

MINUTES

The Spalding County Board of Commissioners held a Public Hearing in Room 108 in the Courthouse Annex, Tuesday, October 1, 2013, beginning at 6:00 p.m. with Chairman Gwen Flowers-Taylor presiding. Commissioners Raymond Ray, Samuel Gardner, Rita Johnson and Bart Miller were present. Also present were County Manager William P. Wilson, Jr. and County Clerk, Ex-Officio Ricky L. Clark Jr. to record the minutes.

I. OPENING (CALL TO ORDER)

II. ORDER OF BUSINESS

1. Conduct Public Hearing to receive comments on the notice of proposed property tax increase.

Dan Klein- 220 Mockingbird Lane Brooks, Georgia

Mr. Klein stated that he has a Senoia phone number & a Fayette County mailing address. Mr. Klein stated that he lives on a poorly maintained dirt road and trees are growing up on the side of the road. Furthermore, Mr. Klein stated that there is no fire hydrant on his road so he has to pay higher premiums for fire insurance. Mr. Klein also stated that his Fair Market Value has increased drastically since 2006 and his taxes are too high for the services he receives. Additionally, Mr. Klein noted that three (3) properties on his street were up for sale on the courthouse steps and received no offer. One of the properties was bought by the bank for half of what it was selling for on the courthouse steps.

Reg Hill- 226 Begonia Court Griffin, Georgia

Mr. Hill stated that he was at the meeting on September 24th and he does not think the questions asked were rhetorical. Most people realize that the meetings are an exercise of utility. Mr. Hill stated that the Board has already made up their minds to raise taxes. Mr. Hill questioned if it wasn't state law, would the commission conduct the public hearings. Mr. Hill stated the following issues with increasing taxes: 1.) unpaid taxes (if you have people that are not paying their taxes, why should everyone else absorb an increase); 2.) Tax appeals that go back to 2009 (who is not doing their job?) Mr. Hill stated that he has been a resident of Spalding County since 2008 and is paying his taxes. With the assessment he received and a mill increase, Mr. Hill feels that he is getting hit twice. Mr. Hill stated that tax payer revenue should always be a top priority by people that are elected. Chairman Flowers-Taylor stated that the School Board Meeting is tonight and they are required to have the same meetings. Chairman Flowers-Taylor also stated that during budget proceedings, citizens are allowed to come to these meetings as they are advertised in the paper, website, etc. There have been opportunities for citizens to share their concerns and to ask questions, stated Chairman Flowers-Taylor.

Delane Bidy- 232 Begonia Court Griffin, Georgia

Mr. Bidy stated that he was here on Monday for the Public Hearing and the same concerns were raised. Mr. Bidy stated that personally he feels if the county collected the back taxes and handled the appeals process properly, there would be no need to borrow money or raise taxes.

Jason Lovett- 102 Fox Road Griffin, Georgia

Mr. Lovett stated that he has been at his residence for about a fifteen years and makes his living repairing trash cans. Mr. Lovett noted that he must work 57 hours to pay the taxes on his property. If an increased is imposed, then he will have to stand another 58 hours. Mr. Lovett commented that the government should be

more frugal. Mr. Lovett urged the commission to get a better understanding of economics. Furthermore, Mr. Lovett stated that an increase in taxes will affect the poor. Additionally, Mr. Lovett noted that industry will seek the cheapest place to produce their goods hence the closing of the Hill Street Market. Every City Manager & County Manager's dream is to make bigger budgets to make bigger government. Mr. Lovett urged the commission to keep the manager in check.

Mike Benedict- 55 Musgrove Road Griffin, Georgia

Mr. Benedict noted that he was here to voice his opinion about property taxes. Mr. Benedict noted that he has lived in Griffin for over 50 years and watched how the textile mills did not want industry for fear of losing their employees to higher paying jobs. Mr. Benedict also stated that if the tax rate is too high, industries will not come here. Raising the value of a home and now attempting to raise the millage rate makes residents feel as if they have been hit twice, noted Mr. Benedict. In closing, Mr. Benedict stated that the Board needs to find out a way to save money and be more frugal. He does not believe a new airport will happen. Chairman Flowers-Taylor questioned if Mr. Benedict appealed his assessment. Mr. Benedict stated that he did file an appeal last year and his value was lowered. This year when he went to file an appeal, he was told that you had to present to the Board of Assessors and that they would call. No one from the Board of Assessors ever called, noted Mr. Benedict. Last year his property was assessed at \$130,000 and it was dropped to \$118,000.

Joanna Johnson- 131 Kelley Road Griffin, Georgia

Ms. Johnson stated that she has lived in the same house for the past seventeen (17) years and nothing has changed but her taxes have gone from \$1,400 per year to over \$2,300 per year. Ms. Johnson commented that the hike just doesn't seem fair since nothing has been added to the property. She lives on a dirt road that does not get maintained even though it is supposed to be a county maintained road. She noted that her road may get scraped once a year if someone complains. Ms. Johnson stated that the potholes on her road will knock the alignment out of your car. There are five (5) houses on the road and the rest are trailers. The properties are surrounded by woods. The property across the street is 100 acres, the property behind her is 50 acres and the properties to the side of her are 25 areas. Ms. Johnson stated that as an educator, she understands that the School System needs the money. Ms. Johnson requested someone coming to reassess her property and to address the dirt road issue. Chairman Flowers-Taylor stated that the Board has asked for a list of all the dirt roads in the County. Mr. Wilson to check into the matter.

Debbie Frost- 724 Teamon Road Griffin, Georgia

Ms. Frost stated that Spalding County residents are struggling to make ends meet during this recession period and cannot afford to pay higher taxes. Ms. Frost noted that taxes have increased 180% over the past two (2) years. She had an appraisal done on her home and was told that she could not refinance due to the value dropping so much. If she cannot refinance to get a lower payment, why she would volunteer to pay more taxes on a house that is not worth it, asked Ms. Frost. She stated that the US government was created to maximize liberty and is not organized by institutional programs. Americans are people of the book...the constitution and according to the founders, the government should play a limited role, noted Ms. Frost. Property taxes are unreasonable. Ms. Frost stated the tax office must now spend additional hours on appeals. Tax Office employees are changing rates to garnish more money for the county, stated Ms. Frost. The Appeals Board is a joke. How is one supposed to receive a fair appeals, asked Ms. Frost. Spalding County has the responsibility to carefully account for public funds and to manage properly. Ms. Frost stated that the commissioners have spent all of the citizens' money and the county is broke because of it: \$3 million dollars Senior Citizens Center, \$6 million dollar 800 Mhz System. Furthermore, Ms. Frost stated that three police cars

have been given away. If the cars are in such bad shape, why are we giving them away and why would another jurisdiction want them. Ms. Frost stated that she has analyzed the budget and have found \$2 million dollars that can be cut without having to cut the school system.

Norma Giles- 302 Elizabeth Lane Griffin, Georgia

Ms. Giles stated that residents are tired and cannot afford a tax increase. Ms. Giles stated that the Board never took into consideration when they were so gung-ho about a new airport how much property would be affected. Ms. Giles stated that she will not be able to sell her property because no one will want to buy it with an airplane landing strip so close.

Debbie Dutton- 161 W. Ellis Road Griffin, Georgia

Ms. Dutton stated that she and her husband purchased their property in 1980 and she understands that there are many factors that affect property values such as the economy, list price for homes, rental properties, foreclosures, etc. The median list price for a home in Spalding County is \$61,900 which is 13.1% decline for the quarter. Zebulon's median list price for a home is \$147,000. 57% of all homes are rented, stated Ms. Dutton. Ms. Dutton stated that her home has been robbed, car vandalized, barn damaged and broken into in broad day light. Ms. Dutton stated that she is not in favor of a property tax increase.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Commissioner Miller- Feels the same way that most citizens feel, properties have been valued too high. Mr. Miller stated that he, too, went into the assessor's office and was not pleased with the outcome. He would like a better understanding of how they come up with their values to answer a lot of the concerns his constituency have. Commissioner Miller stated that he knows that the county has overspent in past year but the Board is adamantly working to cut spending. Commissioner Miller stated that he does not want to lay off employees.

Commissioner Johnson- Echoed comments made by Commissioner Miller and noted that these are tough economic times. Commissioner Johnson stated that he has been a resident of Spalding County for the past twelve (12) years and she, too, has had to pay higher taxes. As a business owner and now a commissioner she understands both sides. In closing, Commissioner Johnson stated that collectively the board must find a way to stop the deficit.

Commissioner Ray- Stated that he was born in Griffin, joined the military, retired and came back to Spalding County. Commissioner Ray advised that he does not deal in emotions. He deals in facts and numbers. Most of what has come forward tonight, has been proper but has been a lot of emotions and misinformation, stated Commissioner Ray. Furthermore, Commissioner Ray stated that a tax increase affect the board just as much as it affects the citizens. The current board is having to address issues that have been going on for years. Commissioner Ray stated that the Board is working on a new financial policy that will protect over spending. Also, the County has performed other actions to cut spending (i.e. Budget Review Committee). Commissioner Ray stated that if you look at the fund reserve available in 2007 and the reserve available know, the numbers are shocking. Commissioner Ray stated that the Board has been told not to decrease services, but if employees are cut, services are also cut.

Commissioner Gardner- Apologized for not being at the initial public hearings but due to an illness with his father, he was not able to make it. Commissioner Gardner stated that this budget cycle has probably been one of the most difficult processes that he has been through. Looking and human lives and jobs and trying to balance it all has been hard, noted Commissioner Gardner. Previous Boards had already begun a program of trying to cut back. Employee functions are done with 50% less

people and they are not getting done near as well as they were before. Raising taxes just doesn't even sound right because it hurts everyone, noted Commissioner Gardner. He wishes there was another way.

Chairman Flowers-Taylor- Stated that she is a commissioner and a property owner so when taxes are raised she in fact has to pay more, as well. Chairman Flowers-Taylor stated that she lives in a block with 17 houses and she is the only property owner. Every other piece of property is rental. She would love for her property to go up; unfortunately the value went down. Chairman Flowers-Taylor commented that the purpose around reassessing homes was to capture those that had renovations and added on things that had not been recorded. Chairman Flowers-Taylor stated that her heart goes out to Sun City & Heron Bay if they didn't understand that they were moving into one of the poorest communities with one of the highest pregnancy rates. Chairman Flowers-Taylor also stated that she is very disappointed that years of appeals have not been heard. She stated that the elected official responsible for this is the Clerk of Court and we have no control over her. In response to several questions raised during public comments, Chairman Flowers-Taylor stated that following: 1.) \$3 Million dollars was spent on the Senior Center however this was SPLOST funds not general funds; 2.) The Board did do their homework on the 800 MHz system. In order to make an informed decision the board underwent at least 2 years of going through paper work and learning how the system worked. Furthermore, Chairman Flowers-Taylor stated that the Board came forward under the assumption that citizens did not want services cut. She would like to request that citizens sit in on budget proceedings. In closing, Chairman Flowers-Taylor noted that she would like to enforce a reduction in force and a reduction in services.

III. ADJOURNMENT

Motion/Second by Ray/Gardner to adjourn at 7:01 p.m. Motion carried unanimously by all.

/s/ _____
Chairman

/s/ _____
County Clerk

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