

SEPTEMBER 6, 2005 - BUDGET HEARING

The Board of County Commissioners, Walton County, Florida, held a Budget Hearing on Tuesday, September 6, 2005 at 5:05 p.m. in Courtroom A of the Walton County Courthouse.

The following Board members were present: Commissioner Kenneth Pridgen, Chairman, Commissioner Scott Brannon, Vice-Chairman, Commissioner Larry Jones, Commissioner Cindy Meadows, and Commissioner Rosier Cuchens. Mr. Ronnie Bell, County Administrator, Attorney David Hallman, Legal Services Director, and Ms. Martha Ingle, Clerk of Courts, were also present.

Commissioner Jones led with prayer followed by the pledge of allegiance to the American Flag.

Chairman Pridgen called to order the scheduled budget hearing to adopt the tentative millage and budget for FY 2005-06 and read the following statement into the record:

“The proposed county-wide millage rate is 5.0650 mills plus voted debt service of 0.0211 mills totaling 5.0861 mills, and 0.5982 mills for the North Walton Mosquito Control District.

In aggregate, this is a 51.44% increase over the Rolled Back Rate.

The Rolled Back Rate is the rate that would essentially generate the same ad valorem tax revenues as last year.

The 5.0861 mills (which is applied to the General, County Transportation, Fine and Forfeiture, Capital Projects, and Debt Service Funds) is lower than the fiscal year 2004-2005 rate, which was 5.0964.

The 0.5982 millage rate for the North Walton Mosquito Control District is the same as fiscal year 2004-2005 rate.”

The floor was opened to public comments. The following property owners addressed the Board to speak in regards to the proposed millage rate: Mr. Robert Matthews, Mr. Dan Scupin, Mr. John Barton, Ms. Elizabeth Clark, Ms. Colette Edwards, Mr. Lex Grainger, Attorney Michele Anchors, representing Mr. Grainger, Mr. Bob Mueller, Ms. Bonnie McQuiston, Mr. David Cook, Mr. David Schott, and Ms. Louise Wise.

The majority of the residents expressed concern regarding the increase in property values and ad valorem taxes. Mr. Grainger suggested that the Board place a cap on the increase of the assessed value of second homes and investment properties. Attorney Hallman stated that the criteria and procedures that the property appraiser has to follow are very statutory. He was unaware of a statute that would authorize the Board to direct the Property Appraiser’s office to vary from the statutory framework for evaluating property. He said that he would be happy to further review the issue. Commissioner Cuchens advised that the previous cap that the County adopted was implemented through the legislature.

Mr. Cook requested that the Board look into the constitution change that allows an additional exemption for construction of additional living quarters.

Mr. Mueller spoke about an additional user tax other counties in Florida have adopted to assist with infrastructure. He recommended that the Board look into adopting a similar tax.

There was lengthy discussion held regarding a request from the Tax Payers Association to reduce the millage rate by one full mill. Each commissioner voiced his/her comments regarding the request.

Attorney Hallman explained that if any resident felt that the assessed value of their property was inaccurate, they had the option to appeal the assessment through the Value Adjustment Board. He advised that the deadline to file an application with the Value Adjustment Board was September 13.

Commissioner Meadows spoke of the need to look into other sources of revenue funding such as user fees, impact fees, utility fees, etc.

Motion by Commissioner Meadows to reduce the millage rate by $\frac{3}{4}$ mill. Motion died for lack of second.

Commissioner Jones emphasized the importance of keeping the General Fund Reserves at 10 million dollars. He said by reducing the millage rate to 4.5468, it would allow the county to operate at the proposed budget without spending any reserve monies for operations.

Motion by Commissioner Jones to adopt the tentative millage rate of 4.5468 mills plus voted debt service of 0.0203 totaling 4.5671 mills, and 0.5982 mills for the North Walton Mosquito Control District. Commissioner Cuchens seconded the motion for discussion.

Commissioner Cuchens discussed the option of implementing a rebate concept instead of reducing the proposed millage rate. He withdrew his second to the motion. He stated that he did not fully agree with the 4 million dollar increase in the Sheriff's Department proposed budget.

Commissioner Brannon seconded the motion with the understanding that there would still be a final budget hearing and this was a tentative millage rate that could be further lowered but not raised.

A vote was called for the motion. Ayes 3, Nays 2. Jones Aye, Brannon Aye, Cuchens Naye, Pridgen Naye, and Meadows Aye.

Chairman Pridgen read the following statement into the record to reflect the new millage rate:

“The proposed county-wide millage rate is 4.5468 mills plus voted debt service of 0.0203 mills totaling 4.5671 mills, and 0.5982 mills for the North Walton Mosquito Control District.

In aggregate, this is a 36.66% increase over the Rolled Back Rate.

The Rolled Back Rate is the rate that would essentially generate the same ad valorem tax revenues as last year.

The 4.5671 mills (which is applied to the General, County Transportation, Fine and Forfeiture, Capital Projects, and Debt Service Funds) is lower than the fiscal year 2004-2005 rate, which was 5.0982 mills.

The 0.5982 millage rate for the North Walton Mosquito Control District is the same as the fiscal year 2004-2005 rate.”

Motion by Commissioner Brannon, second by Commissioner Meadows, to adopt the tentative budget for FY 2005-2006 in the amount of \$101,483,344 for Operations and \$119,770,543 Total Budget. Ayes 3, Nays 2. Jones Aye, Brannon Aye, Cuchens Naye, Pridgen Naye, and Meadows Aye.

Mr. Bell gave an update on the requested extension on the emergency order and beach scraping. He also gave an update on the fuel status in Walton County. He stated that in order to conserve fuel, they had reviewed the option of alternative scheduling for 10 hour shifts Monday through Friday. He said that if it was the Board's direction, the alternative scheduling could go into effect Monday, September 12 for a period of 60 days. He said he could come back at that time to the Board for further discussion.

Motion by Commissioner Jones, second by Commissioner Brannon, to enter into special session. Ayes 5, Nays 0. Jones Aye, Brannon Aye, Cuchens Aye, Pridgen Aye, and Meadows Aye.

Motion by Commissioner Jones, second by Commissioner Brannon, to authorize Mr. Bell to implement the alternative scheduling at his discretion for a 60 day period, at which time he would come back to the Board for further discussion. Ayes 5, Nays 0. Jones Aye, Brannon Aye, Cuchens Aye, Pridgen Aye, and Meadows Aye.

Secondly, Mr. Bell addressed the issue of locating an area for Hurricane Katrina evacuees to park their recreation vehicles. He stated that he discussed the issue with Mrs. Blackshear, Planning and Growth Management Director, and they would work together and keep the Board advised.

Commissioner Meadows requested that the Board adopt a resolution to express appreciation to the American Red Cross for hosting the shelter located at the "Old National Guard" building in DeFuniak Springs, and request that they keep the shelter open for the next 60 days. Mr. Bell requested that the Board authorize him to work with the City of DeFuniak Springs to assist with funding if necessary.

Motion by Commissioner Meadows, second by Commissioner Brannon, to adopt a resolution (2005-82) requesting the American Red Cross to keep the “host shelter” in the “Old National Guard” building open for the next sixty days; and to authorize Mr. Ronnie Bell, County Administrator, to assist the American Red Cross and Hurricane Katrina victims in any way possible. Ayes 5, Nays 0. Jones Aye, Brannon Aye, Cuchens Aye, Pridgen Aye, and Meadows Aye.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:13 p.m.

APPROVED: _____
Kenneth Pridgen, Chair

ATTEST: _____
Martha Ingle, Clerk of Court