

City Hall, Monroe, Louisiana
June 24, 2025
6:00 p.m.

There was a legal and regular session of the City Council of the City of Monroe, Louisiana held on this date at the Council's regular meeting place, the Council Chamber, City Hall Building, Monroe, Louisiana.

The Honorable Chairman Juanita G. Woods, called the meeting to order. She then asked the clerk to call roll.

There were present: Mrs. Ezernack, Ms. Woods, Mr. McFarland, & Mr. Muhammad.

There was absent: Mr. Harvey

Chairman Woods announced that a quorum was present, and that the Invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance would be led by Mayor Ellis or his designee.

The Invocation was led by City Engineer Morgan McCallister.

COMMUNICATIONS & SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

(1.) Mrs. Ezernack thanked everyone for being present at tonight's Council meeting. Noting the presence of young people who would be recognized later in the meeting. She extended her best wishes to Mrs. Stacy Rowell on her retirement, acknowledging her many contributions to the community, the City, and the Council. She noted that Mrs. Rowell will be missed and she looks forward to seeing her again personally. She thanked her for her dedicated service to the City and their constituents.

(2.) Mr. McFarland echoed the sentiments of Mrs. Ezernack, and he said they will very much miss Mrs. Rowell. He thanked her for her service and wished her well. On another note, he said he is hearing a lot about bus stops in his district and that is something he will be trying to address after the Mayor has the State of City. He noted after July 11th he will have a community meeting to discuss some things of what the community most likely will hear in the State of the City address and things concerning better government in the City of Monroe. He said the issue about trash and garbage is still a concern with some of his constituents and he knows the Council will have to move on that probably at the next meeting. He said he feels he has heard enough from his constituents to make a very good decision on the matter. Lastly, he said they still have a few more air conditioners that they will be putting out, but they don't have any extra, and they are trying to get them installed. He thanked Dr. Janet Floyd, Senator Katrina R. Jackson Andrews, Representative Adrian Fisher for helping them put 175 air conditioners in the homes of senior citizens.

(3.) Mr. Muhammad congratulated Mrs. Rowell on reaching retirement, calling it a significant milestone. He shared that the Conflict Resolution Symposium at Henrietta Johnson was a success and announced the establishment of a hotline (318-598-1303) for those needing assistance with conflict mediation. He noted there were many valuable takeaways from the event, and he mentioned Mr. Creekbaum stopped by, and he invited him to share his thoughts on the symposium.

Mr. Brandon Creekbaum, City Attorney, said it was absolute phenomenal experience, and the speaker had wonderful ideas for community engagement. He said he it was a great afternoon getting to hear people who are concerned about solving problems in our community.

On another note, Mr. Muhammad acknowledged Ms. Marie Brown for her 20 years of organizing the Juneteenth celebration and noted the Council's participation in the parade. He thanked all who took part in the event. He also shared that he attended the Miss Louisiana pageant for the first time. Lastly, he expressed excitement that the City has gone a month without a murder, encouraging everyone to continue praying for peace and to stay safe.

(4.) Ms. Woods began by thanking Mrs. Rowell, noting that aside from Mrs. Ezernack, she is likely the longest-serving member on the City Council. She shared that even before joining the Council, she had the opportunity to work with Mrs. Rowell professionally and she was always dedicated, loyal, and above board.

Mrs. Rowell expressed that working for the City has been a rewarding career choice, not just public service. While she previously worked with the school board, she found city government to be the best fit. She shared her appreciation for the opportunity to work with multiple Councils and three Mayors, noting the experience has been interesting and fulfilling. She also thanked everyone for their support and acknowledged her staff present at the Council meeting.

Ms. Woods acknowledged Ms. Johnnie Thomas for her dedicated efforts in helping identify community members in need of air conditioners, noting that social media alone doesn't always reach the intended audience. She also congratulated Pastor Clarence Jackson on his recent retirement, and she recognized Ms. Marie Brown for 20 years of leading the Juneteenth parade, now passed on to Funyanna Saulsberry. Ms. Woods shared highlights from her district's Juneteenth event featuring guest Marion Obafemi, the "Poor People's Poet." She emphasized the importance of community unity in addressing crime and celebrated a month without a murder as a blessing. She also introduced B.A.L.M. (Balanced Approach to Lowering the Murder rate) as a new initiative in Monroe. She concluded by yielding her time to Dr. Gene Tarver for a special presentation.

Mr. Gene Tarver, St. Joseph Assisted Living Center, presented the Council and the City with the first gavel that was use one week and 45 years ago today to launch a new form of government for the City of Monroe. The Home Rule Charter that was adopted by the voters in August of 1979. He said it represented a dramatic change in the face of Monroe City government.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know if Mr. Tarver is the last living of the Commissioners Council.

Mr. Tarver said Judge Milton Moore, who he invited to the meeting, but he is on vacation.

Mr. Muhammad thanked them for their role in crafting and being among the original architects of the City Charter. He noted that their work paved the way for leaders like Mr. Osberry and Mr. Johnson and led to the formation of Council districts that ensured representation for all citizens.

Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad and seconded by Mr. McFarland, and the amended minutes of the Legal and Regular session of June 10, 2025, were approved. (Mrs. Ezernack abstain. She was not present at the last meeting.) (There were no public comments.)

Mr. Muhammad stated several agenda items had him as the motion and the second and he doesn't think that is the proper wording.

Ms. Carolus Riley, Council Clerk, stated that some issues were identified and corrected, but she is unsure what Mr. Muhammad is referring to. However, she noted that any necessary corrections will be made.

PRESENTATIONS: Admin Request to Present Tanko Streetlighting Audit Study:

Mrs. Stacy Rowell, Director of Administration, stated that the City engaged Tanko Lighting about a year ago to evaluate the streetlight system. She noted that the company was hired to conduct an audit of the streetlights, and she introduced Mr. Tulley to present their findings.

Mr. Neil Tulley, Senior Entergy Advisor with Tanko Lighting, presented the results of a recent streetlight outage inspection conducted under an agreement with the City. He emphasized that streetlights are primarily for public safety and noted that the City has about 9,085 Entergy-owned fixtures, with annual lighting costs around \$1.27 million. Nearly half of the fixtures are outdated mercury vapor lights from the 1960s. The inspection revealed approximately 1,455 inoperable lights—16% of the system—yet the City is still billed for 100% of the service, meaning over \$200,000 annually is spent on non-functioning lights. Mr. Tulley recommended organizing meetings with the utility provider to explore solutions and suggested a full daytime audit to align field data with billing records. He concluded by wishing Mrs. Rowell well and thanking her for their collaboration.

Mrs. Ezernack wanted to know would the presentation be shared with the Council via email.

Mrs. Rowell said yes, she can do that.

Ms. Woods thanked Mrs. Rowell for taking the lead on this and getting the information to the Council.

Proposed Condemnation

The following condemnation was considered:

1. 804 Louise Anne Ave (D4) – Owner : Martha Handy c/o Reginald Handy. Notice to show cause was served. Photographic evidence was presented. There was no one present. Upon motion of Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved, the building was condemned, and the property owner given 30 days in which to bring the structure into compliance with the Code or demolish the Structure and clean the lot. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. Tommy James, Code Enforcement Officer, said this is dilapidated structure and it was in court on the 22nd. They are asking that the property be condemned and give the property owner 30 days to bring the structure into compliance.

Mr. McFarland motion to condemn the property giving the owner 30 days to bring the structure up to code or demolish the property.

Ms. Woods said she would really like some attention on the corner of South 24th and Wood Street.

Mr. James said it is on the agenda.

Mr. McFarland said the property on South Second that was being condemned he really need that structure taken down before July 4th if at all possible. He said his big issue is they condemn the property they see signs that it is condemned, and he don't know who dragging their feet. He said he doesn't blame Mr. James because he knows he has to talk to other people but it's problematic. He said it wouldn't be the same on the other end of town with structures that are on their side of town. He said with it being condemn and 30 days it is time to move forward. He thanked him for helping them get the other structures down on South 7th.

Ms. Woods said she has been discussing the issue with Mr. James for the past two months and she is not happy. She noted that someone began tearing the structure down, and constituents have complained about large rats coming from it. She urged immediate action to address the problem, stating she does not want to attend the next meeting with the issue unresolved.

RESOLUTIONS AND MINUTE ENTRIES:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8940 appointing Thelma Merrells to the Monroe Planning Commission.

Ms. Thelma Merrells thanked Mr. Muhammad for the appointment, and she stated she is of the old school thought if you are going to complain about something, do something.

(b) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved to remove from the agenda item (b) adopt a Resolution reappointment of Tegitra Thomas to the Monroe Planning Commission. (There were no public comments.)

(c) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8941 granting an exception to the Open Container Ordinance to City of Monroe (Downtown Independence Day Celebration) pursuant to Monroe City Code Sec. 12-231 D. (Open Container Ordinance) and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(d) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8942 granting an exception to the Open Container Ordinance to City of Monroe (Triangle Park Block Party) pursuant to Monroe City Code Sec. 12-231 D. (Open Container Ordinance) and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Department of Administration:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved to consider an Application by Residence Inn Monroe dba Aimbridge Hospitality, 4960 Millhaven Road, Monroe LA 71203 for a New 2025 Class A Alcoholic Beverage Permit. The Monroe Police Department has no disqualifying records and Sales Tax has been approved. (There were no public comments.)

Department of Planning & Urban Development:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8943 exempting certain Lead Hazard Reduction and Health Homes Grant Projects

from Resolution No. 8783 (requiring specific council authorization for all public work contracts) and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(b) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8944 authorizing a contract with Perspective Building Solutions, LLC for Lead Remediation at 1400 Georgia Street and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(c) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8945 approving the submission of the City of Monroe's fy 2025-2029 Consolidated Plan and fy 2025 Annual Action Plan to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (There were no public comments.)

Mrs. Ellen Hill, Planning and Urban Development, gave a presentation overview of the 5-year Consolidated and the Annual Action Plan. She highlighted the goals they inputted for the next 5 years after working in the community and they had over 500 people participate in meetings that were also virtual. She noted this is the plan for the next 12 months based on the allocation they have gotten.

Ms. Woods stated Mrs. Hill has been an amazing partner to the City and she has brought a lot of money to help people in housing rehabilitation, and she said it doesn't go unnoticed. She thanked her for all she is doing, the successful home expo, and the work she does in the community.

Ms. Hill thanked the Council for their support, and she thanked her staff.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know if Ms. Hill has seen a reduction in federal money.

Ms. Hill said not yet, but CDBG funds is zeroed out.

Mr. Gene Tarver, a board member of the 1900 Club, explained that the nonprofit received tax-exempt status from the IRS about six years ago and focuses on improving neighborhoods by providing recovery support for individuals facing addiction. Mr. Tarver noted they requested \$10,000 in funding, which they believed was the maximum, but also submitted a request for an additional \$13,000. After seeing that other nonprofits were funded above \$10,000 in Mrs. Hill's presentation, he inquired whether the 1900 Club could receive additional funding.

Mrs. Hill stated that new organizations that have never received CDBG funding are limited to \$10,000. She also informed the Council that they have reached the 15% cap allowed for spending on nonprofits.

Department of Public Works:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8946 authorizing the purchase of two 2025 Chevrolet Traverses from State Contract No. 4400023793 for the Transit Division. (There were no public comments.)

(b) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8947 authorizing the purchase of one 2025 Ford F-150 Regular Cab from State Contract No. 4400023793 for the Transit Division. (There were no public comments.)

Engineering Services:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. McFarland, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved to Passover item (a) Resolution authorizing funding commitments and approving general obligations for the Jackson Street Corridor (Route US 165 Business) Enhancement Project and further providing with respect thereto until the July 8, 2025, City Council meeting. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. McFarland said that back in 2021 a Resolution came before the Council with permission to move forward with funding money.

Mr. McCallister said if he is not mistaken the Resolution from 2021 approved the matching funds for that project. He said this project began in 2012 and money was allocated at 95/5 split from DOTD. He said it set on the back burner for quite a while but brought back before Council obviously cost estimates changed and scope changed. He said it was approved and put out for advertising by DOTD. The bids came back nearly double the cost estimate. He said the Council

rejected those bids that was the right thing to do. He said they revamped the plans, and they have a cost estimate that could be found in the back of the new dollar allocation of 4.5 million. He said he cost estimate in 2021 and when they went out to advertise was 3 million. He said the reason they want to move forward with this project DOTD took note of the value engineering efforts that the City put forth and they understood they did what they could, and they found some additional funds. He said DOTD is upping their allocation from 2.5 million to 3.7 million. He noted the City match is going to be increased from \$479,000.00 to \$777,000.00. He further noted it is paid for from the City's 1% sales tax.

Mr. McFarland thanked Mr. McCallister for providing the history on a project that has been on the shelf for thirteen years. He acknowledged the project originated under Mayor Mayo's administration and appreciated the fact the DOTD want to give a little bit more in order to get this project moving. He said the specifications of the beginning point of this work and the ending of it he cannot find in the documents. With that being said, the Council need more written clarity on this project. He made a substitute motion the Council Passover this item until the next meeting.

Mr. McCallister wanted to know if the Council received the email he sent this past Friday which included the information that Councilman McFarland is requesting now.

Mrs. Ezernack noted yes, she did.

Mr. McCallister noted it was in an email, and he follows up ever Monday before Council meeting to answer any questions the Council may have.

Mr. McFarland stated when he looks at certain things and specification of where a project will begin and end Mr. McCallister will learn he is far from being a fool. He said between now and the next Council meeting the Council will have more clarity in writing on this project.

Mr. Muhammad second the motion to Passover until the next Council meeting on July 8th.

Mrs. Ezernack wanted to know what does this do to the whole project do the Council loss out because they didn't act tonight or is there a timeline associated with it.

Mr. McCallister stated that while he wouldn't say the project is at risk of losing funding, it has experienced delays. He noted a document is ready for his signature, pending Council approval, and advertising for the project has been postponed. Although he doesn't believe the funding is in immediate danger, he expressed disappointment in the continued delays but understands the situation. He will continue to share previously provided information with Council members and is available to answer any questions. He added the project spans approximately 1.25 miles along Jackson Street—from Jackson and DeSiard to Plum and Jackson—and includes sidewalks on both sides, crosswalks near the hospital, ADA-compliant push-button countdown signals, and about 200 pedestrian lights similar to those on DeSiard Street.

Mr. McFarland reiterated this project has been sitting on the shelf for 13 years. He said he is asking for 14 days to make sure his constituents are not hoodwinked on a fast move.

Mrs. Ezernack noted it is Mr. McFarland's responsibility to read his email.

(Mrs. Ezernack leaves City Council meeting at 7:29 pm)

Mr. McFarland said nobody likes to be questioned about anything. He said they want this Council to be a rubber stamp Council and it's not going to be that. He said the constituents elected them and they will be accountable.

INTRODUCTION OF RESOLUTIONS & ORDINANCES:

(a) Upon motion of Muhammad, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved to remove from the agenda item (a) Introduce an Ordinance adopting the authorized Millage Rate(s) and providing for the Levying of Special and General Taxes for the City of Monroe for the year 2025 and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. Muhammad stated the millage rates aren't changing.

Mrs. Stacy Rowell noted that 2024 was a reassessment year and, as of now, there is no change.

Mr. Muhammad asked when the Council would be able to make changes. He specifically mentioned recreation facilities, noting that the recreation millage rates have remained the same for decades.

Mrs. Rowell stated that if the Council is open to the discussion, the administration would be willing to assist. She emphasized the deadline is July 31st and recommended starting the conversation by December at the latest. She noted that increasing the millage would require an election, so planning needs to begin soon.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if there is any way the Council can change any of this.

Mrs. Rowell explained that the only millages the Council can change without an election are the general fund or general alimony millages; however, there is a different process required for a roll forward. She said the Council can pull this tonight and do a reintroduction as a roll forward.

Mr. Muhammad said he would want to see what the numbers would generate to see some improvements.

Mrs. Rowell said they would gain about \$29,000 this year.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know if that is without an election.

Mrs. Rowell said right.

Mr. McFarland stated that it is not much at all, and they had that conversation when they were dealing with the budget. He wanted to know if there is anything they can adjust from one category to another.

Mrs. Rowell said no sir.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know the layover time.

Ms. Riley noted no less than 30, no more than 60 days to layover.

Mr. Muhammad withdrew his motion in order for the Council to have a conversation about this item.

Mr. McFarland stated that with the withdrawal of Mr. Muhammad's motion, he also withdrew his second.

(After further discussion, the Council made a unanimous decision to remove item (a) from the agenda in order to find other options for increases.)

Citizen's Participation:

(1.) Coach Mr. Charles Smith, 1900 Hickey Street, said every year they have a summer track program with kids from all over nation. He said they travel a lot and when it comes to expenses it is an economic hardship on them. He said they are before the Council for a help and hand not a handout with some of their expenses.

(2.) Coach DeeDee Massey, Founder of Massey Mircale Run, shared that she currently have 64 young athletes from across the nation. Among them are two standout athletes, Mr. Dylan Hall and Mr. Royal West, both of whom hold national records and are currently ranked number one in the United States. She emphasized that while these two athletes are exceptional, many other outstanding young competitors are also preparing for the Olympics. She is seeking assistance from the Council to help fund the athletes' participation in both the Olympic Games and national competitions. She assured the Council that any support provided will be returned in 2026.

(3.) Mr. Michael Caster stated the kids win every year and Coach DeeDee keep kids off the street, and she teaches them about structure. He said they have to help her and when you take about fighting crime she been fighting it. Lastly, he said he put articles in the paper about the recreation centers, and the Council is trying to do something about it. He said let's get our neighborhoods right, get our people right, and support them.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if there is anything the Council's internal Audit Mrs. Yolanda Washington can do to help.

Mrs. Washington stated she can let them know by tomorrow.

(4.) Ms. Peggy Jones, 3312 Jackson Street, stated she is the owner of 127 Egan Street, and the Council gave her 30 days to get a burned roof repaired that she didn't burn. She said she works in the evening, and she took off so she can be her to night to address the Council. She wanted to know what is the Council's plan to help her because she can't get nothing done in 30 days. She said she has someone coming to give her a bid on it, but she needs more than 30 days.

Mr. McFarland stated before he got on the Council an Ordinance was in place. He said the code is the code and this didn't happen overnight. He said before Mr. James brings anything to the Council it has went through the correct process and the Council have to start somewhere to clean up the city. He noted she needs to speak with code enforcement.

Ms. Woods noted if Mrs. Jones is making some progress she doesn't think they will tear it down.

Mr. McFarland noted Mr. James bends over backwards to help all their constituents, and he tells them exactly what they need to do to get the process stopped or slowed down. He noted he has been a fair helping citizens in their districts, but they have to talk to him. He said once it gets to the Council they either vote it up or down.

(5.) Ms. Alice Gordon, 3911 Wiley Street, stated on Saturday, June 21st around 12:20 AM a man tried to break into her home. She said the ADT alarm sounded but it never alerted her the door had been opened. She said she is thankful to the Monroe Police Department for their quick work making an arrest. She said after alerting her neighbors it was reported to her that at 4007 Harvey Street a halfway house has been placed in the neighborhood, and if the Council was aware.

The Council responded they were not.

Ms. Woods wanted to clarify when putting those type of facilities in a neighborhood does it have to come before the Council.

Mr. Creekbaum explained that the term "halfway house" is often used broadly, but there are many types of group living homes with different classifications. He said it's important to know who is living in the home to determine if it is permitted in that area. He noted that some of these homes come before the Council while others do not, depending on their specific use. He added that Planning & Zoning can investigate and verify what activities are occurring at a location to ensure compliance with the City's zoning ordinances.

(6.) Mr. Tyrone Dickson, K-9, said what he think Ms. Gordan is referring to is a sober living home. Lastly, he wanted to know if the City would be able to accommodate them with the stage for an event on August 30th. He said he invites everyone out to his events no matter what race they are.

There being no further business to come before the council, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 8:10 p.m.

Ms. Juanita G. Woods
Chairman

Ms. Carolus S. Riley
Council Clerk

Ms. Ileana Murray
Staff Secretary

For extended details on the council meeting please call the Council Clerk Monday-Friday at 318-329-2252 to schedule an appointment to listen to the minute recording.