

**DAWSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING MINUTES – AUGUST 6, 2020  
DAWSON COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER ASSEMBLY ROOM  
25 JUSTICE WAY, DAWSONVILLE, GEORGIA 30534  
11:00 AM**

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**ROLL CALL:** Those present were Chairman Billy Thurmond; Commissioner Sharon Fausett, District 1; Commissioner Chris Gaines, District 2; Commissioner Tim Satterfield, District 3; Commissioner Julie Hughes Nix, District 4; County Manager David Headley; County Clerk Kristen Cloud; and interested citizens of Dawson County. County Attorney Angela Davis was not present.

**INVOCATION:** Chairman Thurmond

**PLEDGE:** Chairman Thurmond

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

None

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

Motion passed 4-0 to approve the agenda as presented. Nix/Gaines

**PUBLIC HEARING:**

*2020 Millage Rate and Property Tax (1st of 3 hearings. 2nd hearing will be held at 6 p.m. August 6, 2020, and 3rd hearing will be held at 4 p.m. August 20, 2020)*

Chairman Thurmond provided information regarding the proposed millage rate. He said the current millage rate is 8.0890 and that the Board of Commissioners (BOC), following three public hearings, would have the option to leave the millage rate as is, or adopt a partial roll back or a full roll back of the millage rate. Thurmond said the millage rate is based on 40 percent assessed value of the total tax digest.

Commissioner Gaines detailed the process of getting to the point of the BOC setting the millage rate. He discussed the offices involved and their duties, the advertising and public hearing process, and the time lines that must be met throughout the process. “This board does not set that process; it’s set by these other agencies and the state is involved ... We do the best we can to take the information that has been provided to us to make these very important decisions.”

Chairman Thurmond mentioned the numerous local- and state-approved exemptions available to citizens. In total, these exemptions in the county add up to \$260,989,642, he said. “Those exemptions come off of the 40 percent assessed value, not the 100 percent assessed value,” said Chairman Thurmond, adding, “This board cannot change any of that.”

Chairman Thurmond explained that the BOC does not set the school board’s millage rate. He said the Board of Education sets the school portion and the BOC sets the county portion, “which is one-third of your property tax bill and the school is approximately two-thirds of your property tax bill.”

Chairman Thurmond said that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he intends to present a flat or reduced FY 2021 budget.

Prior to opening the public hearing, Chairman Thurmond announced that, because of COVID-19, the BOC is giving citizens who may not feel comfortable attending public meetings an opportunity to submit comments in writing.

Chairman Thurmond opened the hearing by asking if there was anyone present who wished to be heard on the 2020 Millage Rate and Property Tax.

The following submitted comment or spoke on the 2020 Millage Rate and Property Tax:

- Lori Finch, Dawsonville, Georgia, submitted a comment, which was read aloud by Chairman Thurmond: “The rich keep trying to get richer. There is no good reason to raise the property taxes, once again, especially in the RA zones. Dawson County is taking more and giving less. I’ve owned this property for over 30 years, have not made any improvements to my land and yet you continue to raise taxes to pay for all the growth around Georgia 400 and the rural areas are not in the same category. It used to be the county would actually maintain the road side drainage ditches and the rural county roads. It took me five years to get the county to come out and dig the drainage ditch that was severely backing up with water. Then they only did a small portion of it; not to mention the waste of time for a crew to come out and sparsely throw gravel in the potholes, which come back after the next rain. You want more for less services. Stop.”
- Joel Anderson submitted a comment, which was read aloud by Chairman Thurmond: “Hi, my name is Joel Anderson. I am reaching out to show my disappointment and disapproval as for the consideration to hike the county’s land tax and also to try to ‘dictate’ what the land owners can and can’t do on their own land. This is nothing more than a political move toward helping big developers come in and to buy up land that people cannot afford to pay the land tax anymore because of the higher taxes; sounds like back-door deals to me and I’m not the only one, either, that thinks that. People of Dawson County need the land tax lowered or abolished where we can have the extra money to buy food, clothing, tires for our vehicles to be safe for our families and others on the road; also medications, etc., and also for the people that do not have kids in the school system anymore, or they have their children in a private school or they are homeschooling - why should they have to keep paying a high priced land tax on land? Shouldn’t that money go into their pockets to pay for the private school or homeschooling? This is nothing but socialism spreading the wealth of hardworking people into the pockets of the abled bodies that do not work but can work. Instead they have a free ride off the hard-working taxpayer. Also, for the use of the land: anyone should be able to do what they want to do on their own land as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone else or contaminate anyone’s waterways. This is also a liberal ideology. We should be able to use the land that we pay for and that we pay taxes on for our benefit. Remember how you got voted into office? For the people by the people. It’s time for the good-old buddy system, back-door deals to stop. God doesn’t like it and He will come down on those that are responsible. It’s time for Dawson Countians to drain its own swamp. Last but not least, I think it’s a pretty crappy way to have hearings on a weekday at work hours, where most people are out working. You officials work for the voters of

Dawson County. The hearings should be on days where the hard-working taxpayer is off work.”

- Hugh Stowers Jr., Dawsonville, Georgia, said the current Board of Commissioners is not at “fault” for many of the issues it faces and that citizens should know that. He said he has heard complaints from a number of citizens, regarding either the homestead exemption or a “senior citizen thing or whatever.” He said the only way to change it is to change the law and have the citizens vote on it. Stowers mentioned a proposal that, if signed into law by the governor, would allow the school board to implement impact fees. He said that would be a way for the school board to “go after the developer and pay for what they’re increasing up here.” He told the BOC that he appreciates “what you’re doing.”
- Christy Castleberry, Dawsonville, Georgia, said she lives off Coltrane Road and that her property tax has increased over the past two years. She said the Coltrane Road area is “pretty rough.” Castleberry said she does not think this is good time for a tax increase because citizens are struggling due to COVID-19. She said she is in favor of a rollback of the millage rate.
- Doug Powell, Dawsonville, Georgia, said he is a volunteer for Good Shepherd Clinic, a free clinic for those who qualify. “I’m seeing an element there on a regular basis - most of them living in Dawson County, some of them working in Dawson County, but they don’t have the means to get by month to month because of their income situation,” he said. Powell said he has been a county resident for 24 years and is “happy to be here.” He added, “I don’t personally have an issue with my property taxes” but noted the economy and employment is struggling and that “people are being squeezed pretty hard as is.” He encouraged the board to trim any “fat” from the county’s budget and to not raise the millage rate.

Chairman Thurmond asked if there was anyone else present who wished to speak on the 2020 Millage Rate and Property Tax and, hearing none, closed the hearing.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

None

**ADJOURNMENT:**

APPROVE:

ATTEST:

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Billy Thurmond, Chairman

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Kristen Cloud, County Clerk