

## BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

The proposed Spalding County Budget for all funds for Fiscal Year 2010 has been submitted to the Board of Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners held a Public Budget Hearing on Monday, June 1, 2009 at 5:00 p.m. in the Meeting Room, Room 108, Spalding County Courthouse Annex, 119 East Solomon Street, Griffin, GA. All citizens were invited to attend and provide the Board of Commissioners with written or oral comments and ask questions concerning the County's proposed budget. The proposed budget is available for public inspection from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday in the Commissioners' Office, Room 104, Courthouse Annex.

The above-noted Budget Public Hearing was convened by Chairman Goss at 5:00 p.m. on Monday, June 1, 2009 with Commissioners Eddie L. Freeman, Gwen Flowers-Taylor, David Phillips and Bob Gilreath in attendance. Also in attendance were County Manager William P. Wilson, Jr., Assistant to the County Manager Paul Van Haute, Administrative Services Director Jinna L. Garrison, and Teresa A. Watson to record minutes. Chairman Goss convened the meeting and requested that County Manager William P. Wilson bring everyone up to speed on the budget process.

Mr. Wilson briefed the Board and citizens in attendance on recommendations for the FY 2010 Budget. Final recommendations after the budget review process included: Elimination of funding for FY 2010 for the Griffin-Spalding Development Authority, elimination of Phase III for the Airport Master Plan Study, elimination of proposed furloughs for all County employees, elimination of the increase in dependent healthcare premiums, and the reduction of recycling center operations from seven (7) to four (4) days per week. As discussed, these changes will necessitate the need for a minimal tax increase in the general fund of approximately .7 mills, based on the current tax digest. The proposed tax increase will result in an estimated \$26.60 on a home valued at \$100,000.

The Fire District budget includes twelve (12) new firefighters with staggered hiring dates throughout the upcoming year for staffing at the new L.B. Norton Station. This additional staffing and operational costs may result in a minimal tax increase in the Fire District tax, as well, of \$7.60 on a home valued at \$100,000 in unincorporated Spalding County. However, I have hopes that the tax digest in unincorporated Spalding County will increase enough to offset any such proposed increase in the Fire District tax, but final tax digest numbers will not be available until late July 2009 to make this determination. The proposed budget public hearing is scheduled for today; first reading is set for June 15, 2009; and final adoption is scheduled for June 25, 2009 at 5:45 p.m.

Commissioner Gilreath noted he would like to see the \$17,500 allocated to the UGA Griffin Campus' Continuing Education Department eliminated from the budget, as well. This allocation comes from the hotel/motel tax fund, which is strictly made up of revenue from tourism dollars at hotels and motels. These funds are closely monitored and narrowly interpreted. Commissioner Phillips asked if the County Commissioners could consider funding it this year and perhaps entertain elimination of the funding in the FY 2011 budget. Commissioner Flowers-Taylor noted she had attended several seminars and courses at Continuing Education on the UGA Griffin Campus and mentioned several community programs in which they are involved. Even some of the programs begun by Parks and Recreation have expanded onto the Griffin Campus. Many of the beneficial outreach programs are because of the existence of Continuing Education and Art Cain on the Griffin Campus. This Campus is open and available to the community and the County, and she felt it was money well spent. Mr. Wilson noted that money is available in the fund, should another project be desired specifically. Commissioner Gilreath said he would prefer to see money spent to promote Spalding County go in another direction but made no specific recommendation.

***Commissioner Gilreath moved to eliminate the \$17,500 for the UGA Griffin Campus Continuing Ed Program from the FY 2010 Budget. Commissioner Phillips seconded the motion for discussion and urged commissioners to leave funding as agreed upon last Friday. Motion failed 1-4 with Chairman Goss and Commissioners Freeman, Flowers-Taylor, and David Phillips opposing.***

Brett Lavender, 1805 Maple Drive, Griffin, Georgia

As Chairman of Griffin-Spalding County Airport Advisory Commission, they held a special called meeting today to discuss elimination of the Phase III Airport Study funding. He stated this was an opportunity we all could not afford to lose. The loss of this prospect would be, in his opinion, more devastating than this Board realized. He pled for reconsideration and offered to answer questions.

Jesse Maddox, Bucksnot Road, Griffin, Georgia

As a County employee himself, Mr. Maddox was pleased to see the elimination of furloughing for County employees, but he would rather have seen that materialize than a more permanent and pervasive tax increase, particularly with the upcoming elimination of HTRG (Homestead Tax Relief Grant) which will add another \$285 to \$315 to a property owner's tax bill, depending on whether the property owner is located in the City or County. The amount estimated, \$26.60 on a \$100,000 home, sounds minimal but it is problematic when compounded with other increases.

Carl Pruett, 120 Four Oaks Drive, Griffin, Georgia

He echoed the sentiments of Brett Lavender. As a County appointee for the past five years to the Griffin-Spalding County Airport Advisory Commission, he has been excited to be working with this project. This new regional airport will go to some other county if not approved for Spalding. Per mandated requirements, we will have to spend \$15 million to improve the present airport if nothing is done to facilitate a new regional airport. The current airport cannot make a profit because it is too small, and will continue to be a drain on the City and County budgets. The new regional airport would provide numerous jobs and peripheral type businesses. It would employ many for years and probably become an industry unto itself. The location of the identified site could not be more perfectly placed for development and growth. He pled with the Board to stay in a positive direction at this crucial crossroads, and to please reconsider the proposed elimination of this funding from the County budget.

Frederick Phillips, 161 Riverdale Circle, Griffin, Georgia

He voiced his concern over an increase in taxes and urged they look it from another perspective.

Robert Mohl, 306 Wynterhall Drive, Griffin, Georgia

He agreed with Messrs. Pruett and Lavender and asked the Board also to not eliminate this funding from the County's FY 2010 budget. Such a facility would benefit the County with ad valorem taxes.

Regina Abbott, 1129 Placid Road, Griffin, Georgia

Ms. Abbott pled with the Board to not raise taxes in the County, a matter of particular concern with senior citizens. She felt there were still expenses that could be cut, as painful as that process may be. The burden of increased taxes will only add to the poverty level in the County which is already high.

Mark Rowland, 726 North McDonough Road, Griffin, Georgia

As a retired serviceman living on a fixed income, he urged the Board to please reconsider implementing a tax increase. He felt other counties paying higher taxes also have greater services.

Commissioner Gilreath noted he had time over the weekend to study the issue of funding for the airport environmental study and wanted to change his perspective. He asked if the Board would be amenable to reinstating this \$180,000 funding for the Phase III Airport Master Plan Study. Commissioner Freeman felt this would be beneficial to the County and asked if funding could be identified. Mr. Wilson noted they could add .1 mill to the proposed .7 mill increase which would add another \$3.80 to the estimated \$26.60 on a \$100,000 home. Commissioner Phillips said while no tax increase is welcomed, this minimal amount would reap great benefits with increased amounts to the tax base and jobs, as well as peripheral industries that will add money to the local economy, too.

***Commissioner Phillips moved to add back to the budget this \$180,000 for the airport study to be funded by increasing the proposed tax increase to .8 mills, seconded by Commissioner Freeman.***

Discussion followed. Commissioner Flowers-Taylor said she could not believe this change in thinking and adamantly opposed any further increase in taxes. She originally favored no tax increase, at all, and did not understand how this Board could entertain such a notion that will adversely seniors and those on fixed incomes. Chairman Goss advised there were some components in the budget that were mandated, but there is a great deal of "gravy," as well, that could be trimmed. Commissioner Freeman noted all commissioners have done due diligence, and he realized they would hear from many citizens who disagreed with their comments. He noted these are difficult decisions but very important ones.

***Motion carried 3-2 with Commissioner Flowers-Taylor and Chairman Goss voting in opposition.***

Da'ood Amin, 133 North Hill Street, Griffin, Georgia

He wanted all to keep in mind that one of the reasons this Board was able to eliminate funding for the Development Authority is because the Authority has SPLOST monies, created jobs, brought projects in under budget, and worked efficiently to address industrial elements of the community. They brought in companies who generated millions of dollars over the years, even though it was true the Wallace Road property has been off the tax digest for awhile. Overall, he agreed with Commissioner Flowers-Taylor that Spalding County is a poor county. He hoped the Board might reconsider this Development Authority issue, as well, since they reinstated the airport study. He was privy to just how beneficial the Development Authority is to this area, and he assured commissioners they are working diligently to replace businesses that have been lost over recent years. Once the Lakes at Green Valley project begins and the economy rebounds, they will again have viable sites.

***Motion/second to adjourn at 6:06 p.m. by Commissioners Freeman and Phillips carried 5-0.***

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Chairman

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County Clerk

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