



BALDWIN COUNTY PUBLIC HEARING

Monday, August 23, 2021

Government Building, Suite 220, 1601 N Columbia St
10:00 AM

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Henry Craig
John Westmoreland
Sammy Hall

MEMBERS ABSENT

Kendrick Butts
Emily Davis

OTHERS PRESENT

Carlos Tobar
Dawn Hudson
Jill Adams
Cindy Cunningham
David McRee

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Craig called the Public Hearing to order at 10:00 a.m.

ADMINISTRATIVE / FISCAL MATTERS

Public Hearing on Proposed Property Tax Increase

Chair Craig opened the Public Hearing for discussion of a proposed property tax increase.

Assistant County Manager Dawn Hudson made the following presentation regarding the proposed property tax increase:

Ms. Hudson stated this is the first of three public hearings on a proposed millage rate increase. She explained the state formula that calculates the rollback rate.

Ms. Hudson then presented information about the impact of the proposed increase on a \$100,000.00 homestead property which will be \$25.80 and a non-homestead property of \$34.40. She discussed local revenue sources stating that 85% of County revenue comes from taxes. Ms. Hudson also discussed mandated services; required services and discretionary services that are provided by the County. 85% of services are mandated by the State of Georgia and 15% are discretionary services; but, these are services most citizens want such as animal control, roads & bridges. She discussed budget impacts such as rising costs of supplies, fuel, utilities, increased costs for public safety and EMS, stormwater fees, elections requirements and the loss of revenue due to the State cancelling the Central State Hospital Fire Contract.

Ms. Hudson opened the floor for questions and public comment.

Mr. William Edmonds – discussed the average fuel cost in 2003 and the millage rate increase in 2014. He stated the County is using the increase now that should have already been covered by 2014 millage rate increase. He stated everyone has to pay for inflation - everything has gone up. He said this means a double tax for citizens - having to pay for inflation and tax increase. He suggested the County wait to get the inflation rate back down before raising taxes. He said the timing of a tax increase is not good.

Carolyn Edmonds - agree on fuel issue - increase since 2014. She questioned how did the County got away without paying any subsidies on EMS all these years and are now paying? She stated she has had to live within her means - why doesn't the County have to do the same?

Carolyn Jaquette - no comment

JoAnn Nunnally – asked if the County will receive any COVID funds that have been coming to State and why these funds couldn't be used.

Al Colter – discussed other increases such as trash pickup. He stated the County should be trying to cut back on expense items rather than raising taxes. He asked if County Departmental budgets could be reviewed to determine where cuts can be made.

Commissioners responded to comments and issues related to proposed increase.

Commissioner Hall responded that in previous years ambulance services were being provided by a different company, and at first Grady EMS was willing to accept the cost from billing patients. However, they have made a substantial investment in the County but because of cost going up Grady EMS will not provide the ambulance service free any longer. Commissioner Hall stated the County operates as frugal as possible on a very conservative budget. He reminded the audience that 85% of County services are mandated by the State.

Commissioner Westmoreland responded that the County must present a balanced budget. He stated services must continue to be provided even though the cost of providing those services increase. He asked what services citizens would want the County to cut.


Chairman Craig commented that every year since 2014 the County has struggled not to raise taxes. Since 2014 we have found ways to keep from raising taxes; however, now because of constitutional requirements we have to reconsider. He discussed the cancellation of the fire services contract at CSH in the amount of \$600,000. He stated COVID money has been received and there are many restrictions as to how the money can be spent. Mr. Craig discussed that trash and water services are utilities and property taxes cannot be used to fund these services. He also stated that no property taxes were used on the Government Building; only SPLOST funds were used.

Hudman Evans - stated citizens need and want services. The cost of providing services goes up as does everything else. He commended Commissioners for their diligence in controlling spending in the past and encouraged them to continue to remain diligent to keep costs down.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Sammy Hall made a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing at 10:45 a.m. Vice Chairman John Westmoreland seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,


Henry R. Craig
Chairman


Cynthia K. Cunningham
County Clerk