



# Union County, NC

## Board of Commissioners

### Meeting Minutes

Union County Government  
Center  
500 North Main Street  
Monroe, North Carolina  
[www.unioncountync.gov](http://www.unioncountync.gov)

#### Special Meeting

#### (Joint Meeting with the Monroe City Council)

Approved February 18, 2025

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**Thursday, January 30, 2025**

**6:00 PM**

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The Union County Board of Commissioners met in a special meeting on Thursday, January 30, 2025, at 6:00 p.m., at the Bazemore Active Adult Center located at 500 West Jefferson Street, Monroe, NC. The purpose of the special meeting was to hold a joint session with the Monroe City Council. The topics for discussion during the special meeting included, but were not limited to, water and sewer agreements between Union County and the City of Monroe, long-term strategy for current capacity and any future expansion for water and sewer services, and related partnerships. The following were:

#### **Union County:**

**PRESENT:** Chair Melissa M. Merrell; Vice Chair Brian W. Helms; Commissioner Clancy C. Baucom; Commissioner Christina B. Helms; and Commissioner Gary Sides

**ABSENT:** None

**ALSO PRESENT:** Brian Matthews, County Manager; Patrick Niland, Deputy County Manager; Clayton Voignier, Assistant County Manager; Lynn G. West, Clerk to the Board of Commissioners; Ben Isley, Senior Assistant County Attorney; Liz Cooper, Director of Public Communications; Maribel Andon, Executive Assistant to County Administration; Hyong Yi, Water Administrator; Amy McCaskill, Director, Business Operations UC Water; Aubrey Lofton, Director, Planning & Res Mgmt. UC Water; John Shutak, Director, Engineering, UC Water; and Chris Clark, Director, Water and Wastewater

#### **City of Monroe:**

Mayor Robert Burns; Mayor Pro Tem David Dotson; Council Member Gary Anderson, Council Member Surluta Anthony; Council Member Franco McGee; and Council Member Julie Thompson

**ABSENT:** Council Member James Kerr

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mark Watson, City Manager; Lisa Hollowell, Assistant City Manager; Jeffrey Wells, Assistant City Manager; and Bridgette Robinson, City Clerk; Bradley Lucore, Communications Supervisor; Teresa Campo, Strategic Projects Manager; Donna O'Keefe, Downtown Manager;

Lisa Strickland, Finance Director; Ron Fowler, Fire Chief; Rhett Bolen, Assistant Police Chief; Pete Hovanec, Director of Tourism; Rich Riser, Assistant Director of Water Resources; Malcolm Weeks, Airport Manager; Scott Clark, Director of Water Resources; Amy Cook, Operations Manager, Water Resources; Rob Miller, Energy Services Director; and Ryan Jones, Director of Parks and Recreation

At approximately 6:00 p.m., Mayor Robert Burns called to order the special meeting of the Monroe City Council.

At approximately 6:00 p.m., Chair Melissa M. Merrell called to order the January 30, 2025, special joint meeting of the Union County Board of Commissioners with the Monroe City Council.

Mayor Burns welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Chair Merrell recognized County Manager Brian Matthews for his initial comments from Union County.

Mr. Matthews expressed appreciation to the Monroe City Council and its staff for the opportunity for the Board of Commissioners to meet with them. He stated that this meeting came about from the discussions of the County and City regarding the current arrangements for water and sewer. He said that both the County and City have myriad image agreements, with the City purchasing water from the County and the County purchasing sewer capacity from the City of Monroe. Mr. Matthews stated that he understood the City is considering expansion of its wastewater treatment plant, and conversations have taken place staff-to-staff about how this works moving forward and whether the County is interested in additional capacity. He said he thought that was the question that led to the discussion between the two boards. He added that there have not been discussions at a board-to-board level. He asked City Manager Watson if he had any additional comments.

Mr. Watson confirmed that the City of Monroe is in the process of expanding its wastewater treatment facility for an additional three (3) million gallons per day (MILLION GALLONS PER DAY) capacity. He stated that the City of Monroe completed a rate study during the last quarter of the calendar year as part of its financing process for that project, and the engineering for the project is well underway and will be completed soon. He said they would then be going through the bid process. He shared that they have a scheduled meeting with the Local Government Commission (LGC) the first of February for the introductory round of discussions regarding the financing of the project. He added that it becomes important for the City to know if the County wants to purchase additional capacity in the plant; and, if so, how much additional capacity it will be requesting because it does have a potential impact on rates, etc.

Mr. Matthews noted that the Union County Board of Commissioners has two new Board members and a member who was previously appointed and is now elected. He said the Board has not had an opportunity to discuss this matter and to make a formal decision. He shared that the previous Board had some discussions and, at the staff level, it had been recommended to seek additional capacity from the City. He stated that there is currently a contractual agreement with the City for 2.65 million gallons from its current wastewater treatment plant, and the County is really considered a customer. He stated the County purchases capacity if it is needed, and the County pays for capital based on the operation and maintenance of the plant,

but it does not pay for expansion of the plant. He added that because the City is considering expansion of its capacity, he thought from a staff perspective, that staff would be interested in additional capacity for the County's eastside sewer, which is served by this capacity.

Mr. Matthews said that staff needs the Board of Commissioners to give authorization that it wants to purchase additional capacity. He reiterated that he thought from a staff's perspective, that additional capacity is what the staff would want for the eastside. He explained that one of the County's biggest questions is what that does with the current plant and the operation of the plant. Mr. Matthews shared that he would be curious to know if it is the City's intent to operate the current plant permanently or in perpetuity or what is the intent on operating the current plant.

Mr. Watson responded that the City intends to operate the current plant for as long as it is useful and practical to do so. He said this project is an expansion of the treatment capacity. He added this additional treatment capacity adds a different treatment train that gives the flexibility of rehabilitation on the current plant to extend the life of that plant and that is the intention.

Mr. Matthews said that was a question he had, and to hear Mr. Watson call it an expansion is comfortable for staff and makes him feel better about the way the agreement is structured. He said he would not be asking the Board to give staff direction tonight since it has not had an opportunity to discuss this matter. He said that the Board has a retreat on February 12, and there can be further discussion with the Board, and at that time, staff could possibly receive direction from the Board. He acknowledged that the City needs to receive answers soon, because it is going through meetings with the Local Government Commission.

Mr. Matthews reiterated that staff would recommend to the Board that it consider purchasing some additional capacity from the City's expansion project. He added that it would also be the staff's recommendation that it follow similarly the current agreement. Mr. Matthews said there is a structure in place for the agreement that he thought works very well. He stated they could discuss the amount of capacity, but he liked the structure of the current agreement.

He asked if there were any concerns with the current structure of the agreement so that the Board could have those discussions.

Richard Long, City Attorney, responded that he thought the structure of the agreement was fine but noted that there were some points that needed to be interpreted. He said he thought the expansion was fairly clear, but it is a negotiated agreement about the expansion. He noted that there are terms about the maintenance that need to be explored.

Commissioner Sides asked about the City's timeline for the anticipated completion of the additional capacity.

It was noted that the expected construction time would be three years.

Commissioner Sides said that the County is being asked how much additional capacity it would be willing to purchase. He stated that his question would be "How much of that capacity does the City anticipate needing that would be available for the County to have an opportunity to purchase?"

Mr. Watson stated that the expansion is for three (3) million gallons per day, and the City is prepared to use all three (3) million gallons per day over time. He said he thought historically

there had been an offer if the County would expand the water treatment plant at Catawba and offered the City additional capacity, the reverse would be offering the County the opportunity to let the City know the County's capacity needs. He stated that it all goes into the planning process. Mr. Watson said he did not know what the County's anticipated capacity needs are, and currently, it has 2.65 million gallons per day capacity in that plant. He stated the County is currently using 1.7 or 1.8 million gallons per day of the 2.65 million gallons per day, so there is currently a lot of capacity remaining of the 2.65 million gallons per day. He said he knew the Town of Marshville is a customer, and it has agreements with Anson County. He estimated that the Town of Marshville is using somewhere in the range of 250,000 to 300,000 gallons on an average day, and if it goes to Anson County, then that frees up County capacity in the Monroe plant.

Commissioner Sides asked if it has been projected when the County would reach the limit on using up its capacity under the current agreement.

Mr. Matthews responded that it is not known when the Town of Marshville will come offline and when that flow would come back to the County. He said it is thought that it would be at least another ten years of capacity if the County gets back the flow from the Town of Marshville. He stressed this was all contingent upon the level of economic development and industrial development that is able to be accomplished in the Wingate area. Mr. Matthews said all of that flow could be used up very quickly depending on that success. He shared the number that has been discussed staff-to-staff to be recommended for consideration is 750,000 gallons. He said he thought the City would have the ability to go with a larger expansion of its plant in the future.

Mr. Watson explained that it is a three-phase expansion, and this is the first phase with three (3) million gallons per day; the second phase would add another three (3) or four (4) million gallons per day, and the third phase would add another three (3) or four (4) million gallons per day. He said he thought rehabbing the current facility would mean a long-term sustainable facility at that location.

Mr. Matthews asked if there was a discharge limit on this site

Mr. Watson stated they did have a discharge limit and described it as a very good question and an interesting topic.

Scott Clark, Director of Water Resources, stated that it was currently permitted for discharge of 10.4 million gallons per day, but it can be increased to a maximum of 15.4 million gallons per day.

Mr. Watson stated that he has always thought it was good and practical to permit it to the maximum. He explained that the City of Charlotte is seeking an interbasin transfer (IBT) from the Catawba Basin into the Rocky River Basin to discharge flow into the Rocky River. He further explained that the discharge flow enters the Rocky River up in the corner of Union County at Fairview, and the Rocky River has a load limit, and if the discharge from Mecklenburg County/City of Charlotte enters at the top of the river, that creates a situation where if anyone else is discharging into the Yadkin Basin and if it is going into the Rocky River, they are probably going to have a hard time permitting downstream, because the load is being put in upstream.

Mr. Matthews asked if the City has plans to expand the 15.4 million gallons per day permit to be greater than that amount.

Mr. Watson responded not in this phase. He shared that they have attended the IBT public hearings and taken a position against the discharge load in the Rocky River Basin. He said he would expect it to be the City's continued position because it cuts into the City's resources.

Commissioner Sides questioned if the County has taken a position on the discharge load in the Rocky River Basin.

Hyong Yi, Public Works Administrator for Union County, responded that staff has attended the meetings just as the City has but the County has not formulated a position on it.

Mr. Matthews shared that the County has had some similar concerns about Charlotte withdrawing water from the Catawba River Basin. He said that the County is obviously concerned about the discharge into the Rocky River Basin, as Mr. Watson discussed, and staff can have further discussions with the Board about the County's position on this matter.

Mr. Watson said Monroe is fine up to the current 15 million-gallon discharge limit, but it is beyond that amount that he thought they needed to consider what might happen in the future.

Chair Merrell asked the Commissioners if anyone had any comments or questions.

Vice Chair Brian W. Helms expressed appreciation to the City of Monroe for hosting the meeting today. He said he thought historically the City and the County have shared a great agreement with sewer and also water. He shared he thought there was a genuine willingness to continue that agreement but said, obviously, he could not speak for the Board, and the Board would need to have some discussion on this matter. He stated it makes a lot of sense, because the County is currently considering projects for the Catawba in partnership with Lancaster for expansion. He said he appreciated the clarification from Mr. Watson regarding the City of Monroe's plans. He further said he thought a number of the County's questions had been answered. The Vice Chair shared that he came into today's meeting with several questions including whether or not this would be an addition or a new facility. He stated that he assumed the City of Monroe is looking at this expansion to be able to accommodate additional commercial and residential growth. He asked if this was correct.

Mr. Watson responded that the expansion had to do with keeping a good-functioning facility. He stated that the City has an aging facility, and it needs to be able to rehab some of those aging concrete structures. He said in order to do so, some have to be taken offline, and they cannot be taken offline and rehabbed without the means to do so. He added that at the same time, they are looking to the future and explained that the City of Monroe always has invested in its utilities looking to the future which has put it in the position it is in today with having the capacity to serve both residential growth that has been approved in addition to any of the industrial customers that have moved into Monroe. He said that everyone sitting at the table knows that the absolute longest lead time planning and construction of anything that is done in local government are wastewater treatment plants. He added that the Monroe City Council has very wisely kept its rates where they need to be in order to afford to set aside monies to pay for some of the expansion and for some of the expansion it will have to borrow the funds, but the Council has done a good job in planning the financials for this expansion.

Vice Chair Brian W. Helms inquired about the total time it will take to reach the three phases.

Scott Clark answered that the first phase of the expansion would take the capacity to 13.4

million gallons per day; the second phase would expand it by six (6) more million gallons per day; and the final phase, which would be the final build-out, is 24 million gallons per day.

Vice Chair Brian W. Helms asked about the number of years that are expected to reach the final build-out.

Mr. Clark said it is anticipated that phase two will occur in ten years, and the third phase is anticipated to occur in approximately 20 to 25 years. He added it is all contingent on the growth.

Commissioner Sides said he assumed they had modeled the cost of the expansion and that would be what the County would need to pay for the proposed 750,000 additional gallons of capacity. He asked if the modeling would give a benchmark to use for the pricing, and that would be subject to negotiation for the additional capacity.

Mr. Watson responded that was correct. He stated that currently, they are looking in the \$110 million range, and then that cost is allocated out to a price per gallon. He shared that they expect to have the construction bids in by August 1. He added that, currently, all the numbers are projections.

Commissioner Sides asked if the City has the permits for the expansion.

Mr. Watson confirmed that the permits were already in place.

Commissioner Sides asked what would be the proposed process for the amount of capacity needed and pricing to determine if it is something the County wants to do.

Mr. Matthews said that typically the Board would give staff direction that it is interested in whatever amount of additional capacity. He stated that staff then would meet staff-to-staff and work out the specifics of the agreement, and the City would build that into its rate model, and ultimately that would yield what the annual costs would be. He explained that currently, the County pays for the flow, and even though it has 2.65 million gallons per day, it does not flow that amount. He said the County pays for the amount of flow that it sends, and there is a prescribed formula for how that amount is calculated and then the County pays a proportionate share of the operation, maintenance, renewal and replacement for the facility. He said he would anticipate having the same structure with the expansion.

Commissioner Sides questioned if it was not participating in the actual cost of the expansion but repair costs after it was online.

Mr. Matthews stated that it is the way the current agreement is structured. He added that the same is true for the water portion. He said if there is an expansion at the water treatment plant, and the City wants to expand its capacity, then there could be a discussion, but the City does not pay the cost of the expansion. He further said it only pays its share of the capital for the replacement and renewal.

Mr. Matthews added that if the City is interested in discussing additional water from the Catawba side, there is an interbasin transfer that does not allow the County to sell water from the Yadkin Plant. He explained that it is based on a grandfathered 1.99 million-gallon flow. He stated they would be happy to discuss it with the Board and staff-to-staff if the City is interested in some additional flow which might require an IBT from the City if the Board is willing to offer it

as an option.

Commissioner Sides asked if the City Council has discussed any additional water needs that might be accommodated as the expansion of the Catawba Plant is being considered.

Mr. Watson responded that the City has not discussed additional capacity coming from the Catawba Plant. He shared that the City has plans to modify some of the processes in its own treatment plant to increase the production level at the Monroe Plant in addition to another water source that it has recently acquired. He said all of that is in play at this time, but it does not preclude future discussions about additional water capacity from the Catawba.

Vice Chair Brian W. Helms asked for the information regarding the initial projections that Mr. Watson had mentioned regarding costs and rates.

Mr. Matthews stated that he did not believe that numbers had been discussed. He said that the County has its own estimates. He added that it is potentially programmed into the budget to cover some costs if the additional flow is contracted. He said it was anticipated it would be a \$100 million-plus project.

Mr. Watson shared that currently in the City's early part of projections, the engineering estimates are all over the place. He said they have done the best they can at this time for the rate modeling, but as the days go by and more of the engineering and design work are completed, those numbers start firming up, and then the bid documents are opened on August 1 and the real numbers are learned.

Mr. Matthews asked about the method of construction: CM At Risk or Design-Build.

Mr. Clark stated it was Traditional Design.

Mr. Matthews stated that was all of the questions that he had and shared that his main concern was the interpretation of the expansion versus a new plant. He said that the Board of Commissioners will need to discuss it and give direction to staff. He said he is comfortable in having that conversation with the Board and giving a recommendation.

Chair Merrell said that the Board will take this information to the Board's retreat on February 12, so staff can give its recommendations and the County's future needs.

With there being no further business, at approximately 6:32 p.m., Mayor Pro Tem Dodson moved to adjourn the Special Joint Meeting with the Union County Board of Commissioners on January 30, 2025. Council Member Anthony seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with the following votes:

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Council Member Anderson | Aye |
| Council Member Anthony  | Aye |
| Council Member McGee    | Aye |
| Council Member Thompson | Aye |
| Mayor Pro Tem Dotson    | Aye |
| Mayor Burns             | Aye |

Council Member Kerr was not present.

At approximately 6:32 p.m., Chair Merrell moved to adjourn the Special Joint Meeting of the Union County Board of Commissioners with Monroe City Council on January 30, 2025. The motion passed by a unanimous vote as follows:

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|---------------------------------|-----|
| Chair Merrell                   | Aye |
| Vice Chair Brian W. Helms       | Aye |
| Commissioner Baucom             | Aye |
| Commissioner Christina B. Helms | Aye |
| Commissioner Sides              | Aye |