

## **LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

### **Public Hearing Minutes**

August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017

9:00 A.M.

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

Chairman Glass called the Public Hearing to order and explained that the handout was a comparison of 2017/2018 to see where the decreases and increases are. Chairman Glass explained that the purpose of the meeting was to hear feedback from the public regarding the proposed increased millage rate. This tentative increase will result in a millage rate of 12.595 mills, an increase of 1.00 mills.

### **Public Comments**

Julia Heidbrink of 588 Hwy 36 West Barnesville addressed the board stating that her biggest concern was the big percentage of a tax increase in 2013 and in 2015. Mrs. Heidbrink said that in other years, you have backed it up but that she is not up there trying to deal with all this stuff but it would seem like it could be a smaller little bit over a steadier can of pie and that it would make more sense and it wouldn't cause her house payment to jump. The main thing for her was that for most retired people in the community there are no raises. Ms. Heidbrink said that she is on Social Security which takes care of her dogs and anything else that she wants to do and other things that she and her husband do together. Ms. Heidbrink stated that her husband lives on Social Security and retirement and there are no raises. They get a little bit each year but it's only 2 percent which is a little better than the last seven or eight years. As house payments go up it causes a hardship on people in the County who are on a fixed income. There are probably some that can afford it but there are lot of folks who cannot. Mrs. Heidbrink stated that she wanted to give the board something to think about and that she appreciated the work the board is doing by trying to keep things at a reasonable level.

Melaine Hardwick of 703 Five Points Road Milner addressed the board and stated that she had come to listen to see what the board had done to try to reduce expenses. She thanked the board for the handout saying that it clearly showed the proposed budget. Ms. Hardwick stated that she had retired from a large corporation and had gone through budget exercises for millions of dollars. Ms. Hardwick stated that when the revenue is not coming in you don't hire people, you cut back. Ms. Hardwick stated that she was disappointed once again because the board is not showing her what they have done to try to reduce expenses. Ms. Hardwick said that in her personal opinion the services that the County is providing such as the road maintenance and cutting of grass is lacking. Ms. Hardwick stated that she is not seeing these services from year to year. Ms. Hardwick

stated that they shouldn't be talking to the board but the board should be talking to them. The board should be telling us what they are doing to reduce expenses. There is fat in every budget so what have you done.

Chairman Glass stated that a 5 Year History was published in the paper and that it shows a quarter of a mill increase per year. Chairman Glass said that the difficulty is that it is hard to project from year to year and what really drives the millage rate is the budget itself along with an understanding of what the State is doing with the revenues.

Julia Heidbrink inquired about the Barnesville Lamar County Library. She said that she thought that the Library belonged to the City and asked why the County owns it now. Chairman Glass explained that the acquisition of the Barnesville Lamar County Library in 2012 was due to the 8.5 million dollar Water Authority swap with the City of Barnesville. The way the State lays out the delivery of services the Library should have already been a County function. Mrs. Heidbrink stated that the thing that bothered her was all of the construction and she had never seen people who couldn't get into a library because it was too small. They have completed one wing and now they are completing another wing on the other side. Chairman Glass explained that the funds are coming out of City of Barnesville's Special Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) fund and it is not coming out of the County's General Fund. With the Water Authority swap the County took over the function of the Barnesville Lamar County Library. The transfer was for the title of the land, the building and 25 percent of the operations. The transition was for a period of four years. The Milner Library is separate from Lamar County and is run by the City of Milner itself and the County provides no money towards the Milner Library. Chairman Glass explained that a lot of people use the computers and the internet service at the Library for job applications, education and basic research. The meeting room has been expanded from 65 to 140 person capacity with increased seating capacity and study areas. Chairman Glass stated that this is a good investment. Chairman Glass noted that the operating expenses for the County come out of General Fund and that the money used to run the County is the tax payers' money. Karl Heidbrink inquired about the services in the County and Chairman Glass responded that the services in the County include the Senior Center, the Recreation Department and the Barnesville Lamar County Library. The services are not constitutionally required but they are services that people expect. If the City of Barnesville and the City of Milner want to provide services they can. Generally, the citizens of the County benefit from them which is under the Service Delivery Act which is part of the State laws.

Melaine Hardwick asked the board if they could answer her question. "What have you done and what are your plans to increase revenue? What are you doing to bring more revenue in and what are you doing to reduce expenses? This is budget 101."

Chairman Glass responded saying that the board had been through several budget workshops in the summer going through each line item. The summary was reviewed by Department heads and then by line item. The Public Works Department was one of the largest line item decreases with a 19 percent decrease. Conservation had a 32 percent decrease due to an employee change. The increases include a state mandated 2 percent salary increase for all of the Constitutional Officers and Commissioners. The largest amount of increases for the Commissioners is in travel and training. County Administrator stated that they negotiated with the Ambulance Service two years ago so that budget line item is set to zero.

Commissioner Thrash stated that when the Governor did the Criminal Justice Reform there wasn't supposed to be an increase for the Counties in the State of Georgia but the Counties have taken substantial hits. Commissioner Thrash said that she has said for many years that it's the entitlement programs that are bringing this Country to its knees. In the Criminal Justice Reform, Mental Health has been effected because they have closed down 6 facilities. When people with Mental Health are arrested they are sent to the County jail and we incur medical expenses and if they have to go to the hospital we have to pay transportation fees. Those expenses add up. Also, you have to feed and clothe them. The Criminal Justice Reform has caused the County a lot of money. It's eating counties alive. In the Juvenile System, the Public Defenders, under the reform every child has to have their own attorney. For a family of five, the tax payer pays for an attorney for mom, for dad, and for each child individually. These are things that the County can't deal with on a County level as far as expenses. The Public Defender is paid out of the General Fund. The Public Defender represents the one child. The conflict attorney's for the other children are supposed to be coming from the State. The juvenile judge has to see the child within a certain amount of time. The applications for the conflict attorneys are sent to the state. By the time the applications get to the state, the judge has missed her time limit. Commissioner Thrash said these are things that the Board of Commissioners fight for at the county level and this shouldn't be a double dip. We shouldn't have to pay for that here because it is supposed to be a service that is provided by the State. Commissioner Thrash stated that these are things they look at when they go to the State meetings. The intent of the Criminal Justice Reform was to try to keep people out of jail and not be an expense to the County but it has been a huge expense for the County. These things are no longer sustainable to the County and that's where people have got to start pounding their legislators. Commissioner Thrash stated that she has been to Washington three times this year fighting for these things and the only choice the board has is to reach into the County pockets and say this is an expense that is mandated by the state. Ms. Hardwick asked what line item this was under and both Commissioner Thrash and County Administrator Zellner responded that it was under Public Safety and the Courts. Chairman Glass stated that there are a lot of people in prison that don't need to be there. They are drug users who are spending five to ten years in prison and there are more

efficient ways to handle this. A lot of people that are being diverted to prison are going through drug courts. That saves money as far as the jail time is concerned but we now have to fund the drug courts. We no longer are receiving fines and forfeitures and the expenses for the drug courts are going up. The State does provide some funding for drug courts but it is not 100 percent. In some cases instead of paying for the conflict attorney, they can provide a Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteer. There are several CASA volunteers in the County that do this. Ms. Heidbrink asked if Sheriff White still takes inmates from other Counties. Chairman Glass explained that there are a lot of other Counties that have built jails in their own County and the revenues have been greatly reduced. For a long time the City of Griffin inmates had been housed in Lamar County but there was a feud between the Spalding County Sheriff and the City of Griffin so those inmates came to Lamar County and that generated a lot of revenue. Spalding County has a new Sheriff that came from the City of Griffin and the feud has been resolved so the inmates are now back in Spalding County and Lamar County has lost that inmate housing revenue. This revenue was as much as \$120,000.00 a year. Commissioner Traylor stated that he had served as Chief Operating Officer (COO) for a company in Savannah and coming into this budget process and when you look at Service Delivery and what the County tries to provide the biggest thing that companies spend money on is training new employees. You hire an employee, train them and then they leave and you have to re-train a new employee. When you look at the Sheriff's Office, the State Patrol is increasing their pay and hiring new employees and we fear that we may lose our employees to them. The County pays to have them trained and now they are leaving and going to work for another organization. The board has to figure out a way to retain our employees with the salaries that they make. Hiring locals so that they stay here doesn't always work and the board has to figure out a way to retain them and keep the employees from going somewhere else. Commissioner Thrash stated another thing that was an issue for the County was the increase in the Health Insurance Policy. The increase was over thirty seven percent in the beginning and the board was able to negotiate the Health Insurance Carrier down to a two percent increase. Chairman Glass stated that the history shows that we cost the Insurance Company more than we pay in premiums so we had to implement a Wellness Program to help prevent this in the future. The board agreed to continue to pay for the employees insurance but if the employee doesn't participate in the Wellness Program it will cost the employee \$100.00 a month. The Wellness Program won't pay off this year but it should pay off in the next few years.

Karl Heidbrink of 588 Hwy 36 West Barnesville addressed the board and asked if the board as a group had prioritized the statutory requirements. The most important things that are done in the County from 1 through 50. In my own home, when the Social Security check is decreased I can't chock away at my house, vehicle and insurance payments, so I go to the bottom of the list. I would like to know what that list is; 1 through 50. Chairman Glass said that they don't generate a list 1 through 50 but they

have looked at it in chunks and there are some things that are required based on State Mandates. They have control over local services and within those the board could possibly find some cuts. Mr. Heidbrink wanted to know where he could find this list. Chairman Glass explained that the line items that the County uses is based on the Chart of Accounts. Chairman Glass stated that he could share the presentation from the meeting with Mr. Heidbrink.

**Adjournment**

Chairman Glass called for additional Public Comments. There being no other comments Chairman Glass called for a motion to adjourn. Vice-Chairman Horton made a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing at approximately 9:33 a.m. 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: \_\_\_\_\_ Carlette Davidson, County Clerk