

SEPTEMBER 26, 2005-FINAL BUDGET HEARING

The Board of County Commissioners, Walton County, Florida, held the Final Budget Hearing on Monday, September 26, 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 Cuchens led with prayer followed by the pledge of allegiance to the American Flag. Chairman Pridgen called the meeting to order.

Mr. Bill Imfeld, Financial Director, presented a resolution requesting adoption of the 2005/06 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 as adopted by the Board on September 6.

The floor was opened to public comments and questions. Mr. Lex Grainger addressed the Board to reiterate his request for a cap on the increase in ad valorem taxes similar to that for homestead exemption be implemented for second homes and investment properties. He said that the majority of ad valorem tax revenues are generated by non resident homeowners in south Walton, and they do not receive enough public services to compensate for the taxes. He also noted that he had been under the impression that this meeting would be held at the South Walton Annex.

Attorney Hallman and Mr. Bell clarified for the record that the advertisement for the final budget hearing stated that the meeting would be held at the courthouse in DeFuniak Springs.

Mr. Frank Comer addressed the Board to express dissatisfaction on the appraisal value placed upon property in Inlet Beach, which he stated was the result of speculators “flipping” property. He requested that the assessment process be reevaluated. Being advised by Attorney Hallman that the Board has no authority over property value assessments, Mr. Comer suggested that the Board consider implementing impact fees.

Commissioner Meadows shared her thoughts on the significant increase in property values, referring to as an “artificial market”. Her concern was the long term economic impacts on permanent residents and second home owners in Walton County. She said she would like for the Board to review other tax exemptions.

Ms. Bonnie McQuiston, Walton County Tax Payer’s Association, addressed the Board and requested that the Board further reduce the proposed millage rate.

Mr. Ross Pritchett addressed the Board to inquire about issues regarding waste management. Mr. Bell asked for Mr. Pritchett’s telephone number and stated he would contact him regarding the matter.

Ms. Diane Smith addressed the Board and concurred with the comments made by Commissioner Meadows. She requested that the Board consider further reducing the proposed millage rate.

Lengthy discussion followed regarding expected FEMA reimbursements for Hurricane Dennis, Katrina and Ivan, impacts of a further reduction on the proposed

budget and general reserves, and the possibility of borrowing money to fund capital projects.

Mr. Bell entered two letters from Sherry Adele Lowry and Tom and Kay Rickman into the record.

Mr. Larry Gipson addressed the Board and stated that he was under the understanding that this meeting would be held at the South Walton Annex. He said that he was told by two county employees that the meeting would be held there. The Board again clarified that the meeting was advertised in the local newspaper as being scheduled to be held in DeFuniak Springs. Mr. Gipson requested for the record that in addition to advertising for the meetings, notices be mailed to advise property owners of budget hearings.

Commissioner Cuchens reiterated his previous suggestion to implement a rebate concept in lieu of reducing the millage rate.

Mr. Harry Henderson, evacuee from New Orleans, also addressed the Board to make public comments.

Further discussion was held regarding bond issues.

Motion by Commissioner Meadows, second by Commissioner Jones, to adopt the millage rate of 4.3099 mills for operations of the county government, a millage rate .0203 to service the Voted Debt Service, Hospital Renovation Bond Issue, and a millage rate of .5982 for operations of the North Walton Mosquito control District for the tax year of 2005-2006 (Resolution 2005-85). The motion also included authorizing staff to review revenue sources to fund capital projects. Ayes 3, Nays 2. Jones Aye, Brannon Aye, Cuchens Nay, Pridgen Nay, and Meadows Aye.

Mr. Imfeld presented a resolution requesting adoption of the tentative budget in the amount of \$119,770,543 for fiscal year 2005-06.

Motion by Commissioner Jones, second by Commissioner Brannon, to adopt the 2005-2006 budget in the amount of \$119,770,543 for the county government, of which \$248,000 is for Voted Debt Service Budget and \$460,884 is for the North Walton Mosquito Control District (2005-86). Ayes 3, Nays 2. Jones Aye, Brannon Aye, Cuchens Nay, Pridgen Nay, and Meadows Aye.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

APPROVED: _____
Kenneth Pridgen, Chair

ATTEST: _____
Martha Ingle, Clerk of Court