

City Hall, Monroe, Louisiana
October 28, 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 Rodney McFarland I, called the meeting to order. He then asked the clerk to call roll.

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

There was absent: None

Chairman McFarland announced that a quorum was present, and that the Invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance would be led by Ms. Woods or her designee.

The Invocation was led by Rev. John L. Russell, II Senior Pastor, Greater New Antioch Baptist Church.

Rules of the Day: The Chairman welcomed everyone to the City Council meeting and outlined the rules: speakers on action items must use the podium to the right, have three minutes, and cannot return once finished. Citizens on the participation list may speak on any topic respectfully and orderly. Comments on agenda items must be germane to that item.

PRESENTATION: THE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER OF OUACHITA PARISH: Ms. Christine Oliveaux thanked the Council for the opportunity to speak and for wearing purple in recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. She shared that she is a survivor and works with The Wellspring, describing it as an organization with many branches that provide various services through the Family Justice Center. These include safety planning, housing referrals, counseling, legal assistance, healthcare, and on-site law enforcement. She noted their offices serve multiple parishes and acknowledged her coworker, Ms. Shayla Kennedy, High-Risk Coordinator. Ms. Oliveaux discussed the High-Risk Assessment program for law enforcement and expressed concern about the lack of response from the Monroe Police Department, urging their greater involvement. She emphasized the importance of full law enforcement participation in domestic violence cases, stating that increased collaboration could help save lives.

Mr. McFarland thanked Ms. Oliveaux for her presentation and for raising awareness about issues affecting communities nationwide. He asked the Mayor to assist with obtaining reports and expressed that, in light of the recent triple homicide, unity across all races is essential to reducing crime. He also thanked everyone who wore purple and the Council staff for reaching out to Ms. Oliveaux on the Council's behalf.

Mr. Muhammad stated that domestic violence is a serious issue affecting the community day and night. He thanked Ms. Oliveaux for her courage and dedication in advocating for victims of domestic violence. He assured her that the Council will do all they can to support these efforts and will work to ensure greater involvement from the Monroe Police Department. He added that Ms. Oliveaux can reach out to the Council for any assistance she may need.

Mr. Harvey thanked Ms. Oliveaux for her advocacy and for sharing her story. He reflected on the importance of recognizing warning signs of domestic violence, noting that friends and loved ones serve as the first line of defense and must have the courage to speak up when they see something wrong.

Mrs. Ezernack thanked Ms. Oliveaux for the presentation and bringing things they know back to their attention.

Ms. Woods echoed the sentiments of the Council, and she said it takes a lot to share her story, but the Council appreciates it. She said she is sure we all know someone suffering in silence.

Mayor Ellis shared that his family's adopted daughter became a ward of the state due to domestic violence and that healing from such trauma takes years of love and care. He noted that recent

incidents serve as a reminder of the ongoing work that needs to be done. He thanked Ms. Oliveaux for highlighting areas where the City can improve and assured her of the City's support in these efforts.

Ms. Carolus Riley, Council Clerk, thanked Ms. Oliveaux for coming to the meeting.

Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. Harvey, the minutes of the Legal and Regular Session of October 14, 2025, were unanimously approved. (Mr. Harvey abstain. He was not presented at the last meeting.)

PROPOSED CONDEMNATIONS:

1. 2309 Short Washington St. (D3) – Owner: Dexter Warren Jackson & Ophelia Straughter. Photographic evidence was presented. There was no one present. Upon motion of Ms. Woods, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved, the building was condemned, and the property owner given 30 days to bring the structure into compliance with the Code or demolish the Structure. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. Tommy James, Code Enforcement Officer, said this is open dilapidated structure and there has been no contact with the property owner. They are asking that the property be given 30 days to bring it into compliance.

Ms. Woods said this is such a lovely home in the community and it is a shame it has gone by the wayside. She motion to condemn the property giving the owner 30 days to bring it up to code or tear the structure down.

RESOLUTIONS AND MINUTE ENTRIES:

Department of Administration:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mr. McFarland and unanimously approved Resolution No. 9024 rejecting the bid for the Texas Ave LS Sewer Force Main Repairs Project. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. McFarland said the Council will hear from the City Engineer. The Council have accepting on the resolution but the recommendation from the City Engineer is to reject, and they would like it on record why it should be voted down.

Mr. Morgan McCallister, City Engineer, said it is recommended to the Council that the bid be rejected because it is 71% over the original cost estimate which was submitted to the Council.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know the amount the bid came in for and the estimate for this project

Mr. McCallister said over 1.7 million and the estimate was 1 million. He said the original estimates were around \$800,000.

Mr. McFarland said this is the second meeting they are coming back to reject the bid and they rejected the bid with Thomas Ave and Georgia Street project because it was over. Now they are rejecting this one because of the same. He said they are hearing a lot in the community that things will be much higher do to meta and contactors are going there and in order to get something down here we will need to pay a high price and wanted to know if there are any facts in that.

Mr. McCallister said yes, he would assume they will see higher prices but no reason to see double the price.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know what is the limit the City will go over before recommending to the Council to reject it.

Mr. McCallister stated that while DOTD standards are not always followed, they serve as a good guideline. Projects exceeding 10% over budget require written justification. He noted that nearly double bids are unacceptable and irresponsible, and any bid without proper justification should be reviewed. In his nearly four years with the City, only two previous bids have been rejected, and he believes better bids will be obtained.

Mr. McFarland stated he is not questioning Mr. McCallister's expertise but believes the public should be given detailed reasons for a bid rejection and emphasized the importance of transparency.

Mr. McCallister noted that there remains a question as to why the resolution was changed from his recommended rejection to acceptance.

Mr. McFarland stated that it is his prerogative.

Mr. Harvey offered a substitute motion to adopt the resolution rejecting the bid for cause of insufficient funds available to complete the project.

(b) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved Resolution No. 9025 authorizing the City of Monroe to enter into a contract with CorPay for fuel management system upgrades. (There were no public comments.)

Department of Planning & Urban Development:

(a) Upon motion of Ms. Woods, seconded by Mr. Muhammad and unanimously approved Resolution No. 9026 authorizing the City of Monroe to apply for and accept funding through the National League of Cities' Southern Cities Economic Inclusion Initiative. (There were no public comments.)

(b) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Ms. Woods and unanimously approved Resolution No. 9027 authorizing the City of Monroe to apply for and accept funding through the cities for Financial Empowerment Fund. (There were no public comments.)

Department of Public Works:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved Resolution No. 9028 adopting the Monroe Transit System Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Police Department:

(a) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Ms. Woods and unanimously approved Resolution No. 9029 accepting a Louisiana Highway Safety Commission fiscal year 2026 Traffic Safety Enforcement Grant (\$51,600.00.) (There were no public comments.)

RESOLUTIONS AND ORDINANCES FOR SECOND READING AND FINAL ADOPTION AND SUBJECT TO PUBLIC HEARING:

The Chairman Open the Hearing and seeing no one come forward the Hearing was closed.

(a) Upon motion of Ms. Woods, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved Ordinance No. 12,275 revoking a 15' wide by 300' long alley between Orange Street and Apple Street and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

Mr. Brandon Creekbaum, City Attorney, explained that the 15-foot-wide alley will be divided, giving each adjacent property owner 7.5 feet added to the rear of their property.

The Chairman Open the Hearing and seeing no one come forward the Hearing was closed.

(b) Upon motion of Mr. Muhammad, seconded by Mr. Harvey and unanimously approved Ordinance No.12,276 amending Sections 37-36 (Table 3:2; Residential Use Bulk and Yard Regulations), Section 37-37 (Table 3:4' Commercial Use Bulk and Yard Regulations) of the Monroe City Code and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

(c) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Ms. Woods and unanimously approved to remove an Ordinance approving a Lease Agreement between the City of Monroe and DaveAir, LLC at Monroe Regional Airport and further providing with respect thereto. (There were no public comments.)

The Chairman Open the Hearing:

(d) Upon motion of Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mrs. Ezernack and unanimously approved Ordinance No. 12,277 amending Sections 37-21 (Definitions), 37-36 (Table 3:1; Residential Use Districts) Section 37-37 (Table 3:3; Commercial Use Districts), and Section 37-92 (Use Standards) of the Monroe City Code to establish sober living homes and further providing with respect thereto.

Mr. Harvey said he received a lot of feedback from across the city and looks for people who have done something well and tries to replicate. He said the City doesn't currently have clear language in the code for sober living or recovery residences. He said the ordinance adds definitions and reasonable guardrails to protect neighborhoods and stay in compliance with federal housing law, aiming to bring structure and accountability to something that already exists in the community.

Mr. Roy Baas, 322 Latham Lane, referenced the case Oxford Houses vs. City of Baton Rouge, where federal courts ruled that denying a permit for a sober living house violated the Fair Housing Act (FHA). He quoted sections from the FHA related to zoning and land use requirements and noted that, as written, the ordinance would require all family homes in the City of Monroe to be at least 650 feet apart.

Ms. Shawn Eves of Ruston, LA, 1917 Stubbs Avenue, stated she is dually licensed in addiction and mental health and owns New Vision LLC. With 15 years in the field, she clarified she is not a sober living owner and has nothing to gain personally. She said she places people in recovery and advocates for them daily, noting they face constant stigma. She initially thought the ordinance seemed protective but, upon further review, saw how it could unintentionally harm both the City and those protected under the Fair Housing Act. She emphasized that sober living is not the problem and should not be blamed for homelessness, which she described as a broader systemic issue. She said they are not asking for no rules just a pause for professional to reword somethings.

Mr. McFarland wanted to know if he can give a time limit for constituents speaking during a Public Hearing.

Mr. Creekbaum said if rules are communicated in advance on an individual topic the Chairman is allowed to limit the amount the time.

Ms. Erin Norred of Ruston, LA, stated she operates three sober living homes in Monroe. She emphasized that sober living is vital and shared how it has personally helped her.

Mr. Jimmy LeBleu, 2502 Lexington Avenue, said he hopes the testimonies will encourage the Council to make a favorable decision. He noted that many people struggle with alcoholism and drug addiction and shared that, in his experience, sober living homes helped him reconnect with society and build healthy, goal-oriented friendships

Ms. Samantha Christenson of West Monroe expressed concern that good sober living homes could be put out of business. She asked if the ordinance could be tabled to allow professionals and sober living homeowners to work together on one that meets everyone's needs. While she said she understands the intent, she believes the current wording is problematic and harmful. She added that sober living played a crucial role in helping her establish her life.

Mr. Joe McLean, 326 Auburn Avenue, said he lives at the Auburn House and has been clean for two years thanks to the sober living home. Originally from Brooklyn, NY, he said he doesn't want to return home and now has his first job at age 58. He shared that he has battled crack addiction since 1987 and spent much of his life in prison but has found peace in Monroe. He said he understands the need for rules but urged the Council not to make things so difficult that homes are forced to close. He suggested forming a committee to find common ground and explore better solutions.

Mr. Brandon Milley of West Monroe said he has no issue with sober living but wanted to highlight a related concern. He explained that one of his tenants in the Garden District felt unsafe after realizing she lived near several men's halfway houses. She reported men roaming day and night, loud noise, thefts from her porch, and people entering her home without knocking. Mr. Milley said something needs to be done to ensure residents in the area feel safe.

Mr. Jonathan Frye, 912 Riverside Drive, stated that residents of sober living homes are not allowed to be idle and are all productive members of the community, with even those on disability required to do community service. He expressed sympathy for the concerns mentioned earlier but noted that while some individuals may not appreciate or deserve the opportunity, they work to maintain control. He said treatment centers across the state continue to send people to Monroe because sober living provides essential stability, such as housing and access to basic needs. He added that they are blessed to have Monroe, and Monroe is blessed to have them.

Ms. Regine Woods, 200 N. McGuire, explained that many sober living residents walk because they must, as public transportation is not free and some come with nothing, not even an ID. She noted that there are several sober living homes in Monroe because it is the only place in Louisiana where they feel accepted by the community. She said she currently attends ULM, an opportunity made possible through sober living, and without it, she would be back on the streets. She urged the Council to reconsider passing the ordinance, saying it is not supportive of the Fair Housing Act.

Mr. Bryan Rucker, owner of 1600 University Avenue, stated he is in favor of the ordinance but believes some adjustments are needed. He suggested that input should come from professionals and long-time sober living home operators in the area.

Pastor Robert Bradford, 2323 Whitney Drive, said he has 20 years of experience in drug counseling and asked what the City can do to help Monroe, given the large number of people on the streets. He emphasized that his goal is to do something positive.

Mr. Creekbaum said many of the concerns were shared and that sober living is not a permanent use within the City zoning code. Currently, sober living exists under a reasonable accommodation through the Fair Housing Act. The City's ordinance allows no more than four unrelated adults to live in a home, but the Fair Housing Act allows sober living homes to function as a family unit. The proposed ordinance will establish sober living houses as a permitted use, removing the need to operate under special accommodations. He said the structure is designed to protect some occupants and help operators flourish, and there is nothing in the ordinance that would require any sober living home to shut down.

Mr. Harvey stated that the ordinance is not intended to close sober living homes but aims to protect the community and support responsible operators. He added that it was drafted based on feedback from local operators and examples from other cities.

Seeing no one else come forward the Chairman closed the Hearing.

Ms. Eves said they all are on board, and she has talked to Mr. Harvey about it, and they just want a pause to look at some restriction and try to make it a better ordinance for everyone.

Mr. Bryan Rucker, 1600 University Avenue, agreed with Ms. Eves.

Mrs. Ezernack said the Council get calls and her intent is to protect the people in the sober living home as well as the people in the neighborhood. She said it sounds like the ordinance needs some tweaking however it start, and they can come back and make changes as they go.

Mr. Harvey said he committed if somebody brings a change something they have learned from this process he'll make that change but this came through a lot of collaboration and even the next version is not going to be something that will satisfy everyone.

Mayor Ellis acknowledged the emotional impact of the testimonies and the difficult day in Monroe. He reflected on the tragic loss of a child and expressed understanding of the community's experiences. He emphasized that the Council never intended harm to residents of sober living homes, thanked everyone for speaking up, and asked for grace toward the Council. He encouraged continued engagement, affirming that their voices matter equally in the community.

Mr. Muhammad thanked those involved in sober living and recovery, noting that many in South Monroe turn to abandoned buildings due to lack of options. He acknowledged input from sober living homeowners, stated the need for rules, and explained that the closure of a halfway house has led to more sober living homes. He referenced the Ordinance to clarify the Council's intent to establish guidelines for these homes.

Ms. Woods thanked everyone, saying their voices were heard. She expressed a heavy heart, noting the positive impact of sober living homes, including saving her brother's life. She acknowledged concerns about safety and emphasized the need for structure, assuring that existing sober living homes will be grandfathered in and remain open.

Mr. Creekbaum said under the current ordinance, there is a period of one year to become compliant with the bulk provisions of the ordinance and a requirement to immediately comply with the

occupancy limits. He said everyone that is in operation today will not be subjected to the distance requirement and it will only be applicable to new homes after this ordinance is effective.

Ms. Woods stated that many people support the ordinance, and she supports Mr. Harvey, but she believes there should be more conversation on the matter.

Mr. McFarland said he said he agrees and they have to understand they have nothing in place, and they are trying to put something in place. He said he will be supporting Mr. Harvey on this and he has committed if they have to make changes he has no issue with that and when there are no rules there no order. He said he is not against sober living, but he is for rules and regulations, and he supports Mr. Harvey motion.

COMMUNICATIONS & SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. Mr. Harvey said it's good to be back and clarified that, despite what a local news station reports, he is not a judge or anything, he is still their Councilman.

2. Mrs. Ezernack had no announcements.

3. Ms. Woods noted that Pastor Mike Byrd, Civic Center Director, lost his mother and asked everyone to keep him and his family in prayer. She said her heart is broken about what happened at 2:30 this morning, that nobody deserves what happened, and asked to keep the Simpson and Bosley families in prayer during these trying times. She gave a special thank you to Mr. Tommy James, Mr. Louis Tolliver, and Ms. Gospel, noting that 3 district is looking a lot better. She also announced her community cleanup on Saturday, November 1, 2025, with a primary focus on White Street, and shared that starting Tuesday, November 4, meditation and aerobics will be held every Tuesday from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the Powell Community Center, and everyone is welcome.

4. Mr. Muhammad thanked Ms. Ellen Hill and her team for hosting the successful Paint Monroe event. He then expressed deep concern over the recent triple homicide involving a two-year-old, saying he was at a loss for words. He urged the Chief of Police to act quickly to bring those responsible to justice, emphasizing that the senseless violence must stop as they continue promoting a positive image for the community

5. Mr. McFarland echoed the Council's sentiments, expressing sorrow over the today's tragedy after a positive Saturday. He extended prayers to the Simpson and Bosley families, noting that one family is using his funeral services, which makes it especially heartbreaking to bury a two-year-old child. He called it a sad day for Monroe, saying there is too much evil in the world. McFarland urged that law enforcement keep the Council informed during such incidents, as they serve the citizens and need timely updates. He added that while everyone in government may not get what they want, they must focus on doing what is best.

6. Mayor Friday Ellis expressed his disappointment over today's tragedy and urged the community not to take matters into their own hands. He stated that the Monroe Police Department has been greatly impacted by the event and will ensure that justice is served.

Citizen's Participation:

1. Ms. Britnei Blunt suggested creating a local ordinance to ban or criminalize the use of masks or ski masks by State and Federal officers while working in an official capacity in the City of Monroe. She expressed concern after CNN reported 24 cases of people impersonating ICE officers and over 170 U.S. citizens being wrongfully detained by ICE.

Mr. McFarland stated that Ms. Blunt could see the Council Clerk after the meeting to obtain his contact information if she wished to discuss the matter further.

2. Mr. Curtis S. Garth, 2300 Georgia Street, came to express ongoing concerns about a City tree that fell on his home.

3. Mr. Herman Jones offered prayers to the grieving families and Mr. Ike Byrd. He announced that his Monroe MLK project, "I Have a Dream," will be held at the Jack Howard Theater from January 7-13, with date changes due to the Mayor's January event. He noted he previously did not fully explain the tourism aspect of his project and thanked the Council for their encouragement in supporting this long-term development.

Mr. McFarland noted for Mr. Jones to communicate with all the Council members. He stated that the next Council meeting will be on November 10th due to the Veteran's Holiday on November 11th. He said today is also the last Council meeting with Ms. Murray, who has decided to have a career change, and the Council wished her well. He thanked her for what she has done with the Council and for them since he has been on the Council, saying she will be missed and wished her God speed.

Mrs. Ezernack thanked Ms. Murray for all she has done to help the Council and the community. She said the Council will miss her and wished her the best in her new career opportunity, expressing confidence that she will do well.

Ms. Woods expressed her thanks, saying Ms. Murray has been an inspiration and a great help.

Mr. Muhammad thanked Ms. Murray for all she has done and encouraged her to follow her heart.

Mr. Harvey added, "Don't be a stranger, see you soon."

There being no further business to come before the council, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 8:15 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.