

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**REGULAR SESSION**

August 20, 2019

7:00 P.M.

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

1. **CALL TO ORDER.** Chairman Langston called the Regular Session to order.
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Chairman Langston led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. **MINUTES.** The motion to approve the minutes of the August 6, 2019 Regular Session, the August 5, 2019 Planning Session, the August 13, 2019 (11:00 AM) Called Meeting & Public Hearing I, and the August 13, 2019 (6:30 PM) Called Meeting & Public Hearing II was made by Commissioner Lange, seconded by Commissioner Andrews, and passed unanimously.
4. **PUBLIC HEARING**
  - 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 the property tax rate; 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 comments.

Randy Dowling, County Manager, said the budget was approved in June and totals \$39 million; that the budget was balanced using funds from the General Fund reserve and from Solid Waste; that continued reliance on those funds is not good practice; that an increase in millage is needed for several reasons to include the salary and compression study on employees salaries, update of land codes, clean-up and development of Ellerslie Park; that the current rate is 8.63 mills and the proposed rate is 9.38 mills, a .75 tax rate increase; and that because 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 asked if anyone wished to comment on the proposed millage rate increase of .75 mills.

Connie Guy, citizen who lives on Bugg Road, appeared before the Board and said that while she was in favor of the millage increase two years ago, but after some deliberation and research regarding the proposed increase, she is not in favor of another increase.

Stephen Waite, citizen who lives on Rosewood Court, appeared before the Board and said that he doesn't get a cost of living increase where he works, and certainly not as a volunteer firefighter, so he doesn't see why County employees should receive such an increase, which was 2.5% this year.

Gary Shuler, citizen who lives on Georgia Highway 85, appeared before the Board and said that he lives on a small retirement, can't afford a tax increase, and is opposed to the millage rate increase.

Meghan Guenther, citizen who lives on Hamilton Mulberry Grove Road, appeared before the Board and said that the School Board reduced its millage only because it collected, in error, for its bond that had been paid off; that she is opposed to the millage rate increase; that the County should not be paying for water improvements related to The Grove development because tax money should not be used for private developments; that the County had 12 years to find a way to fund such improvements rather than waiting until now; and that she does not agree with the increase.

There being no further comments, Chairman Langston closed the Public Hearing and thanked everyone for their comments.

5. **NEW BUSINESS**

- A. **Jim Livingston, River Valley Regional Commission.** Jim Livingston, Executive Director of the River Valley Regional Commissioner (RVRC), appeared before the Board to introduce himself as the Executive Director, since Patti Cullen retired earlier this year, and to review the various programs and assistance provided by the RVRC to include comprehensive planning, economic development, historic preservation planning, geographic information system, public administration grant writing, and transportation planning. Katie Howard, with the RVRC Area Agency of Aging, said that anyone needing help or information regarding services for senior citizens should contact the Area Agency on Aging. Mr. Livingston continued by briefly discussing the upcoming TSPLOST Regional Roundtable and the Census count and said that Harris County is not one of the “hard to count” counties, unlike many of the others in the 16 counties served by the RVRC.
- B. **Appointment: TSPLOST Regional Roundtable.** Chairman Langston said that with the upcoming expiration of the TSPLOST, the RVRC is initiating efforts to have a second TSPLOST, which would take effective immediately upon the expiration of the current TSPLOST, which is December 31, 2022. She said the Transportation Investment Act calls for a regional roundtable comprised of two members from each of the 16 counties in the region; that one of two is to be either the Chair or CEO of the County and the other is to be a Mayor of one of the municipalities; that as Chair she would like to be appointed to the roundtable and that Jim Trott, Mayor of Pine Mountain, will represent the municipalities. The motion to appoint Chairman Langston to the roundtable was made by Commissioner Zuerner, seconded by Commissioner Andrews, and passed unanimously.
- C. **Surplus Property.** Chairman Langston said that it is being requested that three railroad signs and markers from the Rails to Trails project in Pine Mountain be declared as County surplus property and donated to the Chipley Historical Society Museum in Pine Mountain. The motion to declare the railroad signs and markers as surplus in order to donate same to the Chipley Historical Society Museum was made by Commissioner Grant, seconded by Commissioner Lange, and passed unanimously.
- D. **Set Millage Rate for 2019.** Chairman Langston said that the third Public Hearing regarding the proposal millage rate increase of .75 mills was held earlier this evening; that the proposed millage rate for the County is 9.38 and that the School Board millage is 17.26, for a proposed total millage of 26.64. 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 17.26.

Commissioner Lange said that he has taken into consideration the comments made by everyone during tonight’s meeting and the previous meetings; that the County went for a long time without raising the millage rate and the Board was glad to have been able to do that, but because of that, the County is faced with needs that have been put off for a long time, the most pressing being that of employee salaries and longevity compression; that if the Consumer Price Index goes up and employees do not receive an increase, they are going backward; that an increase is needed to help make the County more financially effective; that while no one likes to increase taxes, it is needed to keep the County fiscally strong; that because slight tax increases weren’t made over time, the County is in the situation it is in and had increases been made, the financial impact on taxpayers would not be as great. He then made the motion to set the County millage rate at 9.38, the portion of West Point within the County at 5.628, and to authorize the Tax Commissioner to collect the School Board’s millage rate of 17.26.

Commissioner Zuerner seconded the motion and said that while he does not want to increase taxes, he can see the need for such in order for the County to be able to undertake projects that have been delayed; and that the most pressing need is the longevity compression and salaries of employees.

Commissioner Andrews said that with the increase in 2017, the County was able to upgrade the 9-1-1 system; that the Community Center debt will be moved to SPLOST, but not for another year; that garbage trucks and ambulances had to be replaced; that the Melody Lakes Dam issue, while not something planned, had to be addressed and the option selected is in Atlanta waiting for approval but we don’t know when the project will move forward; that The Grove developers stopped work on the project

and the County was not aware as to when or if the project would move forward so planning for improvements to the water line could not take place until such was known; that the Board receives emails from the Sheriff on a regular basis indicating that another deputy has moved on to a higher rate of pay elsewhere and the compression/longevity issue has to be addressed; and that the proposed increase will be about \$44 on a \$200,000 home, and that she is in favor of the increase.

Commissioner Grant said that while he has said he did not want to increase taxes, he has seen the condition the County is in; that his main concern is to address the compression/longevity of the County employees; that he wants the County to have an many amenities as it can without ending up looking like Atlanta or Columbus; that the Board has to make hard decisions to move forward; that with an increase now, the County should be able to continue at the same rate for a while; that the increase will also help in the event the County endures another disaster, such as the recent tornado and the one a few years ago; and that he is in favor of the increase.

Chairman Langston said that she is not in favor of the raising the millage rate; that she feels taxpayers deserve a break on taxes; and that while she is opposed to the increase she understands the concerns of the other Commissioners and respects their opinions.

The motion to increase the millage rate by .75 mills to 9.38 mills passed with four in favor (Lange, Zuerner, Andrews, Grant) and one opposed (Langston).

6. **COUNTY MANAGER**

- A. **Bid Award: Road Striping.** Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that the County received \$50,000 from the GDOT LMIG program for road signing and marking improvements; that the County is required to provide a 10% match, for a total project cost of \$55,000; that bids for the striping/restriping of 16 County roads were received on August 13, with Peek Pavement Marking submitting the low bid of \$50,715; that because the full project cost of \$55,000 would not be utilized by the low bid, two additional roads were added to the list at the same bid unit costs; and that the revised/adjusted bids are as follows:

COMPANY	Original Bid	Addition of 2 Roads	Revised Bid
Peek Pavement Marking, Columbus, GA	\$ 50,715.00	\$ 4,370.00	\$ 55,085.00
Mid-State Striping, Eatonton, GA	\$ 58,564.00	\$ 4,930.00	\$ 63,494.00

Mr. Dowling said that the recommendation is to award the bid to Peek Pavement Marking for the revised bid amount of \$55,085; that the bidder is in agreement with the addition of the two roads; that funding for this project is \$50,000 from GDOT and \$5,085 from SPLOST 2014; and that the project is expected to be completed by November 30, 2019. The motion to award the bid to Peek Pavement Marking for the revised low bid of \$55,085 and to authorize the County Manager and County Clerk to execute any necessary documents was made by Chairman Langston, seconded by Commissioner Zuerner, and passed unanimously.

- B. **Bid Award: Ellerslie Park Lodge Repair.** Randy Dowling, County Manager, reminded the Board that the Ellerslie Park Lodge was damaged during the March tornado and said that insurance proceeds totaled \$70,775.25; that bids were requested and only one bid was received from Riley Contracting, of Senoia, GA, in the amount of \$139,455.00, which is almost double the insurance proceeds; and that it is being recommended the bid be rejected and another bid request be made. The motion to reject the bid from Riley Contracting and to go back out on bid for the project was made by Commissioner Lange, seconded by Chairman Langston, and passed unanimously.
- C. **Final FY 18/19 Budget Amendments: Adjustments for Audit.** Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that final budget amendments are needed in connection with the audit for FY 18/19, and Clint Chastain, Finance Officer, will explain. Mr. Chastain reviewed each of the amendments (#10 for General Fund, #11 for Hotel/Motel Tax Fund, #12 for Law Library Fund, and #13 for SPLOST 2004 Fund). Following explanation, the motion to approve the budget amendments was made by Commissioner Andrews, seconded by Chairman Langston, and passed unanimously.

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

- (1) County-wide Email System. Bid specs are being prepared.
- (2) Replacement Telephone System for Courthouse, Commissioners' Office, and Community Development. Bid specs are being prepared.
- (3) Restriping of County Roads. Awarded during tonight's meeting; road number increased to 18; and completion expected by November 30, 2019.
- (4) Pitts Drive Paving. Right of way issues still to be resolved.
- (5) Community Center Parking Lot Restriping. Project has been completed.
- (6) Community Center Pool Equipment. Bid specs being prepared.
- (7) Ellerslie Park Lodge Repair/Renovation. Bid was rejected; working with insurance company for more reimbursement of damages.
- (8) Ellerslie Park Chipping & Grinding. Project is underway; a total of 7,770 cubic yards have been chipped and transported out of the County; and project should be completed by late October.
- (9) Soccer Complex Pavilion. Demo has been completed; building permits have been obtained; concrete foundation should be poured soon; and project should be completed by end of the year.
- (10) Rails to Trails. Phase I of the project, from downtown Pine Mountain to the intersection of US 27 and SR 18 (354), is underway. Bids for Phase II & III are due August 27.
- (11) Airport Security & Wildlife Fence, Phase II. Project is about 75% complete.
- (12) Melody Lakes Dam. Option 8 was submitted to the State for approval and we are still waiting on the State to respond.
- (13) Mulching of 35 acres, Northwest Harris Business Park. Project is underway; about 6 acres has been mulched; and project should be completed in mid-October.

7. **COUNTY ATTORNEY**

- A. **Resolution: Increase Cable/Video Franchise Fee.** John Taylor, County Attorney, said that the Board entered into an agreement with the Georgia Municipal Association in July for assistance in increasing the cable/video franchise fee from 2% to 5%; that as part of the process to increase the fee, a resolution is needed; that upon approval, letters will be sent to the three cable/video companies in the County (Charter, Mediacom, and WOW) as well as to the Secretary of State regarding same; that the increase from 2% to 5% is expected to go into effect in January 2020; that the increase is expected to generate an additional \$120,000 per year in cable franchise fees; and that he recommended approval of the Resolution. The motion to approve the Resolution was made by Commissioner Grant, seconded by Commissioner Andrews, and passed unanimously.
- B. **Agreement: Traylor Business Services (Personal Property Verification).** John Taylor, County Attorney, reviewed and discussed the agreement for personal property verification, said that it was the same document as in years past, and that he recommended approval of same. The motion to approve this agreement was made by Commissioner Lange, seconded by Commissioner Andrews, and passed unanimously. (Document can be found in "Contracts & Agreements" file as C&A #19-29.)
- C. **Agreement: Georgia Forestry Commission Rural Fire Defense Cooperative Lease.** John Taylor, County Attorney, reviewed the agreement regarding cooperation between the County and the Georgia Forestry Commission in fighting rural wild fires. Following comments from Mike Dean, Georgia Forestry Chief Ranger for the Harris/Muscogee/Talbot District, and discussion, the motion to approve was made by Commissioner Grant, seconded by Chairman Langston, and

passed unanimously. (Document can be found in “Contracts & Agreements” file as C&A #19-30.)

8. **ADJOURNMENT**. There being no further business to discuss the motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Lange, seconded by Chairman Langston, and passed unanimously.

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Becky Langston, Chairman

Attest:

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Nancy D. McMichael, County Clerk