library causing employees to lose their jobs and insurance, causing citizens dependent on the library for technology to lose that resource because they can't afford internet at home. Ms. Stuart stated it is a shame the example that is being set for our children that our leaders would bully and threaten defunding of the library if the library doesn't do what they want it to do. Ms. Stuart stated her solution is to represent everyone and pleaded for the board to not leave the public without a library. Ms. Stuart stated she is a retired librarian, and as a retired librarian, she is familiar with those types of books and these types of books are things young adults are going through at the time and are very therapeutic for them.

Betty Eskew, resident of 514 Brushy Creek Circle, stated she is a Christian and she believes "love your neighbor as yourself" and that doesn't mean love your neighbor because they are just like you. Ms. Eskew stated not everyone comes from a home with two parents or are taken to church every time the doors are open. She stated she was kicked out when she was 15 years old, and the library was a valuable resource for her. Ms. Eskew stated we can't just protect heterosexual children we protect all children and removing this book from the children's section will make a child that is looking for this type of book feel singled out.

Dr. Joan Whitehead Freeman stated she is a lifelong Monroe County resident, and her first job was at the Monroe County public library. Dr. Freeman stated this issue really bothers her as a 34-year educator

because when the children she taught heard about these books it made them want to go read them. Dr. Freeman stated we are all humans and have different wants and desires. Dr. Freeman stated the public library is a necessary thing and everybody's opinion needs to be honored.

Marilyn Smith stated she retired from the Monroe County library after 33 years. Ms. Smith stated Monroe County has very rich schools and we need a rich library.

Dr. Maddie Bush, a licensed mental health counselor, stated she is outraged at the thought of closing the Monroe County library. Dr. Bush stated as a licensed mental health counselor LGBTQ+ children struggle and have a high percentage of suicide. Dr. Bush stated if one of those children can come in the library and see one of those books it may help save their life. Dr. Bush stated the Flint River Regional Library system has ok'd the books and their locations and asked the board to allow the credentialed people to govern the library.

Matthew Hanson resident of 2959 Reedy Creek Road stated he doesn't think banning the books or defunding the library is the solution. He stated he is in favor of relocating the books to an age-appropriate section.

Mary Ellen Strickland, Conifer Drive resident stated she brought her children to the library almost every week and they loved checking out books. She stated the suggestion to monitor the children in the library would have meant she would have had to walk around with each of her children every second. Ms. Strickland stated the library board stated the books had rainbow stickers and that the books weren't in the children's section, but this wasn't true.

Angel Latch, resident of 285 East Main Street stated she wanted to remind everyone that it only took one person to complain to have the bible removed from the public school system. Ms. Latch stated she is one of those that would close the library because of these books. Ms. Latch stated these children are our responsibility.

Nathan Jackson resident of 2075 Hwy 41 South stated he grew up in the library and is opposed to shutting the library down. Mr. Jackson stated all we are asking is for the books with pictures and words that are inappropriate for children to be moved to a different section. Mr. Jackson stated, "Let's protect our children."

Rod Callahan resident of 403 Taylor Drive stated he moved to Monroe County in 1987. Mr. Callahan stated he was the prison chaplain for 8 years and worked as a hospice chaplain for 15 years in Macon. Mr. Callahan stated he is starting to feel like Daniel in the lion's den at the moment. He stated he is concerned about the location of the books; he is not in favor of censoring the books or defunding the

library. Mr. Callahan stated Ga Law states 16 years old is the consenting age and asked why 15-year-old children and below needs access to these types of materials. Mr. Callahan stated he was going to read from the bible, and he has the right to do so as a citizen and it is his right to free speech.

Ralph Bass resident of 318 Indian Springs Drive addressed the board stating he thinks we are too much hung-up on the designation of LGBTQ+. He stated there is a debate among librarians with the use of that terminology and placing books with that designation on the shelf. He stated he personally thinks that designation should not be used. Mr. Bass asked what criteria are to be used when labeling a book LGBTQ. He continued stating the argument is that these books push a homosexual agenda, and he disagrees. Mr. Bass stated these books may contain a character that is gay but so are men, women, boys and girls we encounter every day at Walmart, at the school and even at church. Mr. Bass stated reading about gay characters does not make one gay anymore than reading about David and Bathsheba makes one kill his neighbor in order to seduce the widow. Mr. Bass stated in this controversy he has heard a lot about Christian values, and he thinks Christian values are very important, but he does not want those in authority imposing their values on him, he stated he does not wish to live in a theocracy.

Ralph Lenning resident of 1904 Charlie Benson Road stated he puts the bible first. He doesn't believe the library needs to be closed; he thinks the books need to be moved.

Lloyd Strickland resident of 172 Conifer Drive stated he hears a lot of emotion here and maybe even some hyperbole at times. He stated he thinks that we can maybe come to a nondiscriminatory solution. Mr. Strickland stated first of all he does not want to see the library closed; however, you can't keep a child from seeing a book that is on display and pulling it out and looking at and that is the issue. He stated it's been said that it can be discriminatory against LGBTQ+ to move the book, however as a parent he would not want heterosexual books with sexually explicit pictures available for his child to pick up either. Mr. Strickland stated a good compromise would be to take the books with a sexual nature that are in the children's section and put them in a different place and let parents make the decision of the books they are willing to let their children read.

Commissioner Ambrose stated the way this was brought up today upsets him, he continued he has brought this up in the past and did not have proper support from this board. Commissioner Ambrose stated when you put a rainbow sticker on books for children, they are going to look at it. Commissioner Ambrose stated he doesn't want to close the library and doesn't want to censor the books; he wants them placed in an age-appropriate section and currently these books are not. Commissioner Ambrose stated he has asked the Library Board to move the books, and they won't. Commissioner Ambrose continued

stating we have no say in the library except for funding and appointing members to the Library Board. He stated in the past when Board seats were up for appointment, the Board of Commissioners would ask the Library Board who they want, and the Board of Commissioners would agree. Commissioner Ambrose stated that is not going to happen again. He stated he doesn't want to shut the library down, but he has spoken with incoming Commissioners and if the LGBTQ+ books aren't moved to an age appropriate location by January 1, 2025 he is going to have it defunded and in the meantime he is going to have the county attorney draw up new operating rules for the library giving the Board of Commissioners more authority. Commissioner Ambrose stated the library is a great asset to the county that doesn't need to be shut down but what ever it takes to get the books moved. He stated the simple solution is to move the books to an age-appropriate area.

Commissioner Davis stated he appreciates everyone's opinion this morning. Commissioner Davis stated we are all talking about age-appropriate books and what the legal age is, he stated there are books in there that talk about alcohol and smoking and people aren't talking about moving those books.

Commissioner Davis asked are we going to stop our kids from reading the bible, he continued the bible talks about everything that we are talking about taking out of the library. Commissioner Davis stated defunding the library is not as simple as people think it is, if we defund the library there are 9 different libraries in the Flint River Regional Library system that will lose funding. He stated and for Monroe County to re-enter the system, Monroe County would have to commit to \$750,000 for a number of years. Commissioner Davis stated he says, "How do you love a man you have never seen but hate your fellow neighbor."

Commissioner Emami stated he wants first to say thank you to everyone who had the courage to speak up and stand up for what you believe. Commissioner Emami stated he has been debating the whole time about what he is about to say, he stated he wants to warn our community about something, and he wants to use the bible to do it. He stated Proverbs 6 states there are six (6) things the lord hates, seven (7) that are detestable to him; haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

Commissioner Emami stated from where he sits, he thinks it is probably more than 70 percent and he already knows where this answer needs to go. He continued with he thinks our community was stirred up into a very political scenario. Commissioner Emami stated I still believe we can come up with a solution that works. He stated I am one of the most conservative people when it comes to voting and the

idea of defunding the library is mortifying to me, just the notion is shameful. For those of you who are a little more conservative than others think about how the notion of defunding the police made you feel, that's how people in our community feel when you talk about defunding the library. Commissioner Emami stated I think there are sensible ways to deal with this. He stated he thinks he speaks for a lot of people that are not in favor of defunding the library but would also not like for their child to stumble across this type of content. Commissioner Emami stated he is not talking about discrimination toward a protected class he is referring to any book in the library with sexual content needs to be moved to an age-appropriate section. Commissioner Emami stated as I get ready to depart from being a commissioner, I think we must find a way to have better discourse in this county. Commissioner Emami addressed Alan Gibbs as Chairman-Elect stating to him, "Don't get into national level politics up here, that's not the front line, don't wait years to figure that out, figure it out now". He stated this could have been worked out in a much more civil manner, but I am proud of the way we handled ourselves through this.

Commissioner Rowland stated I am sad it has come to this point also, but I am also glad it came to this. I am glad the community can sit down and discuss things without yelling at each other. I think when I listened to Nathan, he best represented it for me. Commissioner Rowland stated Eddie Rowland will never vote to shut down or defund the library. He stated I think we had a good discussion; I think we should move toward something that is non-traditional rather than focusing on LGBTQ+ terminology. He stated there may be things that are not LGBTQ+ and are still inappropriate. I represent everyone in the community, and I hope that you feel like I am listening to you.

Chairman Tapley stated there is no action item on this today. Chairman Tapley asked George to repeat the 7th thing in Proverbs 6 in which Commissioner Emami replied "a person who stirs up conflict in the community." Chairman Tapley stated this has been a civil discourse, we have had a good conversation. Chairman Tapley stated he looks back at how this got started and there is a person in the community that keeps stirring things up and tries to divide us without talking about the positive things. Chairman Tapley stated these things kept getting stirred up again and again, but no one went to the library and went through the process of challenging the books. Chairman Tapley stated there was only two or three books that were challenged and none of the people challenging these books read the books. He stated the books that were challenged only had LGTQ+ characters they were not having relations. Chairman Tapley stated there are fifty-seven (57) books and seven (7) of these books are in the young adult section. He stated there were 3 books in the children's section that had two female penguins that

were mothers of a baby penguin. Chairman Tapley stated you have to get your information correct before you start making ridiculous statements like closing the library. Chairman Tapley said he is proud to work with the Library Board and he appreciates the service that they have given to this county. Chairman Tapley stated the library is a great resource for all the public.

The board recessed at 10:35 a.m. to allow time without disruption for anyone that wanted to leave.

The meeting reconvened at 10:41 a.m.

Property Tax Penalty Refund Request

County Manager Jim Hedges stated Richard and Kathy Williams' tax bill was sent to an incorrect address, and they are claiming they owe \$498.87.

Mrs. Williams stated the following:

- A. Delinquent letter dated February 07, 2024, from Monroe County. Delinquent Letter was mailed to previous address PO Box 283, Lizella Georgia.
- B. Monroe County Tax Bill was returned by Post Office to Monroe County according to the yellow sticker on May 29, 2024.
- C. According to the envelope the tax bill was sent from Lawrenceville, Ga on July 12, 2024.
- D. Letter from Lawrenceville, Ga was in my mailbox on 150 Manor Court on July 17, 2024. I immediately went to Monroe County Tax office to find out they now want us to pay \$626.39.

Mrs. Williams stated this has never happened to us before and we can't pay a bill that we never received. We feel we owe \$498.87.

Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve removing the late fees and penalties as long as Tax Commissioner Lori Andrews approves.

Chairman Tapley seconded the motion, and the motion passed 5-0.

Commissioner Rowland stated he worries the Board is setting a precedent because these have come before the Board in the past and have been denied.

Landfill Recertification

During 2021 and 2022, the construction of the Phase 2 landfill cell was in progress. In September 2022, the EPD granted approval to begin waste acceptance by installing a layer of residual waste known as "fluff" at the bottom and sides of a cell to protect the liner. In January 2023, the EPD issued a letter of non-compliance stating they noted significant rills in the protective cover layer that will need to be regraded, restored to its permitted conditions and its thickness recertified by a licensed surveyor. This is going to be a significant cost to the county in the neighborhood of \$200,000 to \$250,000.

Dan Wallace, Triple Point Engineering, addressed the Board stating the total cost of the EPD-required repairs could be as much as \$250,000, but he suggested completing the 5-acre project in two phases.

Mr. Wallace stated his recommendation was to do half now and the other half in the spring. Mr.

Wallace stated he estimates the first 2.5 acres would cost around \$150,000.

County Manager Jim Hedges stated he will include the estimated cost of the landfill liner repair in the 2025 Budget.

Following a Board discussion, no action was taken.

Septic Fees

Gina Smith, Environmental Health Manager for Monroe County, requested to be on the agenda to request to revise the Land use Fees (mainly septic systems and wells). Ms. Smith stated the Board of Health has voted to approve the raised fees and a public hearing was held August 5th with no comments received. Ms. Smith gave the following presentation:

Proposed Septic and Water Fees-2024

- Services Provided
 - New Septic Systems
 - New Construction (Residential and Commercial)
 - Repairs of Existing Septic Systems
 - Damaged or Failing Systems
 - Additions and Modifications of Existing Septic Systems
 - Use of Facility changes or additions are made to a building
 - Individual Water Wells
 - Permitting, Testing, and Evaluation
- Current Fees
 - Have not been adjusted for some time
 - Do not reflect increases in salaries, equipment, travel, and other costs.
- Uniformity of Fees Across the District
 - The various fees across the district were adopted by the counties without regard to actual costs to provide service, fee structure, or uniformity.
 - The septic fees will be structured the same in all 13 counties within the district.
- Calculation of Actual Cost
 - Estimated Total Cost to provide the service

- Travel time
- Time to perform work
- Admin costs
- Equipment costs
- Follow up visits (if warranted)
- Other Factors we consider
 - Addition of New Fees for Existing Services
 - Added fees for services we conduct for which we currently do not collect fees
 - Actual cost of service compared to existing fees
 - If the actual cost to provide the service far exceeded the existing fee, we used 65% of the actual cost for the new fee
 - If the existing fee was above the actual cost
 - The fee was not adjusted and was left the same
 - If the existing fee was below the district average
 - The fee was brought up to the district average
 - Unless commercial

Rick Craft, Deputy Director of Training and Development for the North Central Health District, stated the current fees were set by individual counties without regard to the actual cost to provide the services. Mr. Craft stated the new fee schedule will be the same in all 13 counties of the North Central Health District.

Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the Land Use fees as presented.

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

2024 Budget Amendment

Lorri Robinson-Byrd, Finance Director/Assistant County Manager presented the 2024 Budget to Actual review and Budget Amendments.

General Fund Budget Amendments

General Fund 101	Budget Amendment
Interest Earned	250,000
Contingency	278,953
Appropriation of Fund Balance	615,158

	1,144,111.00
Over encumbered expenditure accounts-telephone, fuel, etc	(259,046.00)
Transfer out to E911 fund 215-PY encumbrance	(468,601.00)
Transfer out to capital projects fund 350	20,000.00
Transfer out to Solid waste fund 540	(405,538.00)
Transfer out to Solid Waste fund 540	(30,926.00)
	(1,144,111.00)

Department	New Hires	Budget Amendment Amount
Probate Court	New Position/per BOC	32,445.00
EMS	Capt salary adjustments	16,371.00
Road	2 new hires paving crew/per boc	\$76,084.00
Animal Control	Salary adjustment/per boc flsa	8,086.00
Community Development	Salary adjustment/per boc flsa	13,368.00
Elections	Salary adjustment/per boc flsa	17,234.00
Purchasing	Salary adjustment/per boc flsa	4,966.00
Conference Center	Salary adjustment/per boc flsa	9,959.00
Solid Waste	Salary adjustment/per boc flsa	\$13,186.00
Administration	Salary adjustment/per boc flsa	3,893.00
Administration	Salary adjustment/per boc flsa	7,935.00
		203,527.00

Care Cottage Fund 213	Budget Amendment
Fines and Forfeitures	20,016.00
Property Damage reimburse	35,372.00
	55,388.00
Capital-Vehicle	(55,388.00)

Solid Waste Fund 540	Budget Amendment
From General Fund	436,464.00

Solid Waste & Recycling	13,900.00
	450,364.00
Solid Waste Collections/Centers	(45,900.00)
Solid Waste Disposal/Landfill	(404,464.00)
	(450,364.00)

E-911 Fund	Budget Amendment
Intergovernmental Rev-City of Forsyth	131,449.00
From General Fund	550,894.00
	682,343.00
Purchased Contracted Services	(600,000.00)
Capital-Computer	(82,343.00)

Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve with the adjustment for the landfill.

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

Gymnasium Budget

County Manager Jim Hedges stated the initial estimate for the construction of the gymnasium at the Recreation Facility was \$2,485,600, and the Board will recall that the original site was to be at the horse arena location. Since then, the Board decided to relocate the gymnasium to the west where the outdoor basketball courts are located. That decision resulted in additional civil works (#128,000) for parking and site work. In developing the final budget estimate, Proform Construction had to add a fire vault utility (\$65,792), a fire sprinkler system (\$66,575), and additional gym equipment and flooring cost (\$367,036). These additional costs added to the original estimate would bring the cost of the gymnasium to \$3,113,003; however, Robert Muckenfuss was able to bring the cost down to the recommended budget of \$2,816,378 saving the county \$296,625.

Robert Muckenfuss with ProForm Construction was present on behalf of the presentation.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the new budget estimate of \$2,816,378 that includes the Design Fee, and the Owner Controlled Contingency and authorize the issuance of Notice to Proceed.

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

Sheriff Training Facility Close-out

County Manager Jim Hedges stated the Sheriff's Training Facility constructed by Proform Construction is complete at a cost of \$641,849. The final cost includes a change order of \$32,779.26 with the additional cost relating to the utilization of the \$15,000 set aside for contingency, additional electrical work associated with outlets for break area equipment, storage room framing and shelving, countertop upgrades, and the addition of an elevated stage, refrigerator and stained cabinets.

The original estimate was for \$529,070 and the Sheriff agreed to pay from seized funds \$80,000 for requested changes to the original architectural design that was included and approved by the Board as Change Order no. 1, bringing the adjusted price to \$609,070.

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to approve the change order.

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

Solid Waste Focus Group

County Manager Jim Hedges stated the operating losses associated with the operation of the county landfill and recycling centers in 2024 are estimated to exceed \$1.7 million and coupled with capital expenditures will exceed \$3.1 million which represents 19.6% of our budgeted annual property tax collections. Compounding this problem is the projected loss of 50% of annual income stemming from the City of Forsyth solid waste disposal company that will use a company owned landfill in an adjacent county, and the continuation of mandated maintenance requirements from the EPD.

From 2018 through 2024, operating losses for the landfill and recycling centers is estimated to exceed \$10.8 million and with the addition of capital expenditures, the total cost for this period is in excess of \$17.7 million. In the past, the Board of Commissioners have discussed options to mitigate the cost of operating the landfill and recycling centers without determining a way forward.

Mr. Hedges stated his suggestion is to form a citizens' Focus Group with a professional facilitator from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government to evaluate all options of curtailing the alarming cost of operating the landfill and recycling center.

Following a Board discussion, Commissioner Emami motioned to approve the creation of a Citizens' Focus Group.

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

Feral Cats

Commissioner Emami stated he felt obliged to add feral cats to the agenda because it has come up a number of times since he has been a commissioner. Commissioner Emami stated it seems as though

Monroe County has a little bit of an epidemic going on with cats. He stated once the item was placed on the agenda, he has had more citizens reach out to him about the issue than before and that he would also like to say he has no idea what the best way to fix it is. Commissioner Emami stated he had learned that two unfixed felines can account for upward of 500,000 to over a million cats over ten years.

Commissioner Emami stated he had one family show him 26 cats they had trapped in their neighborhood in Monroe County.

Commissioner Emami stated there had been discussions with Becky Gifford, Monroe County Animal Shelter Manager and staff at the possibility of taking in cats. He stated Ms. Gifford was present at the meeting and he wanted her to give the county's side of it and he thinks some funding should be found to help deal with the cats in the community.

Monroe County Animal Shelter Manager, Becky Gifford stated the Georgia Department of Agriculture, which oversees the county's animal shelter, will not allow MCAS to operate a trap-neuter-release program.

Commissioner Emami stated Jones County has a program in place for cats. The program places a five-day hold on stray cats and keeps them in a 192 square foot facility with one employee dedicated to cats. Commissioner Emami also stated Jones County has a leash law for cats.

Commissioner Ambrose suggested Monroe County establish a license fee for animals to help cover the cost to take in cats.

Commissioner Emami stated if Monroe County's Animal Shelter is not allowed to take in cats maybe a low cost spay/neuter program could be offered quarterly.

Sapphire Court resident Wanda Donihoo stated she contacted Commissioner Ambrose in 2022 regarding the cats in her neighborhood. She stated there is one section in her neighborhood that is considered the litterbox. Ms. Donihoo stated Code Enforcement has visited one home in her neighborhood several times about the issue, but it has continued to be a problem.

Ms. Gifford stated 20 cats had been caught at the residence Ms. Donihoo is referring to before the homeowner ordered them to leave.

Conifer Drive resident Jennie Floyd said she doesn't think the public is aware of how big of a problem feral cats are in Monroe County. She stated Monroe County should maybe increase social media awareness and education on feral cats. Ms. Floyd asked if the citizens caught the cats could they bring them to the Animal Shelter and have them euthanized.

Ms. Gifford replied it cost her department \$75.00 per death because it is not done in house. She stated euthanizing in house would be a cheaper option but until there is affordable vet care it is not an option. Ms. Gifford stated in order to euthanize in house they would have to operate under a vet's license and the current vet we use is not willing to do that.

Eddie Hickman resident of English Road stated he frequently feeds feral cats that are dumped at his home. Mr. Hickman stated the cost of spay/neuter is one of the problems.

Ms. Gifford stated Monroe County's spay/neuter program is funded by a grant and is specifically for owned pets. Ms. Gifford stated she can only use the funds for what the grant is written for.

Chairman Tapley we have the information, and we have gotten some input.

Commissioner Emami stated he thinks we should look for \$10-\$15,000 dollars to give to animal control and ask them to do the best they can.

SeeClickFix Privacy Policy

Public Information Officer Richard Dumas stated Monroe County utilizes CivicPlus' SeeClickFix software which collects some personal data when citizens utilize their software to notify the county of an issue. CivicPlus has developed a Privacy Policy that describes their policies and procedures on the collection, use and disclosure of our information when we use the SeeClickFix services. Mr. Dumas stated County Attorney Ben Vaughn and IT Director Boyd Elrod have reviewed the Privacy Policy and have approved the policy as to the form.

Mr. Dumas stated the policy needs to be adopted by the Board to meet requirements set by CivicPlus' for us to operate SeeClickFix on our website.

Commissioner Emami motioned to adopt the SeeClickFix Privacy Policy.

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

Public Comments

Nipper Bunn resident of 274 Franklin Drive asked the Board about the landfill and the statement regarding it not paying its way. Mr. Bunn asked why we have a county government and what is the board's idea of what services it's supposed to provide to citizens.

Wanda Donihoo resident of Sapphire Court stated closing the landfill is not a good idea because Monroe County will be like Bibb County and have lots of dump sites.

Commissioner' Comments

Commissioner Lamarcus Davis

Commissioner Davis had no additional comments.

Commissioner Eddie Rowland

Commissioner Rowland had no additional comments.

Commissioner John Ambrose

Commissioner Ambrose ask Bronwen Morgan why it matters where comments are on the agenda.
Commissioner Ambrose stated he appreciates the job everyone is doing and agrees the landfill and recycle centers do not need to be shutdown.

Commissioner George Emami

Commissioner Emami had no additional comments.

Chairman Greg Tapley

Chairman Tapley had no additional comments.

County Attorney Ben Vaughn

Executive Session

There was no executive session.

Action from Executive Session.

There was no executive session therefore no action.

Adjourn

Commissioner Ambrose motioned to adjourn at 12:43 p.m.

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

Respectively Submitted by:

Janet Abbott, County Clerk