

HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION

August 18, 2020
7:00 P.M.

Commissioners Present: Becky Langston, Susan Andrews, Rob Grant, J. Harry Lange, Andrew Zuerner.
Staff Present: Randy Dowling, County Manager; Nancy D. McMichael, County Clerk. Staff Present (via telephone): Russell Britt, County Attorney.

1. **CALL TO ORDER & ANNOUNCEMENT**. Chairman Langston called the Regular Session to order. She also announced that the County had lost a Sheriff's Deputy, Steve Dutton, to illness.
2. **MINUTES**. The motion to approve the minutes of the August 4, 2020, Regular Session, the July 30, 2020, Planning Session, the 11:00 AM August 11, 2020, Public Hearing, and the 6:30 PM August 11, 2020, Public Hearing, was made by Commissioner Lange, seconded by Commissioner Andrews, and passed unanimously.
3. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **Taxpayers Bill of Rights Public Hearing III**. Chairman Langston called the Public Hearing to order and said this was the third and final hearing, as required by law, regarding the notice of intent to increase property taxes. Chairman Langston said that the County has tentatively adopted a 2020 millage rate which will require an increase in property taxes by 0.83 percent County Wide less West Point and by 0.04 percent in the West Point area; that this tentative increase will result in a millage of 9.38 mills, an increase of 0.077 mills in the County wide less West Point area and without this tentative tax increase, the millage rate will be no more than 9.303 mills; that the proposed tax increase for a home with a fair market value of \$225,000 is approximately \$6.93 and the proposed tax increase for non-homestead property with a fair market value of \$150,000 is approximately \$4.62; that in the West Point area, this tentative increase will result in a millage rate of 5.628 mills, an increase of .002 mills and without this tentative tax increase, the millage rate will be no more than 5.626 mills; that the proposed tax increase for a home with a fair market value of \$150,000 is approximately \$0.12 and the proposed tax increase for non-homestead property with a fair market value of \$100,000 is approximately \$0.08. Chairman Langston asked if anyone wished to comment on the millage rate. There being none, she closed the Public Hearing.

B. **Set Millage Rate for 2020**. Chairman Langston said that with the third Public Hearing regarding the proposed millage rate having been held, the proposed millage rate for the County is 9.38 and that the School Board millage is 18.26, for a proposed total millage of 27.64. She said that the motion would be to set the County millage at 9.38, the portion of West Point within the County would be 5.628, and to authorize the Tax Commissioner to collect the School Board's millage rate of 18.26.

The motion to set the millage rate at 9.38 mills was made by Commissioner Lange, seconded by Commissioner Zuerner, and passed unanimously.

C. **Policy: Fireworks on County Property**. Chairman Langston said that the Board had discussed allowing citizens to rent County property for public fireworks exhibitions, and consensus was to move forward with a policy; and that the policy has been drafted for the rental of County property (Ag Center Arena, Moultrie Park, Pate Park and Soccer Field) setting out fees, requirement of an application and insurance requirements. The motion to approve the policy was made by Commissioner Zuerner, seconded by Commissioner Grant, and passed unanimously.

D. **Requests for Tax Refund**. Chairman Langston said that three requests for tax refunds had been received, as follows:

- (1) Alsten, Eddie Lee. Refund of \$22.64 (ad valorem tax) due to having traded his vehicle after purchasing tag; and that the Tax Commissioner and the Board of Tax Assessors agree with the request.
- (2) Cornett, Michelle. Refund of \$101.23 (ad valorem tax) due to having purchased her trailer tag and selling it before her birthday; and that the Tax Commissioner and the Board of Tax Assessors agree with the request.

- (3) Ferguson, Charles S. & Lindsay Taylor. Refund of \$85.51 (ad valorem tax) due having purchased vehicle tag and trading it before his birthday; and that the Tax Commissioner and the Board of Tax Assessors agree with the request.

The motion to approve the requests was made by Commissioner Grant, seconded by Commissioner Andrews, and passed unanimously.

- E. **Consideration of Road Acceptance**: Easement off Teel Circle. Chairman Langston said a petition had been received for the Board’s consideration regarding the acceptance of an easement off Teel Circle in the Backwaters area; that both property owners (Saunders Family & Georgia Power) signed the petition; that the easement road is 1.4 miles long and had been inspected by Mike Brown, Public Works Director; that if accepted, the road would be categorized as a “Class D” road and will receive minimum maintenance; and that Mr. Brown’s recommendation was to not accept the road. She said that a motion is needed regarding moving forward with the acceptance process.

Buddy Burnett, representing the Saunders Family, appeared before the Board and explained having the road accepted by the County would benefit the individuals who currently live at the end of road on leased Georgia Power land; and that the Saunders Family and Georgia Power would be willing to participate in the costs associate with the acceptance.

Following discussion, the motion to not move forward with the acceptance process was made by Chairman Langston, seconded by Commissioner Zuerner, and passed unanimously.

- F. **Appointment: Planning Commission**. Chairman Langston said that a vacancy exists on the Planning Commission and that Commissioner Zuerner desires to appoint an individual to complete Matthew Newberry’s term, which expires December 31, 2021. Commissioner Zuerner made the motion to appoint Gene Weldon to the Planning Commission to complete Mr. Newberry’s term, and said the Mr. Weldon would be resigning from the Development Authority to take this position. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Grant and passed unanimously.
- G. **Census Update**. Chairman Langston said that Harris County’s response rate to the census is at 65% and that the deadline for responding is September 30. She asked those in attendance and listening in to spread the word about responding to the census, which can be done on-line at 2020census.gov. Commissioner Lange said that an accurate count helps for planning over the next few years, Federal funding for schools and other programs, and could possibly increase the number of representatives in the House of Representatives.
- H. **Financial Statement: May 2020**. The motion to approve the May 2020 financial statement was made by Commissioner Lange and seconded by Commissioner Andrews. In response to a question, Clint Chastain, CFO, said that the County’s finances look good; that the SPLOSTs and LOST are not decreasing, and that all Department Heads are doing a good job staying within their budgets. The motion to approve passed unanimously.

4. **COUNTY MANAGER**

- A. **Bid Award: Prison Kitchen Equipment**. Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that the FY 2020-21 Prison budget includes \$23,500 to purchase replacement kitchen equipment to include a convection oven range, griddle and gas fryer, all with “prison” packages; that bids were prepared and advertised; and that two (2) bids were received on August 5 as follows:

	TOTAL BID
Alpha-Pritchard Restaurant Equipment, Columbus GA	\$ 18,992.00
Bi-State Services, Smiths Station AL	\$ 20,738.17

Mr. Dowling said that County staff had evaluated the bids and recommends that Alpha-Pritchard Restaurant Equipment, the low bidder, be awarded the bid for a total of \$18,992.00, which is \$4,508 (19.2%) below budget; that if approved, the installation can be completed within 60 days, or about mid-October, and the old kitchen equipment will be disposed of through GovDeals.com. The motion to award the bid to Alpha-Pritchard for \$18,992.00 was made by Commissioner Andrews, seconded by Chairman Langston, and passed unanimously.

B. **Project Updates.** Randy Dowling, County Manager, reviewed various projects, as follows:

- (1) Replacement Telephone System. Interviews were held August 11 and Board consideration scheduled for September 1.
- (2) Live Stream Equipment for Commission Chambers. Bid awarded during the August 4 meeting; will be installed by mid-September.
- (3) Ambulances (2). Bid awarded during the August 4 meeting; ambulances are expected by February 2021.
- (4) Courthouse ERU Replacement. Bid awarded during the August 4 meeting; should be completed by late September 2020.
- (5) Prison Kitchen Equipment. Bid awarded this evening.
- (6) Removal & Disposal of Underground Fuel Storage Tank. Bid awarded during the August 4 meeting; should be completed by early October 2020.
- (7) Repair to Three County Bridges. This project is on bid, bids are due September 10, with consideration by the Board on September 15.
- (8) Repair to Barnes Mill Road Bridge. Proposal approved during the August 4 meeting; hope to add this bridge repair to the Three County Bridges project so that all are completed at the same time.
- (9) Melody Lakes Dam. Bid specifications are being prepared, and project completion is expected early 2021.
- (10) Airport Flagpole. Installation is almost complete.
- (11) Airport Monument Sign. Sign has been ordered and is expected to be installed in late September 2020.
- (12) Garbage Trucks (2). On order, should be delivered by late December 2020.
- (13) Hadley Road Water Lines. In the process of being installed.
- (14) Water Meter Replacement. Project is about 70% completed and is on-going.
- (15) Renovation of Old Library. The MOU and lease agreement with Mercer Medicine is underway and should be before the Board for consideration on September 1.
- (16) Compensation Study by CVIOG. This is the next item on the agenda for consideration by the Board.
- (17) CARES Act Allocation. County has been allocated \$1.6 million to be spent by September 1, 2020; the County has received 30% (about \$480,000) for public safety salaries. The addition 70% is being requested.
- (18) SPLOST Collection. No funds yet received for this fiscal year.
- (19) LOST Collection. No funds yet received for this fiscal year.
- (20) T-SPLOST Collection. No funds yet received for this fiscal year.
- (21) Single Family Building Permits. 21 permits issued during July.
- (22) Solid Waste Tonnage. Almost 1,700 tons disposed of in July; this time last year, it was just over 1,400 tons.

C. **CVIOG: Employee Compensation Study.** Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that Alex Daman, with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government (CVIOG), was on the phone and will review the information shared with the Board during their July 30 planning retreat.

Mr. Daman reviewed the PowerPoint presentation, which had been revised to include the Tier (1-4) and millage rate of each of the comparable entities (that showed about

half of the counties are in Tier 4, as is Harris, and only one county had a millage rate lower than Harris) and information on Options #2 and #3, which included the estimated cost of Option #1 at \$1.67 million, of Option #2 at \$1.45 million, and of Option #3 at \$1.23 million, and that the one time pay included with Option #1 would not carryover year to year, thus reducing it to \$1.1 million after the first year. In conclusion, Mr. Daman said that Options #2 and #3 are very similar to Option #1 by including the adoption of the table, the length of service, and the classification and compensation maintenance, but do not include the one-time payment. Following Mr. Daman's presentation, and there being no questions, Chairman Langston asked for a motion.

Commissioner Lange said that the Board looked at the compensation plan seriously; that it's been a long time coming; that he appreciates the work CVIOG has done with the initial presentation as well as the options based on reservations of the Board, which were not about the money; that it was about treating people fairly; that the problem with Option #1 was the one-time check for employees as pay for "past sins" of the County regarding salaries; that Option #2 is about total continuous years of service to the County at 1% per year; that employees need to be rewarded for the time they have worked for the County; that Option #3 was similar to Option #2 but at .5% per year; that the Board is committed to doing what is long overdue; and that Option #2 addresses compression, loyalty, and at the same time salaries will move forward.

Commissioner Lange then made the motion to adopt and approve Option #2 (to include the compensation table), with an effective date of July 1, 2020, with COLA increases, if any, to be July 1 of each year and employees to receive an additional annual increase of 1% on their employment anniversary. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Grant and Chairman Langston.

Commissioner Grant said that CVIOG did a good job and it's something the County can be happy about and that he hopes all employees will be happy with it. Commissioner Andrews said that her only concern was the on-going cost (the carryover), but this is something that is long overdue. In response to a question from Chairman Langston, Mr. Dowling said that funding for the new salaries totaling around \$2 million will come from the \$800,000 included in the FY 2020-21 budget, about \$400,000 from tax revenues, and the remaining \$800,000 from the CARES Act reimbursement.

The motion to approve/adopt Option #2, effective July 1, 2020, with annual COLA increases (if any) given July 1, and an additional annual increase of 1% on employment anniversary passed unanimously.

5. **ADJOURNMENT**. There being no further business, the motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Lange, seconded by Commissioner Andrews, and passed unanimously.

Attest:

Becky Langston, Chairman

Nancy D. McMichael, County Clerk