

SEPTEMBER 13, 2010 – BUDGET HEARING

The Board of County Commissioners, Walton County, Florida, held a Budget Hearing on September 13, 2010, at 5:01 p.m., at the Walton County Courthouse Annex in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida.

The following Board members were present: Commissioner Scott Brannon, Chair; Commissioner Larry Jones, Vice-Chair; Commissioner Kenneth Pridgen, Commissioner Cecilia Jones; and Commissioner Sara Comander. Mr. Lyle Seigler, County Administrator; Attorney Lynn Hoshihara, Interim County Attorney; and Ms. Martha Ingle, Clerk of Courts; were also present.

Commissioner L. Jones led the invocation followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag. Chairman Brannon called the meeting to order.

Chairman Brannon read the following statement: At the July 13, 2010 Budget Workshop the Walton County Board of County Commissioners proposed a county-wide millage rate at 4.1458 mills, and 0.4912 mills for the North Walton Mosquito Control District. In aggregate, this is an eight one hundredths of a percent decrease below the Roll Back Rate. The Roll Back Rate is the rate that would essentially generate the same ad valorem tax revenues as last year. The county-wide 4.1458 mills (which are applied to the General, County Transportation, and Fine and Forfeiture Funds) are more than the fiscal year 2009-2010 rate, which was 3.4076 mills. The 0.4912 millage rate for the North Walton Mosquito Control District is the same as fiscal year 2009-2010 rate.

Mr. William Imfeld, County Finance Director, stated that since the July 13, 2010 Budget Workshop staff has worked diligently to find other sources of revenue. He discussed the different areas where additional funding was found. He recommended that the millage rate for Budget

Year 2010-2011 to be decreased to 3.5563 resulting in a total budget of \$98,041,873 of which \$2,250,000 is designated for Capital Debt Service. He also recommended that the North Walton Mosquito Control District remain the same at 0.4912 mills with a budget of \$605,075.

Mr. Lyle Seigler, County Administrator, stated that there was an additional reduction of \$4,137,800. He announced that there would be no employee COLA or step increases. He discussed salary decreases and personnel changes, and stated that department review and assessments would be continued.

Ms. Lorene Gruzdis asked for the budget amounts before and after the cuts were made. Mr. Imfeld stated that the proposed budget presented at the July workshop was \$98,591,654 and the amount being presented at this meeting is \$98,041,873.

Ms. Bonnie McQuiston asked what recurring operational expenses had been cut. Mr. Imfeld stated that cuts were made in personal service (FTE's). Ms. McQuiston asked how many employees were accounted for in the 2010-2011 budget. Mr. Imfeld stated 515.5.

Mr. Bob Gelardi commended staff on cutting the millage rate and questioned if unpaid leave and larger insurance co-pays were considered. Mr. Imfeld discussed some areas that were considered for cutting and stated that cutting these areas would not have made up the difference.

Mr. Bob Hudson, Walton County Taxpayers Association, commended the Board and staff for locating areas in which to cut the budget. He felt that the lower millage rate could have been set at the July workshop and suggested reviewing additional areas to cut in preparation of the 2011-2012 budget year.

Mr. Andy Newitt voiced concern that the budget could have been lowered even more than \$500,000.

Ms. Mary Neilson and Ms. McQuiston each addressed the issue of the South Walton Fire District. They both felt that a separate taxing district should be created for northern Walton County. Ms. Neilson felt that insurance should also be reviewed and increase in co-pays considered. Ms. Shirl Williams, Assistant County Administrator, stated that there is currently an assessment in the northern part of the county. Mr. Imfeld stated that the area could be looked at during the next budget cycle. Mr. Cory Godwin, Chief Deputy Tax Collector, stated that a ballot initiative would be required to create a special taxing district.

Mr. Hudson clarified for Mr. Newitt that the total budget amount had been cut over \$3 million.

Mr. Bob Sullivan, Walton County Tea Party, Ms. Judy Craparo, and Mr. Dan Scupin all felt that taxes should be lowered and the county government held accountable for their spending.

Ms. Gail Powell stated that raising the millage to 10.30 has negatively affected property values. Mr. Imfeld stated that the 10.30 mills that were referred to by Ms. Powell included the mills approved by the Walton County School Board.

Mr. Shawn O'Neal felt that the bed taxes should be increased to provide extra revenue.

Ms. Peggy Gregg thanked the Commissioners for lowering the millage rate. She felt that a broader view should be taken and the homeowners' viewpoint should be considered.

Ms. Talia Smith asked if the meetings could be consolidated to benefit the public. Commissioner Brannon reported that State law prohibited consecutive meetings.

Chairman Brannon closed public comment.

Motion by Commissioner L. Jones, second by Commissioner Pridgen to approve the tentative millage rate of 3.5563 mills, and 0.4912 mills for the North Walton Mosquito Control District.

Commissioner L. Jones stated that the Board has heard the public comment and staff has worked hard to decrease the millage. He reported that the Assistant County Administrator will be responsible for holding the departments to strict efficiencies.

Ayes 4, Nays 1. Brannon Aye, L. Jones Aye, Pridgen Aye, C. Jones Aye, Comander Nay.

Motion by Commissioner C. Jones, second by Commissioner Pridgen, to approve the tentative 2010-2011 Budget. Ayes 4, Nays 1. Brannon Aye, L. Jones Aye, Pridgen Aye, C. Jones Aye, Comander Nay.

Commissioner Comander asked that Mr. Imfeld work with the Constitutional Officers and Department Heads to find ways to further cut the budget before the next budget hearing.

Chairman Brannon read the following statement: The proposed Walton County Board of County Commissioners' county-wide millage rate is 3.5563 mills, and 0.4912 mills for the North Walton Mosquito Control District. In aggregate, this is a 14.14% decrease below the Roll Back Rate. The Roll Back Rate is the rate that would essentially generate the same ad valorem tax revenues as last year. The County-wide 3.5563 mills (which are applied to the General, County Transportation, and Fine and Forfeiture) are more than the fiscal year 2009-2010 rate, which were 3.4076 mills. The 0.4912 millage rate for the North Walton Mosquito Control District is the same as fiscal year 2009-2010 rate, which was 0.4912.

There being no further items to discuss the hearing adjourned at 5:42 p.m.

APPROVED _____
Scott Brannon, Chair

ATTEST _____
Martha Ingle, Clerk of Courts