

**DAWSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
VOTING SESSION MINUTES – THURSDAY, AUGUST 3, 2023
DAWSON COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER ASSEMBLY ROOM
25 JUSTICE WAY, DAWSONVILLE, GEORGIA 30534
6:00 PM**

Motion passed 4-0 to come out of Executive Session. Stowers/Dooley

ROLL CALL: Those present were Chairman Billy Thurmond (via teleconference); Commissioner Seth Stowers, District 1; Commissioner Chris Gaines, District 2; Commissioner Alexa Bruce, District 3; Commissioner Emory Dooley, District 4; County Attorney Angela Davis; County Clerk Kristen Cloud; and interested citizens of Dawson County. County Manager Joey Leverette was not present.

OPENING PRESENTATION:

Recognition of Parks & Recreation Employee with a Life-Saving Award

Parks & Recreation Director Matt Payne presented lifeguard Declan Rhodes with a Life-Saving Award.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Vice Chairman Gaines

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Motion passed 3-1 to approve the Minutes of the Work Session held on July 20, 2023. Dooley/Stowers- Commissioner Bruce abstained

Motion passed 3-1 to approve the Minutes of the Voting Session held on July 20, 2023. Dooley/Stowers- Commissioner Bruce abstained

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Motion passed 4-0 to approve the agenda with the following change:

- Addition of No. 3 under New Business:
 - Appointment of a Keep Dawson County Beautiful Interim Executive Director

Stowers/Dooley

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

PUBLIC HEARING:

2023 Millage Rate and Property Tax (3rd of 3 hearings; 1st hearing was held July 6, 2023, and the 2nd hearing was held July 20, 2023)

Vice Chairman Gaines discussed the 2023 Millage Rate and Property Tax.

Vice Chairman Gaines opened the hearing by asking if there was anyone present who wished to be heard on the 2023 Millage Rate and Property Tax.

The following spoke on the 2023 Millage Rate and Property Tax:

Phil Adams, Dawsonville, Georgia, thanked the board for its intention to roll back the millage rate. He said, “The other thing is: most of my friends my age are leaving Dawson County, going to Forsyth County,” so they can get reduced school rates, etc. “We’ve paid a pretty good share of school rates our whole lives,” said Adams. “In the future, I hope [you will] consider that.”

Dale Smart, Dawsonville, Georgia, said, “I’m just hoping to have a little clarification because I know a lot of us aren’t used to the lingo. When you say ‘roll back,’ you mean roll back on the millage rate. Does anything happen to the assessments that we got? Can you explain a little more so I can understand?”

Barbara Smart, Dawsonville, Georgia, thanked the board. “I understand that the tax assessor’s office is independent and separate from you, but I want to go on record that we’re a neighborhood called ‘Country Place,’ which is on the other side of Chestatee. We are all on similarly situated properties. The tax assessors have assessed those on the value of a .1 acre from \$23,000, being the lowest, up to \$276,000. There is a huge disparity in those numbers for properties that are very, very similar. We’re all on the water, so we really think the tax assessor’s office needs to re-look at the total valuation on our homes.” Smart added, “Also, we will go to the school board meeting. My husband and I both are well over 70 and we did get a reduction in our taxes when Dale turned 70 several years ago, and this increase just blew our minds because it went back up higher before he got that decrease. We have paid the school tax forever, and I think we need to look at the other counties around us. Just as Phil Adams was saying, we know people who are moving out of Dawson County to get away from the school tax. These are people who are aged and who contribute in a lot of ways economically to this community.”

Jeff McLean, Dawsonville, Georgia, said he lives in the Chestatee Point area. “I think a couple of things of clarification need to be taken care of here. One: anything over 15%, homeowners, you’re supposed to send out with your appraiser’s office - all the details that went into that re-evaluation. That’s a fact, and it’s part of your public record. You need to do that. Other people have called multiple times; nobody is answering the phone. If that’s part of the assessor’s office, they need to get on their act.” He added, “I also found out [that] there used to be a board for the assessor’s office and it was farmed out to another firm to do the re-assessments. Is that true? The reason we’re saying this is that the evaluations are all over the map. A property value that’s .41 acres and the other one [that is] .41 acres and it’s on the lake, both of them have the same view, same everything, houses might be different. The property values between those two properties are over \$200,000 difference. That’s a problem. That’s not being uniform to everybody in this room; it’s not being uniform to you, sitting as commissioners, and I know last time, it was very evident that everything was pushed toward the school board or other people to take care of the problem. You’re our representatives and that’s why you sit in those spots up there. You need to take that into account when you’re looking at all of this. I appreciate the 100 percent rollback, but I think there are other things that need to be taken care of and cleared up.”

Tim Satterfield, Dawsonville, Georgia, said, “I’m with some of the other people about the uniformity, and I’ve even been told it was uniform. It’s not uniform. It’s all over the board.” He added, “We sat down and talked with the tax assessor - the computer program, I think if you put a square footage in there or put it close to somewhere else, it’s going to spit that number out, but I

don't think it's the same value as what's next to it. Ours went way up from \$200,000 to \$500,000; we have no amenities. We have a 3-inch water line, no fire hydrants, no street lights, no sidewalks, but ours got comped with subdivisions on both sides of us. So we do need to look at that. Thank you again for the rollback. It's going to help, and good job."

Bill Kohler, Dawsonville, Georgia, said, "The non-uniformity has really hit me hard, and I've got a bunch of rentals. I've been in Dawson County for 20 years now and bought rental houses as income for when I retired. I'm seeing stuff 30, 40 50, 60 percent in one year, and I've got to roll that on to the tenants. I've got good tenants. I've got good houses. They're hurting right now and, once they raise the price up like that, then your insurance goes up. That's going to come next. The taxes come in high, the insurance says it's worth much more. It's another big cost coming to people that can't afford it."

Darlene Haddock, Dawsonville, Georgia, said, "I'm in the boating business so thank you for taking the wind out of my sails with the rollback. I appreciate that. I've been in Dawson County for 31 years. You've done a good job because you had a 5 percent increase last year and I think you collected more than \$2 million in tax revenue that you didn't expect to collect. So I want to look at it a little differently that everybody else is saying tonight." Haddock said she lives in Blacks Mill Place off of Blacks Mill Road, "and within that five-mile radius of my house, there are six subdivisions, either built last year or under construction. So when you look at your revenue for the year, are you considering, at one time, that was raw land, 20 acres, 40 acres, whatever? You pay a different rate on raw land. Now, you're going to put 400 homes on there and you're going to tax 400 people, so do you consider that?" Haddock added, "My bill this year was a 63 percent increase from last year, and I pulled all my tax bills for 31 years and my bills go up maybe \$25, maybe \$50, nothing like \$1,020 this year. That's a lot of money, especially when the county ended the year with a \$1.64 million surplus. I just want to make sure you are considering how many homes are being built in this county, which is going to bring in more revenue because you're going to tax those people for property and a home versus somebody who just had 40 acres of raw land."

Carolyn Futter Davis, Dawsonville, Georgia, said, "I've only been in Dawson County for two and a half years. My husband has grown up in Dawson and Lumpkin counties, raised his children in Dawson County, and paid plenty of school taxes in his lifetime. But we bought a house here and it was already 20 years old, and we paid a decent amount of taxes on it last year. We're both 74 and I don't understand [why] we're still paying school taxes. I came from Cobb County where at 62 you stopped having to be responsible for school taxes, which most of us by 62 don't have children in school. I did hear that the school was going to do a rollback as well. I don't know how that computes to our actual taxes, but I know that our house was revalued at about \$100,000 more than last year and it's not worth that. We're in Windsor subdivision off Grizzle Road. I know that all the houses in there are 20 years old. The fact that I'm hearing that the assessments are not uniform, because I was thinking that this was a significant bump, but if they're not being done uniformly it may not be a fair bump at all. If they're not being done by Dawson County personnel, and they're not based on property size and other things like that, then it doesn't seem to me that they're going to be uniform." She added, "I don't think that we should still be paying school taxes at 74, but that's me. I don't want to end up having to move out of Dawson County because the taxes are so steep that we need to go someplace else to be able to survive on our Social Security income."

Don Nason, Dawsonville, Georgia, said, "I got my tax assessment for this year. Last year, it went up 15.8 percent; this year it went up 31 percent and I was shocked. I came in and met Elaine Garrett; also Terry McCormick who's an outside appraiser [that] she brought him in. We spent about an hour and they both encouraged me to file an appeal of this assessment, which I did." He added, "I live in Chestatee. I lived in Cobb County and raised two kids there but, when I was 62, I did not have to pay school taxes any more. Each of the counties around here has different things, but Dawson County has one of the most convoluted, complex and unfair age-based property tax exemption formulas. You've got to have a Ph.D. and be a lawyer to understand it. I know they're working on it and it requires the state to go through that. We still need the help up here. I know you all are trying."

Vice Chairman Gaines asked if there was anyone else present who wished to speak on the 2023 Millage Rate and Property Tax and, hearing none, closed the hearing.

Motion passed 4-0 to approve a full rollback of the 2023 property tax, reducing the millage rate to 5.6340. The millage rate of 5.6340 is a reduction from the 2022 rate of 7.2225. Stowers/Dooley

ZONING:

ZA 23-02 - Albert Anderson on behalf of Red Oak Sanitation requests to rezone TMP 106-079, 106-060-001, 106-076 and 106-077 from RA (Residential Agriculture) and CHB (Commercial Highway Business) to CIR (Commercial Industrial Restricted) for the purpose of a transfer station (Evans Circle) (Tabled from the June 15, 2023, Voting Session, at which time a public hearing was held, and moved from the July 20, 2023, Voting Session).

Motion passed 3-1 to deny ZA 23-02. Dooley/Stowers- Commissioner Gaines abstained after announcing he would recuse himself from voting on the item

NEW BUSINESS:

Consideration of Application for Parade and Assembly - Sheriff's Office Shop with a Cop Motorcycle Ride Fundraiser

Motion passed 4-0 to approve an Application for Parade and Assembly - Sheriff's Office Shop with a Cop Motorcycle Ride Fundraiser. Dooley/Stowers

Ratification of 2023 Annual Life Safety Inspection

Motion passed 4-0 to ratify a 2023 Annual Life Safety Inspection. Dooley/Stowers

Consideration of Appointment of a Keep Dawson County Beautiful Interim Executive Director

Motion passed 3-1 to appoint Robbie Irvin as the Keep Dawson County Beautiful Interim Executive Director. Stowers/Dooley- Commissioner Bruce opposed the motion

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion passed 4-0 to adjourn the meeting. Stowers/Bruce

APPROVE:

ATTEST:

Billy Thurmond, Chairman

Kristen Cloud, County Clerk