

Liberty County, FL

Liberty County Board of County Commissioners - Regular Monthly Meeting

Minutes

Thursday, September 4, 2025 at 6:00 pm

Zoom Link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81739681314?pwd=vzyFGYt4TuqCnjQpvJDvCbBsDdBCKT.1>

1. Call to Order

Minutes:

- Chairman Dewayne Branch called the regular meeting to order in person and via zoom at 6:00 P.M. Present at the meeting were Commissioners Hannah Causseaux, Jim Johnson, Doyle Brown, Derrick Arnold, County Attorney Ken Hosford, Clerk Jace Ford and Deputy Clerk Kaly Barfield.

2. Invocation

3. Pledge of Allegiance

4. Awards and Recognitions

Minutes:

- There were no awards and recognitions.

5. Audience Concerns

Minutes:

- Mr. Ford addressed the Board regarding engineering and grant writing services. He emphasized Liberty County is a priority for his firm, noting 6 of 11 employees live in the county. Over the past five years, they submitted nearly \$200 million in grant applications, securing \$37,276,775 (about \$7M annually) for transportation, parks, resilience, and compliance projects. Mr. Ford affirmed his office's commitment to securing funding, encouraged communication if concerns arise, and reiterated that Liberty County remains their top priority.

COUNTY DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Monthly Department Briefing

- Brian Eddins – Fire Control Coordinator
 - Not in attendance.
- Marie Arick – Extension Director
 - Marie Arick followed up on advertising for Shelly King's position, noting that Ms. King will be retiring. The Board granted permission to proceed with advertising. Ms. Arick also informed the Board of an upcoming 4-H Wild Game Dinner.
- Tommy Duggar Jr – Recreation Director
 - Tommy Duggar Jr. asked the Board about the easement he previously requested. County

Attorney Ken Hosford advised that the county could not grant the easement because the land is under lease, and the lessor would need to provide direction.

- Melissa Peddie – Ambulance Director
 - No business.
- Cole Maloy – Solid Waste Director
 - Cole Maloy announced that his employee, Perry, successfully took and passed his CDL exam.
- Boo Bryant – Road and Bridge Superintendent
 - No business.
- Monica Welles – Transit Director
 - Not in attendance.
- Katie Kellett – Housing Director
 - It was noted that Katie was not in attendance. Clerk Ford announced that the Building Department has been moved to the Elections Office. Kathy Brown has been assisting at the Building Department in the meantime.
- Ben Guthrie – Emergency Management Director
 - Not in attendance.
- County Engineer - Dewberry
 - It was announced that the CDBG-DR grant will include a public comment period due at the end of the month. The grant is tied to storm and tornado recovery from last year. Commissioner Johnson asked what percentage Dewberry receives for grants. Commissioner Brown raised questions about the survey conducted in Hosford, noting that a tree and fence are located in the right-of-way.

6. Motion to Amend Agenda

Minutes:

- A motion was made to amend the agenda to add Change Order #13 to Item #24 and to pull Items #12 and #16 from the consent agenda made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion Carried.

7. Adoption of the Agenda

Minutes:

- Adoption of the agenda made by Commissioner Causseaux, seconded by Johnson. Motion Carried.

8. Motion to approve consent items

Minutes:

- Motion to approve consent items made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion Carried.

CONSENT ITEMS

9. Approve previous month's board minutes

10. Approve Clerk to pay the bills

11. Letters of Support

12. **Human Resource Management**
13. **Next month meeting schedule**
14. **CR 12 EXP Change Order**
15. **Excessive Force Policy**
16. **Citizen Complaint Policy**

INDIVIDUAL ACTION ITEMS

17. EMS - Football games

Minutes:

- Clerk Jace Ford reported several upcoming retirements, including Shelly King, Allison Malloy, and Pat Alfonso, and noted the County is working with department heads to fill those positions. He also discussed reevaluating the Building Department structure to provide additional support for Ms. Katie. Clerk Ford recommended relocating the Grants Coordinator position to his office for closer oversight, noting the role's importance in managing large financial transactions. He stated that no budget changes were needed and asked for the Board's approval to make this adjustment. Motion to approve the resignation of Allison Malloy and hire of Kathy Brown, part time made by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Commissioner Johnson. Motion Carried.
- Clerk Jace Ford reported that, after review with County Attorney Ken Hosford, two policies were required for grant eligibility: an Excessive Force Policy and a Citizen Complaint Policy. Mr. Hosford had no issues with the Excessive Force Policy but expressed concern with certain language in the Citizen Complaint Policy. He planned to review and adjust the wording to ensure compliance while addressing the concern. County Attorney Ken Hosford discussed concerns with the proposed Citizen Complaint Policy, explaining that the language appeared to restrict verbal public comments to the Board. He emphasized that citizens have a constitutional right under the First Amendment to address their government and petition for redress. He cautioned that requiring only written complaints could expose the County to legal risk under federal law. Mr. Hosford recommended adopting the policy subject to clarification or amendment, specifying that it should not be interpreted to limit citizens' rights to speak verbally at properly noticed public meetings. Motion to approve citizen complaint policy, contingent on modifications by Mr. Hosford, made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion Carried.
- The Board discussed providing EMS coverage at home Liberty County High School football games. The proposal included paying \$1,200 for an additional ambulance and off-duty personnel, with the School Board contributing an equal amount. A motion was requested to approve the County's \$1,200 contribution for EMS services. Commissioner Jim Johnson stated he was not opposed to the EMS funding but expressed concern about the County's limited budget. Commissioner Branch clarified that the EMS cost was \$400 per game, or \$200 per person. He explained that during the first home game, both ambulances were called out before the game began—one for a child with a broken arm and another for a separate incident requiring assistance from Calhoun County. He

emphasized that the additional staffed ambulance would ensure coverage remains available at the field during such emergencies. Reassess the arrangement next year, with the hope that the School Board would assume full responsibility for future costs. It was agreed that the \$1,200 expense was a small price to ensure safety during games and that the County's contribution would apply only to this season. Motion to approve \$1200 for EMS at football games made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Commissioner Brown opposed. Motion carried.

18. Transit Resolution and Letter of Support

Minutes:

- Innovative Service Development Grant through the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged. The grant totaled \$219,619, requiring a 10% local match of \$21,961, which would be covered through the fuel tax credit in the existing budget. Approximately \$97,000 would be reimbursed from the Commission. It was explained that the purpose of the grant was to reduce transportation reservation times, improving local transit efficiency. While not an on-demand service like Uber or Lyft, the program would allow next-day local trips instead of the current 72-hour wait, benefiting county residents. Motion to approve the transit resolution 2025-27 and transit letter of support made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Causseaux. Motion Carried.

19. RIF Resolution

Minutes:

- Clerk Jace Ford reported on the EMS building project, noting that despite multiple budget reductions, the project remained short on funding and lacked contingency dollars. He met with Office Solutions, Architect Doug Schuler, EMS staff, and Commissioner Branch to review options. He explained that the County was submitting a Rural Infrastructure Fund (RIF) grant application to request additional funding needed to complete the facility. The application required a Board resolution for submission. Motion to approve resolution 2025-28 made by Commissioner Causseaux, seconded by Commissioner Johnson. Motion Carried.

20. Liberty County Library - Grant agreement and Certification

Minutes:

- Motion to approve Library grant agreement and certification made by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion Carried.

21. Liberty County - Rock Bluff Contract

Minutes:

- Clerk Jace Ford reported that the Rock Bluff Community Center project had been fully engineered and adjusted to meet budget limits. The contractor revised the agreement to address issues identified by County Attorney Ken Hosford, and the final contract was ready for execution. Motion to approve Rock Bluff contract made by Commissioner Arnold, seconded by Commissioner Brown. Motion carried.

22. Tobacco Policy

Minutes:

- Clerk Jace Ford presented two new policies for Board consideration: a Tobacco Use Policy and a Dress Code Policy. He explained that both were developed at the request of commissioners, using sample policies from other counties and refined through meetings with department heads. The policies were reviewed line by line, revised based on staff input, and finalized to address concerns regarding tobacco use on county property and in county vehicles, as well as appropriate dress standards for county employees. Motion to approve the tobacco policy and dress code policy made by Commissioner Arnold, seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion carried.

23. Dress Code

Minutes:

- Motion to approve the tobacco policy and dress code policy made by Commissioner Arnold, seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion carried.

24. Culpepper - Jail Change Orders

Minutes:

- Brock Gholston discussed Change Order No. 12, which included adding a pad for activities and sheriff-specific work, repurposing existing space, reducing the perimeter fence from 12 feet to 8 feet (a cost savings), adding a second recreation yard fence with razor wire, and installing bollards around the tank chiller. These items would be funded from the \$3 million allocation already secured. He also discussed Change Order No. 13, which provided a 56-day time extension for work related to the monument sign, building channel letters, programs/trustee remodel, fencing changes, and the lift station. He noted that contingency funds would cover general condition costs, ensuring no increase to the overall project budget. Motion to approve change order 11, 12 and 13 made by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Commissioner Johnson. Motion Carried.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

25. Dewayne Branch, Chairman - District 1

Minutes:

- Commissioner Branch discussed ongoing efforts to dredge the Apalachicola River to restore navigation and address erosion issues. He noted upcoming meetings with Fran Davis and Phil Clayton of Tri-Rivers and said the project, led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, would include rebuilding upland areas using dredged material. He added that erosion at Steverson Landing had been officially recognized and that local leaders were working together to support the project, which could bring environmental and economic benefits.

26. Hannah Causseaux, Commissioner - District 2

Minutes:

- No business.

27. Jim Johnson, Commissioner - District 3

Minutes:

- Commissioner Jim Johnson discussed sand buildup and navigation hazards along the Apalachicola River, including dangerous submerged stumps and rocks near Ammonia Lake. He supported dredging to restore water flow and safety, noting the removed sand could be reused for concrete. He recommended holding a workshop to keep the Board updated on the project's progress.

28. Doyle Brown, Vice Chairman - District 4

Minutes:

- No business.

29. Derrick Arnold, Commissioner - District 5

Minutes:

- No business.

30. Ken Hosford, County Attorney

Minutes:

- County Attorney Ken Hosford apologized for being without a cellphone since Tuesday morning due to damage. He explained that the phone was being repaired and was expected to be ready by the following day. He apologized for any missed calls or delayed communications during this time.

31. Dusty Arnold, Liberty County Sheriff

Minutes:

- Sheriff Dusty Arnold reported that the County would house approximately 84 ICE detainees at the new jail facility under a permanent housing agreement pending final signatures. He noted that detainees with legal standing to remain in the U.S. would be held locally, while others would be deported within about 72 hours. He expressed concern about potential protests once operations begin, emphasizing that peaceful demonstrations are protected but that safety measures will be in place to prevent disturbances. Sheriff Arnold also acknowledged Clerk Ford's efforts to seek state funding for ambulance and emergency services in fiscally constrained counties, voicing his full support. He mentioned that detainee intake could begin around November 12 and suggested the County consider leasing the old jail facility to the state as a potential revenue source.

32. Jace Ford, Liberty County Clerk of Court and Clerk to the Board

Minutes:

- Clerk Jace Ford reminded the Board that the Legislative Delegation Meeting is scheduled for November 7 at 10:00 a.m., likely to be held in Liberty County. He suggested holding a county planning workshop beforehand to establish legislative priorities and discuss future use of facilities such as the current jail and

EMS building once new projects are complete. He emphasized the importance of developing a clear plan for county facilities and exploring funding opportunities for renovations or revenue generation. Clerk Ford also noted efforts to seek state funding for EMS services and encouraged Board support and participation during the upcoming legislative session in Tallahassee.

33. Motion to Adjourn

Minutes:

- Motion to adjourn made by Commissioner Arnold, seconded by Commissioner Brown. Motion Carried.

34. Signature

Florida Statute 125.001 requires that due public notice be given of all regular meetings of the Board of County Commissioners of a County in the State of Florida. Florida Statute 286.0105 requires that notices of any meeting or hearing, if a meeting or hearing is required, must include the following language, "if a person decides to appeal any decision made by the board, agency or commission with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearing he will need a record of the proceedings, and that, for such purpose, he may need to insure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based."