

**DAWSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION MINUTES – AUGUST 20, 2020
DAWSON COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER ASSEMBLY ROOM
25 JUSTICE WAY, DAWSONVILLE, GEORGIA 30534
4:00 PM**

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 Attorney Angela Davis; County Clerk Kristen Cloud; and interested citizens of Dawson County.

PUBLIC HEARING

2020 Millage Rate and Property Tax (3rd of 3 hearings. 1st hearing was held at 11 a.m. August 6, 2020, and 2nd hearing was held at 6 p.m. August 6, 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 the final public hearing, would hold a Special Called Meeting at 6 p.m. August 20, 2020, to establish the millage rate. He explained that the BOC sets the county millage rate and the Board of Education sets the school board's millage rate. 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; and these exemptions come off of the 40 percent assessed value, not the 100 percent assessed value.

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.

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 on the 2020 Millage Rate and Property Tax:

- Joel Anderson submitted a comment, which was read aloud by Chairman Thurmond: "I have a few questions about the Board of Education wanting to raise the millage rate on land taxes. My first question is: since the population of the county has grown then wouldn't Dawson County be receiving more money from new residents moving in? With that, why would we need to raise taxes? Because if there are more people moving into Dawson County, then that would mean more revenue for the county; meaning that instead of saying because of more people then we need more money. However, wouldn't each person that is moving in paying their fair share in taxes so that the county can take that money into supplying the county, for what the county needs? My second question is: why would raising any kind of tax during the pandemic, where people have lost their jobs, be in consideration of doing? My third question is: shouldn't the ones in the county that either have no children in school, or they have children in a private school or home

schooling, be exempt from having to pay taxes on the portion of what the county takes out in land taxes for education? [Is it not] 80 percent of our land tax that goes to the school system? So shouldn't the portion of the land tax go back into the pockets of those individuals that don't have children in the school system?"

Chairman Thurmond directed Anderson to the Board of Education concerning his questions regarding the school board and its millage rate.

- Ashley Brogdon, Dawsonville, Georgia, submitted a comment, which was read aloud by Chairman Thurmond: “Good afternoon, my name is Ashley Brogdon. My family moved here about six years ago. We love Dawson County, but we're noticing a concerning trend. First there was the increase in assessed value for property taxes. We followed the directions on the letter and showed up before the board to fight the charges. After having made our argument, the board noted that our points were valid and might be better off settling directly with the county, but the tax assessors explained it was too late. We would have to adhere to the board's decision (the board only had the power to meet us halfway, and not maintain our original assessed value). Again, no transparency on how to handle this. One could even say we were misled by our county. Then a Dollar General was built that no one in our surrounding area wanted. The county held a public hearing where most people spoke out against the DG, and the only people for the building of the DG on Harmony Church Road were the construction company and the DG manager. The county voted no at that time. Then the county held a second, quickly arranged, public hearing with little advanced notice; so quick that one commissioner was absent from the meeting. And, magically, the DG was approved and built. No transparency, and the commissioners went against public opinion and outcry. Then the people voted against the 8 percent sales tax for TSPLOST. And one tax commissioner said he didn't feel like the people of Dawson County understood what the tax was for. We understand fully, sir. You are in error. We, as taxpayers, feel that the commissioners are misusing the funds, and we do not want you to raise a sales tax that could upset people coming from surrounding areas to our retail stores. Dawson already has a great shopping area that pulls in a lot of revenue for this county. We don't want you to upset them. Dawson already has a TSPLOST account as well. Please make this more transparent; how much is in the account, and where are the funds going? This commissioner also stated per *Dawson County News* that he would hate to have to raise property taxes to get the TSPLOST money. That sounds like a threat. It certainly seems like one in light of this hearing - a hearing held not at a time when most people can attend, or watch in Zoom/remote media. A seemingly unpublic scenario for a very public topic. And here we are now, citizens simply asking for a tentative budget for FY 2021. We are asking to be given the facts, let us decide, and honor our choice. We need transparency and commissioners that will take our rights seriously. With four Title I schools in our district, a median income of \$65K (this means 50 percent of the people make less than \$65K), a population of only 26,000 people, why do we need higher taxes? Don't forget the 8.7 percent of families who are impoverished (these statistics can be found on census.gov). I know the commissioners keep stating we need to keep up with surrounding counties, but I found on the Georgia Department of Revenue website (dor.georgia.gov) that our millage rates are very similar to surrounding counties. And we still have Title I schools? Who are you actually planning to tax? What is the benefit to us? By comparison: Dawson: school tax of 15.778, unincorporated/incorporated tax of 8.089. Forsyth has a median income of \$101K,

population of 244K. Their school tax is 17.3, and their unincorporated/incorporated tax is 4.791, with 5 percent of families in poverty. I have notes on Gilmer, Hall, Lumpkin and Pickens if you would like to see them or check them out yourselves, but time is short. We are vastly different counties and, when looking at tax percentages, demographics should be taken into consideration. Many families are traveling outside Dawson County for jobs that pay more than \$65K a year. If Dawson had more opportunities for those kinds of jobs, this would be a different conversation.”

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.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Presentation of Continuation Application for Victims of Crime Act Grant for FY 2021- District Attorney Lee Darragh
This item will be placed on the September 3, 2020, Voting Session Agenda.
2. Presentation of FY 2021 Department of Human Services / Deanna Specialty Transportation Contract and Memorandum of Understanding- Senior Services Director Dawn Pruett
This item will be added to the August 20, 2020, Voting Session Agenda.
3. Presentation of Annual Capital Improvements Element Update- Planning & Development Director Jameson Kinley
This item will be added to the August 20, 2020, Voting Session Agenda for consideration to move forward with a public hearing.
4. Presentation of Resolution of Acceptance of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act Funding for Dawson County- Chief Financial Officer Vickie Neikirk
This item, presented by Emergency Services Director Danny Thompson, will be added to the August 20, 2020, Voting Session Agenda. Thompson also provided a local COVID-19 update.
5. County Manager Report
This item was for information only.
6. County Attorney Report
County Attorney Davis had no information to report and requested an executive session when appropriate.

APPROVE:

ATTEST:

Billy Thurmond, Chairman

Kristen Cloud, County Clerk