



Cherokee County Board of Commissioners

SUMMARY

Special Called Meeting: July 24, 2014 6:00 p.m. | Cherokee Hall

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. Those present included Vice Chair/Commissioner Harry Johnston; Commissioner Raymond Gunnin; Commissioner Jason Nelms; Commissioner Brian Poole; County Manager, Jerry Cooper; County Attorney, Larry Ramsey; County Clerk, Christy Black. Also present were Agency Directors/Department Heads; the media; and the public.

1. Consider adoption of all 2014 Millage Rates.

Commissioner Nelms made a motion to open the Public Hearing at 6:03 p.m. Commissioner Gunnin seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Janelle Funk began by providing an overview of the process for setting the millage rate. She then explained how they build a zero-based budget, assess the risks, and shared a possible upside for the FY2015 General Fund. Next, she provided a revenue forecast for FY2015. Finally, Ms. Funk reviewed the calculations for the 2014 millage rate using the latest tax digest including options for Public Safety increase. The complete process was repeated for the Fire Fund and the Parks Bond Debt Service Fund. Ms. Funk explained the impact to the average homeowner could be an increase of \$17.88. She added that with the new Fire ISO rating, homeowners could see a decrease in insurance premiums up to \$45 to \$75 on average and some could even see up to \$150 decrease. The presentation is attached and is a part of these minutes.

Four people signed up for comment.

1. Mr. Bill McNiff spoke in opposition to raising the millage rate.
2. Mr. Larry Smith spoke in favor of pay increase for public safety but would like to see it come out of the revenue from property tax evaluations. He referred to a newscast of a similar topic.
3. Mr. Gene Carter spoke in opposition of a millage rate increase.
4. Ms. Carolyn Cosby spoke in opposition of a raise in the millage rate as well as for the two exiting Commissioners to recuse themselves of a vote on this matter.

Commissioner Nelms made a motion to close the public hearing at 6:30 p.m. Commissioner Gunnin seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Nelms referred to the Board's discussion during the July 17, 2014 Work Session and mentioned the human element and training aspect of public safety citing his own experience in the field. He believes that because of the one-time use of reserves, the pension credit, the Fire reserves, and the sale of park land would allow them to reduce the rate. He expressed rolling the rate back slightly by using the one-time reserves.

Commissioner Gunnin stated that using reserves would be a good way to do it and he agrees with Commissioner Nelms. He expressed concern that we could lose a lot more public safety employees to other entities if we don't step up and do something about it.

Commissioner Nelms made a motion that the 2014 Board of Commissioners set a millage rate of General Fund at 5.728, Fire at 3.436, Parks at 0.744 for a combined total of 9.908 and for the adoption of the Cherokee County School District's Maintenance and Operation millage rate of 19.450 mills; Commissioner Poole seconded.

Chairman Ahrens commented that the School Board's millage rate is slightly less than last year.

Commissioner Johnston commented on his desire to keep the tax rates as low as possible. He said that he is flexible and stated the Public Safety divisions deserve anything we can pay them. He added that another thing that swayed him is in response to those who spoke during the public hearing that suggested using the increase in the assessed values and don't go beyond that. He said that although he came in hoping for less, he is prepared to support the motion.

The Chairman asked Commissioner Johnston to recap what was said in the previous public hearing about the rollbacks over the past 14 years. Commissioner Johnston stated that they have asked to roll back the rates virtually every year that he has been in office. The only exceptions include ten years ago when they started the Fire Improvement Program and they increased the tax rates in Fire only for 2004/2005 and that was to move from one firefighter per truck per shift in the rural fire stations up to a minimum of two; then in 2009 for the General Fund, they set a rate below the rollback rate in hopes of a short economic downturn but it turned out more persistent than they thought and went through reserves at a scary rate in 2010; and then in 2011 they set the rate equally higher than the

rollback rate to offset the 2009 amount. He added that Cherokee County is the 11th lowest of 159 Counties in Georgia.

Commissioner Poole commented that he got behind finding a solution to this a couple of meetings ago when we were giving away weapons to the Georgia State Patrol because we didn't have enough deputies to patrol our roads at night and throughout the County. He added that this is not frivolous money - it isn't going anywhere but to Public Safety. He stated that the County has a lot of real estate and there have been discussions about selling some property to replace the funds used from other areas to support the increase. He suggested tightening up in other places. He said nobody likes having taxes raised any more than he does, so he started looking at other ways, but he believes it to be wise to invest in our deputies and firemen. He thanked them for what they do for the County.

Chairman Ahrens stated that he is supportive of the needs that are outlined but does not support the motion that's presented. He feels they are biting off too much at one time and is concerned with the amount of reserves we have identified. He added that the budget is not until October, but this is time-specific and has to be done.

Commissioner Nelms referenced the Work Session discussion on the growth plan outline, adding that they will be looking into some of those things.

Chairman Ahrens recalled the motion and second and called for the vote. The motion passed 4-1, with Chairman Ahrens voting nay.

Adjourn

Commissioner Nelms made a motion to adjourn at 6:48 p.m. Commissioner Poole seconded. The motion carried unanimously.