

## **LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

### **Public Hearing Minutes**

August 15<sup>th</sup> 2017

6:00 p.m.

Present for the meeting were Chairman Glass, Vice-Chairman Horton, Commissioner Heiney, Commissioner Traylor, and Commissioner Thrash, County Administrator Zellner, and County Clerk Davidson. Absent from the meeting was Attorney Mayfield.

Chairman Glass called the Public Hearing to order at 6:02 p.m. and stated that the task was to hear Public Comments regarding the proposed millage rate increase. The board is proposing a 1 mill increase over the past year and this is approximately \$40.00 on a \$100,000.00 house of assessed value. Chairman Glass stated that the handouts include a table with the increases based on assessed value if they go up to the 1 mill increase. Chairman Glass stated that there was a typo on the handout with the \$250,000 value showing 989.29 for a 1 mill increase.

County Administrator Zellner shared a power point presentation and Chairman Glass pointed out what the taxes pay for. Chairman Glass said, "Whether you live in the City or the County all the property owners pay property taxes. If you live in the City of Barnesville, you also pay property taxes to the City of Barnesville. All of Lamar County property owners pay school taxes. The school taxes go to the Board of Education and are completely separate from the County taxes. Lamar County residents, including those within the cities of Barnesville, Milner and Aldora will pay a combined \$5.6 million this year in property taxes. This will go toward the \$9.8 million budget. Property taxes make up approximately 67% of the overall revenue contained in the County's general fund budget. Looking at non-tax revenues, they have been going down for several years largely because of State mandates or factors that are beyond the boards' control. The Title Ad Valorem Tax (TAVT) tax that you pay on new vehicles has replaced the birthday tax on tags that you used to pay. We don't get the ad valorem part but we do get a portion of the TAVT. This also hurts our SPLOST and LOST revenues. This is a penny for the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) and the Local Option Sales Tax (LOST). Another source of revenue decline is the inmates that we house at the jail from other cities. Last year the inmates from the City of Griffin were moved to the Spalding County jail. There was a long time disagreement between the City of Griffin and the Spalding County and the new Spalding County Sheriff convinced the City of Griffin to move their inmates to the Spalding County jail. They charged more per day but they didn't have to transport prisoners and apparently it worked because they are still keeping the prisoners in the Spalding County jail. There has also been a decline from other cities who are now housing their own prisoners. If you look at the expense side, Law Enforcement and Court is forty five percent of the budget and this includes all of the

judicial offices. The other services we have to pay for are mandated by State legislature or constitutional requirements and this is fifteen percent of our budget. The remaining county government functions and the most significant percent is spent on operating the Public Works Department which is eleven percent of the budget. Other services funded by the County property taxes include: Parks and Recreation, Animal Control, Business Licenses, Building Permits, Building and Zoning & Environmental Inspections, Code Enforcement, Public Library, County Attorney's Services, Indigent Burials, Economic and Industrial Development, Agricultural Extension, Archives, Financial Management and Record Keeping." The Budget Comparison between 2017 and 2018 was shown and is attached to the minutes.

### **Public Comments**

Lenora Ginn of 503 Thomaston Street Barnesville addressed the board and said that she was not mad but she was disappointed and she was there to represent the elderly of Lamar County. She stated that she was 93 years old and has lived in her Daddy's house since 1961. She used to be a City Councilman and was hung many times on the courthouse square. Ms. Ginn stated that every year her taxes go up and that she pays \$1,470.00 for County taxes and \$787.00 of this is for School taxes and she has never had a child in school. Many counties give a 70 percent decrease in taxes and asked why we can't do this in Lamar County. If it wasn't for the school tax, she said that her bill would only be \$ 683.00. Many of the citizens only have a small Social Security check and when you get to be in your 80's and 90's, Social Security will not pay your taxes and at this age you have a lot of health expenses. Ms. Ginn said that she did not see how they could make it. It is hard. She said she remembered when people made \$1.00 an hour and people her age don't draw a Social Security check. If you don't make it you can't save it and even \$1.00 more makes a difference. Ms. Ginn said that she was a booster for schools and went to Gordon Grammer and loved her school. Ms. Ginn wanted to know why everyone had to have so many frills, new cars and trucks and a secretary. Ms. Ginn said that we all need to cut back because some people can't make it. Ms. Ginn said that when you get her age something has to change and that you have to cut out the frills. Ms. Ginn asked about the purpose of the College/Career Academy. Ms. Ginn asked how much the Commissioners make per meeting and how much the Board of Education members make per meeting. Ms. Ginn said at 93 years old she has worked hard and she is a booster for Lamar County and she is not mad just disappointed. Ms. Ginn said that she has grown up here and in her last days wanted to know why it had to be so hard. Ms. Ginn said that she is not leaving and she would find a way to pay her taxes because she didn't want to be run out of town. Ms. Ginn requested that the board think about people that are 70 years and older because many of the elderly people don't get Social Security checks. Ms. Ginn

stated that she was there to stand up for the elderly people in Lamar County and requested the board try to make cuts.

Chairman Glass stated that the Board of Commissioners don't control the school board and that his salary is about \$761.50 per month. Commissioner Thrash stated that she makes about .57 per hour as of last year. Commissioner Heiney stated that he makes about \$500.00 per month and that they had worked on the budget in five meetings that last about three hours each.

Ricky Hambrick of 171 Ennis Road addressed the board and said that it broke his heart to hear of the increase and that he is struggling month to month. He said that he is trying to keep things going and he moved to Lamar County 9 years ago. His road is not better than it was when he moved to Lamar County and he pays his taxes. Mr. Hambrick said that there is a lot of money wasted and wanted to know where the money is going. Mr. Hambrick stated that you might as well let him hold out his arm and stick him with a needle to make up for the waste. Commissioner Thrash requested that Mr. Hambrick elaborate on what he means by waste. Mr. Hambrick said that he was referring to the roads and the pot holes. Mr. Hambrick said that the increase was for a slush tax and that the board is just trying to stick people for more money. Mr. Hambrick said that he is struggling from the economy and that he wants to find out what is going on. Mr. Hambrick stated that Commissioner Thrash had helped him several times and that he is sorry for the amount of money that she gets paid every month and that he couldn't make it on that amount of money. Mr. Hambrick stated that he disagreed with the purchase of all the new trucks and the new police car. Mr. Hambrick stated that he has done all he can to reduce taxes including getting a conservation deduction and if he can't pay his taxes he will fight for his property and he guess there might just be another civil war. Mr. Hambrick said that no one put in more than Ms. Ginn and she is struggling day by day and is 93 years old.

Elaine Watson of 868 Ingram Road addressed the board and said that every year her taxes go up, up, up. She used to pay escrow on her house and didn't see the taxes until her husband passed away and she paid off the house. Now she sees the taxes and she feels like that she pays more in taxes than Monroe and Bibb and on School taxes more put together than in Lamar County. Ms. Watson said that the grass is not being cut and asked where the money is going. Ms. Watson said that the property owners pay the school taxes and in other counties when you reach a certain age the school tax decreases so why doesn't it decrease in Lamar County. Ms. Watson wanted to know what is going on. Chairman Glass replied and stated that there were handouts that showed the General Fund Budget with a breakdown of expenses. The proposed budget is 9.8 million dollars for 2018. Ms. Watson stated that there is a lot of waste. Chairman Glass said that there had been 5 workshops in the month of June and that the board reviewed every department

line item by line item including revenues and expenses. Chairman Glass stated that the County has to assume State mandates and Monroe County has more revenue because of plants like Georgia Power. Commissioner Traylor stated that we used to have revenue from Carter's Mill and General Tire which kept the millage rate low. Industrial Authority Director (IDA), Kathy Oxford is pushing to bring businesses to Lamar County and to the Community. Commissioner Traylor stated that he has a Master's Degree in Business and he has seen cuts in the Industry where the company has to carry the load. Ms. Watson stated that she lives on two acres with a house and she is paying a higher rate than someone who lives on 15 acres of farm land with a conservation covenant. Ms. Watson stated that this makes no sense and asked why some people get a break if you own farmland. Ms. Watson said that she can't keep doing what she is doing if her property tax is going to keep going up. Vice-Chairman Horton stated that she needed to contact her State Legislators and request that there be a flat tax for every citizen. Chairman Glass stated that the Board of Commissioners doesn't have control over the Board of Education. Vice-Chairman Horton requested that Ms. Watson contact her State and Local officials and if they don't do a good job that is what elections are for.

Amelia Limbrick of 136 Ledbetter Road addressed the board and stated that every year her property taxes go up and she agreed with Ms. Ginn that you are trying to take it out on the old people and try to take away their homes.

Preston Thompson of 2025 Hwy 36 East addressed the board and stated that increasing taxes is like a race. When you start the race there is a beginning and an ending and it goes somewhere in the middle. You have too many pits stops, blown tires, blown engines and you are muddling up the race. You need to spend what you set out to spend regardless of the budget. You need to spend money based on what is coming in. You don't need to get a new truck in 2018, 2019, 2020. Mr. Thompson said that he drives a truck with 376,000 miles on it and puts oil in it to make it work.

James McLarty of 161 Dumas Road addressed the board with his concerns about the Board of Elections and the Commissioners increase. Mr. McLarty stated that he worked in law enforcement for 40 years and worked with the Sheriff, the EMA, the Juvenile Court, and served on the CASA board. Mr. McLarty was concerned about the Board of Elections increase and Chairman Glass explained the increase was due to the upcoming elections in 2018.

Melissa Cline of 420 Country Kitchen Road addressed the board and stated that she heard Commissioner Traylor say that the board had gone line item by line item. Mrs. Cline stated that she owned property in Butts and Pike County and that she was blessed. She said that she can afford to pay the \$40.00 if they do a one mill increase. Mrs. Cline said that she feels for the elderly and would appreciate it if the board would cut back on the

budget. Chairman Glass stated that the property taxes in Spalding, Butts, Pike, Monroe and Upson are all higher than Lamar County.

Jane Huguely of 512 Thomaston Street addressed the board and stated that we live in bad times. The Government is overspending. The taxes fall on the homeowners and she owns a business. You can't spend what you don't have. Last meeting she learned that if you are over 79 you get a tax break. She said that this is no good for this year, but next year she will get \$150.00 tax break. She went on to say that she was not aware of this and inquired about how people know about this tax break. She said that citizens need help. Her house and car are paid off but she thought that if she didn't own a house or a car payment that she would be ok to just live on Social Security. This is not true you still have utility bills to pay for. She realizes that the Sheriff's Office needs raises and those people impact us. She realizes that we lose good people like the Senior Center Director who left and went to the Housing Authority to make more money but you can't keep taxing people. People are struggling. Ms. Huguely spoke about all the free stuff that is being given away. People shoot it up, smoke it up and they don't take care of themselves. They need to take care of themselves because we are just a crutch to them if we continue to help them. Vice-Chairman Horton inquired about what she meant about free stuff. Ms. Huguely said she was referring to Mental Health. The addicts and the drunks at McIntosh Trail. They give away medicine and claim that people are bipolar or manic depressed or kids are hyperactive when they really are just people. This is always on our dollar. She said that she realizes that we are supposed to help your brother. The County shouldn't be funding this program. Chairman Glass stated that the County doesn't fund McIntosh Trail and Finance Director Townsend stated that the County contributes \$5,000.00 a year. Ms. Huguely said the board does a great job and they give their service to us.

Eloise Ivey of 122 McCollum Road addressed the board and wanted to know what the board is doing about grants. Chairman Glass stated that there has been a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) applied for by the County to build a new Health Department and that 2 Siren Grants have been applied for. This grant needs matching money. There is the DOT that gives a 10 percent excise tax and the Recreation Department gets grants. The County gets grants from the DOT, the DNR with land donated for the Recreation Park on Hwy 36. There is also grants from Three Rivers. The passenger bus is provided by Three Rivers and the County pays them \$5,250.00 per year. This is a State matching grant.

Marilyn Price of 200 Lee Street inquired about the EMA and the sirens grant. Ms. Price questioned the board about the school taxes, SPLOST and ESLOST and the differences between the two. Ms. Price inquired about the Chinese Plant that didn't come to Lamar County and the tax breaks that Lamar County didn't receive. Chairman Glass requested that Ms. Price email and call her legislatures and the Governor's office. Ms. Price stated

that she realized the Sheriff Office needs cars but asked about using prisoners to do manual labor such as mowing the grass. Captain Knight explained that if the inmate is not sentenced then they can't be made to mow grass. They have to be sentenced before they can be used. Ms. Price said that she is not against the Sheriff, EMA, Public Safety and Fire Department increases. Ms. Price again inquired about the school board and the taxes. Ms. Price stated that the early voting was ridiculous. Chairman Glass explained that the Poll Workers are not volunteers but are paid at least \$100.00 a day.

James Ross of 359 Walters Road addressed the board and said if you don't have money then don't spend money. He asked why raises are being given if you don't have it to give. Mr. Ross also complained about the new trucks and the dump truck being purchased. Mr. Ross stated that paving Walters Road was a waste and he thought that by now the road would be paved. Mr. Ross said that Ms. Walter died and never saw it paved and that he would probably never see it paved either. Mr. Ross said that the Public Works Department needs to do the job right. They Bring out gravel and smooth it out and then it rains and it's gone. Mr. Ross said they need to do things right. He also said he talked to Chairman Glass who said it would be paved but when he talked to County Administrator Zellner he said that it wasn't going to be paved.

**Adjournment**

Commissioner Heiney made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 p.m. and Commissioner Thrash seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

THE LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Charles Glass, Chairman

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Bennie Horton, Vice-Chairman

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Robert Heiney, Commissioner

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Ryran Traylor, Commissioner

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Nancy Thrash, Commissioner

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ County Clerk

