

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**CALLED SESSION - PUBLIC HEARING I**  
August 13, 2019  
11:00 AM

Commissioners Present: Becky Langston, Susan Andrews, Andrew Zuerner. Commissioners Absent: Rob Grant, J. Harry Lange. Staff Present: Randy Dowling, County Manager; Nancy D. McMichael, County Clerk.

1. **CALL TO ORDER.** Chairman Langston called the Called Session to order.
2. **PUBLIC HEARING I: NOTICE OF INTENT TO INCREASE PROPERTY TAXES.** Chairman Langston called the Public Hearing to order and said that the purpose of this meeting is regarding the notice of intent to increase the property tax rate and that there will be two more Public Hearings regarding same before the millage rate is set, one at 6:30 tonight and the other during the August 20 regular session. She said the Public Hearings are required by law, and were appropriately advertised; that individuals will have five (5) minutes to speak; and that Commissioner Zuerner will act as time keeper. She then asked Randy Dowling, County Manager, for his comments.

Randy Dowling, County Manager, reiterated that this is the first of three State required public hearings, the second will be tonight at 6:30, and the third will be during the August 20 meeting of the Commissioners, after which the millage rate for 2019 will be set; and that the School Board has set its millage rate at 17.26. He explained that with the approved budget having been balanced using funds from the General Fund reserve and from Solid Waste, continued reliance of those funds is not good practice; that an increase is needed for several reasons, to include salary study and increase for employees, updating land codes, clean-up and development of Ellerslie Park; that the current tax rate is 8.63 mills and the proposed rate is 9.38 mills, a .75 tax rate increase; that since the Board of Education has reduced its millage by 1.3 mills and the County is proposing a .75 mill increase, overall, property taxes will be less than last year.

Chairman Langston commented that the millage rate was increased in 2017 but before that the last time was in 2002. She asked if anyone wished to comment on the proposed millage rate increase of .75 mills.

Meghan Guenther, citizen who lives on Hamilton Mulberry Grove Road in Cataula, appeared before the Board and said that she is opposed to a tax increase; that an increase last occurred in 2017; that the County lived off the same rate from 2002 to 2016; and that she does not see any benefits that justify an increase.

Jim Kelly, citizen who lives on East Bon Acre Road in Cataula, appeared before the Board and said he is not in favor of a tax increase; that the County needs to be more vigilant of lights being left on in a recreation park; that the budget shows six million in the Water Works account; that one million of that could be used for the budget, but what about the other five million; that it appears that citizens are being overtaxed; and that lights are needed at the soccer fields. Chairman Langston commented that the County is working on a public/private partnership regarding the lighting of the soccer fields.

Wayne Harbert, citizen who lives on Gray Smoke Trail in Cataula, appeared before the Board and said that with the millage increase of 2.5 in 2017 added to the proposed .75, it results in a 40% increase in taxes, which is difficult for many senior citizens; and that senior citizens make up the highest population category in the County.

Frank Henderson, citizen who lives on South Buckeye Loop in Midland, appeared before the Board and said that he wanted to know why taxes are being raised, that there are funds for the fire departments and 911 in the budget and those costs should be included in one's health or automobile insurance; and that the County should consider lowering taxes, not raising them.

Byron Whitehead, citizen who lives on Old McKee Road in Waverly Hall, appeared before the Board and said that he was concerned about expenses related to the Melody Lakes Dam and asked questions related to same. Mr. Whitehead was advised the minutes of all the meetings regarding the Dam are on the County's website, to which he responded that he would look at the minutes.

Carolyn Early, citizen who lives on Troop Drive in Fortson, appeared before the Board and said that she is not opposed to the millage increase but had questions regarding the budget. Chairman Langston said that comments during this Public Hearing are limited to the millage rate.

There being no further comments, Chairman Langston closed the Public Hearing, thanked everyone for their comments and said that the Board will take all comments into consideration when making a final decision on the millage rate.

3. **ADJOURNMENT**. Chairman Langston adjourned the meeting and reminded everyone that the next Public Hearing will be tonight at 6:30 PM.

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Becky Langston, Chairman

Attest:

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Nancy D. McMichael, County Clerk