

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION**

August 15, 2017
7:00 P.M.

Commissioners Present: J. Harry Lange, Jim Woods, Susan Andrews, Martha Chewning, Becky Langston. Staff Present: Randy Dowling, County Manager; John Taylor, County Attorney; Nancy D. McMichael, County Clerk.

1. **CALL TO ORDER.** Chairman Lange called the Regular Session to order.
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** At the request of Chairman Lange, Randy Dowling, County Manager, led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. **MINUTES.** The motion to approve the minutes of the August 1, 2017 Regular Session, Called Session of 11:00 AM, and Called Session of 6:30 PM was made by Commissioner Woods, seconded by Commissioner Chewning, and passed unanimously.
4. **PUBLIC HEARING III: TAXPAYERS BILL OF RIGHTS**

- A. **Call to Order.** Chairman Lange called the Public Hearing to order and explained that this is the third public hearing as required by law regarding the proposed millage rate increase of 2.5 mills; that the new rate being considered is 8.64 mills, which is lower than any of the surrounding counties, but higher than it has been in a number of years; the current millage rate is the same as it was in 1992, even though it has gone up and down during the interim since that time; that the tax digest is about the same as it has been for the last few years with no appreciable growth or decline in the face of rising costs; that some of the items in budget are the upgrading and replacement of the 911 telephone, CAD and radio system, an increase in fire department equipment stipend, a new financial accounting system to replace the current one which is no longer supported and is not in compliance with state requirements, debt payment for the Community Center, improvements to the Jail and Prison, a 2% cost of living increase for employees, a 20% increase in health care costs, and four new deputies; that funds have been taken from the Jail Fund, Solid Waste Fund, Water Work Funds as well as the General Fund to offset some of the costs; that the County Manager reduced the requests of the Department Heads by approximately three million and after the budget was presented to the Board, it was again reduced by another two million or so in addition to cutting the budget for each department by 3%, not including personnel; that the Board welcomes comments and is interested in hearing what the citizens have to say; and that the Board does not like having to consider raising taxes. He said that wherever possible, items have been moved to SPLOST, the majority of which is paid by tourists; and that the General Fund balance over the last three years has decreased but cannot continue to decrease. He reminded all that each speaker will have five minutes to make comments, and that they should give their name and address before speaking.

Marina Lovern asked how much is a mill, and Chairman Lange said that 2.5 mills on a \$150,000 home will result in an approximate increase of \$150.

James Rodgers, citizen who lives on Salem-ChIPLEY Road in Pine Mountain, appeared before the Board and said that a jump of 2.5 mills is a big jump; that he realizes the Board has done a good job in cutting expenses, but it is a disservice for the citizens to be hit with such an increase.

Peter Byrd, citizen who lives on Plantation Creek Road in Fortson, appeared before the Board and said that he is retired, lives on a fixed income, opposes the proposed millage increase, and that it's a struggle at the end of the year when taxes are due.

Kay Thompson, citizen who lives on Pine Tree Road in Hamilton, appeared before the Board and asked about the rate of the proposed millage increase, which Chairman Lange explained. Ms. Thompson said that she doesn't see the need for the Community Center, which benefits the citizens in Hamilton; that libraries are a thing of the past and doesn't understand why citizens should pay for same (to which Chairman Lange said that SPLOST dollars are paying for the Library along with funding from the State and private donations); that Ellerslie Park is in a very remote area of the County with a small number of residents; that she and her neighbors pay a lot of taxes living on the lake but there are pot holes in the roads, no lines on the roads, and there is no tornado warning system; and that perhaps increasing the millage by a small amount at a time would be better. Chairman Lange said that the

County has previously looked at tornado warnings and it was determined to not be a feasible venture and suggested that people sign up for Code Red.

Ron Roth, citizen who lives on Burnt Log Road in Fortson, appeared before the Board and said that he lives on the lake and pays taxes to the County and to Georgia Power for the same property which seems like double taxation. Wayne Morris, Tax Assessor, said that it is not double taxation as the County tax is paid on the structures and docks, while the land value is assigned by and paid to Georgia Power, who, as a utility company, pays tax to the state, which assesses the value of Georgia Power property.

Alvin Howard, citizen who lives on Mountain Creek Drive in Hamilton, appeared before the Board and said that the voice of the citizens must be heard and suggested a compromise increase of 1.7 mills. He also said that it may be necessary to reduce personnel or not fill open positions.

George Clark, citizen who lives on Georgia Highway 103 in West Point, appeared before the Board and said that building the Community Center was a bad thing and before the County spends money on anything else, it should be looked at real close; that Lickskillet Road does not need to be paved and those funds could be used elsewhere; and that he understands property is to be appraised every three years, but that is not being done. Wayne Morris, Tax Assessor, said that his staff looks at the value of every property in the County every year because every property owner gets an assessment notice every year. Mr. Clark asked about the health insurance premiums and retirement of the Commissioners and employees. Commissioner Chewning said that the County pays the health insurance premiums because salaries are relatively low, and Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that retirement is from contributions from salaries. Mr. Clark suggested that employees be given a raise and then be required to pay their insurance and retirement to get it off the taxpayers.

Timothy Jackson, citizen who lives on Mulberry Trace in Cataula, appeared before the Board and said that he agrees Lickskillet Road doesn't need to be paved; that he lives on a graveled road which needs to be graded; and that West Point has a lower millage rate than the County. Chairman Lange said that West Point contributes their services to the County portion of West Point. Mr. Jackson said that each time a house is built, more taxes are paid to the County; and that while he doesn't mind an increase in taxes, a 2.5 millage increase is a substantial increase. Commissioner Woods said that while tax revenues have decreased over the past few years, expenses have increased; and that hiring four new deputies is \$80,000 this year, but will be \$300,000 next year for cars, insurance, and fuel. Chairman Lange said that the School Board sets its millage separately from that of the County; that the County collects for the School Board; and that the School Board gets about 76% of the taxes collected with the County retaining the balance of 24%; and that while a new house does bring in taxes, the taxes on a \$350,000 home does not cover one year's cost for one school student.

Mike Jones, citizen who lives on Bowes Drive in Hamilton, appeared before the Board and said that he lives in the Lake Harding area; that he would like to see tax money spent in his area; and that his road, which has been on the paving list for several years, has not yet been paved, there is no garbage pickup and no sidewalks.

Roy Saxon, citizen who lives on Rosewood Drive in Fortson, appeared before the Board and asked if the 911, CAD, and radio system could be funded by SPLOST, to which Chairman Lange said they could but the Board was not made aware of the need in time to put them in the current SPLOST. Mr. Saxon said that such one-time costs should be in SPLOST; and that the Board should consider increasing the millage rate by only 1.7.

Clint Williamson, citizen who lives on Georgia Highway 315 in Cataula, appeared before the Board and said that an increase for deputies, fire department needs, and 911 is hard to argue with, but that the 20% increase in health insurance is a lot. He then asked how many insurance bids were received and who is the County's current provider for insurance. Chairman Lange said that the provider is Blue Cross Blue Shield. Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that the County's broker, MSI, handled the request for health insurance proposals and one viable bid was received, one bid wasn't viable, and three did not respond; and that the County has had high claims within the past year. Mr. Williamson suggested that the millage rate be increased by only 1.5 or 1.7 mills, which would help most citizens, and said that if it does increase by 2.5 it may be possible to decrease it in two or three years.

Shirley Gaultney, citizen who lives on Helen Lane in Hamilton, appeared before the Board and said that she opposes the 2.5 millage rate increase and would prefer to see it increase by only 1.7; that Licksillet Road does need to be paved; that rights of way needs to be cut; that limbs hanging over roads need to be cut; that she would prefer to see paid fire departments; and that a 2.5 millage rate increase will be hard on people with fixed incomes.

Myrna Pizarro, citizen who lives on Ruth E. Willett Drive in Midland, appeared before the Board and said that in her area of the County there are 161 houses for sale; that four new deputies is a bit much to pay for; that she agrees with the comments about Eilerslie Park and the Library; and that a gradual increase in the millage rate would be better for all.

Keith Seeley, citizen who lives on Cannon Road in Fortson, appeared before the Board and said that it sounds like the plan is to build the County larger and larger with more people, more houses, more industry, and bring problems that are in Columbus, Atlanta and LaGrange to Harris County; that increasing the millage rate is going to hurt citizens; that he doesn't believe four new deputies are needed at this point; that he agrees a gradual increase in the millage rate would be better; and that the Board should reconsider the millage increase. Chairman Lange said that the Board is listening to the citizens and that an increase of 2.5 was the talking point and could be changed.

Mervyn Willoughby, citizen who lives on Gail Drive in Fortson, appeared before the Board and said that the Board backed the citizens regarding the rock quarry and he appreciated it; that he is retired and on a fixed income; that he can't sell his house for the amount it is being appraised due to the rock quarry; that he is opposed to the 2.5 increase in the millage rate; that he is a proponent of law enforcement, fire departments and personal safety of the citizens, more than he is for the library; that people don't use the library anymore due to cell phones, internet, etc., and he would prefer to see the funds for the Library and Community Center go toward law enforcement and fire departments. He also said that a neighbor has an issue with a drainage pipe and with limbs being cut by the County and left on the right of way.

Gail Ingersoll, citizen who lives on Lakeshore Drive in Hamilton, appeared before the Board and said that she would like to know what the Airport brings to the County, and why the County continues to support it; that she lives on Lake Harding, pays County taxes, and also has to pay Georgia Power; that she would like to know if the County system is based on cash or accrual; that she is concerned about the new Library; and that the Community Center is being under utilized. Chairman Lange said that regarding the Airport, it brings people to the County either to stay at Callaway Gardens or just passing through on trips, the County makes a profit on fuel sales, the County receives revenue from hangar rentals and tax on the planes that are based at the Airport, and that the Airport is pretty close to breaking even. Regarding accounting, Clint Chastain, Chief Financial Officer, said that it is a cash basis for items such a building permits, but the County as a whole works on a modified accrual basis.

Lynn Sanders, citizen who lives on Dogwood Lane West in Fortson, appeared before the Board and said that she attends most Commission meetings; that she realizes that the County got behind on some things, like the 911 system, but has noticed the County spends a lot of money on items that don't seem to be good ideas - like studies performed for one reason or another; that things seem to be going well, then all of a sudden taxes needs to be raised; and that she can't understand why other people decide how the County's money is to be spent when that is why the citizens pay the Commissioners.

Jim Furin, citizen who lives on Dogwood Lane West in Fortson, appeared before the Board and announced to those in attendance that the Commission meetings are taped and can be found on YouTube under Harris County Georgia Concerned Citizens.

- B. **Public Hearing Closed.** There being no further comments from citizens or from the Commissioners, Chairman Lange closed the Public Hearing and announced that the Millage will be set later in the evening.

5. **NEW BUSINESS**

- A. **Resolution of Recognition: Neal Joseph Callahan, Jr., and Patrick Michael Parr.** Chairman Lange read the Resolution of Recognition honoring Neal Joseph Callahan, Jr., age 14, and Patrick Michael Parr, age 12, who were instrumental in locating the submerged vehicle in which Herbert Davis “Sonny” Groover was found deceased. The motion to approve the Resolution was made by Commissioner Woods, seconded by Commissioner Chewning, and passed unanimously. The young men were in attendance, were congratulated, received a standing ovation, and had photos taken with the Board.
- B. **TUSA: Radio Agreement Development Assistance and Budget Amendment #1 for FY 17/18.** Chairman Lange said that TUSA is proposing to provide assistance in the development of the agreement regarding the radio system between the County, Diverse Power, and Dean’s Commercial Two-Way at an estimated cost of \$15,000, which was not budgeted. Discussion included that while the County Attorney would prepare the agreement and include the legal requirement, the technical aspects of the agreement that TUSA would provide are necessary; that the amount should be capped at \$15,000; that if less than 100 hours are used, the County will pay only for those hours (at \$150/hour); and that the funds would come from General Fund Reserves. Following discussion, the motion to move forward with the assistance as proposed but with a cap of \$15,000, or less if less than 100 hours are utilized, and payment made for actual hours worked at \$150/hour for a maximum of 100 hours. was made by Commissioner Andrews, seconded by Commissioner Chewning, and passed with four in favor (Andrews, Chewning, Lange, Woods) and one opposed (Langston).
- C. **TUSA: CAD & 911 System Phase 4 and Budget Amendment #2 for FY 17/18.** Chairman Lange said that TUSA has either completed or is in the process of completing the first three phases of the agreement (approved in January 2017), which reflected that Phase 4 would be determined at a later point; that TUSA has indicated that Phase 4 will cost about \$54,000; and that funds were not budgeted. Commissioner Langston tabled discussion and action to the September 5 meeting during which the Board is to hear from TUSA regarding the results of the radio system evaluation.
- D. **Setting Millage Rate.** Chairman Lange said that three Public Hearings, as required by State law, were held; that the Board heard comments from citizens during all three hearings; that the current County millage rate is 6.14, the School Board’s M&O is 17.91, the School Board’s bond indebtedness is .65 for a current total of 24.70; that the proposed increase to the County’s millage rate is 2.50, which would bring it to 8.64; that five meetings were held regarding the budget; and that the Board has given much consideration to the needs of the County and comments from citizens. He asked for a motion regarding the millage rate.

Commissioner Andrews said that some of the items in the budget will be one-time expenses and she believes the County could get by with an increase of 2 mills rather than 2.5. She then made the motion to adopt a millage rate of 8.14 (6.14 plus 2.00). The motion died for lack of a second.

Following discussion, which included a review of the millage rates of surrounding and comparable counties, Commissioner Woods made the motion to adopt a millage rate of 8.64 (6.14 plus 2.50), which was seconded by Commissioner Chewning. Commissioner Andrews again stated her reasons for a 2 mill increase, Commissioner Chewning stated her reasons for the need of a 2.5 mill increase, Mr. Dowling reviewed the sources to help fund the budget (Jail Fund, Solid Waste Fund, Water Works Fund, and General Fund), and Chairman Lange stated that over \$3 million was cut from the budget before it was presented to the Board where more cuts were made and that he understands about those who are on fixed income. Commissioner Woods then amended his motion to adopt the County millage rate of 8.64, the portion of West Point within the County at 5.184, and to authorize the Tax Commissioner to collect the School Board’s millage of 18.56, and said that said that the School Board’s millage is 17.91, its indebtedness bond is .65, for a total millage rate of 27.20. Commissioner Chewning amended her second. The motion passed with three in favor (Woods, Chewning, Lange) and two opposed (Andrews, Langston).

- E. **Appointment: Recreation Board.** Chairman Lange said that Troy Lundquist had notified the Mountain Hill Athletic Association (MHAA) in January that he

would be unable to continue as its representative on the Recreation Board; that the Recreation Board temporarily appointed Heather Hajek to the Board as MHAA's representative on March 29 and then on June 28, temporarily appointed Brad Johnson as MHAA's representative; and that the MHAA is now requesting that Mr. Johnson be formally appointed to the Recreation Board as its representative to complete Mr. Lundquist's term, which expires December 31, 2018. The motion to appoint Brad Johnson to the Recreation Board as MHAA's representative to complete the term of Troy Lundquist was made by Commissioner Langston, seconded by Commissioner Chewning, and passed unanimously.

6. COUNTY MANAGER

A. **Project Updates.** Randy Dowling, County Manager, brought the Board up to date on various projects, as follows:

- (1) IT Manager. Eight applications were received, three individuals were interviewed, an offer was made, and the new employee will start September 1.
- (2) Accounting Software Upgrade. Proposals are due September 1 and will be before the Board on September 5 to award.
- (3) Prison CCTV Security System Update. The pre-proposal meeting took place on August 14, proposals are due August 24, with results before the Board on September 5 to award.
- (4) Radio System. Evaluation underway by TUSA with report to the Board expected September 5.
- (5) 911 Telephone & CAD System. Telephone installation project underway. CAD System pre-proposal was held July 28, proposals are due August 18 (submission date was extended from August 11), with results before the Board on September 5 to award.
- (6) LMIG 2016 & 2017. Project is underway with completion expected during October.
- (7) Hardage Road. Project is underway with new water lines being installed; project completion expected by year's end.
- (8) LMIG 2017 Off-System Safety. Funding has been awarded for guardrails and striping in the amount of \$65,000 plus 10% County match of \$6,500 for a total of \$71,500 with projects being finalized to be bid out and completed by the end of the year.
- (9) AV Fuel Truck for Airport. Truck has been ordered with delivery expected before the end of the month.
- (10) Library. Project is going well, and is on time and on budget.
- (12) Kings Gap CDBG. The public hearing to closeout the project was held August 8 and all paperwork has been completed.
- (13) Planning Retreat. The Board's planning retreat was held August 11.
- (14) Five Year Capital Improvement Program. This includes projects spread out over a five-year period and was reviewed by the Board during its August 11 retreat.
- (15) SPLOST Continuation. The current SPLOST ends March 2019, but plans are to hold a referendum in May of 2018 for the continuance of the SPLOST.
- (16) Fee Schedules Update. Fee schedules, prepared with input from appropriate departments, were discussed during the August 11 retreat, and a Work Session has been scheduled for September 5 for Department Heads to meet with the Board regarding same.

7. **COUNTY ATTORNEY**

- A. **Resolution: Moratorium on Planned Unit Developments (PUD)**. John Taylor, County Attorney, said that the Planning Commission has requested a moratorium on the application and approval of Planned Unit Developments (PUD), which include Planned Residential Developments, Planned Commercial Developments, and Planned Manufacturing Developments, for a 90-day period; that after 90 days, the Board could extend the moratorium for another 90 days if necessary; that a couple of changes in the first and second paragraphs of the resolution are necessary (change “is” to “has been” in first paragraph, and replace the second paragraph with “residential and planned developments have increased in Harris County”); and that with those changes he recommended approval of same. The motion to approve the Resolution with the recommended changes was made by Commissioner Chewning, seconded by Commissioner Woods, and passed unanimously.
- B. **Request for Executive Session**. John Taylor, County Attorney, requested an Executive Session for the purpose of discussing litigation, real estate acquisition or disposition, and personnel matters.
8. **RECESS FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION**. The motion to go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing litigation, real estate acquisition or disposition, and personnel matters was made at 9:30 PM by Chairman Lange, seconded by Commissioner Langston, and passed unanimously.
9. **RESUME REGULAR SESSION**. The motion to go back into Regular Session was made at 10:15 PM by Commissioner Chewning, seconded by Commissioner Andrews, and passed unanimously.
10. **ADJOURNMENT**. There being no further business to discuss, the motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Chewning, seconded by Commissioner Woods, and passed unanimously.

J> Harry Lange, Chairman

Attest:

Nancy D. McMichael, County Clerk