

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION**

August 15, 2023
6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Rob Grant, Susan Andrews, Greg Gantt, Scott Lightsey, Bobby Irions. Staff Present: Randy Dowling, County Manager; Clint Chastain, Chief Financial Officer; Wayne Morris, Chief Appraiser; Shalee Mallory, Chief Appraiser; Brian Williams, Community Development Director; Jeff Culpepper, Water Services Director; Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk.

1. **CALL TO ORDER** Chairman Grant called the Regular Session to order at 6:30 p.m. Chairman Grant asked everyone to keep Hawaii/Maui in their thoughts and prayers.
2. **INVOCATION / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** Vice-Chair Andrews gave the invocation. Chairman Grant led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. **MINUTES** The motion to approve the minutes of the August 1, 2023 Regular Session, August 8, 2023 Special Called Session (Public Hearing I), and August 8, 2023 Special Called Session (Public Hearing II) was made by Commissioner Lightsey, seconded by Commissioner Irions, and passed unanimously.
4. **THIRD PUBLIC HEARING AS REQUIRED BY THE STATE ON THE COUNTY'S 2023 MILLAGE LEVY - To hold a Public Hearing as required by State Law on the County's intent to levy a millage rate that differs from the calculated "rollback" millage rate for ad valorem tax purposes.**
Chairman Grant 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 and that this is the third of three hearings the County is required to hold regarding same. Chairman Grant said that the County has tentatively adopted a 2023 millage rate which will require an increase in property taxes by 2.72 percent County Wide less West Point and by 6.60 percent in the West Point area and that this tentative increase will result in a millage of 9.13 mills, an increase of 0.242 mills in the County Wide less West Point area. Chairman Grant said that without this tentative tax increase, the millage rate will be no more than 8.888 mills and the proposed tax increase for a home with a fair market value of \$250,000 is approximately \$24.20 and the proposed tax increase for non-homestead property with a fair market value of \$175,000 is approximately \$16.94. Chairman Grant stated that in the West Point area, this tentative increase will result in millage rate of 5.478 mills, an increase of .339 mills, without this tentative tax increase, the millage rate will be no more than 5.139 mills, and the proposed tax increase for a home with a fair market value of \$175,000 is approximately \$23.73 and the proposed tax increase for non-homestead property with a for market value of \$125,000 is approximately \$16.95.

Chairman Grant asked Chief Tax Appraiser Wayne Morris if he would like to address the Board related to the millage rate. Chief Tax Appraiser Wayne Morris addressed the Board and stated that the millage rate for the County and the School District is not changing this year; that the Taxpayers Bill of Rights requires three public hearings; that the Homeowner Tax Relief Grant that Governor Kemp has put in place will give up to \$480 tax credit to citizens with a homestead exemption and they qualify for it; and that the Homeowner Tax Relief Grant is only for one year. He advised that the reason that the County performs re-evaluations is because there are audits each year related to sales. In response to an inquiry from Chairman Grant and Vice-Chair Andrews, Mr. Morris advised that approximately 20% of the properties were re-evaluated this year and that 80% of property owners will not see an increase in their taxes.

Chairman Grant asked if anyone wished to comment on the millage rate.

There being none, Chairman Grant closed the Public Hearing at 6:40 p.m.

5. **CITIZEN COMMENTS**
 - A. **Larry Hall - King's Gap Water Association** Larry Hall, citizen, appeared before the Board and provided background information and the history of the King's Gap Water Association since 2002; that members paid \$12.00 per member initially to cover water testing and any other costs; that Harris County took over one of the areas in 2014 and they lost 23 members that contributed to the costs; that at that time they had a reserve; that they went from 64 to 41 members; that in 2018 they failed a water test and now have to test daily at a cost of approximately

\$500.00 per month; that monthly expenses are about \$667.00; that the members fees were raised to \$24.00 in addition to the water bill itself; that they no longer have money for improvements; and that they would like Harris County to take over the system for the remaining 41 members like was done for King's Gap Village.

In response to questions from the Board, Jeff Culpepper, Water Services Director, stated that the cost estimates would need to be updated; that the sections did not qualify before for a CDBG grant; that the water lines are not large enough for fire hydrants; that he can update the costs estimates and bring the information back to the Board; that they would have to look at easements and right-of-way; and that some homeowners looked into wells but the lots were smaller.

- B. **Stuart Smith - Amending Section 308.03 of the UDC (Chickens in R-1 Zoning)** Stuart Smith, citizen, addressed the Board and read portions of the Constitution; stated that governments encouraged livestock; that agriculture was protected and preserved; that there were campaigns to encourage raising rabbits and chickens; that he couldn't find any city that doesn't encourage raising chickens; that the UDC restricts the number of hens in residential; that in a major subdivision none are allowed; that real estate agents don't know; that he suggests that livestock rules be left to the HOA's; and that noise and smells can be handled by laws.

Commissioner Lightsey stated that five to six chickens were seen coming out of the woods behind the property and that the Joneses contacted him and asked him to tell Mr. Smith to remove the chickens from their property.

In response to questions from the Board, Stuart Smith stated that he has about 100 chickens and roosters on about 3 1/2 acres.

Chairman Grant advised that two individuals have signed up to also speak on this agenda item and address the Board.

Mike Arsenault, citizen who lives on Big Sky Drive in Hamilton, stated that most don't mind chickens but "maybe not this many" and that the number should be reasonable.

Andrew Zuerner, citizen who lives on Moon Road in Shiloh, asked the Board not to amend Section 308.03 of the UDC; that if you live in R-1 that you can live and not have chickens; that a person's largest investment is a house and that people should research and learn what requirements are ahead of purchasing a home; that to change the UDC would be "opening Pandora's box"; and that if there were no other options to live where chickens were allowed that he could then see the need.

6. **OLD BUSINESS**

- A. **Second Reading: Alcohol Application of Vance C. Smith for Harris County Chamber of Commerce.** Chairman Grant read the specifics of the application and stated that this was the second reading. Chairman Grant said that the Sheriff's Office recommended approval and that there was no recommendation from the Health Department or Community Development. The applicant was available to respond to any questions. The motion to approve the Alcohol Application of Vance C. Smith for the Harris County Chamber of Commerce was made by Chairman Grant, seconded by Commissioner Irions, and passed unanimously.

7. **NEW BUSINESS**

- A. **2023 Property Tax Millage Rate Adoption.** Chairman Grant stated that all State required documents have been prepared, published in the newspaper, and posted to the County's website for public review. Chairman Grant advised that based on the 9.13 millage rate that three public hearings were required and that the first public hearing was held on August 8, 2023 at 11:00 a.m., that the second public hearing was held on August 8, 2023 at 6:30 p.m., and that the third public hearing was held earlier during this meeting. He said that the Board can now adopt the 2023 property tax millage rate and that, if approved, the property tax bills will be distributed during early October and due in December. The motion to adopt the proposed resolution and the Board of Commissioner's 2023 property tax millage rate at 9.13 mills, the millage rate for the portion of West Point that is located within the County at 5.478 mills, and the Board of Education's 2023

millage rate at 17.50 mills was made by Vice-Chair Andrews, seconded by Commissioner Lightsey, and passed unanimously.

B. **Financial Statement - May 2023.** Clint Chastain, Chief Financial Officer, was available to answer any questions. The motion to approve the Financial Statement for May 2023 was made by Commissioner Gantt, seconded by Commissioner Irions, and passed unanimously.

C. **Request for Tax Refund: Juanita Downs Gilman.** Chairman Grant introduced the request by Juanita Downs Gilman for a \$51.93 refund for the ad valorem taxes paid on June 22, 2023 for a vehicle renewal and that the Requestor sold the vehicle on July 31, 2023 which was before the renewal due date.

The motion to approve the \$51.93 refund to Juanita Downs Gilman for the ad valorem taxes paid on a vehicle renewal was made by Commissioner Irions, seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews, and passed unanimously.

D. **Request for Tax Refunds: Hayward Whitaker.** Chairman Grant introduced the request by Hayward Whitaker for a total refund of \$698.03 (\$235.54 for 2020, \$235.55 for 2021, and \$226.94 for 2022) due to being taxed for 4 acres but only having 2 acres.

The motion to approve a total refund of \$698.03 (\$235.54 for 2020, \$235.55 for 2021, and \$226.94 for 2022) to Hayward Whitaker was made by Chairman Grant, seconded by Commissioner Irions, and passed unanimously.

E. **Agreement with Traylor Business Services Inc for Business Personal Property Verification Program.** Chairman Grant introduced the item related to a yearly contract with Traylor Business Services for the Business Personal Property Verification Program. The motion to approve the contract with Traylor Business Services, Inc for the Business Personal Property Verification Program was made by Vice-Chair Andrews, seconded by Chairman Grant, and passed unanimously.

8. **COUNTY MANAGER**

A. **Limited Time Benefit Offer to Provide Group Health Insurance to Eligible Employees for Early Retirement.** County Manager Randy Dowling provided an overview of the agenda item related to providing group health insurance to eligible employees for early retirement. He further stated that during the July 27, 2023 Planning Session that the Board had a consensus to move forward with the a proposal. The motion to approve the proposal and authorize the County Manager and County Clerk to execute all related documents was made by Commissioner Irions, seconded by Commissioner Lightsey, and passed unanimously.

B. **Project Updates.** Randy Dowling, County Manager, advised that this is the first Program of Work for this fiscal year and reviewed various projects as follows:

(1) **Employee Compensation and Classification Plan.** CVIOG will begin project in January 2024 and be completed by June 2024 and implementation during Fiscal Year 2024-2025

(2) **Prepare for and Conduct SPLOST Continuation Referendum.** We are preparing strategic plan.

(3) **Update to Comprehensive Master Plan.** RVRC will hold a kick-off meeting and public hearing on Monday, August 28, 2023.

(4) **New EMS/VFD Facility.** This project is progressing and should be done later this year.

(5) **Annual LMIG Resurfacing Program.** LMIG was submitted to GDOT and approved. Funding should be received soon and the project will be bid out in early January.

(6) **Agricultural Complex Conceptual Design.** Studio 8 has started working on the conceptual design.

(7) **Observation Tower at Ellerslie Park.** Board has approved the bid and completion is expected in early 2024.

- (8) Develop Pine Mountain Valley Park. Board of Education does not want the property. There are perpetual restrictions on the 11 acres and we are in the process of obtaining a survey and Phase I assessment. Further action might be possible at the Board's next meeting.
- (9) Reconfiguration of Lights at Moultrie Park. Chairman Grant said that they are working on it but will defer to the Director of Recreation.
- (10) Panels for Three Additional Kiosks on MOW Trail. The kiosks are up and Phase VI will be complete on Friday, opening on Monday, and ribbon cutting will be in September. Also, the kiosks and trail maps are installed in Ellerslie Park.
- (11) New Fire Training Facility. This project is ongoing and completion is expected in October 2023.
- (12) RFP for Vendor for P25 Standard 911 Radion System. Proposals have been received and are being evaluated by the selection committee. The recommendation will be provided to the Board at either the first meeting in September or the second meeting.
- (13) Water and Wastewater Rate Study. The consultant is gathering information and should be complete in 60-90 days.
- (14) Phase II of Courthouse Renovation. This project is on-going.

9. **COUNTY ATTORNEY**.

10. **REQUEST FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION**. Chairman Grant stated that he would like to an executive session to discuss personnel.
11. **RECESS FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION**. Chairman Grant made the motion to go into Executive Session for personnel at 7:31 p.m. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews and passed unanimously.
12. **RESUME REGULAR SESSION**. The motion to go back into Regular Session was made at 7:42 p.m. by Commissioner Gantt, seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews, and passed unanimously.
13. **COUNTY ATTORNEY (cont'd)**.
 - A. **EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENT BETWEEN HARRIS COUNTY, GEORGIA AND RANDALL DOWLING**. Chairman Grant made the motion to approve the Employment Agreement between Harris County, Georgia and Randall Dowling, seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews, and passed unanimously.
14. **ADJOURNMENT**. There being no further business to discuss, the motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Lightsey and Commissioner Irions, seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews, and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:43 p.m.

Rob Grant, Chairman

Attest:

Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk