

The Brooks County Board of Commissioners met for its Public Hearing and Special Called Meeting on Wednesday, August 17, 2022, at 6:00 p.m., in the Courtroom of the Brooks County Courthouse located at 100 E. Screven St., Quitman, GA. Commissioners present were: Mr. Patrick Folsom, Chairman; Mr. James Maxwell, Vice Chairman; Mr. Willie Cody; Ms. Myra Exum, and Mr. Lee Larko. Others present were: Mrs. Jessica McKinney, County Administrator; Ms. Patricia Williams, County Clerk; Ms. Kim Daniels, Human Resources; Mr. Jason Kemp, County Attorney; and various residents.

**Public Hearing** – Notice of Property Tax Increase. Sign-in sheet was provided for those wishing to speak. Chairman will allow each one two minutes to speak with no deferments.

Chairman called the meeting to order; and asked Mr. Jack Harrell to lead all in attendance in prayer and pledge of allegiance.

The Brooks County Board of Commissioners has tentatively adopted a millage rate which will require an increase in property taxes by 14.56 percent for the unincorporated area and by 18.40 percent for the incorporated area.

This tentative increase will result in a millage rate of 14.153 mills, an increase of 1.799 mill, for unincorporated area and 16.107 mills, an increase of 2.503 mill, for incorporated area. Without this tentative tax increase, the millage rate will be no more than 12.384 mills for unincorporated area and 14.304 mills for incorporated area. The proposed tax increase for a home in the unincorporated area with a fair market value of \$150,000 is approximately \$109420 and the proposed tax increase for non-homestead property with a fair market value of \$200,000 is approximately \$143.92. The proposed tax increase for a home in the incorporated area with a fair market value of \$150,000 is approximately \$150.18 and the proposed tax increase for non-homestead property with a fair market value of \$200,000 is approximately \$200.24.

Chairman opened with an explanation of the situation of Brooks County for the past two years; stating that employees were underpaid especially Deputies and Fire Fighters, Courthouse renovations that were much needed and if not done; would have been ordered by Judges of the circuit to close the courthouse; needed a new Ag Building, the old one was in deplorable unhealthy condition. We continue to be in a struggle with increase in trash pickup; the Fire Department in need of rebuilding; Volunteers would not sign up. There were no trucks for the Ag Extension Agents; Road Department needs new equipment. We try to do everything we can; tired of seeing Brooks County taking shortcuts and putting the County in great liability.

County Administrator advised attendees of open records request received; and have provided copies of audits, budgets, CD account statements, etc. for public review. Anyone desiring copies can make an open records request; and will be made available.

Those signed in to speak as follows:

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Tony Mock – Restated his remarks from previous public hearing held August 8<sup>th</sup>, that the County is not in compliance with regulations to collect the fire fee and that can not be done under the State of Georgia; and will have to come to terms with it.

Greg Ley – Stated that Lowndes and Thomas County both have lower millage rates, and they have services such as utilities; and that it will not work for the County to tax citizens to death. Further stated the County has spent million of dollars in the radio system and it still does not work.

Wesley Robinson – Stated there has been no progress in 15 years, do not know where the money goes; but not seeing any progress. The roads are still in the same shape; there is no resurfacing or paving. He stated that financial statements should be done monthly to show itemization of what has been spent; and that citizens can not continue to pay out.

Pamela Ross – Stated she is asking the Board to vote no on the millage increase. Basic human needs have skyrocketed; constituents are feeling the pain; to raise taxes will hurt the County. She asked the Board to go back and establish a moderate budget; that it can be done other counties are doing it.

Yvonne Wyche – Commented that a tax increase would be destructive and will affect the person that sits next to you in church, that you see at cookouts, on the streets; they are not nameless. They own businesses and are your constituents. This is not a small increase; do the right thing and reconsider.

Karen Spell – She hopes the funds from the increase will be allocated for department heads and constitutional officers to be held accountable where can see and hold accountable to see a better community.

Jack Harrell – Stated that each person that has spoken speaks the truth as it will affect them. The big issue is the County Government needs to realize the situation of the citizens that live here. New jobs need to be created not hire now but in coming future. Further stated he will do whatever it takes within the law, even a recall of votes, to get to listen to citizens.

Carol Sapp – Presented her ideas for the County; vehicles should only be used by employees of the Sheriff's Office and Fire Department; CD funds being saved for rainy day; the rainy day is now. Stated she hopes the vote is no; citizens do not want; have had enough.

Cynthia Coulter – Asked the Board to think about the residents of Brooks County, every dollar counts. Mishandling of funds cause increase; there are other ways to make money; even a small increase will do.

Greg Squires – Commented there are other ways to raise money than put on the taxpayers with inflation and recession, now is not the time to raise taxes. This will affect the property owners, not renters, as they will not feel it as much as property owners will.

Jason Crosby – Agreed with what was said by everyone else, paying for a Cadillac; but riding in a Pinto. If the County has money in the bank; what are raising taxes for?

David Nunnally – The tax disproportionate is a burden on the County; will affect the property owners, farmers, is there another way to raise money rather than taxes?

Tom Wheeler – Thanked the ones on the Board that voted against the tax increase. The ones that did not, is hurting folks not helping, have some consideration.

Michael Conolty – Stated in the past few years the County is falling apart, houses are falling down, trash in the streets; there are more ways to do this than raise taxes.

Roger Price – Stated he understands the millage; has problem with the property appraisal. There is water running on/over roads, something needs to be done.

Nadine Newsome – Agreed with others. Returned to Brooks County four years ago and have been disappointed what she came back to; taxes up every year she has been back. Do not see the importance of raising taxes for seniors who are living on social security.

Peggy Howard – Quoted the amount of the total of the CDs with Edward Jones. Asked is there any other thing to do? The County is not in compliance with excess budget. She hopes all of this is not thrown on deaf ears.

David Ragsdale – The budget is a wish list for \$1.4 million; eight vehicles this is the worse time to buy vehicles, prices are high. Other items such as Side Arm, Culvert Cleaner, dump trailer, etc. not say they are not needed, but can squeeze more life out of the equipment and there is no need to buy vehicles. Each Commissioner is responsible for their actions. Take it out of reserves; there were two options offered during the budget process; but the fully funded option was chosen. People will not forget about it; be respectful and do the right thing for the people of Brooks County.

Bob Dwyer – Emphasized he opposes the rate increase; and do not see what getting for it.

Larie Cooper – Respectfully asked the Board to vote no on the rate increase, stating property values are up.

Harlie Bodine – Provided digest history for years 2020, 2021, and 2022. Stated the Board should consider putting the rate increase out for the people to vote for Brooks County and Board of Education.

Burt Wider – Stated the Board need to do something different; someone else needs to contribute, work together; and if the money is not in the pot, do not buy, although he understands regarding the wages/salaries.

Stephanie Williams – Stated she was speaking on behalf of the Development Authority and the people they serve. Raising taxes is not good during inflation/recession it is harmful. Development Authority has projects in the process worth approximately \$300,000. Asked the Board to reconsider; leaders are held to a higher standard.

Chairman allowed a 5-minute break at 6:57 pm.; and returned at 7:04 pm.

Chairman explained that the County used reserved funding to balance the 2021 budget; 2020 the Board dropped a mill; and have been continuing to trim the fat, such as using vehicles in other departments. He welcomed citizens to documents and submit an open records request.

The public hearing concluded at 7:10 pm.; and went into the special called meeting.

Mr. Maxwell made the motion to adopt the following millage rates and fees for 2022; Mr. Cody seconded:

Incorporated	16.107	
Unincorporated	14.153	
Development Authority	.3	
Fire Fee	\$130.00	Mobile Home
Fire Fee	\$90.00	With Land
Fire Fee	\$200.00	Commercial
Fire Fee	\$80.00	Homestead
Fire Fee	\$130.00	Non-Home
Briggs Fire District	0.00	
Solid Waste Annual Fee	\$216.00	
Board of Education	13.500	

Chairman called for discussion.

Mr. Larko stated he is against a tax increase; there were two options provided during the adoption of the budget; he had three different alternatives to not increase taxes: 1) lease vehicles through a fleet maintenance purchase system; 2) sales tax increase; and 3) on the \$80,000 E-Ticketing System maybe a fee could be included on the system for the defender to pay.

Mrs. Exum thanked everyone for here and stated she agrees with Mr. Larko, this is not the time to increase taxes. But do not have time to do a sales tax increase as that would require a referendum to go on the election ballot to get citizens to vote. She advised everyone to remember to shop here locally first, that will bring tax dollars to the County. She inquired whether the list of requests are needs or wants if they are wants; cut down to needs.

Chairman stated when he came into office, there was a lot to be done and corrected. Had to rebuild the Sheriff's Department fleet, renovate the courthouse, build new Ag Building; the Sheriff's Department needs a building; they are housed in a double wide mobile home. He took an oath to be a good steward of tax dollars. Thanked everyone for attending.

Chairman called for the vote. Mrs. Exum and Mr. Larko voted no. Mr. Maxwell, Mr. Cody, and Chairman voted yes. Vote was 3 to 2.

Mrs. Exum made the motion to adjourn the special called meeting at 7:21 pm; Mr. Larko seconded.

Mr. Patrick Folsom, Chairman  
Mrs. Jessica McKinney, Administrator  
Ms. Patricia Williams, Clerk