



**MONROE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
REGULAR MEETING**

City Hall Conference Room
300 W. Crowell Street
Monroe, NC 28112
Thursday, May 14, 2026 - 8:30 AM

AGENDA

1. Approval of Minutes of Monroe Tourism Development Authority Meeting of April 9, 2026
2. Finance/Occupancy Report
3. Tourism Strategy Presentation by Arpan Bhakta
4. Dowd Center Theatre Update
5. Monroe Science Center Update

**MONROE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
REGULAR MEETING
CONFERENCE ROOM
300 W. CROWELL STREET, MONROE, NC 28112
APRIL 9, 2026 – 8:30 A.M.
MINUTES**

Present: Chairman Robert Burns, MaryAnn Rasberry, Gina Day, Jennifer Moore, Bill Heisner, Sheila Crunkleton, Arpan Bhakta (arr. 8:33 a.m.), Ron Hinson (arr. 8:33 a.m.), and Joyce Rentschler (arr. 8:48 a.m.)

Absent:

Staff Present: Parks & Recreation and Tourism Director Pete Hovanec, Finance Director Lisa Strickland, Tourism Administrative Assistant Kristen Hensley, Science Center Supervisor Lauren Fike, Downtown Director Ashley Nowell, Assistant City Manager Lisa Hollowell (leave 8:56 a.m.), Director of Economic Development Teresa Campo (leave 8:56 a.m.), Senior Staff Attorney Terry Sholar (leave 9:13 a.m.)

Staff Absent:

Visitors:

Chairman Burns called the Monroe Tourism Development Authority Regular Meeting of April 9, 2026 to order at 8:30 a.m.

Item No. 1 Approval of Minutes of Monroe Tourism Development Authority Regular Meeting of March 12, 2026. Sheila Crunkleton made a motion to approve the Minutes of Monroe Tourism Development Authority Regular Meeting of March 12, 2026. MaryAnn Rasberry seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with the following votes:

AYES: Day, Moore, Heisner, Rasberry, Crunkleton

NAYS: None

Item No. 2 Finance/Occupancy Report: Lisa Strickland presented the Finance/Occupancy Report. She stated that the occupancy tax collections through February totaled \$62,845, and that the figures overall are down 1.3% compared to last year.

Lisa Strickland stated the Operating Fund balance is \$881,516, the cash balance for the Capital Project Fund is \$10,400 for the Rotary Picnic Shelter, and the balance of the Occupancy Tax Special Revenue Fund is \$399,920. She gave a brief recap of the Science Center Operating Activity.

Item No. 3 Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget: Pete Hovanec presented the budget, noting that there have not been any changes to these figures since last month's presentation. He displayed the Budget Ordinance BO-2026-01 on the screen. He noted that the previously discussed allocation to the Monroe Science Center will be presented to the Board at a later date, and will need to go before City Council. He noted that the Board will be presented with specific exhibit proposals and precise monetary figures to approve at future meetings.

Section 2 A copy of this Budget Ordinance shall be furnished to the Director of Finance of the Authority to be kept on file for direction in the disbursement of funds.

Adopted this 9th day of April, 2026.

Ron Hinson seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with the following votes:

AYES: Day, Moore, Heisner, Rasberry, Bhakta, Hinson, Crunkleton

NAYS: None

Item No. 4 Dowd Center Theatre Update: Pete Hovanec presented an update on the Dowd Center Theatre on behalf of Operations Supervisor Tim Pappas, who is on vacation this week.

Pete Hovanec stated that March was a busy month at the Dowd, with many events occurring. He explained that they will be taking April off from events for “Spring Cleaning” and facility maintenance such as painting. There will, however, be four movie showings during this time.

He noted May will be a busy month with music including a Mother’s Day concert as well as the Charlotte Symphony, a magician, and TV’s Celebrity Housewives appearances scheduled.

Pete Hovanec, Sheila Crunkleton, and Gina Day briefly discussed pricing and advertising for Dowd events.

Item No. 5 Monroe Science Center Update: Lauren Fike stated that this week has been especially busy at the Science Center with Spring Break occurring. She stated that another Community Day is scheduled for April 18th concurrent with the NC Science Fest. She explained that due to the long wait times at the January free event, they decided to issue tickets for the April 18th event, with reservations made online for the free tickets. She noted that the tickets have all sold out for each arrival time. She explained that during this event there will be additional STEAM Stations throughout the museum.

Lauren Fike stated that the Science Center will be opening to the public Tuesdays this summer from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in addition to their regular schedule Wednesday through Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

She stated that they are hosting the Monroe High School Prom and expecting 150 students.

Lauren Fike presented an analysis of zip code data, which is collected upon admission to the museum, on the screen. She noted that the two zip codes for Monroe comprised the highest percentage of visitors, with other zip codes from North Carolina, South Carolina, New York and Florida also having higher percentages of visitors.

Pete Hovanec added that this data could be used for targeted marketing.

Sheila Crunkleton suggested partnering with local hotels to issue discounted passes, or something similar as an incentive to visit the Science Center. Gina Day noted that if visitors are already at the hotel for another event, it might be difficult for them to also attend the Science Center due to time

constraints, and suggested a billboard or some other type of advertising might be more effective to promote the Science Center as an attraction.

Mayor Burns suggested some type of partnership with the online booking whereby visitors could see an advertisement for the Science Center online while they are booking hotel rooms.

Gina Day noted that the Monroe Science Center and Dowd Center Theatre are already listed on their website as local attractions, but suggested creating a “Local Monroe Package” whereby visitors could book discounted tickets for local attractions like the Science Center or golf course. She also suggested brochures or “guides” that she could hand out at the hotel.

Item No. 6 Science Center Grant Approval and Budget Amendment:

Lauren Fike explained that staff had applied for and received a \$4,300 grant through the Association of Science and Technology Centers - IF/THEN Champions Network to facilitate additional Maker programs through 2026. The Science Center will host three Maker Days utilizing the laser cutter and 3D printer, as well as an educator evening event. She asked for the Board’s approval to accept the grant funds.

Ron Hinson moved to adopt Budget Amendment BA-2026-01:

Amendment necessary to appropriate funds for the IF/THEN Champions Network Small Award to be used for programming at the Science Center.

TDA:

Revenues:

Restricted Revenue	\$4,300
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Expenditures:

Programming	\$4,300
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Adopted this 9th day of April, 2026.

Arpan Bhakta seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with the following votes:

AYES: Day, Moore, Heisner, Raspberry, Bhakta, Hinson, Crunkleton, Rentschler

NAYS: None

Arpan Bhakta has created a presentation to bolster marketing efforts and will present at the next meeting. Pete Hovanec stated he will share the proposal with the team and start to elaborate on some of the topics.

Sheila Crunkleton inquired about occupancy averages and Arpan Bhakta and Gina Day had a brief discussion regarding fluctuating occupancy numbers.

Ashley Nowell, Jen Moore, Joyce Rentschler and Pete Hovanec discussed the possibility of a music festival or booking local music acts at the Dowd, perhaps monthly, or possibly several acts at a time to attract larger crowds to Monroe.

Pete Hovanec gave an update on the Country Club, including the golf simulator, menu, VIP event and potential opening date.

Sheila Crunkleton made a motion to adjourn. Bill Heisner seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with the following votes:

AYES: Rasberry, Hinson, Day, Moore, Heisner, Bhakta, Crunkleton, Rentschler

NAYS: None

The meeting adjourned at 9:29 a.m.

ATTEST:

Robert Burns, Chairman

Kristen Hensley

MTDA/4-9-2026

**CITY OF MONROE, NORTH CAROLINA
HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAX COLLECTIONS HISTORY**

Month	Collections										Inception	
	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	Total from FY2024	Total from FY2025		FY2026
July	\$50,935.50	\$57,757.87	\$49,237.75	\$52,555.67	\$50,502.69	36,361.82	\$58,632.48	\$77,203.59	\$71,311.91	\$70,875.15	\$77,308.09	
August	48,845.23	56,430.47	53,328.43	53,326.15	56,119.30	33,717.52	\$57,897.52	\$72,112.89	\$70,250.44	\$76,578.66	75,481.12	
September	43,971.63	52,501.28	49,280.40	57,322.54	54,601.79	36,333.99	\$57,646.95	\$67,860.45	\$70,961.74	\$80,412.65	73,710.88	
October	50,450.31	62,852.14	54,883.77	61,478.56	58,576.63	47,918.88	\$60,324.82	\$72,465.20	\$78,388.15	\$90,971.64	83,244.67	
November	44,935.28	53,718.49	52,159.03	52,344.58	44,677.93	33,689.77	\$62,776.88	\$69,846.82	\$66,133.93	\$78,695.22	70,001.39	
December	37,857.15	42,905.99	43,020.41	41,248.49	35,855.88	30,608.58	\$55,627.44	\$58,041.30	\$61,688.92	\$62,565.29	62,864.60	
January	47,446.36	49,314.76	44,917.89	45,790.70	37,998.34	34,555.26	\$47,425.62	\$57,371.07	\$66,446.68	\$68,625.18	68,838.50	
February	49,690.07	50,786.19	49,090.46	50,174.09	41,074.64	35,790.58	\$55,074.93	\$64,640.72	\$62,730.49	\$53,143.41	62,845.12	
March	54,238.06	58,370.59	58,151.91	55,628.08	44,213.52	49,982.86	\$68,473.24	\$77,373.44	\$73,443.47	\$99,912.45	77,620.90	
April	56,185.32	54,463.65	55,541.22	52,298.83	24,603.84	54,315.36	\$72,023.49	\$69,155.17	\$68,463.29	\$77,453.41	-	
May	55,415.35	59,183.07	56,465.45	58,606.08	30,748.09	57,003.16	\$72,299.75	\$76,655.92	\$77,856.16	\$86,423.02	-	
June	56,036.83	53,968.10	56,273.88	54,481.57	36,285.75	57,435.41	\$72,729.08	\$74,197.82	\$80,517.94	\$82,066.87	-	
Penalties/Interest	40.29											
Total Collections	\$596,047.38	\$652,252.60	\$622,350.60	\$635,255.34	\$515,258.40	\$507,713.19	\$740,932.20	\$836,924.39	\$848,193.12	\$927,722.95	\$651,915.27	
Distribution of Collections												
Administrative Fee	\$17,881.42	\$16,522.53	\$16,415.73	\$16,352.55	\$15,152.58	\$15,077.13	\$17,409.32	\$17,296.09	\$18,481.93	\$19,277.23	\$16,519.15	\$487,385.48
Operating (2/3)	\$385,443.97	\$423,820.05	\$403,956.58	\$412,601.86	\$333,403.88	\$328,424.04	\$482,348.59	\$546,418.86	\$553,140.79	\$605,630.48	\$423,597.41	\$6,243,460.56
Capital (1/3)	\$192,721.99	\$211,910.02	\$201,978.29	\$206,300.93	\$166,701.94	\$164,212.02	\$241,174.29	\$273,209.43	\$276,570.40	\$302,815.24	\$211,798.71	\$4,784,645.23
	\$596,047.38	\$652,252.60	\$622,350.60	\$635,255.34	\$515,258.40	\$507,713.19	\$740,932.20	\$836,924.39	\$848,193.12	\$927,722.95	\$651,915.27	\$11,515,491.28

Operating Fund Activity:

Fiscal Year	Total Revenue*	Operating Expense	Capital Fund Transfer Out	increase/(Decrease in Net Assets)	Fund Balance
2004	\$ 172,430	\$ 249	\$ 114,830	\$ 57,351	\$ 57,351
2005	245,420	49,354	163,613	32,453	89,804
2006	268,539	70,628	176,514	21,397	111,201
2007	292,730	69,590	191,873	31,267	142,468
2008	319,940	79,519	210,593	29,828	172,296
2009	327,232	85,108	217,376	24,748	197,044
2010	286,292	105,147	190,079	(8,934)	188,110
2011	306,323	141,300	199,809	(34,786)	153,324
2012	338,380	218,328	214,473	(94,421)	58,903
2013	366,349	157,025	223,162	(13,839)	45,064
2014	389,562	132,144	239,765	17,653	62,717
2015	505,323	229,769	193,164	82,390	145,107
2016	603,262	324,214	192,722	86,326	231,433
2017	677,786	243,750	211,910	222,126	453,559
2018	634,804	270,913	201,978	161,913	615,472
2019	643,745	257,345	206,301	180,099	795,571
2020	599,412	270,236	166,702	162,473	958,044
2021	501,615	385,603	164,212	(48,200)	909,844
2022	732,524	459,705	241,174	31,645	941,489
2023	973,580	720,369	273,209	(19,999)	921,490
2024	1,068,593	788,070	276,570	3,953	925,443
2025	1,189,749	930,860	302,815	(43,927)	881,516

Fund Balance as of June 30, 2025

\$881,516

Capital Expense History:

Professional Fees for Civic Center	86,838
Monroe Park Master Plan and Site Assessment	23,058
Air Museum Advance Planning	19,240
Purchase of "The Tinker Belle"/Capital Upgrades	255,177
Storage Building	8,175
Tourism Study	7,500
Snow Machine	6,129
Center Theatre Property/Adjacent Property Purchase	508,770
Purchase of 318 E. Franklin Street Property for Science Center & Capital Improvements/Consulting/Fun	5,038,358
Capitalized Equipment/Exhibits - Science Center	786,625
Center Theatre Expansion	332,497
Branding Initiative/Website Design	33,830
NC DNCR Grant Capital Equipment Expenses - Science Center Exhibits	100,000

**Cash Balance of the Capital Project Fund
as of April 29, 2026**

Projects:	
Monroe Science Center Building	-
Science Center Exhibits	-
Rotary Picnic Shelter Project	10,400.24
	<u>10,400.24</u>
	<u>\$ 10,400.24</u>

Occupancy Tax Special Revenue Fund Operating Activity FY 2026

		<u>Budget</u>	<u>FYTD Actual</u>
Revenue:	Occupancy Tax	288,413	\$ 186,184
	Sales of TinkerBelle	-	-
	Investment Earnings	17,481	13,318
	Appropriation of Fund Balance	-	-
	Total	305,894	199,502
Expenses:	Debt Service - Principal & Interest	256,848	27,326
	Debt Service - Bond Admin Fees	1,056	1,144
	Total	257,904	28,470
Net Income (Loss)		47,990	171,032

Fund Balance History of the Occupancy Tax Special Revenue Fund

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Total Revenue*</u>	<u>Debt Service Expense</u>	<u>Capital Fund Transfer In/(Out)</u>	<u>Increase/(Decrease in Net Assets)</u>	<u>Fund Balance</u>
2022	\$ 241,649	\$ 254,351	\$ 260,565	\$ 247,863	\$ 247,863
2023	278,051	258,403	-	19,648	267,511
2024	406,745	256,665	(70,000)	80,080	347,591
2025	306,639	251,116	(3,194)	52,328	399,920

Monroe Science Center Operating Activity FY 2026

	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Current Year Actuals</u>	<u>Prior Year Actuals</u>
Revenue:	201,000	\$ 133,953	\$ 177,617
	60,000	26,548	34,358
	12,375	8,220	4,687
	0	-	-
	6,000	-	-
	279,375	168,720	216,663
Expenses:	432,617	315,663	391,410
	7,100	5,831	7,397
	10,000	3,436	12,207
	9,000	2,933	6,617
	20,200	-	1,444
	750	344	285
	4,711	4,711	3,871
	24,250	6,820	19,318
	2,000	-	1,751
	9,300	4,412	6,977
	1,000	893	1,794
	1,367	1,253	6,139
	26,920	26,194	24,416
	28,000	7,451	18,119
	750	660	650
	1,111	946	879
	2,500	1,444	6,023
	11,657	11,546	7,406
	593,233	394,539	516,702
Net Income (Loss)	(313,858)	(225,819)	(300,039)

Monroe, NC Tourism Strategy (2026–2029)

- Driving Overnight Stays & Hotel Revenue

Key Assets

- Corporate base
- Walkable downtown
- Wineries
- Event venues
- Proximity to Charlotte
- Parks and Trails

Strategic Priorities

- 1. Sports tourism
- 2. Event creation
- 3. Corporate Business
- 4. Brand positioning

Sports Tourism

- Target overflow tournaments
 - Capture tournaments that are mid tier below Charlotte/Mathews area
 - Utilize partnerships with Wingate
 - Align objectives with parks and recreation
- Develop signature events
- Focus on multi-day stays
 - Tournaments designed to encourage 2+ nights

Corporate Business

- Determine how tourism board can help with economic development
- Ensure corporations have good pool of employees
 - Training programs at the colleges
- Continue promoting Union County Monroe as a great area for corporate development

Event Development

- Create shoulder season events
 - This creates better business as hotels can drive better value to guests because we are selling into a lower demand period.
- Food & wine festivals
 - Demographics need to be aligned to the food and wine festivals
- Downtown activations
 - Leverage social district
 - Monthly events

Marketing Strategy

- Geo-target Charlotte market
- Promote cost/value
 - Small town value and big town enjoyment
- Retarget event visitors

Brand Positioning Themes

- Close to Charlotte. Better for Staying.
- Southern Charm, City Convenience.
- Stay Smart. Stay Monroe.
- Near the City, Beyond the Expected.
- Your Gateway to Greater Charlotte

Goals

- Drive hotel revenue
 - Increase occupancy
 - Extend stays
 - Build year-round demand

Year 2026

- Build sales program
- Launch events
- Start sports outreach

Year 2027

- Expand events
- Grow tournaments
- Increase marketing reach

Year 2028

- Scale demand
- Establish Monroe as destination

Success Metrics

- Room nights
- Weekday occupancy
- Length of stay
- Event impact

Final Takeaway

- Monroe must shift from reactive demand to engineered demand



STAFF REPORT

TO: Tourism Development Authority

VIA: Mark Watson, City Manager

DATE: May 14, 2026

FROM: Pete Hovanec, Parks & Recreation and Tourism Director

PREPARED BY: Tim Pappas, Dowd Center Theatre Operations Supervisor

SUBJECT: Dowd Center Theatre Update

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The TDA will be presented an update on events for the Dowd Center Theatre.

REVIEW

The Dowd Center Theatre held back-to-back performances at the beginning of the month featuring two distinct offerings: *Magic Rocks!* and the *Charlotte Symphony Orchestra*. Both shows welcomed a large number of first-time ticket buyers. 55% of the Magic Rocks audience and 64% of the Charlotte Symphony audience had never been to the theatre before, accounting for 344 new theatre patrons.

The theatre will round out FY26 with a Mother's Day eve jazz concert, an interview Q&A show featuring the *Celebrity Housewives*, and finally, a much-requested return performance by Mini KISS on Friday, June 12.

Our May film series centers around movie musicals with *Grease*, *Newsies*, and *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, which is our featured film in the America 250 patriotic series. The June films are currently being finalized, with *Captain America: The First Avenger* as our America 250 movie, alongside other action-packed films in our Superhero Summer series.

RECOMMENDATION

No action is needed at this time.



STAFF REPORT

TO: Tourism Development Authority
VIA: Mark Watson, City Manager
DATE: May 14, 2026
FROM: Pete Hovanec, Parks & Recreation and Tourism Director
PREPARED BY: Lauren Fike, Monroe Science Center Supervisor
SUBJECT: Monroe Science Center Update

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The TDA will be presented an update on events and operations for Monroe Science Center.

REVIEW

April was a busy and successful month with spring break, Community Day and a private event. This month we will focus on remaining school field trips and prepping for summer. Summer Tuesdays start in June where we will open from 9-1 for two dollars off admission.

RECOMMENDATION

No action is needed at this time.