

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Lee Hearn, Chairman
Edward Gibbons, Vice Chairman
Eric K. Maxwell
Charles W. Oddo
Charles D. Rousseau



FAYETTE COUNTY, GEORGIA

Steve Rapson, County Administrator
Dennis A. Davenport, County Attorney
Tameca P. Smith, County Clerk
Marlena Edwards, Chief Deputy County Clerk

140 Stonewall Avenue West
Public Meeting Room
Fayetteville, GA 30214

MINUTES 1st Public Hearing

August 18, 2022
10:00 a.m.

Welcome to the meeting of your Fayette County Board of Commissioners. Your participation in County government is appreciated. All regularly scheduled Board meetings are open to the public and are held on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month at 5:00 p.m.

Call to Order

Chairman Lee Hearn called the August 18, 2022 Board of Commissioners meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. A quorum of the Board was present. Vice Chairman Gibbons and Commissioner Charles Rousseau were absent.

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Hearn offered the Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance.

Acceptance of Agenda

Commissioner Charles Oddo moved to accept the agenda as written. Commissioner Maxwell seconded. The motion passed 3-0. Vice Chairman Gibbons and Commissioner Rousseau were absent.

PUBLIC HEARING:

1. First Public Hearing to discuss the 2023 Property Tax Millage Rate.

Fayette County Chief Financial Officer Sheryl Weinmann stated that this was the first of three Property Tax Millage Rate public hearing. She stated that the next hearing would be held later today at 6:00 p.m. and the final hearing would be on August 25th at 5:00 p.m. Ms. Weinmann advised the Board that the required newspaper advertisement had been posted in accordance with the law. Ms. Weinmann stated that the justification for not rolling back the millage rate was based upon the recruitment and retention program that was introduced to the Board in November 2021. She stated that the goal of this program was to not only retain but also hire high quality employees who were vital in maintaining the high level of service delivery. She stated that all departments within the county had experienced and continue to experience a downturn in maintaining good staff. The recruitment and retention program increased the pay scale by 10.45% for all county employees beginning January 1, 2022. She added that Public Safety staff received an additional 8.55%, in order to increase the Deputy Sheriff position starting salary from \$42,117 to \$50,117. As a result, Public Safety staff received a total increase of 19%. Ms. Weinmann stated that the recruitment and retention program proposal was unanimously approved by the Board in November 2021. She stated that this program was a huge investment but would come with huge benefits.

Ms. Weinman provided the Board with a brief overview. She stated that the 2021 Digest was about \$7.1 billion. She noted that the real property was growth of 17.89% and the personal property growth was 2.64%. Ms. Weinmann stated that, as seen over the last few years, the motor vehicles had decreased by 8.82% but typically it would run into the 20% -25% increase range. She stated that the exemption had increased and was at a negative \$680K or -0.16% because it would be subtracted out from the tax

digest. Ms. Weinmann stated that the real property reassessment was \$1.058B. She continued that this left a positive change to the digest of \$1.245B making the new digest \$8.367B. Ms. Weinman moved on to discuss the change in the taxable digest noting its continued increase since 2013 from \$4.3M to \$8.367M. She outlined past years variances based upon the previously reviewed digests. Ms. Weinmann noted that in 2017 there was a spike with an increase of \$587M and this year an increase of \$1.245B. She stated that the proposed millage rates for this fiscal year for the General Fund (M & O) would remain the same at 4.034. She stated that even though the millage rate would remain the same, it would have to be advertised as a tax increase because there would be no rollback. Fire Services rate would remain the same at 3.070 and 911 Service rate would remain the same at 0.210. She added that the proposed millage rate for Emergency Medical Services would increase slightly to 0.500. Ms. Weinman stated that the average home value in Fayette County was \$325K based on that, she provided the Board with a sample property tax statement. She noted that with homestead value at 40% the rollback rate would have been 3.524 but the proposal was to maintain the current rate. As a result, the increase on the annual tax bill was \$63.75 for a \$325K home. Ms. Weinmann also noted that based on the slight increase for the Emergency Medical Services millage rate the increase on the annual tax bill was \$5.50 making the total increase \$69.25. Ms. Weinmann provided an overview of a sample property tax statement for Fayette County and each neighboring municipality within the county. She highlighted that with a home value of \$325K unincorporated residents property tax bill would be about \$3,477, with the highest portion \$2,500 or 71.9% going to the school board, \$504 toward the County's M & O, \$382 to the Fire District and \$63 to Emergency Services Management, and \$28 to 911 District. Ms. Weinmann noted that the Town of Tyrone had the highest tax bill at \$3,838 while unincorporated Fayette County tax bill was the cheapest of the municipalities. Ms. Weinmann reviewed the millage rate history since 2014 and stated that only the Town of Brooks and unincorporated Fayette County did not rollback their millage rates twice since 2014, and in 2019 and now in 2022. She noted that the financial impact to the General Fund of the rollback since 2014 had a cumulative effect of \$65.7M savings to citizens. Ms. Weinmann stated that the County was required to have three Public Hearings for the Property Tax Millage Rate. She stated that the next hearing would be held later today at 6:00 p.m. and the final hearing would be on August 25 at 5:00 p.m., where staff would request the BOC to adopt Resolution 2022-06 to levy the County property tax.

Commissioner Maxwell advised the audience that the Board would not be voting on this item until the August 25, BOC Meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to receive the information and garner citizen feedback. Commissioner Maxwell stated that in watching what was happening around us in neighboring jurisdictions its vital that Fayette County remained competitive in attracting new talent and employees. Commissioner Maxwell stated that he was convinced that approving and implementing the Recruitment and Retention Program was the right thing to do. And unfortunately, it was expensive. He stated that the second piece of this related to public safety. He acknowledged the 19% increase for public safety, which was necessary due to the increase in crime, as well as the need to retain employees, and even with the increase, the need to maintain employees was critical. Commissioner Maxwell stated that he may not attend the August 25 meeting but if he were, he would support this item. He stated that if the Board had not move forward with the proposal, he was afraid that the County would begin to loss people and the level of service would decrease. He noted that there was a national concept floating around regarding defunding the police. He stated that he would never defund the police and fully supported law enforcement. Commissioner Maxwell stated that he had received several emails regarding the tax increase and not approving it. He also noted that as a Fayette County citizen he would also have to pay an increase in his taxes along with the other Board members. Commissioner Maxwell stated that although it was an increase it was a minimum amount about \$65 and something he felt the average citizen could afford.

Chairman Hearn stated that in conversation with some of his friends he asked if they would rather the county be safe or see a modest tax increase. And without fail, they all wanted to maintain safety in the county. Chairman Hearn also noted that the County had to remain competitive. He stated that he felt this was a big step but a necessary one that he fully supported and felt was the right thing to do.

No one spoke in favor or opposition.

County Administrator Steve Rapson stated that he thought it was key to highlight that a \$325K home in unincorporated Fayette County would have a tax bill of about \$3,477, but in the Town of Tyrone for the same home value of \$325K their tax bill was \$3,838. He was proud to point out that while unincorporated Fayette County tax bill was the cheapest of the municipalities and was able to maintain the same amount and level of services. Mr. Rapson also highlighted the fact that since 2014 only the Town

of Brooks and unincorporated Fayette County did not rollback their millage rates twice since 2014, in 2019 and now in 2022, which equates to a cumulative effect of \$65.7M in saving for citizens.

ADJOURNMENT:

Vice Chairman Gibbons moved to adjourn the August 18, 2022 Property Tax Millage Rate Public Hearing. Commissioner Hearn seconded. The motion passed 3-0. Chairman Gibbons and Commissioner Rousseau were absent.

The August 18, 2022 Board of Commissioners meeting adjourned at 10:24 a.m.

Marlena M. Edwards, Chief Deputy County Clerk

Lee Hearn, Chairman

The foregoing minutes were duly approved at an official meeting of the Board of Commissioners of Fayette County, Georgia, held on the 8th day of September 2022. Attachments are available upon request at the County Clerk's Office.

Marlena Edwards, Chief Deputy County Clerk