

City Hall, Monroe, Louisiana  
July 8, 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: Mr. Harvey, Mrs. Ezernack, Ms. Woods, Mr. McFarland, & Mr. Muhammad.

There was absent: None.

Before moving to the next item on the agenda, Ms. Woods thanked everyone for the opportunity to serve as Chair for the last year, and she said it has truly been an experience. She thanked everyone who poured into the city to make it great. She said they had some good and bad times, but at the end of the day, she thinks they disagreed to agree. She believes they all are here for one purpose, and that is to move the City of Monroe forward.

ELECT CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE COMING YEAR 2025/26:

Upon a motion by Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack to nominate Mr. Rodney McFarland I for Chairman; Voting in favor: Mr. Harvey, Mrs. Ezernack, Ms. Woods, Mr. McFarland, and Mr. Muhammad to elect Mr. Rodney McFarland I for Chairman, 2025-2026. (There were no other nominations on the floor.)

Mr. McFarland thanked the Council members for electing him as the new Chairman. He said he prays and hopes they can continue to work together to move the city forward and take it to another level. He also thanked the Council for having confidence in him to serve as Chair.

Upon a motion by Ms. Woods, seconded by Mr. McFarland to nominate Mr. Verbon Muhammad for Vice-Chairman; Voting in favor: Mr. Harvey, Mrs. Ezernack, Ms. Woods, Mr. McFarland, and Mr. Muhammad to elect Mr. Verbon Muhammad for the Vice-Chairman, 2025-2026. (There were no other nominations on the floor.)

Chairman McFarland announced that a quorum was present, and that the Invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance would be led by Mr. Harvey or his designee.

The Invocation was led by City Engineer Morgan McCallister.

COMMUNICATIONS & SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

(1.) Mr. Harvey had no announcements.

(2.) Mrs. Ezernack welcomed everyone this evening and thanked Mr. McCallister for the invocation. She expressed her heartfelt wishes and prayers for peace for those who have lost everything, describing the tragedy in Texas as one that has unfolded and continues to unfold.

(3.) Ms. Woods gave a special apology to Mr. James, stating she thinks they had a misunderstanding at the last meeting. She said she was fairly upset about a property that was in her community. She said she thinks Mr. James truly misunderstood her intentions on that, and it was never intended for Mr. James to go out and manually clean up. She noted Mr. James is truly a trooper and an excellent code enforcement person, and he has been supportive of her the whole time she has been on the Council. She further noted if she has done anything to hurt his feelings and make him feel unworthy, she apologizes publicly. Next, she announced the grand opening of the senior room at Powell Community Center on July 15th at noon. She said she is inviting everyone to come out to see and appreciate and feel appreciated by the City of Monroe. She noted they will have light refreshments, and she thanked Assistant Chief of Police Mary Tellis, Sgt. Stephanie Williams of the Monroe Police Department, and Mayor Ellis for putting this in the community. She announced Summer Fun Days an empowerment sessions for teens next week on July 14th and 15th from 5 pm until 8 pm, ages 3-18, sponsored by Senator Katrina Jackson Andrews, Hampco, Ross Law Firm, Zion Travel Baptist, and herself. On another note, she said there is a new ice cream parlor in Pecanland Mall called Artem's, and they say if you thought you

liked Blue Bell, just wait until you taste them. Lastly, she acknowledged Dr. Justin Hoggard and his lovely wife Mrs. Laurie Hoggard and she asked Mr. Hoggard to say a few words.

Mr. Hoggard thanked the City for the opportunity and said the community has been incredibly gracious. He noted that people have been warm and welcoming, and although there are challenges, they are here to serve, which means taking the good and the bad, facing challenges head-on. He said he and his wife feel very fortunate to be arriving in Monroe at a time when the area he serves as Chancellor is booming. He noted that Northeast Louisiana has some unprecedented growth opportunities, and they hope to lead the college through these opportunities, bringing them to the citizens and serve the community well.

(4.) Mr. Muhammad thanked everyone for attending and urged the community to stay united while the City Council works together with the Administration to move the city forward. He expressed confidence in Mr. McFarland and encouraged others to do the same. He announced that the Southern Classic will close Friday due to poor working conditions and will be rebuilt, reopening in a few months. He announced the grand opening for the senior room at Harvey Benoit next Tuesday at 11:00 am. He also shared that AT&T will install fiber to improve high-speed internet, especially in South Monroe, and thanked the Mayor and Administration for their efforts. He said the meet and greet will be Thursday at Harvey Benoit at 10:30 am. Finally, he noted it has been 45 days without a murder in the city, which he called a blessing, despite some incidents on July 4th, and encouraged Monroe to keep it going.

(5.) Mayor Ellis shared updates on several city projects, including the ribbon cuttings for the Louisiana Purchase Garden and Zoo Street Mural and the Downtown Monroe Street Mural, noting Monroe now has the longest and largest street mural in Louisiana. He also announced the opening of the Monroe Business Hub, which brings multiple city services under one roof and may soon include a drive-thru for bill payments. He spoke about his recent trip to Washington, D.C., with the Southern Rail Commission to advance the Amtrak I-20 rail project, supported by \$10 million from the State DOTD to help build stations in Monroe, Ruston, and Shreveport. He emphasized this project is moving forward thanks to support from Speaker of the House Mike Johnson. He also highlighted Monroe becoming the first city in Louisiana to form a public-private partnership with AT&T to address the digital divide, with groundbreaking for new broadband service. He invited the public to the in-person State of the City address on July 11th at the Jack Howard Theater to learn about past progress and future plans. Lastly, he said that local fire departments including Monroe, Ouachita Parish, Ruston, and West Monroe will help with search and rescue efforts in Texas, asking for prayers for their safety. He closed by congratulating Chairman McFarland, Vice-Chairman Muhammad, and thanking Ms. Woods for her leadership over the past year.

(6.) Mr. McFarland stated to the former Chair, outstanding job, and he appreciated her so much for how she steered the ship. He thanked her for putting her confidence in him to work beside her these past twelve months. He said everyone has a different leadership style and they need to respect everybody's leadership style, and they all have one common cause, and that is to make this city better. He said that is what he plans on doing the next 12 months as Chairman of this Council to help navigate this ship and take them to another level. He said he wants each Council person to understand he has an open-door policy, and if they ever need to talk to him about anything, feel free to call him. He said he prays and hopes that over the next 12 months they can hold hands and work together. He said he prays and hopes he and Mayor Ellis can have conversations, and as Chair he pledges that when he calls, if he doesn't answer right away, he will text to let him know he will call him back, and he would hope he would do the same. He said he wants them to have a harmonious working relationship these next 12 months and see what they can do to make Monroe a better place. On another note, he thanked everyone for being here tonight, and he said there are rules to be followed, and when the Council calls for public comments, understand all comments need to come out then because they will not be able to return to the podium. He said at citizens' participation they will have three minutes, and once the bell sounds they should go back to their seat. He said they will have an orderly meeting, and they will set protocol and stick to protocol.

Upon motion of Ms. Woods and seconded by Mr. Muhammad and the amended minutes of the Legal and Regular session of June 24, 2025, were approved. (Mr. Harvey abstain. She was not present at the last meeting.) (There were no public comments.)

Proposed Condemnation

The following condemnation was considered:

1. 105 Morton St. (D5) – Owner: Estate of Lillie Roberson c/o Louvna Robinson. Notice to show cause was served. Photographic evidence was presented. There was no one present. Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. Harvey 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, stated this is a dilapidated structure and there were multiple inoperable vehicles, but they moved a few of them. They are asking that the property be condemned giving the owner 30 days.

Mr. Muhammad motion to condemn the property giving the owner 30days.

Department of Public Works:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8948 authorizing a Mowing and Litter Maintenance Agreement with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development for July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026. (There were no public comments.)

Mrs. Ezernack wanted to know if this is the same agreement that the City had, as far as the funding and number of locations.

Mr. Brandon Creekbaum, City Attorney, explained that it is the same annual agreement as before, with the same funding levels and the same number of times they will be mowing.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know if the Administration has considered expanding its mowing.

Mr. Creekbaum stated this is something State law allows a municipality to perform on behalf of the State's request. He said if there are desired areas to mow that is a discussion that the City could have with the State if they are willing to extend this agreement. He said this has been historically been used to maintain highway and interstate right of ways at specific locations.

Engineering Services:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8949 funding commitments and approving general obligations for the Jackson Street Corridor (Route US 165 Business) Enhancement Project and further providing with respect thereto.

Ms. Teresa Casey, 502 Cole Avenue, said last meeting the Council didn't vote to go ahead with this project. She said Jackson Street is the middle of the city and they need the sidewalks and lighting to make the area all it can be for the citizens of Monroe. She asked that the Council passed this project so they can get the heart of the City and Jackson Street to the level it need to be.

(b) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8950 authorizing a Traffic Signal Maintenance Agreement with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026. (There were no public comments.)

Mrs. Ezernack wanted to know if this is similar to the same agreement the City had for years.

Mr. Creekbaum said that it is correct.

(c) Upon motion of Ms. Woods, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Resolution No. 8951 accepting as substantially complete work done by Mechanical Systems and Services for the HVAC & Electrical Improvements (various city locations) Project and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

INTRODUCTION OF RESOLUTIONS & ORDINANCES:

(a) Upon motion of Mrs. Ezernack, seconded by Mr. Harvey and failed to 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.) (Ms. Woods nay, Mr. McFarland nay, and Mr. Muhammad nay)

Mr. Muhammad stated the Council passed over this item in hopes that they would roll the general alimony forward to its max, but it seemed like that didn't take place. He said Mrs. Rowell stated the Council could roll forward without violating anything, but now it seems they can't.

Mr. Creekbaum said he spoke to Ms. Rowell the last day she was here, and she confirmed that the deadline to submit the millage rates to the assessor's office is July 31st, and therefore they did not have time to do the proper notice to do a roll forward. He said they can roll forward in a subsequent year, but the timing would push them well into August before they would be able to accomplish a roll forward.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know when did Mrs. Rowell get this information.

Mr. Creekbaum said he spoke with Mrs. Rowell on June 30<sup>th</sup>, but didn't go into a great discussion on the matter.

Mr. Muhammad said they are missing out on a million dollars

Ms. Woods wanted to know the ramifications if the Council doesn't make the July 31<sup>st</sup> deadline.

Mr. Creekbaum noted he is not a tax assessor or a millage implementer, but it's his understanding the millage deadline is for the tax assessor to properly apply the millages in order to send out the tax bills, which is an administrative deadlines.

Ms. Woods wanted to know if the taxes are due at the end of the year.

Mr. Creekbaum said that he doesn't know.

Mrs. Ezernack said she thinks they also have to send it to the State once these are processed because they so-called close the books.

Mr. Creekbaum noted that it is beyond his purview.

Ms. Woods wanted to know if these are renewable annually.

Mr. Creekbaum said yes, this is something the Council does every single year.

Ms. Woods said they were talking about it once having a sunset and if they don't meet that full potential before that time is up, they lose their right to do that.

Mr. Creekbaum stated that Mrs. Rowell explained it at the last meeting, but it is his understanding that there is a period of time in between reassessments that period is usually four years. And that if you don't roll forward at some point in that four year period, you lose the ability to roll forward on that assessment going into the next reassessment. As long as you roll forward within that reassessment period, you protect your right to reassess and to roll forward in the future.

Ms. Woods wanted to know if they are still within that timeframe. She wanted to know if the Council doesn't do it this year can they do it next year.

Mr. Creekbaum stated that is what he believed Ms. Rowell said at the last meeting.

Ms. Woods said with the roll forward do they recall the amount of money they would save.

Mr. Creekbaum said there's about eight different millages that are assessed and some of those have the ability to roll forward because you're not already at the maximum millage. He said which ones of those he can't tell the Council right now.

Mr. Muhammad said he met with Mrs. Rowell the next day after the Council meeting, and she said Recreation could roll forward to \$29,000 and there was room for the general fund to roll forward. He said it would generate a million dollars, and that's why the Council passed over this item to bring it back with the new roll forward without having an election. He said he doesn't know what happened, and if that was the case, they should have voted on it at the last meeting if it was going to be brought back the same. He wanted to know if Mr. Dan has any knowledge on the matter.

Mr. Dan Richards, Budget Officer, noted he was never involved in the rollover process.

Mr. Muhammad wanted to know if Mrs. Rowell told Mr. Richards what they was trying to do. He said he doesn't know who is functioning in her capacity with her being gone. He said she is gone

so there's a gap and he wanted to know who's dealing with the finances. He said the Council asked that the millage roll forward and it's not on there.

Mr. Richards said he can't answer what occurred in the last two weeks and he just knows what is on the agenda tonight.

Mrs. Ezernack wanted to know what would the requirements for advertising and so forth. She wanted to know if they know what those requirements are at this particular time.

Mr. Creekbaum said he thinks that there is an added delay, some additional for publication requirements, and a public hearing requirement. He said a roll forward in essence does increase the amount of property taxes and individual would pay. He said without pulling up the statute and trying to go through each of them he could not identify every specific requirement.

Mrs. Ezernack wanted to know could Mr. Creekbaum get that information to the Council for them to be prepared next year.

Mr. McFarland noted he thought Mr. Creekbaum knew the intent of the majority of the Council at the last meeting. He said the Council were looking for a roll forward because they need the additional funds to operate the city. He noted he was under the impression that before Stacey left that she was going to leave the plan and pass it on to Mr. Richards in order for it to ready tonight. He said to their disappointing discovery it's the same suit worn over again and he is not happy with it because it seems like they just ignored what the Council was looking for. He said she said to them that there will be additional money and now they have nothing.

Ms. Woods wanted to clarify if they are really and truly talking about the difference of a million dollars.

Mr. Richards stated the roll forward wouldn't create a million dollars, but he can provide those figures to the Council that the assessor gave them of what the increase in the collections would be. He said the difference between the general alimony they are not at the maximum rate, and they are only at 10.18 and it should be 12.335. He noted the rollover doesn't increase the millage to 12.35 he said he think the rollover would only increase it to like 10.4 or 10.3 and that's the additional revenue that's created.

Mr. Muhammad said he understands Mr. Richards wasn't involved, so they can't speculate, but he needs actual facts. He added that he called Mr. Creekbaum, who mentioned someone was supposed to receive a second call from Mrs. Rowell, but he can't support it.

Ms. Woods motion to either remove or Passover this item.

Mr. Muhammad stated he is not going to be force to vote on something because of a deadline.

Mr. Creekbaum stated he put this item back on the agenda with the understanding after speaking with Mrs. Rowell that there was a deadline and it wouldn't comport with the roll forward. He said if the Council would like him to bring it back as a roll forward he has no problem.

Mr. McFarland said he thinks the Council need to vote this item up or down, then they will bring back with the roll forward because that is exactly what they asked for at the last Council meeting. He said what they will have to understand from this day forward is to listen well to the majority of the Council about what they are expecting to be on the agenda.

Vote: Mr. Harvey aye, Mrs. Ezernack aye, Ms. Woods nay, Mr. McFarland nay & Mr. Muhammad nay

(b) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved to Introduce an Ordinance declaring certain movable property as surplus and authorizing its sale through an online public auction conducted by 32 auctions and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(c) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved to Introduce an Ordinance authorizing the City of Monroe to take corporeal possession of and sell to Alvin McClain and Natasha McClain, all rights, title, and interest that the city may have acquired to Lot 21, Sq. 52, Ouachita Cotton Mills 2<sup>nd</sup> Addition, Ouachita Parish, 1301 Florida St., Monroe,

La, by adjudication at tax sale dated July 31, 2003, and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(d) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved to Introduce an Ordinance authorizing the City of Monroe to take corporeal possession of and sell to Kimareanna L. Ross, all rights, title, and interest that the city may have acquired to the lot in Lot 11 Stubbs Bayou Addition, beg 211.11 ft no of Grammont St. & frtg 40 ft on east side alley, depth 107. 48 ft., Ouachita Parish, (no situs) S 21<sup>st</sup> St. Monroe, La, by adjudication at tax sale dated June 18, 2010, and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Citizen's Participation:

(1.) Mrs. Peggy Jones, of 3312 Jackson Street, thanked Mr. Tommy James for his helpful information shared. She said she is still renovating her house on Egan Street, which has been gutted and is awaiting two more roofing bids. She requested an appointment to speak with the Mayor and also thanked Mr. McFarland for his open door policy, asking for his phone number

Mr. McFarland noted his name is 318-512-042.

(2.) Mr. Robert E. Johnson, 2608 Cooley Street, expressed concern about being accused by the City Attorney of causing confusion in departments, clarifying that someone did steal a weed eater, and while that person got a two-week suspension, he received 45 days even though he had permission. He acknowledged the Council makes important decisions affecting city employees and they are doing a good job. He concluded by noting his time was short but that he could return another day to share more.

(3.) Mr. Curtis Garth, 2300 Georgia Street, stated that in the past he reported crimes to the Council, including mismanagement of funds, fraud, theft, and an attempted murder against him by victim affairs. He said the Council had agreed to investigate these matters, and he is now asking for an update on the status of those investigations.

Mr. McFarland stated he cannot give Mr. Garth an answer because he has no knowledge of it.

(4.) Ms. Dixie Smith, 3800 Lee Avenue, said she is here because of the low hanging trees in her area. She said she would like to know who is responsible for taking care of the low hanging branches.

Mr. Muhammad said it depends on where the trees are located and if it is on City property.

Mr. McFarland asked Mr. Tolliver if he can look it the matter for the Council.

Lastly, Ms. Smith said it is embarrassing to see all the trash down her street and broken down cars in people front yards.

With no objection from the Council, Mr. Muhammad recognized Police Juror Lonnie Hudson and Mr. Kevin Cosby.

Mr. McFarland thanked his members from Greater Free Church that came out to support him on tonight.

There being no further business to come before the council, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 7:16 p.m.

Mr. Rodney McFarland I  
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.