

Overview

The City of Monroe held a one-day Planning Workshop on January 30, 2025, at the State Botanical Gardens of Athens, which is located at 2450 S. Milledge Avenue, Athens, Georgia. A planning workshop serves as a strategic opportunity to establish priorities, align key initiatives, and set long-term goals. It fosters collaboration and strengthens relationships among elected officials and city staff, enhancing teamwork and decision-making. The planning workshop allows for in-depth discussions on city operations, policies, and emerging challenges, ensuring that governance remains effective and responsive to community needs. By clarifying roles, responsibilities, and expectations, council members can improve their decision-making processes and build a stronger foundation for leadership. Overall discussion included a brief review of the Charter, Roles and Responsibilities, Communication, Department Updates, Updates to the city's work plan (**Exhibit B**), and the Strategic Planning Process. See **Exhibit A** for the PowerPoint presentation used during the retreat.

Participants

Elected Officials Mayor John

Howard

Vice Mayor Lee Malcom, District 1 Councilmember

Julie Sams, District 4 Councilmember Tyler Gregory,

District 6 Councilmember Greg Thompson, District 7

Councilmember David Dickinson, District 8

City Staff

Logan Propes, City Administrator

Chris Bailey, Assistant City Administrator Andrew

Dykes, Fire Chief

Beth Thompson, Finance Director Brad

Callender, Planning Director Chris Croy,

Director of Central Services

Jeremiah Still, Director of Streets & Transportation Kaitlyn

Stubbs, Executive Assistant

Les Russell, Director of Human Resources

Mike McGuire, Director of Telecommunications

Rodney Middlebrooks, Director of Water, Sewer, Gas & Electric RV Watts,

Chief of Police

GMA Staff

Pam Helton, Director of Member Services Emily

Davenport, Member Services Consultant

Purpose of a Planning Workshop

A planning workshop is designed to set priorities, align goals, and develop actionable strategies for future success. It provides a structured environment for collaboration, problem-solving, and decision-making, helping participants assess current challenges, explore opportunities, and establish a clear roadmap for progress. These workshops foster communication, improve teamwork, and ensure alignment among individuals or groups working toward a common objective. Additionally, they promote accountability by defining responsibilities, setting timelines, and establishing measurable outcomes. Whether for an organization, government body, or community initiative, a well-executed planning workshop enhances efficiency, clarity, and long-term impact.

Check-In: Where Are We Now

Starting a planning workshop with a "check-in" is important because it helps to establish the tone, fosters engagement, and ensures participants are mentally present and ready to contribute. It also provides facilitators with insight into the group's energy and helps shift participants' focus away from daily distractions and toward the purpose of the workshop, promoting active listening and collaboration. Each participant was asked to share one word that describes where they are now, and the responses included:

Transitioning	Busy	A New Day
Learning	Humble	Changing
Developing	Expanding	Halfway Home
Positive	Ahead	Challenging
Exciting	Extraordinary	Big Plans
Work in Progress	Going Forward	

Charter, Roles, and Responsibilities

Clear communication and a strong understanding of roles and responsibilities are inherently interconnected to effective governance, operational efficiency, and successful implementation of city policies. In general, the primary roles and responsibilities can be explained as:

- **City Council** (The Eagle): The governing body, including the mayor and council members, represents the community and shapes the city's future. They set the vision, chart the city's direction, and ensure goals align with the community's best interests, much like an eagle overseeing its surroundings.
- **Administrative Staff** (The Architect): Comprising the city manager, department heads, and senior officials, they handle daily operations. Like architects, they turn the Council's vision into actionable plans, allocate resources, and ensure smooth implementation of policies.
- **City Employees** (The Builders): Responsible for daily tasks and services. They are the builders who execute plans and maintain infrastructure. They ensure strategies result in tangible outcomes, keeping services running and the community thriving.

A city charter serves as the foundational legal document that establishes a city's government structure, powers, and functions. It acts as a constitution for the city, defining the roles and responsibilities of elected officials, outlining governance procedures, and specifying how local laws, budgets, and policies are created and enforced. The charter provides a framework for decision-making, public administration, and citizen engagement, ensuring that the city operates effectively and in accordance with state and federal laws. Additionally, it helps maintain accountability and transparency by setting guidelines for elections, financial management, and public services. In the State of Georgia, cities operate under a home rule charter, which allows more local autonomy in governance.

For the City of Monroe, the charter identifies the positions of the Mayor, Vice-Mayor, eight council members, eight council districts, and a Weak Mayor form of government. A quick summary of the responsibilities for each role include:

Role of the Mayor

- Preside at Council Meetings
- Vote to break ties
- Veto power
- Ceremonial head of the city
- Sign ordinances and resolutions after passage
- Obtain short-term loans, deeds, bonds, and contracts as needed
- Encourage communication with Council, citizens & media

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- Provide support to the community during a crisis

Role of the Vice-Mayor

- All responsibilities of the Mayor in the Mayor's absence

Role of the Council

- Hold public meetings
- Exercise its powers only in public meetings
- Vote on the adoption of ordinances
- Adopt by ordinance rules & bylaws to govern the conduct of its business

Role of the City Administrator

- Shall be vested with such power and authority as may be granted by the mayor and council which are necessary or proper for efficient and effective government administration, which may include generally, but shall not be limited to, those duties of purchasing agent for all departments, coordinator of commissions and departments, and the general management of city business under the direction and guidance of the Mayor and Council.
- In the absence of a City Clerk, the Council may vest all duties of the City Clerk to the City Administrator.

To learn more about the City of Monroe's charter, visit [Municode](#).

Communication

Communication, whether effective or poor, can significantly shape the dynamics and performance of a Council, influencing its ability to serve the community effectively. Councils can function in a more positive and effective manner. Effective communication enables a council to function as a cohesive, efficient team, while poor communication disrupts relationships, decision-making, and public trust. When these elements are aligned, Councils can function more positively and effectively.

Department Updates

Department updates are important for a City Council planning workshop because they provide council members with a clear understanding of the city's operations, challenges, and priorities. These updates offer valuable insights into each department's accomplishments, ongoing projects, budget needs, and any obstacles that may impact service delivery. By hearing directly from department leaders, council members can make informed decisions, align policies with operational realities, and set realistic goals for the city. Additionally, department updates foster transparency, improve communication between staff and elected officials, and help identify opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration. This information ensures that planning discussions are grounded in current data and practical considerations, ultimately leading to more effective and strategic governance. Key highlights from each department include:

Administration: The biggest challenge is time, with over 80 projects currently in progress and staff size remaining the same. Efficiency has been maximized, but only 5 of the 25 prioritized projects for 2025 can likely be completed. It is recommended to finish ongoing projects before adding more and finding ways to fund these projects is crucial. The City Manager provided an update on the city's current work plan. See **Exhibit B**.

Finance: Department Heads are actively engaged in the budget process, ensuring input and buy-in from all areas. However, the Finance Department is feeling the strain of increasing projects and needs additional staff to manage the growing workload. While they are keeping up with demands, it is becoming increasingly difficult. Customer service, meter reading, and billing are particularly impacted, facing daily challenges in maintaining efficiency.

Fire: The department faces a staffing gap between those with 5 years or less and over 15 years of

experience. While the number of employees has grown from 21 to 27 since 2000, the daytime population is much higher, increasing demand. Three fire trucks need to be replaced, preparation for upcoming state-standard changes needs to be made, and a new fire station, which is included in the new SPLOST, secured.

Grounds & Right-of-Way: The department is facing significant challenges due to the increase in growth, which is placing a heavy workload on the staff. As demand rises, staff members are stretched thin, making it difficult to keep up with the growing responsibilities.

Human Resources: HR is working with high schools on summer internships and Walton County Workforce Development but struggles to make certain jobs attractive despite offering competitive pay and benefits. Turnover is low at 17%, but recruiting qualified staff remains a challenge. HR continues to prioritize employee safety with ongoing training.

Police: The department is performing well overall, with succession planning as a key priority. The focus is on determining how effectively best to meet the needs associated with growth, securing funding, and effectively allocating necessary resources.

Planning & Code: With 800 lots in the development pipeline, the department is facing significant challenges with the ever-growing workload. Currently, there is only one code enforcement officer and one permit clerk, which raises concerns about the ability to keep up with the demand. To effectively manage development and funding opportunities such as PlanFirst and CDBG, the department needs two additional staff members for both code enforcement and permitting, as well as a new planner.

Streets & Transportation: The bypass project is progressing and is expected to help reduce traffic congestion. However, increased population growth raises concerns about road conditions and maintenance needs. Funding remains a challenge, as resurfacing costs approximately \$105,000 per mile, yet the city receives only \$250,000 annually for its 90 miles of roads, meaning it would take 38 years to repave all roads, despite asphalt having a lifespan of just 15 years. The rejection of TSPLOST was a missed opportunity for much-needed transportation funding.

Telecom: The department has grown from 4,300 to 5,300 internet customers in just two years and faces staffing challenges with increased demand. Bond money will soon stop, and a contractor will be needed to maintain the main line. Despite adding only two employees in 23 years, the department serves seven counties, creating growth concerns. The loss of \$2 million in cable revenue is another challenge, though the Support System implemented last year has been successful.

Utilities: With most utilities underground, assessing conditions and prioritizing projects is ongoing. Discussions about burying overhead utilities have arisen due to recent weather events, but the costs are high. Staffing shortages are a concern, with the gas department growing from 4-5 employees 25 years ago to just 9 today. Finding skilled workers remains difficult, and collaboration with the local technical school has not yet produced results.

During this section of the workshop, HB581, which relates to the floating homestead exemption, was discussed. By March 1, a decision must be made on whether to stay in, opt out with no further action, or opt-out and create a customized floating homestead option for Monroe. Regardless of the choice, it's essential to clearly communicate the options and the reasoning behind the decision to ensure the community understands. Education on this matter will be key.

Strategic Planning Process

A strategic planning process is a structured approach organizations use to define their vision, set priorities, allocate resources, and create a roadmap to achieve long-term goals. It helps align leadership, employees, and stakeholders toward a shared direction while ensuring adaptability to changes.

Vision, Mission, and Core Values

Defining or refining an organization’s **mission, vision, and core values** is crucial because these elements serve as the foundation for decision-making, strategy, and organizational culture. The **mission** clarifies the organization's purpose, ensuring that all actions and initiatives align with why it exists. A strong **vision** provides a clear and inspiring future direction, motivating employees, stakeholders, and leadership to work toward a shared goal. **Core values** establish the ethical and cultural framework that guides behavior, decision-making, and interactions within the organization and with the community. Together, these elements create a cohesive identity, drive alignment across teams, enhance accountability, and help the organization stay focused on long-term success. Without a well-defined mission, vision, and values, organizations may struggle with inconsistency, lack of direction, and misaligned priorities. The city’s current mission and vision statements are:

Mission

To provide services that make Monroe a vibrant, successful, and fun place to live.

Vision

Monroe envisions a thriving community with a vibrant downtown at its center and revitalized neighborhoods connected to a variety of businesses via a network of greenspace and safe places for walking and bicycling.

Core values for a city serve as guiding principles that shape decision-making, governance, and community engagement. They reflect what the city stands for and help create a shared identity for residents, businesses, and stakeholders. Each participant was asked to identify three core values that should guide the city, and the following responses were provided:

Accountable (6)	Fairness	Responsible (3)
Balance	Fiscally Responsible	Responsive
Cohesive	Flexible	Service First
Commitment	Honest	Teamwork (2)
Courage	Inclusive	Trainable
Creative (4)	Integrity (4)	Trust (7)
Dependable	Knowledgeable	Value Driven
Easy to work with	Loyal (2)	Vision Forward
Efficient	Motivational	Visionary (2)
Equitable	Professional	Welcoming
Ethical	Reliable	

SWOT Analysis

Continuing the discussion, the workshop moved into the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis. A SWOT analysis helps identify internal and external factors affecting performance or potential. The collective feedback was as follows:

- **Strengths:** Dedicated Employees, Utilities / Full-Service City, Public Safety
- **Weaknesses:** Lack of Staff / Retention, Training, Aging Infrastructure
- **Opportunities:** Improve Communication, Growth, Jobs / Work Force Program
- **Threats:** Public / Social Media Perception, Political Environment, Growth

Council Priorities

Building on the discussion from this process, the Mayor and Council shifted their focus to identifying key priority areas based on the common themes. The four priority areas focused on:

- **Resources** (e.g., staffing levels, training, vehicles, and equipment)
- **Transportation**
- **Infill / Development**
- **Funding for Projects**

Goal Setting

An important part of the workshop included setting goals for the City Manager, City Departments, and citywide initiatives to ensure alignment, accountability, and strategic progress. Clearly defined goals provide a roadmap for decision-making, resource allocation, and performance measurements across all levels of government.

City Manager Goals establish leadership priorities, ensuring that the City Manager's efforts align with the Council's vision and community needs. These goals help drive efficiency, policy implementation, and overall city operations. The goals identified include:

- **Conduct a comprehensive job study for each department** to assess operational needs, resource allocation, and staffing requirements.
- **Evaluate the organizational structure of city departments** and provide a detailed report with recommendations to the Council.
- **Enhance public relations efforts** by identifying, recruiting, or hiring a dedicated media and video specialist.
- **Collaborate with the Council to prioritize the 2025 project list**, ensuring alignment with strategic goals and community needs.
- **Oversee the successful execution of key projects**, working closely with Department Heads to ensure timely completion and efficiency.
- **Strengthening leadership effectiveness by delegating responsibilities** and empowering department leaders to take greater ownership of initiatives.

City Department Goals create a structured approach to service delivery, helping departments focus on improving operations, enhancing public services, and addressing specific community concerns.

- **Deliver high-quality services** while maintaining a strong focus on stakeholder needs and community impact.
- **Work toward full departmental staffing** to enhance efficiency and service delivery.
- **Assess current staffing levels and identify training needs** to strengthen workforce capabilities and professional development.
- **Enhance and streamline customer interactions** to improve responsiveness and overall service experience.
- **Recruit a dedicated Grant Administrator** to optimize funding opportunities and resource management for the city.
- **Expand the Main Street Program by establishing dedicated staff** to support event planning and execution.
- **Hire an additional planner** to manage workload demands and improve project efficiency.
- **Foster stronger interdepartmental communication** to enhance collaboration and coordination across city functions.

Citywide Goals set the broader direction for economic development, infrastructure, public safety, sustainability, and quality of life, ensuring that the city is moving toward a shared vision for the future.

- **Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA):** Secure funding, enhance public communications, and expand the park system and walkability initiatives.
- **City Hall Security:** Implement measures to improve security at City Hall.
- **Employee Engagement:** Increase team-building opportunities to enhance collaboration and workplace culture.
- **Long-Term Redevelopment:** Establish a priority list for park improvements and the redevelopment of vacant properties.
- **Public Communications:** Strengthen outreach efforts to improve transparency and engagement with residents, including short video highlights of city services.

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- **Strategic Planning:** Schedule a mid-year meeting to review progress and provide updates.
- **Community Recognition:** Promote and highlight positive developments within the community.
- **Transportation:** Assess the current list of capital projects, update project statuses, and identify funding opportunities as needed.
- **Development:** Focus on infill projects and strategic redevelopment efforts.
- **Funding:** Identify and secure financial resources to support city projects and initiatives.

As the retreat began to close, each participant was asked to “Check-Out: Where Are We Now” using one word, and the responses included:

More Informed	Better Understanding	Proud
More informed	Challenged	Motivated
Tracking	Busy, but more collaboration	Refining
Inspired	Positivity	Refocused
Love it so good	Encouraged	Immersed
Committed	Engaged	

Closing

The planning workshop provided a valuable opportunity for the Mayor, Council, and city staff to align goals, assess challenges, and set priorities for Monroe’s continued growth. Through open discussion and collaboration, key focus areas were identified, including staffing and resources, transportation, development, and funding. The strategic goals established will help guide leadership, departments, and citywide initiatives toward a stronger and more efficient future. While change is a constant, today’s discussions reinforce that Monroe is not only prepared for change but positioned to embrace it. By working together with a clear vision, defined goals, and a commitment to continuous improvement, we can turn challenges into opportunities and progress into lasting success. As the city moves forward, maintaining communication, accountability, and a shared purpose will ensure that efforts translate into meaningful outcomes for the community.

John Howard, Mayor

Logan Propes, City Clerk