

MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING
PROPOSED PROPERTY TAX INCREASE
COLQUITT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Monday, August 17, 2015
10:00 a.m.

CALL TO ORDER: The public hearing was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman Terry R. Clark. The public hearing was duly called and advertised for the purpose of receiving public input regarding a proposed property tax increase, which will require an increase in property taxes by 4.51% over the rollback rate for the unincorporated areas of the County; a decrease of 4.91% under the rollback rate for the incorporated areas of the County; and a decrease in property taxes by 0.07% under the rollback rate for the Special Service District.

PRESENT: Commissioners Marc DeMott, Donna Herndon, Paul Nagy, and Johnny Hardin, Chairman Terry R. Clark, County Administrator Chas Cannon, and County Clerk Melissa Lawson.

ALSO PRESENT: Finance Director Wayne Putnal, Chief Compliance Officer Justin H. Cox, and Alan Mauldin, Reporter with the Moultrie Observer.

ABSENT: Commissioner Luke P. Strong and Commissioner Winfred Giddens.

PROPOSED PROPERTY TAX INCREASE PRESENTATION: At this time, Mr. Cannon presented projected and actual millage rate changes in both the Unincorporated and Incorporated areas of the county, as well as the Special Service District.

Mr. Cannon explained that a discrepancy concerning Gross M&O millage rates for prior years must be corrected, as recommended by the Georgia Department of Revenue.

Mr. Cannon declared that there was an overall decrease in the tax digest of approximately \$13,500,000.00, and emphasized that this was the second consecutive year that the county realized negative growth in the tax digest.

Mr. Cannon presented millage rates impacts for both residential and non-homesteaded property values.

Mr. Cannon explained that over the course of several months, county staff and the commission had met several times, working together diligently in an effort to keep millage rates as low as possible. Mr. Cannon stated that with negative growth in the tax digest, the county was forced to increase the millage rate.

Mr. Cannon presented the five year history of levy for Colquitt County, and emphasized that due to unavoidable increases in operating expenses, the county had to compensate for the shortage of revenue by increasing the millage rate.

Mr. Cannon presented a calendar regarding advertisement and meeting requirements for establishment of the millage rate.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Chairman Clark opened the floor for public comments regarding the proposed property tax increase.

Brent Chitty addressed the commission, stating that he wished to take the opportunity to officially thank them for granting county employees a raise for the first time in seven years.

Mr. Chitty questioned if there were two separate budgets for the Incorporated and Unincorporated areas of the county. Mr. Chitty further questioned if the county collected all taxes, including those for the City of Moultrie.

Mr. Cannon replied that the county collected all taxes and distributed them accordingly.

Mr. Chitty questioned if the reason for raising the millage rate in the Unincorporated areas was due to a lack of sufficient revenue. Mr. Cannon replied that this was one reason, as well as the need to correct the discrepancy in Gross M&O millage rates.

Mr. Cannon discussed funding for the Parks and Recreation program, explaining that the city funded their portion of the Parks and Recreation program from city taxes, with the county funding their portion from the taxes received within the Special Service District. Mr. Cannon explained that the Special Service District was established to prevent double taxation for areas such as Recreation, Fire Protection, and E-911 Services.

In closing, Mr. Chitty thanked the board for their efforts to keep millage rates low for the citizens of Colquitt County.

Ronald McMullen addressed the commission, and proceeded to question the amount of property taken off the tax records last year or more specifically, which parcels were granted exemptions, resulting in decreased revenue for the county. Mr. McMullen also questioned the particular group of taxpayers to whom the exemptions were granted.

Mr. McMullen stated that he would like an itemized breakdown of this information, and further stated that his taxes have repeatedly increased, due to increases in his property value. Mr. McMullen stated that there were several individuals in the county whom, due to exemptions, were not paying the same amount of taxes as a residential homeowner with comparable property values. Mr. McMullen stated that he wished for the commission to look out for the common, average citizen of Colquitt County.

Mr. McMullen spoke of the recent sale of county property, and again suggested that the county look out for the "little people," who make the county operate. Mr. McMullen urged the commission to stand up to state legislators who continually impose mandates and exemptions.

Mr. Cannon explained that one particular exemption program, Conservation Use Valuation Agreement (CUVA), was open to farmers who possess a certain amount of acreage. Since 2011, Mr. Cannon stated that the amount of tax dollars enrolled in CUVA has increased to \$192,000,000.00. Mr. Cannon noted that this exemption was a state policy, not a county policy.

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Mr. Cannon informed Mr. McMullen that the county has requested that state legislators reimburse the county for lost tax revenue due to extensive agricultural exemptions in a county that is primarily zoned Agricultural.

Mr. McMullen agreed, and urged the commission to inform state legislators of their desire to “even out the playing field.” Mr. McMullen urged the commission not to be intimidated by state officials, and again urged the board to look out for the average citizen.

Commissioner Herndon addressed Mr. McMullen, stating that the board had spent countless hours researching ways to decrease the tax burden on property owners in the county, while still maintaining an acceptable level of services. Commissioner Herndon also stated that the county has no choice but to follow state laws and regulations, stating that many of the services provided by the county were state mandated.

Commissioner Herndon stated that the commission, as a whole, worked diligently to do what was in the best interests of the citizens of Colquitt County.

Again, Mr. McMullen urged the commission to stand up to state and federal officials, in an effort to reach a mutual understanding. Mr. McMullen stated that, as elected officials, the board was in an appropriate position to stand up to higher level officials.

In closing, Mr. McMullen urged the commission to consider the whole picture, and thanked the board for their time and the opportunity to address them.

Chairman Clark opened the floor for additional comments.

Mr. Cannon informed Mr. Chitty that he would contact him soon in order to grant him the specific information requested.

There being no further comments from those in attendance, the public hearing was adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry R. Clark
Chairman

Melissa Lawson
County Clerk

Approved:

MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING
PROPOSED PROPERTY TAX INCREASE
COLQUITT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Monday, August 17, 2015
4:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER: The public hearing was called to order at 4:04 p.m. by Chairman Terry R. Clark. The public hearing was duly called and advertised for the purpose of receiving public input regarding a proposed property tax increase, which will require an increase in property taxes by 4.51% over the rollback rate for the unincorporated areas of the County; a decrease of 4.91% under the rollback rate for the incorporated areas of the County; and a decrease in property taxes by 0.07% under the rollback rate for the Special Service District.

PRESENT: Commissioners Marc DeMott, Paul Nagy, and Johnny Hardin, Chairman Terry R. Clark, County Administrator Chas Cannon, and County Clerk Melissa Lawson.

ALSO PRESENT: Finance Director Wayne Putnal, Chief Compliance Officer Justin H. Cox, and Alan Mauldin, Reporter with the Moultrie Observer.

ABSENT: Commissioners Luke P. Strong, Winfred Giddens, and Donna Herndon.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: No one from the public was in attendance.

The public hearing forum remained open for ten minutes. With no citizens in attendance, Chairman Clark adjourned the public hearing at 4:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry R. Clark
Chairman

Melissa Lawson
County Clerk

Approved:
