Liberty County, FL

Liberty County Board of County Commissioners - Regular Meeting

Minutes

Thursday, April 9, 2026 at 6:00 pm

ZOOM LINK AND CALL IN NUMBER

Topic: Liberty County BOCC - Regular Meeting
Time: Apr 9, 2026 06:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)
Join Zoom Meeting
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85717010701?pwd=05gtuVw9KJEbtdj4eoICCtx2yf8yC7.1

Meeting ID: 857 1701 0701
Passcode: 426338

One tap mobile
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+19292056099,,85717010701#,,,,*426338# US (New York)

1. **Call to Order**

   Minutes:
   - Chairman Branch called the meeting to order in person and through Zoom at 6:00 EST. Present at the meeting are Chairman Branch, Vice Chairman Brown, Commissioner Causseauex, Commissioner Johnson, Commissioner Arnold, Clerk Ford, and Deputy Clerk DeLoach.

2. **Invocation**

   Minutes:
   - County Attorney Ken Hosford gave the invocation.

3. **Pledge of Allegiance**

   Minutes:
   - Mr. Smith led the Pledge of Allegiance

4. **Awards and Recognitions**
5. **Audience Concerns**

   Minutes:
   - Mr. Quentin Eastbird with the Apalachee Regional Planning Council (ARPC) introduced new staff member Stella Kearns, who will assist with growth management and land use services for the County, and provided an update on the regional Safe Streets for All Safety Action Plan, a grant-funded project

through the U.S. Department of Transportation aimed at reducing roadway injuries and fatalities, noting upcoming committee formation, public engagement opportunities, and future funding eligibility tied to the plan.

COUNTY DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Monthly Department Briefing

- Brian Eddins – Fire Control Coordinator
  - Not in attendance
- Marie Arick – Extension Director
  - No business.
- Deanna Bryant – Recreation Director
  - No business.
- Melissa Peddie – Ambulance Director
  - No business.
- Cole Maloy – Solid Waste Director
  - Hazardous waste day had 101 people show up, which was a great turnout. Cole gave a shout-out to boo for stepping in and helping.
- Boo Bryant – Road and Bridge Superintendent
  - No business.
- Monica Welles – Transit Director
  - Recently went to the ROADeo, and their driver got the highest test score in the state, and he is qualified to go back next year.
- Tera Hinson - SHIP Director
  - Everything is on track with all the SHIP projects.
- Ben Guthrie – Emergency Management Director
  - The County remains under a burn ban due to continued dry, windy conditions, above-normal temperatures, and little to no rain in the forecast, and recommends maintaining the burn ban until significant rainfall improves water levels.
- Kaly Barfield – Grants and Special Projects Coordinator
  - Ribbon cutting for Rock Bluff Community Center will be on May 1st.
- Kaly Barfield - Building Department
  - The fee schedule was revised and reduced with added detail, staff have been working to improve and streamline processes, and requested the Board amend the agenda to include Resolution 2026-15.
- Dewberry - County Engineer
  - No business.

6. Motion to Amend Agenda

Minutes:

- Item 14, Rock Bluff Rental Agreement, to be moved from consent items to action items.
  - Clerk Ford presented the Rock Bluff Rental Agreement to the Board. The Board discussed the rental agreement for the Rock Bluff Community Center, including aligning it with the Veterans Civic Center agreement,

setting an appropriate daily rental fee, and eliminating the use of a cleaning company due to cost concerns, ultimately agreeing on a proposed rate of $100 per day with a $100 deposit to be forfeited if the facility is not left in proper condition.
    - Motion made to approve the agreement made by Commissioner Causseaux and seconded by Commissioner Johnson. Motion carried.
- Resolution 2026-15 Building Department Fee Schedule to be added.
    - Clerk Ford presented Resolution 2026-15 regarding the updated fee schedule, noting a comprehensive review and revision of fees based on operational efficiency, feedback from contractors and citizens, and comparisons with neighboring counties, with the intent to pass cost savings on to residents while creating a clearer, fair, and consistent structure, acknowledging the schedule may require future adjustments as a living document.
    - Motion to approve the new fee schedule made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Brown. Motion carried.
- Motion to amend the agenda by Commissioner Causseaux, seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion carried.

7. **Adoption of the Agenda**

Minutes:

- Motion to adopt the agenda by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Brown. 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. **Motion to Approve Board Minutes**
10. **Motion for the Clerk to Pay the Bills**
11. **Letters of Support**
12. **Human Resource Management**
13. **Next Month Meeting Schedule**
14. **Jace Ford - Rock Bluff Rental Agreement**
15. **Jace Ford - EMS CDBG-DR Amendment**
16. **Career Source Chipola - Donnie Read Reappointment**
17. **Resolution 2026-08 - BR #7**
18. **Resolution 2026-09 - Sidewalk Refurbishment**
19. **Resolution 2026-10 - Authorization of Pass-Through Funds / Cash Advance**
20. **Resolution 2026-11 - CR 379 Mary Branch Bridge Repair**

21. **Resolution 2026-13 - SCOP CR 379**

ACTION ITEMS

22. **Monica Welles - Bid Opening**

Minutes:

- Monica reported that bids were opened for the project at the designated time, with one bid received from Oliver Sperry Renovations in the amount of $344,549, which falls within the approved $500,000 budget. It was noted that this was the third time the project had been advertised, including outreach to neighboring counties, after prior attempts resulted in either no bids or only one bid that required adjustment to encourage participation. Monica confirmed the project consists of a substantial renovation of the existing structure, essentially taking it down to the framework with the exception of restrooms, and acknowledged that rising material costs since the project's initial planning in 2022 have impacted pricing, but the current bid still allows the County to move forward and accomplish the project as intended.
- Motion to approve Oliver Ferry renovation at $344,549 was made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Causseaux. Motion carried.

23. **Rachel Bryant - Review of Fee Scheudle**

Minutes:

- Mrs. Rachel Bryant presented proposed updates to the FY 25–26 fee schedule, noting that new Level Two FDLE fingerprinting and background screening services will be offered in-house to generate additional revenue, with fees set at $100 without a photo and $125 with a photo. It was further explained that provider form fees were increased to account for additional time required during patient visits.
- A motion to approve the new fee schedule was made by Commissioner Brown and seconded by Commissioner Causseaux. Motion carried.

24. **Rachel Bryant - Story Walk**

Minutes:

- Mrs. Rachel Bryant presented a proposal for a Story Walk at Veterans Park, explaining it would consist of a series of book pages displayed along a walking path to allow visitors to read a story progressively. She advised that the Health Department would purchase materials and handle ongoing maintenance and seasonal story changes, and requested Board approval, along with assistance from the County, to install approximately eight posts.
- Motion to approve the story walk and the county's help with installation made by Commissioner Brown and seconded by Commissioner Causseaux. Motion carried.

25. **Mike Stewart - EDC Update**

Minutes:

- Mr. Mike Stewart provided a comprehensive update on the Economic Development Council, identifying committee members and noting that the group has been meeting regularly while working with Opportunity Florida to develop a strategic plan. He stated that outdated elements of the comprehensive plan and land development code were identified as primary barriers to growth, and outlined efforts to promote Liberty County through site selection meetings, Rural County Days at the Capitol, and ongoing networking with developers and state leaders. Mr. Stewart also discussed coordination with regional and state partners on initiatives such as Opportunity Zone 2.0 designations, the Strategic Site Inventory process to identify potential industrial sites, and meetings with state officials regarding funding for a comprehensive plan rewrite and the Lowry Chip Mill property. He further reported on discussions with railroad representatives regarding infrastructure conditions and potential future improvements tied to economic growth. Mr. Stewart concluded by emphasizing that the Council's role is to attract and present opportunities, while the Board of County Commissioners retains final authority on whether to approve any proposed developments.
- No motion necessary.

26. Resolution 2026-12 - Acknowledging Sheriff Grant Funding and Spending Authority

Minutes:

- Ms. Elizabeth, Grants Manager for the Sheriff's Office, presented Resolution 2026-12 for spending authority for several awarded grants, including the LEAP Grant in the amount of $405,492.66, the JAG Grant at $48,598, a Patrol Vehicle Grant totaling $143,000, a FIBERS Grant for $206,280, a Local Firearms Grant for $41,102, State Residual Funds in the amount of $200,000, an FSA Grant for deputy vests totaling $7,500, and a Guardian Grant request for a $130,000 cash advance. She confirmed the total funding amount and addressed Board questions regarding discrepancies in the listed grants prior to consideration of approval.
- Motion to approve Resolution 2026-12 made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion carried.

27. Contract Renewal - Southeastern Consulting Engineers

Minutes:

- County staff presented three agenda items regarding contract renewals for CEI and engineering services, noting the existing agreements included optional one-year extensions following the initial three-year term. Discussion was held regarding whether to exercise the final one-year extensions or pursue new proposals, with concerns raised about roadway quality and the role of CEI in inspection and compliance. Following discussion, the Board elected to proceed with the one-year extensions and approved renewals for Southeastern Consulting Engineers, EXP U.S. Services for CEI services, and Dewberry Engineering, each by separate motions, seconds, and unanimous vote.
- Motion to approve Southeastern Consulting Engineers as a contractor made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Causseaux. Motion carried.

28. Contract Renewal - EXP US Services

Minutes:

- County staff presented three agenda items regarding contract renewals for CEI and engineering services, noting the existing agreements included optional one-year extensions following the initial three-year term. Discussion was held regarding whether to exercise the final one-year extensions or pursue new proposals, with concerns raised about roadway quality and the role of CEI in inspection and compliance. Following discussion, the Board elected to proceed with the one-year extensions and approved renewals for Southeastern Consulting Engineers, EXP U.S. Services for CEI services, and Dewberry Engineering, each by separate motions, seconds, and unanimous vote.
- Motion to approve EXP US Services as a contractor made by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Commissioner Johnson. Motion carried.

29. Contract Renewal - Dewberry Engineering

Minutes:

- County staff presented three agenda items regarding contract renewals for CEI and engineering services, noting the existing agreements included optional one-year extensions following the initial three-year term. Discussion was held regarding whether to exercise the final one-year extensions or pursue new proposals, with concerns raised about roadway quality and the role of CEI in inspection and compliance. Following discussion, the Board elected to proceed with the one-year extensions and approved renewals for Southeastern Consulting Engineers, EXP U.S. Services for CEI services, and Dewberry Engineering, each by separate motions, seconds, and unanimous vote.
- Motion to approve Dewberry Engineering as a contractor made by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Commissioner Johnson. Motion carried.

30. Culpepper - Change Order 23

Minutes:

- Clerk Ford presented Change Order No. 23 for the jail project with Culpepper, explaining it was part of the reconciliation process related to the previously approved EPO agreement to capture sales tax savings on materials. The change order, in the amount of $52,104.31, reflects the return of additional sales tax savings to the contract price following final review of vendor invoices and project costs.
- Motion to approve Change Order 23 made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion carried.

Public Hearing

BOCC to close regular BOCC meeting and open public hearing regarding proposed ordinance.

31. Ordinance 2026-02 - Fire Tax

Minutes:

- No public comments were made.

Close Public Hearing

Board to close public hearing and reopen regular BOCC meeting.

32. Ordinance 2026-02 - Fire Tax

Minutes:

- Motion to approve Ordinance 2026-02 made by Commissioner Johnson, and seconded by Commissioner Causseaux.
- Commissioner Brown opposed the Ordinance, suggesting that the board could manage the fire department without a fire tax, which he feels complicates budgeting for the County Administrator. He expressed a wish for the ordinance to be discontinued.
- Motion carried.

Public Hearing

BOCC to close regular BOCC meeting and open public hearing regarding proposed ordinance.

33. Ordinance 2026-03 - School Zone Enforcement

Minutes:

- County Attorney Ken Hosford called on anyone from the public to come speak about Ordinance 2026-03.
- No public comments were made.

Close Public Hearing

Board to close public hearing and reopen regular BOCC meeting.

34. Ordinance 2026-03 - School Zone Enforcement

Minutes:

- Motion to approve Ordinance 2026-03 by Commissioner Causseaux and seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Commissioner Johnson Opposes. Motion carried.

35. Altumint - Final Contract

Minutes:

- Clerk Ford presented the final contract with Ultimate for installation and operation of school zone cameras, noting that the Board needed to select a payment option outlined in the agreement. It was explained that Option Two, which includes a $20 fee per paid citation collected by the company, was recommended based on projected traffic data and financial considerations, with the ability to convert to another option after the first year.
- A motion to approve the final Altumint contract under option two was made by Commissioner Brown and seconded by Commissioner Causseaux.

Commissioner Johnson opposes. Motion carried.

Public Hearing

BOCC to close regular BOCC meeting and open public hearing regarding Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Citizen Advisory Task Force.

36. FY 2025 CDBG Small Cities Grant

Minutes:

- Mr. Justin Ford with Dewberry opened the public hearing by outlining requirements for applying for the upcoming Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), noting the shortened application timeline and the need to complete two public hearings prior to the May 5 deadline. He explained the four eligible program categories—economic development, commercial revitalization, housing, and neighborhood revitalization—and advised that the Citizens Advisory Task Force recommended applying under the neighborhood revitalization category. Mr. Ford further detailed funding considerations, including the typical $750,000 cap (temporarily waived), eligibility requirements tied to low- to moderate-income areas, and potential project options such as road paving or improvements to the local boat ramp, emphasizing that only one primary project could realistically be pursued. Board discussion followed regarding potential project selection, with members weighing previously identified road projects against completing additional phases of the boat ramp project, including concerns about funding limits, eligibility constraints, and ongoing grant timelines. During public comment, Mr. Mike Stewart spoke in support of prioritizing the boat ramp project, citing safety concerns and the need for improved local facilities. Mr. Ford concluded by requesting Board direction and a formal motion to proceed with the selected project under the neighborhood revitalization category.

Close Public Hearing

Board to close public hearing and reopen regular BOCC meeting.

37. FY 2025 CDBG Small Cities Grant

Minutes:

- Motion to apply for funds for finishing the boat ramp project made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Brown. Commissioner Arnold and Chairman Branch both opposed. Motion carried.

38. Boykin Road

Minutes:

- Chairman Branch opened discussion on the Boykin Road agenda item, stating the purpose was for the Board to review a newly prepared survey and legal description and determine whether it accurately reflected the Board's intent from

the prior meeting. He explained that, based on earlier direction, the revised survey maintained the existing length and width of Boykin Road but removed the turnaround at the end, noting that prior discussion had been extensive and somewhat unclear, prompting the need to revisit the item for confirmation before proceeding further. During the discussion, the County Attorney Ken Hosford outlined requirements under the Florida Fire Prevention Code, explaining that any dead-end road exceeding 150 feet must include an approved turnaround for emergency vehicles, and advised that failure to maintain such a turnaround could create liability for the County. Options discussed included abandoning the entire road, abandoning a portion while securing an easement for a new turnaround, or redesigning the turnaround area to meet code requirements. Property owner input was also received regarding potential locations and constraints for a turnaround, including space limitations and fencing. Board members discussed practical concerns related to road maintenance, safety, and existing conditions, including comparisons to other county roads without formal turnarounds. After further deliberation, rather than taking immediate action on abandonment, the Board directed Dewberry to return to the site, meet with the property owners, and revise the survey to identify a feasible solution for a compliant turnaround location.

- Motion to abandon all of Boykin Road made by Commissioner Arnold. Motion dies for lack of support.
- A motion to proceed with additional coordination and survey revisions was made by Commissioner Brown and seconded by Commissioner Johnson. Chairman Branch and Commissioner Arnold both oppose this motion. Motion carried.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

39. Dewayne Branch, Chairman - District 1

Minutes:

- No business.

40. Hannah Causseaux, Commissioner - District 2

Minutes:

- No business.

41. Jim Johnson, Commissioner - District 3

Minutes:

- No business.

42. Doyle Brown, Vice Chairman - District 4

Minutes:

- No business.

43. Derrick Arnold, Commissioner - District 5

Minutes:

- No business.

44. Ken Hosford, County Attorney

Minutes:

- Mr. Ken Hosford referenced an editorial from the Florida Times-Union regarding kratom, encouraging the Board to review the article for additional context on the issue. He noted that the piece, written by a rehabilitation facility CEO, highlighted concerns about increasing addiction rates associated with kratom, stating that treatment admissions are approaching levels comparable to substances such as heroin and cocaine, and suggested the article supports the rationale behind the proposed ordinance.

45. Dusty Arnold, Liberty County Sheriff

Minutes:

- Sheriff Arnold advised the Board that Gulf County had recently contacted his office and intends to adopt a similar kratom ordinance, noting that Franklin County is also moving in that direction. He expressed appreciation for the Board's ongoing support of the Sheriff's Office, acknowledging that while there may be occasional disagreements, the working relationship and support have been exceptional.

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

Minutes:

- Clerk Jace Ford informed the Board that it was recently discovered the County owns a portion of the roadway leading into the Georgia-Pacific facility, based on prior agreements and documentation dating back to around 2000 related to grant funding for roadway improvements. He explained that Georgia-Pacific has requested permission to construct a third travel lane to improve traffic flow and safety for both logging trucks and employees, and noted that staff is continuing to research the matter but wanted to bring it to the Board's attention for direction before proceeding further. Discussion included background on the original land conveyance, with the understanding that the County may need to grant an easement if the project moves forward.
- Clerk Ford also advised the Board of a vacancy on the Library Advisory Committee due to a member accepting employment with the library, Mrs. Fran Davis, and requested a replacement appointment.
- Additionally, he relayed a request from the City of Bristol to consider reducing the speed limit near the high school from 45 mph to 35 mph, and to potentially schedule a workshop to discuss fire tax allocation.

47. Motion to Adjourn

Minutes:

- Motion to adjourn made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion carried and meeting adjourned.

48. 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."

Contact: Jace Ford (jford@libertyclerk.com (850) 643-2215) | Minutes published on 05/12/2026, adopted on 04/10/2026