

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 2nd Public Hearing

August 18, 2022
6:00 p.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 6:00 p.m. A quorum of the Board was present. Vice Chairman Edward Gibbons and Commissioner Charles Rousseau were absent.

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

Commissioner Eric Maxwell 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. Second Public Hearing to discuss the 2023 Property Tax Millage Rate.

Fayette County Chief Financial Officer Sheryl Weinmann stated that this was the second Property Tax Millage Rate public hearing. She stated that the first public hearing was held at 10:00 a.m. and the third and final public hearing would be held on August 25, 2022 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 the increase and not rolling 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 to retain but also hire high quality employees who are vital in maintaining the high level of service delivery. With the recruitment and retention program, the pay scale was increased on January 1, 2022 to 10.45% higher. Ms. Weinmann stated that all County staff received the 10.45% increase. She added that Public Safety staff received an additional 8.55% increase making the total increase for Public Safety staff 19%. Ms. Weinmann stated that the Public Safety increase was based upon the need to bring the Deputy Sheriff position starting salary from \$42,117 to \$50,117. Ms. Weinmann stated that the recruitment and retention program proposal was unanimously approved by the Board November 2021.

Ms. Weinman provided the Board with a brief overview. She stated that the 2021 Digest was about \$7.1B. She noted that the real property growth was 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% to -25% reduction. She stated that the exemption was highlighted at a negative \$680K or -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 \$4.3B to \$8.367B. 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 remained 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 and was able to maintain the same amount and level of services. 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. She noted that the financial impact to the General Fund of the rollback since 2014 had a cumulative effect of \$65.7M. Ms. Weinmann stated that this was the third and final Property Tax Millage Rate public hearing and asked for Board approval of Resolution 2022-06 adopting the 2022 Property Tax Millage Rate.

No one spoke in favor.

Alvin Holt of Fayetteville stated that he did not agree with the tax increase. He stated that he did not feel it was time to increase anything at this point. Mr. Holt stated that the economy was bad, and people were struggling, and this was the wrong time. He suggested that if the film industry paid their actual tax bills and did not receive significant tax breaks, those funds could cover the shortfall needed.

John Donadeo of Fayetteville stated that he was not in favor of the proposed tax increase. Mr. Donadeo stated that he agreed with previous commenter Mr. Holt. He stated that it did not seem fair to have the big companies receive tax breaks but have citizens tax bills increase.

George Deets of Fayetteville stated that he felt as though the film industry billionaires were reaping all the benefits and county residents had to foot the bill or expense. Mr. Deet expressed his confusion and frustration with the Development Authority and asked how they benefited him as a citizen of Fayetteville. He also expressed his displeasure with the potential data center.

Commissioner Maxwell stated although he could not convince the gentlemen who made comments, he could assure them that he did extensive review and analysis of this proposal. Commissioner Maxwell stated that this was his 10th year on the Board and would be the first time he would vote in favor of a tax increase. He stated that this was not something he wanted but was, in his opinion, necessary. Commissioner Maxwell stated that in response to a commenter's question regarding funds received from this, the tax increase would go towards the Recruitment and Retention program. Commissioner Maxwell stated that in watching what was happening around us in neighboring jurisdictions, its vital that Fayette County remain competitive in attracting new talent and employees. Commissioner Maxwell stated that he was convinced that approving and implementing the recruitment and retention was the right thing to do. And unfortunately, that was expensive. He also stated that if the Board had not move forward with the proposal, he was afraid that the County would begin to lose good 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. He 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.

Mr. Rapson stated that the mileage rate was not changing it would remain flat. Based on Georgia law because of certain criteria, this proposal had to be advertised as a tax increase. He continued that over the past ten years, unincorporated Fayette County had only held the millage rate twice, meaning it stayed the same. He stated the mileage rate has never been raised. Mr. Rapson briefly outlined what a tax abatement was and the benefits of it for the county. He stated that Pinewood Studios had a 20-year abatement which was a special deal. He continued that the studios were at an 55% abatement which meant that when they received their tax bill, 55% of it would be abated. Previously, the county received about \$10K of revenue for the land which is now the studios. Conversely with Pinewood in place, the amount was closer to \$900K this year. Mr. Rapson stated that no one expected the digest to grow as quickly as it had over the last two years. With that in mind, when the Recruitment and Retention program was proposed it included an actual tax increase with the mileage set at 4.308, which was 7% high than what was currently before the Board. He stated that they were able to take the digest growth and keep the millage rate flat. To put that into perspective, the property tax associated with the digest growth was an additional \$4.6M; and the impact of increasing the sworn officers was 19% and the remaining employees at 10.45% was \$4M. Staff took the action approved by the Board, and used cash reserves as a stop gap, knowing there would be a tax increase to be able to fund the program perpetually because it was a \$6M adjustment.

Mr. Rapson stated that this proposal was basically the Board ratifying a decision they already made. Mr. Rapson briefly explained the breakdown of tax payment for an annexed property.

Mr. Rapson concluded that 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, at a value of \$325K, their tax bill was \$3,838, and the County still provides the same level of service.

Commissioner Oddo stated that when tasked with a big decision as a commissioner he always asked himself if the Board could afford not to do something. He stated that his goal was to try and convey to citizens that the Board did not want to raise taxes but also have the responsibility to provide services to the citizens of the county. It is a delicate balancing act. Commissioner Oddo stated that Fayette County staff was top-notch, and that we want to maintain the level of service citizens expect. He concluded that although a tax increase was not something the Board wanted to do, it was necessary.

Chairman Hearn stated that in conversation with some of his friends he asked if they would be willing to pay an extra \$70 a year or risk being a little less safe. And without fail, they all wanted to maintain safety in the county. Chairman Hearn stated that he wanted the salaries for staff to be competitive to assist with recruitment. This proposal would make the county more competitive. He 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.

ADJOURNMENT:

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

The August 18, 2022 Board of Commissioners meeting adjourned at 6:57 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