

## **BUDGET HEARING**

A Special Called Budget Hearing was held by the Spalding County Board of Commissioners in Room 108 in the Courthouse Annex, Monday, June 4, 2007 beginning at 5:00 o'clock p.m. Commission Chairman Eddie Freeman presided, and Commissioners Edward Goss, Jr., Johnie McDaniel and David Phillips were present. Absent was Commissioner Gwen Flowers-Taylor. Also present were County Manager William P. Wilson, Jr., Assistant to the County Manager Paul Van Haute, and Executive Secretary Teresa Watson.

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

### **II. ORDER OF BUSINESS**

#### 1. Discussion and comments relative to the Proposed Fiscal Year 2008 Budget.

Commissioner David Phillips, 63 Green Acres Road, Griffin, Georgia

Commissioner Phillips stated he has kept up with budget processes although he has not been present for all hearings due to illness. He was present to speak on behalf of employees with regard to their Cost of Living Adjustment raises potentially being struck from next year's budget. Things you can get, but not people ... they are a valuable commodity, he noted. If they are not appreciated and feel that way, they will leave and go to greener pastures and he did not want to see Spalding County become a farm club for other counties' employees. Employees put in ungodly hours and do the impossible with often little or nothing. They, as is the case with himself, as well, didn't take this job to make money and most probably have lost more than they have made. But he cares about County, as do all these employees. He doesn't see how in good conscience commissioners can accept a 3% raise as mandated by the State and deny employees a salary increase at the same time. Employees fight the good fight. He knows it's hard to raise taxes or rearrange budget line items, delay a capital project, etc., but he felt it might be in the County's best interest to do those things. No employee asked him for these comments, but rather they came from his heart. Particularly in light of imposing the anticipated insurance premium increase, employees are entitled to and should be appreciated.

Chairman Freeman noted that teachers are getting the mandated salary increase also from the State. He noted that commissioners have to work within the budget and it's not an easy task.

Lanny Hook, 148 McKinley Drive, Griffin, Georgia

Many figures have been bandied about, and he wanted to know how much the original budget would have increased each homeowner, and he was informed the increased millage rate would have produced about \$57 more per \$100,000 household in taxes owed. He noted this amounted to near \$.14 per day in increased taxes and he felt this would be minimal for most.

Sheriff Dee Stewart, 839 Manley Road, Griffin, Georgia

Sheriff Stewart was speaking for all his employees who daily are doing a good job for the County. They typically run 4-5 calls behind and are working with next to nothing at times. The Sheriff welcomed any to come ride with his deputies to witness first-hand the work environment. His department has already been cut \$100,000 for the CID pawn shop detail and they desperately need everything else they have requested, particularly the additional personnel and the employee salary increase. Many work and live on a paycheck-to-paycheck basis, and the now-proposed budget with no salary increases would pose a real hardship for most. Employees work hard to make Spalding County a safer place to live and work, and they should be appreciated enough to be granted a cost of living increase.

Chipper Gardner, 234 Tomochichi Road, Griffin, Georgia

The Spalding County Fire Chief urged support of the original budget. He harkened ack to 1981 when inflation was running 20% and the County was struggling. Having to raise taxes is difficult at any time, but they did it then and gave raises to employees who deserved it. They realized a hard decision was needed at a time when inflation was in the double digits, but commissioners looked after their most valuable resource -- their employees.

Novin Darsey, Special Operations, Spalding County

He requested that the line item for his SWAT team remain in the budget. His officers are mostly young and he noted a recent incident where a man shot his girlfriend and barricaded himself in his. This item in the budget would help keep his personnel safe in such instances. He would not want to go to anyone's wife or husband and relay the bad news that something tragic had happened that could have been prevented. He has been in law enforcement for 23 years and wants to keep everyone safe, both resident and employee, as he always has done.

Vickie Redding, 2376 High Falls Road, Griffin, Georgia

On behalf of employees in Parks and Recreation, she stated the budget needed to keep City Park security as a funded item. Children need to be safe and traffic has increased there every day since the skate park opened. If security goes away, then problems with undesirables will be greater than ever before, as happened recently with the large fight that occurred in City Park. Recently a bag was stolen that contained a young boy's insulin, so situations can escalate from what appears to be petty theft to a life-threatening circumstance.

Captain Keith Duncan, Sheriff Department, 1330 Minter Road, Griffin, Georgia

Officer Duncan said he had performed his own salary survey today and his department is about \$5000 behind surrounding counties and cities in pay for comparable positions. Gypsy police will be trained here just to go elsewhere if the pay problem is not addressed. There are already fewer quality employees in the pool, and they can't fill positions now because of salary. He's been here too long to move elsewhere, but he did discover that a Captain in Fayette County makes \$26,000 more than his position with comparable years in Spalding County. He urged the Board to take care of employees and he felt that, for the majority of taxpayers as he is, they don't mind paying \$57 more per year in taxes for good reason. This amount would add no more than \$5 or \$6 to a monthly mortgage escrow.

Captain Larry Wilson, 377 Burnett Road, Barnesville, Georgia

As Spalding County Sheriff Department Jail Administrator, he was present to ask the Board to reconsider their decision on raises for officers. He has officers he might lose because of no step raise and no cost of living raise, not to mention the anticipate increased insurance premium next year. He felt we owe employees better than to tell them they don't deserve a raise. He also didn't want to tell a young wife or husband that someone was killed in the jail because he doesn't have enough help. He urged the Board to please reconsider for employees.

Mr. Wilson advised the latest proposed amended budget does include utilizing fund balance, not raising taxes and is based on 4% net digest growth by Tax Assessors, drawing down the fund balance to \$6.3 million. Per the Board's direction, he requested that all departments look at line items and cut 5% from their budgets. Some of these budget cut recommendations were followed and some not because it might adversely affect County programs. He and Staff have worked 4-5 days to get the budget revised to this point so directed by commissioners. First reading will be on June 18 and second reading on June 28 at a Special Called Meeting. He

requested that he be advised of any changes quickly, so can prepare for the June 18 first reading.

This proposed budget would leave 14% or about 1-1/2 months operating expenses in fund balance. The County tries to maintain a minimum of 15%, and the fund balance had gotten up into the mid-20s. He strongly recommended they don't draw it any lower than this. The Tax Assessors' revaluation phase I of a 2-year process is in this recommended budget. Tax Assessors estimate a 4% net digest growth. Gross digest growth should be about 5-1/2%, but with exemptions caution dictates budgeting about 4%. A mil of tax in Spalding County is approximately \$1,387,000 with 4% growth, totaling about \$1,443,000. A mil of tax in Henry County generates over 2-1/2 times that and in Clayton County, 3-1/2 times; Fayette County, 2 times. He urged caution in just comparing millage rates.

Commissioner Phillips asked about the difference from the original recommended budget to the alternative amended one being considered. The recommended budget versus the amended budget totals \$1,643,000 less. About \$851,000 is needed for salaries and benefits in as recommended in the original recommended budget which was proposing a 1.5 mil increase in taxes. The amended budget does not include salaries and benefits as originally recommended.

Mr. Wilson said the decision rested solely with the Board, who could opt to go with the original, the amended, or a hybrid budget composed with elements from both. Time is of the essence, however, he noted.

Commissioner Phillips still felt the County's most important resource is their people.

Chairman Freeman understands salaries are a big issue and, excluding all other requests for departments, they might want to look at this budget process for something in between the two (original recommended and amended).

Commissioner Goss wanted to look at the budget cuts done by each department and wanted to know exactly what was cut from each line item to obtain the overall 5% reduction before making any decision on salary increases.

Commissioner McDaniel said it has been suggested tonight that the Board of Commissioners didn't think employees deserved a raise. This is far from the truth but he challenged Department Heads to help the Board find way to fund these increases. The Board can raise taxes, which they are committed to not do, or find other things in budget to exchange for this.

Some suggested that perhaps the collection of taxes that are past due could assist in the effort. Commissioners noted they should take that appeal across the street to another constitutionally elected officer as this issue falls under her realm of responsibility.

Brian Clark, 420 County Kitchen Road, Barnesville, Georgia

He doesn't pay taxes here, but he does work for Spalding County in the jail. Should employees not get their raise, will the Board not accept their 3% increases but rather forfeit it or donate it to employees, questioned Mr. Clark.

Commissioner McDaniel, in response to a County employee who asked if Commissioner McDaniel would accept his state-mandated 3% salary increase if County employees did not receive a cost of living increase, stated that should County employees not receive a pay increase, then effective January 1, 2008, he planned to give the 3% increase he would be paid to United Way rather than accepting it into his bank account or spread it among the employees if that would help in any way.

Captain Larry Wilson, 377 Burnett Road, Barnesville, Georgia

Commissioners asked for budget cuts and department tried in good faith to do that. In that same vein, the Board may be looking at lawsuits from jail if he cannot get proper personnel. They are over capacity and he needs help to safeguard his officers. His only alternative is for the jail to house these inmates that put us over capacity into another county. If the Board does not provide the help needed, then he has no choice but to help protect all, including the Board of Commissioners, by housing inmates in other counties. They are currently 80-100 people over capacity. Is this situation worth that or can the Board provide him with more people?

Captain Wilson responded to Commissioner McDaniel that his comments were not blackmail, but rather just facts based on what he felt was about to happen. He welcomed Ms. Flowers-Taylor last week but she had not been able to visit as yet. He will walk anyone through jail himself and his inmate count was 484 this morning with 10 officers on duty. He was greatly concerned with what will happen should a riot occur. He schedules 16-17 per shift but,

accounting for holidays, sick, annual leave, training, etc., that number is always greatly decreased. He did not mean to imply blackmail, but inmates are tired of sleeping all over the place; they are weary of substandard food because of antiquated kitchen space, staff and equipment that is the same as it was 20 years ago when it was built. The population when the kitchen was built was around 300 and he regularly cooks now for 500 per day. He would love to have Warden Massac's kitchen at the Correctional Institute and space, since the CI has three times the jail space with fewer inmates than are housed at the jail. The jail has a few out of county inmates and a small number of state inmates, probably around 15. Probation people are the problem. They are moving state inmates out as quickly as possible.

Chairman Freeman said as a former probation officer for 34 years, he felt they could load up the state inmates and take them down when they wanted to regardless of the state's inclination. Captain Wilson noted that would require more officers gone from the facility in an already stressful situation with understaffing. One day something tragic will happen and he'll ask commissioners to go with him to relay bad news to some family. Some responsibility needs to go back on the shoulders of commissioners. He answered Chairman Freeman that he has no control over sick leave and most shifts have at least one out sick. Vacation time hampers staffing, as well, but vacations are greatly needed for these officers.

Commissioner Phillips helped chase someone last night in his neighborhood who assaulted a police officer in his home. When he has to come out of his home and help look for someone at 11 p.m. who has made a death threat in the house of a police officer in his neighborhood, then Commissioner Phillips advised the situation has certainly worsened.

Chairman Freeman said there was no quick fix and he would love to correct the problems overnight, but this Board cannot do that. The problem has been growing for some time but he assured employees the Board will work to alleviate as best they can.

Sheriff Stewart since he has taken office, 69 new subdivisions have been developed in Spalding County since 2001, not including Sun City. He does not have enough personnel to handle what we have now without considering these new developments. There is a safety issue not only in the jail but in road departments. There are \$3,000,000 in back taxes not paid, so why not put these properties for sale on the Courthouse steps, he questioned.

Mr. Wilson corrected the figures cited by the Sheriff, noting that the \$3,000,000 in unpaid taxes was for the top 100 delinquent taxpayers, 65% of which goes to Board of Education and the remainder to the City of Griffin and to Spalding County. We do budget for prior year's taxes, penalties and interest, so these amounts will be included in next year's budget. The Board of Education gets the majority of money collected.

Sheriff Stewart said employees deserve this raise and they work hard to serve and protect. Now we, in Spalding County, must fight for their income but more importantly for their safety.

Captain Wilson said he had some officer living barely above the poverty level now. He has some who cannot afford to drive to Spalding County to come to work. He is about to lose good officers with no step program and no salary increase, not to mention taking back what was originally offered as enticements in a benefit package to come to work in the County. That, he suggested, was not fair.

Paige Holmes, Sheriff's Department, Spalding County, Griffin, Georgia

She has worked for the Sheriff's Department for 19 years as a faithful employee and has done her job to the best of her ability. She has gotten called out and disappointed her family of six many times. She is not greedy and doesn't want to be rich; most law enforcement don't do it for the money but rather because they have a calling. She needs this raise as everyone else does. The Board says it's another official's job to deal with uncollected taxes, but she felt it was the responsibility of the Board to ensure this gets done; she felt that surely they could direct this person to collect these past due amounts. She urged this County to take care of its employees.

Sheriff Stewart said he simply wanted to urged that commissioners please consider employees as they work hard and do their jobs. This little bit of a raise is well worth it for these people who go above and beyond the call of duty on a daily basis.

### **III. ADJOURNMENT**

***Motion to Adjourn at 6:01 p.m. by Commissioner McDaniel, seconded by Commissioner Phillips, carried by a vote of 4-0.***

County Clerk

Chairman

