

Liberty County, FL

Liberty County Board of County Commissioners - Regular Meeting & Public Hearing

Minutes

Thursday, August 6, 2026 at 6:00 pm

Meeting Location

Liberty County Courthouse - 10818 NW SR 20; Bristol, Florida 32321

Zoom Link and Call-In Numbers

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83300410645?pwd=K9Wb5F7aQAqRcVefDcsVXKjafZ1ECa.1>

1. Call to Order

Minutes:

- Chairman Branch called the meeting to order in person and through Zoom at 6:50 EST. Present at the meeting are Chairman Branch, Vice Chairman Brown, Commissioner Money, Commissioner Johnson, Commissioner Arnold, Clerk Ford, and Deputy Clerk DeLoach.

2. Invocation

Minutes:

- Invocation was completed at the workshop help at 5:00 PM by Mr. Doobie Hayes.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes:

- Invocation was completed at the workshop help at 5:00 PM by Sheriff Dusty Arnold.

4. Awards and Recognitions

Minutes:

- No awards or recognitions.

5. Audience Concerns

Minutes:

- Mrs. Tiffany McGlockton addressed the Board regarding ongoing drainage and erosion concerns affecting her property in the Rock Bluff area. She explained that stormwater runoff from the roadway flows toward her property and has repeatedly washed out her private road, requiring her to pay for grading and repairs over the past several years. She also expressed concern regarding emergency vehicle access, noting that an ambulance previously became stuck while attempting to access her property. Mrs. McGlockton requested that the County inspect the area and determine whether drainage improvements or other

measures could be implemented to redirect the runoff and reduce future erosion. Chairman Branch stated that he and Road Department personnel had previously visited the property and attempted improvements along the ditch line. He explained that the property's location at the bottom of a slope and the natural flow of water contribute significantly to the drainage issue and discussed the possibility of installing a berm across the driveway to help redirect water back toward the ditch. Mrs. McGlockton requested that the County review the matter again and consider any additional solutions that may be available. Following discussion, Chairman Branch agreed to return to the property with Road & Bridge personnel to inspect the drainage conditions again and determine whether any additional measures could be recommended.

COUNTY DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Monthly Department Briefing

- Brian Eddins – Fire Control Coordinator
 - Not in attendance.
- Marie Arick – Extension Director
 - Mrs. Marie Arick updated the Board regarding recent damage to the Civic Center by renters, including damage to the internet box and other areas of the facility. She advised that the renters' deposit had been withheld and expressed concern about ongoing damage to the building.
 - Mrs. Arick also discussed renters bringing bounce houses and inflatable water slides onto Civic Center property and questioned the County's potential liability. The Board discussed adding liability language to the rental agreement or prohibiting the inflatables altogether. County Attorney Ken Hosford recommended reviewing the County's insurance coverage, and the Board agreed to check with the insurance provider before making any changes.
 - Mrs. Arick reported that Bee College currently has 67 participants registered and that Liberty County 4-H reached approximately 40% of the County's youth during the past year, intending to reach 50%. She also discussed the Tri-County Arena nearing completion and the potential for future 4-H activities at the facility.
- Deanna Bryant – Recreation Director
 - Nothing to discuss.
- Melissa Peddie – Ambulance Director
 - Not in attendance.
- Cole Maloy – Solid Waste Director
 - Nothing to discuss.
- Boo Bryant – Road and Bridge Superintendent
 - Mr. Boo Bryant updated the Board regarding the potential purchase of a dozer, stating that funding appears to be available within his budget. He advised that he will obtain updated quotes and bring them back to the Board at the next meeting.
 - Commissioner Brown also discussed completing mitered ends and other work on approximately 15–17 culverts along CR 67 that were not included in the previous project. Mr. Bryant advised that materials are already available for some of the remaining work. Commissioner Brown requested an updated price for the additional culverts to determine whether the work can be completed within the current budget year or at the beginning of the next.
- Monica Welles – Transit Director
 - Mrs. Monica Welles updated the Board on the new Transit Building, stating that the punch list

inspection had been completed and only a few remaining items need to be addressed. Once completed, Transit will begin ordering technology, furniture, and other necessary equipment for the facility.

- Mrs. Welles also reported that a potential replacement for Sterling has been identified, pending completion of the required background checks. Sterling's retirement party is scheduled for October 9, 2026, at the Civic Center, and Transit hopes to hold the grand opening of the new building earlier that same day if the facility is completed in time.
- Tera Hinson – SHIP Director
 - Nothing to discuss.
- Ben Guthrie – Emergency Management Director
 - Mr. Ben Guthrie advised the Board that he needed to add an item to the agenda regarding the training requirements for elected officials and others under 2025 Senate Bill 180. He stated that he would provide additional information regarding the requirements during his scheduled agenda item later in the meeting.
- Kaly Barfield – Grants and Special Projects Coordinator
 - Nothing to discuss.
- Kaly Barfield - Building Department
 - Everything's going well.
- County Engineer - Dewberry
 - Nothing to discuss.

6. Motion to Amend Agenda

Minutes:

- Motion to amend the agenda to add Mr. Ben Guthrie to discuss the 2025 Senate Bill 180 training requirements under Agenda Item 28 made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Money. Motion Carried.

7. Adoption of the Agenda

Minutes:

- Motion to adopt the agenda was made by Commissioner Money and seconded by Commissioner Johnson. Motion Carried.

8. Motion to Approve Consent Items

Minutes:

- Motion to approve the consent items made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Money. 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. **Kaly Barfield - The Management Experts LLC Agreement**
15. **Jail Project - Change Order 24**
16. **Jail Project - Change Order 25**
17. **Jail Project - Change Order 26**
18. **Transit - Change Order #1 - RCO #2 & #3**
19. **EMS Building – Change Orders #2, #3 & #4**
20. **Ben Guthrie - Mosquito Control Contract**
21. **SHIP - New LHAP guidelines and recommendations**
22. **Clerk Ford - State Aid to Libraries Grant Agreement**

PUBLIC HEARING

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

23. Solar Ordinance 2026-04

Minutes:

- The Board temporarily closed the regular meeting and opened the public hearing for Ordinance 2026-04 regarding utility-scale solar energy facilities and battery energy storage systems. Mr. Scott Mixon with Duke Energy addressed the Board and stated that Duke Energy was not opposed to the intent of the ordinance but requested several amendments. Mr. Mixon explained that Duke Energy's primary concerns involved the ordinance's stormwater requirements and the designation of solar facilities as a conditional rather than permitted use. He advised that certain requirements could substantially increase development costs and potentially make a future solar project in Liberty County cost prohibitive.
- County Attorney Ken Hosford disagreed with Duke Energy's interpretation regarding permitted use and advised that the County retained authority to regulate solar development. He emphasized that the ordinance was intended to protect Liberty County not only with respect to Duke Energy, but also any future applicant that may seek to develop a solar facility. He stated that the County could consider well-defined exceptions when an applicant demonstrated a better or more appropriate method of meeting the ordinance's intent.
- Ms. Vanessa Goff with Duke Energy further addressed the Board regarding stormwater management. She explained that Duke Energy typically designs its systems around the natural flow and terrain of a site and expressed concern that the proposed requirements could require unnecessary retention ponds, increase environmental impacts, and significantly increase project costs. She also discussed Duke Energy's experience working with Jefferson County and stated that adjustments were made there through cooperation between Duke Energy and the County.
- A lengthy discussion followed regarding the need to balance protection of Liberty County with encouraging future economic development. Commissioner Doyle Brown expressed concern that the ordinance, as written, could discourage businesses from locating in the County and questioned whether certain stormwater provisions were unnecessarily more restrictive than Florida DEP standards. Commissioner Brown emphasized the importance of working with

industry while maintaining appropriate protections for the County.

- Duke Energy representatives explained that Florida DEP and other agencies already impose extensive stormwater, environmental, wetland, and mitigation requirements. Discussion focused heavily on Sections 6 and 7 of the ordinance and whether the County should defer to DEP standards for certain stormwater, wetland, and floodplain requirements. Duke Energy representatives advised that some of the proposed County requirements could add millions of dollars to a project and potentially cause a developer to reconsider locating in Liberty County.

CLOSE PUBLIC HEARING

Board to close public hearing and reopen regular BOCC meeting.

24. Solar Ordinance 2026-04

Minutes:

- The Board debated whether to abandon the ordinance and begin the process again or adopt it and subsequently amend the areas of concern. Chairman Branch emphasized that the ordinance was intended to protect Liberty County for the future and not be written around a single company. Commissioner Brown maintained that once potential problems had been identified, the Board should address them. After extensive discussion, the Board determined that the ordinance could be adopted and then separately amended to address the identified stormwater, wetland, and floodplain provisions rather than abandoning the ordinance and restarting the entire process.
- Motion to approve and adopt Ordinance 2026-04 made by Commissioner Brown and seconded by Commissioner Money. Motion Carried.
- Following adoption, Commissioner Brown proposed amending the ordinance by removing Section 6(E)(4), (5), and (6), relating to stormwater requirements, and modifying Section 7(A), relating to wetlands and floodplains, to follow Florida DEP standards and guidelines. The provisions and proposed changes were reviewed aloud for clarification prior to the vote.
- Motion to approve the amendment to Ordinance 2026-04 by removing Section 6(E)(4), (5), and (6) and modifying Section 7(A) to follow Florida DEP standards and guidelines made by Commissioner Brown and seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion Carried, with opposition noted.

PRESENTATIONS & UPDATES

25. James Moore - 24-25 Audit

Minutes:

- Mr. Zach Chalifour, Partner with James Moore & Company, presented the County's Fiscal Year 2025 audit results. He thanked the Board, Clerk Jace Ford and his staff, and the constitutional officers for their cooperation throughout the audit process. Mr. Chalifour highlighted the significant improvement in the

timeliness of the County's financial reporting, noting that this was the earliest the County's audit had been issued in at least five years and that the County was in its best financial reporting position during that same period.

- Mr. Chalifour reported that the County received an unmodified audit opinion, meaning the financial statements were fairly presented and could be relied upon. The federal and state single audits resulted in no matters to report, and the County was also found to comply with state requirements regarding investments. While some audit adjustments and other minor findings remained, he stated that there were fewer adjustments than in previous years and no matters of significant concern.
- He explained that the General Fund showed a decrease of approximately \$4 million on paper, primarily due to the timing of grant reimbursements associated with the jail project. Approximately \$3.5 million was received in Fiscal Year 2026 and therefore could not be recognized in the FY 2025 financial statements. When accounting for those reimbursements, he advised that the County's operational reserves remained approximately 20–25%, with no significant concern regarding the County's financial condition.
- Mr. Chalifour concluded that the County continues to show significant improvement, particularly in the timeliness and overall financial reporting process, and expects that progress to continue into the next audit year.

26. Gloria Kennan - Arts Council

Minutes:

- Mrs. Gloria Keenan addressed the Board regarding the Liberty County Arts Council and Veterans Memorial Railroad. She stated that the Arts Council previously had \$30,000 in a County account that she believes was later transferred into the General Fund. Mrs. Keenan requested that the County return the \$30,000 to the Arts Council and allow the funds to be used toward \$40,000 in needed railroad ties and track repairs so the Veterans Memorial Railroad could operate for the Christmas season.
- Clerk Jace Ford explained that his office, along with the County's financial professionals, had researched the available records dating back to 2009. While \$10,000 currently belonging to the Arts Council could be verified, no documentation had been located establishing that the additional \$30,000 remained in the Arts Council account or had been transferred into the General Fund. Clerk Ford stated that he could not, in good faith, advise the Board to release \$30,000 without documentation supporting the request.
- Mrs. Keenan continued to maintain that the \$30,000 had existed, recalling that she had previously been told by someone in the Clerk's Office that the Arts Council had that balance. During discussion regarding how the funds had been deposited, Mrs. Keenan acknowledged that she did not recall receiving receipts for the money turned over to the County and could not provide the account number or financial records necessary to establish a clear paper trail at the meeting. Clerk Ford reiterated that he was not stating that the funds never existed, but that the available County records did not presently support Mrs. Keenan's claim. He advised that his office would continue researching the matter.

before making any recommendation to the Board regarding the requested \$30,000.

ACTION ITEMS

27. Resolution 2026-25

Minutes:

- County Attorney Ken Hosford presented Resolution 2026-25 regarding previously abandoned streets and alleys in Telogia. Attorney Hosford explained that during a recent title search involving the former John Wynn Store/Thompson's Grocery property, a title company discovered an error in Resolutions 94-07 and 94-09 adopted by the County in 1994. The resolutions abandoned certain streets and alleys but incorrectly referenced the former Addition to the Town of Telogia rather than the Resurvey of the Town of Telogia dated May 1957 and recorded in Plat Book A, Page 21, of the Public Records of Liberty County.
- Attorney Hosford explained that Resolution 2026-25 does not create a new abandonment but instead clarifies and corrects the legal description of the streets and alleys previously vacated, abandoned, and disclaimed by the County, specifically those associated with Blocks O and N. He stated that the resolution was necessary to correct the 1994 error and clear the title issue so the affected property could proceed with its sale.
- Motion to approve Resolution 2026-25 made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Brown. Motion Carried.

28. Ben Guthrie - Debris Bid Awards

Minutes:

- Mr. Ben Guthrie presented the results of the County's procurement process for debris hauling and debris monitoring services. He advised that nine proposals were received for debris hauling services and recommended Ceres as the highest-ranked contractor, with DRC Emergency Services as the second-ranked contractor and backup provider in the event the primary contractor is unavailable.
- Motion to approve Ceres as the primary debris hauling contractor and DRC Emergency Services as the secondary/backup contractor made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Money. Motion Carried.
- Mr. Guthrie then presented the debris monitoring proposals, advising that three proposals were received. He recommended DebrisTech, the County's current debris monitoring provider, which received the highest evaluation score of 300 points.
- Motion to approve DebrisTech for debris monitoring services made by Commissioner Money and seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion Carried.

29. AMENDED: Ben Guthrie - 2025 Senate Bill 180

Minutes:

- Mr. Guthrie informed the Board of training requirements established by 2025

Senate Bill 180 for certain local government officials involved with emergency management, public works, and public infrastructure. He advised that the required biennial training must be completed by December 31, 2026.

- Mr. Guthrie explained that the Florida Division of Emergency Management has developed three online courses that meet the requirement, including a course specifically for elected officials. He advised that Emergency Management would assist Commissioners and other applicable County officials with setting up their Florida Learning Exchange (FLEX) accounts and completing the appropriate training. No Board action was required.

30. Chad Smith - Homecoming Parade

Minutes:

- Mr. Chad Smith advised the Board that the LCHS Homecoming Parade is scheduled for October 23, 2026, and requested approval to submit the necessary permit for the temporary road closure using the same parade route as in previous years. Mr. Smith also advised that he would request the Christmas Parade be placed on the next agenda for approval.
- Motion to approve submission of the permit for the October 23, 2026, LCHS Homecoming Parade made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion Carried.

31. Dewberry - Letters of Support

Minutes:

- Mr. Noah Byler with Dewberry advised the Board that Dewberry is working with its resilience team to pursue additional funding for the Estifanulga Riverbank Restoration Project. He discussed pursuing an EDA grant for construction funding, riverbank stabilization, improvements to the boat ramp park, and potential improvements to other County-owned property that could support tourism and economic development.
- Mr. Byler also advised that Dewberry plans to reapply for the Florida Resilient Florida Grant, which the County has previously pursued for the same project. He stated that the total funding request could be around \$11 million due to increasing construction costs and potential future cost escalation.
- Motion to approve letters of support for the EDA and Resilient Florida grant applications for the Estifanulga Riverbank Restoration Project made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Motion Carried.

32. Dewberry CEI Agreement -Bristol Boat Ramp Project

Minutes:

- Kaly Barfield presented the contract with Dewberry for the Bristol Boat Ramp Project, noting that Dewberry had previously been selected for the project and that approval of the contract would allow work to begin.
- Motion to approve the contract with Dewberry for the Bristol Boat Ramp Project made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Money. Motion Carried.

- Mrs. Barfield also provided an update on a separate pending grant application, advising that the County recently participated in an environmental/on-site review call as part of the next stage of the process. Additional documents requested during the review were submitted, and the County is currently awaiting further notification regarding the grant award.

33. Clerk Ford - Boykin Road MOA

Minutes:

- Clerk Jace Ford presented a proposed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) regarding Boykin Road, following several months of discussions with the affected property owners. Clerk Ford explained that the purpose of the agreement is to document the proposed modifications before the County spends additional funds on surveying or other work.
- Clerk Ford advised that the proposed plan includes adjustments to the roadway and a cul-de-sac style turnaround on the Buffington property. He stated that both affected property owners had reached an agreement on the proposed layout, with each party and the County making concessions. Board approval would allow Clerk Ford to obtain signatures from all parties confirming their agreement before proceeding with the next steps.
- Motion to approve the proposed Boykin Road Memorandum of Agreement and plan made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Brown. Motion Carried.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

34. Dewayne Branch, Chairman - District 1

Minutes:

- During Commissioner Branch's time, he raised concerns regarding the County's lack of specific regulations addressing hyperscale data centers following the Board's earlier decision not to proceed with a moratorium. Chairman Branch expressed concern that a data center developer could approach the County before appropriate protections were established." County Attorney Ken Hosford advised that the Board should continue educating itself on the issue and determine what regulations it wanted included in the Land Development Code.
- Chairman Branch maintained that the purpose of the moratorium was simply to provide time for the County to become educated and establish protections before an application was submitted. Commissioner Brown disagreed with placing a moratorium on an industry before the County had fully researched it and argued that doing so could send the wrong message to prospective businesses.
- Commissioner Brown questioned whether the County had placed similar restrictions on other major industries, such as GP or Rex Lumber, when they located in Liberty County. Chairman Branch disagreed with the comparison and clarified that a temporary moratorium would not indicate opposition to the industry, emphasizing that a moratorium is a temporary measure and is different

from adopting a permanent ordinance.

- Commissioner Brown continued that no data center developer had formally approached the Board and stated that the County should first educate itself by bringing in industry experts and potentially visiting an operating facility before drafting regulations. He stated that he did not support discouraging businesses from locating in the County and favored learning more about the industry before determining what regulations may be necessary.
- County Attorney Hosford interjected in an effort to clarify the comparison to previous industries. He explained that when GP located in the County, Liberty County already had a Comprehensive Plan with designated industrial areas and had been aware of the project well in advance. Chairman Branch concluded by reiterating that his concern was the County's current lack of protections and that the proposed moratorium had been intended only to provide time for education and preparation, not to prohibit data centers from ever locating in Liberty County.

35. Walter Money, Commissioner-District 2

Minutes:

- Nothing to discuss.

36. Jim Johnson, Commissioner - District 3

Minutes:

- Nothing to discuss.

37. Doyle Brown, Vice Chairman - District 4

Minutes:

- Nothing to discuss.

38. Derrick Arnold, Commissioner - District 5

Minutes:

- Nothing to discuss.

39. Ken Hosford, County Attorney

Minutes:

- County Attorney Ken Hosford recommended that the Board gather as much reliable information as possible regarding data centers before determining how to proceed. He encouraged the Commissioners to attend available workshops and hear from knowledgeable sources before deciding what protections or regulations should be included.
- Attorney Hosford advised that once the Board determines how it wants to address data centers, it can provide him with direction, and he will draft the appropriate language.

40. Dusty Arnold, Liberty County Sheriff

Minutes:

- Nothing to discuss.

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

Minutes:

- Clerk Ford reminded the Board that open enrollment begins September 1, 2026. Anyone needing to make changes to their benefits was advised to contact Lisa Short for assistance and coordination with the appropriate representatives.

42. Motion to Adjourn

Minutes:

- Motion to adjourn at 9:14 PM made by Commissioner Money and seconded by Commissioner Johnson. Motion Carried.

43. 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."