

**Lamar County Board of Commissioners**  
**Public Hearing**  
**August 20<sup>th</sup>**  
**6:00 P.M.**

Chairman Glass called the Public Hearing to order at 6:02 p.m. Present for the meeting were Chairman Glass, Vice-Chairman Traylor, Commissioner Horton, Commissioner Heiney, Commissioner Thrash, County Administrator Townsend and County Clerk Davidson.

**Public Comments**

Tom Wellner of 271 Eady Creek Road, Barnesville addressed the board and stated that he was there to support the proposed tax millage increase. Mr. Wellner said that he has attended the Board of Commissioners budget workshops and was impressed with them because it mimicked the process of budget workshops he has attended in the corporate world in previous years.

Harold Jackson of 200 Laurel Drive, Barnesville addressed the board and said that he was not 100 percent in favor of a tax increase; especially for those over 60 years old. He said that he could afford the increase but if his wife passes away then no he could not. Mr. Jackson stated that he drives a truck that is 12 years old and was concerned about the new trucks that had been purchased in the County. He said he didn't understand why they couldn't have been divided out over a period of time. He said that the only fair tax is the Special Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) and he had no problem with this tax but he didn't like it that everything falls on the property owners.

Chairman Glass responded that SPLOST is limited by law to one penny. He said that there is a possibility for a Transportation Special Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST) in the future. He said that property tax is the least equitable and favorable type of tax.

Commissioner Thrash stated that they had spread the purchase of vehicles out over 7 years. She said that the board researched the options regarding whether or not to purchase vehicles or to do a lease purchase agreement instead because the board was tired of throwing good money after bad. She said that they didn't want to have deputies breaking down on the south end of the county, so these were the type of things that had to be considered.

Kevin Bradley of 120 Mill Pond Court, Liberty Hill Road, Milner addressed the board and stated that it seems most problems go to the property owners. He inquired about the options that the board had tried before requesting to increase the millage rate. He said that they need to get the information out to the public. He suggested that they use social media such as Facebook to help people understand things better.

Chairman Glass responded that budget workshops are held for planning the budget and there is a process that they follow so that details are covered. He said that the budget workshops are held at the Administration building and they are advertised in the paper. Chairman Glass stated that Mr. Bradley could contact any of the board members regarding his questions. He said that their email and contact number is listed on the website and that the board members also have business cards that can be obtained in the Administration office. Mr. Bradley inquired about the time for the budget workshops and Chairman Glass replied that the workshops are held during the day time. Mr. Bradley said that this doesn't benefit the working class and Chairman Glass replied that he

could contact him outside of the budget workshops to set up a meeting with him or any of the other board members.

Commissioner Horton explained that that they have to follow mandated laws from both the Federal and State government. Commissioner Horton said that he agreed with Mr. Jackson regarding the fair taxes and said that he spoke to someone ten years ago, in the legislature, who was in favor of fair taxes so that everyone is contributing. He said that he agreed that this needs to be removed from the property tax payers. Commissioner Horton said that the board is very consciousness about cost and said that the Board of Commissioners in 2007 and 2008 didn't raise taxes at all and said that they should have gone up at least a quarter of a mill so that they didn't get behind. Commissioner Horton said that when taxes are raised, he and the board members pay taxes too.

Chairman Glass stated that reviewing surrounding Counties, Lamar County's tax rate was lower. He said that with a metric comparison, the operating budget is divided by the number of citizens and based on the number of citizens in the County, Lamar County's operating budget is the lowest. He said that Lamar County is \$518.00 per citizen; Pike County is \$560.00 per citizen; Spalding County is \$697.00 per citizen; Monroe is 106 percent higher because of Plant Shear. Monroe County's pays as much property tax as the entire digest of Lamar County but they still have a higher millage rate. Monroe's millage rate is 13.331. Chairman Glass said that the board has faced salary issues with employees because in the job market there are better offers somewhere else. He said that with a service organization it takes people to provide the services. He explained that the insurance premium went up with a 10.4 percent increase and the percentage also went up for the Lamar County Towaliga Circuit budget. He said a Wellness Program had been implemented to help with the premiums and they aren't sending as many people to the emergency room with health issues. He said that the Wellness Program has detected people with high blood pressure and diabetes and that a few employees have quit smoking but Health Care insurance premiums are still going up.

Vice-Chairman Traylor said that they are seeing growth in Lamar County which will help in the future as a contribution to the tax digest. He said that they are working with the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) so that a business such as Plant Shear can help contribute so that it isn't falling solely on the citizens.

David Ware of 841 Yatesville Road, Barnesville said that he knew they were good stewards of the money but asked why they had to pay so much money to the lawyers regarding the graveyard. Chairman Glass stated that this was not paid by the County but the City of Barnesville. Mr. Ware apologized for the mistake and asked about the Park on Hwy 36. Chairman Glass responded that the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) required a decel lane and a left turn lane. This expense was not part of the original plan and it is unsafe to get in and out of the park without those lanes. Chairman Glass said that a low bid came in at 1.6 million dollars and that only \$750,00.00 was allocated for the park. He said that County Administrator Townsend is working with an engineer at GDOT. There is a possibility that something can be dropped from the bid but right now the bid is higher than the County can afford but they do still plan to move forward with the park. Mr. Ware stated that he saw kids playing soccer out there before a gate was put up. Mr. Ware asked if other contractors and other companies look at the tax base and asked if they would want to move to Lamar County. Chairman Glass stated that they look at the millage rate but the tax base is a consolidation of all of the assessed values of the property. Mr. Ware stated that he saw that Ranew's had moved over to Thomaston on Delray Road and wondered why. Commissioner Thrash

stated that she had worked really hard on this and Lamar County doesn't have an industrial waste water plant where they can do away with waste water. Chairman Glass explained that Mr. Ranew lives in Lamar County and wanted to keep the business here but because there was a waste water issue they moved to Upson County. He said that they worked with Mr. Ranew for 18 to 24 months trying to figure out what they could do to make it work. Chairman Glass stated that the waste water that they would send to the waste water treatment plant would kill all the bacteria and the waste water treatment plant requires bacteria because that cleans the water. The process that the EPD requires as pre-treatment takes that bacteria out. Mr. Ware said that taxes always fall on the working man and a lot of family's struggle. He said that they also have the school taxes and this cost more money. He said that they need to simmer things down and not do an increase every year. He said that President Trump gave everyone a tax break and that the school taxes ate that up. Commissioner Horton said that the land for the Park on Hwy 36 was donated by the Federal Government and certain things are required to maintain that land. Mr. Wade said that he would like to see more industry and that some people say it's a small city and that the old people are running the town.

Commissioner Thrash said that the County spent one million dollars, plus Grant money received from GDOT, so that they could do a deep reclamation on Industrial Road to attract more business. Mr. Wade said that a lot of people are moving into Lamar County from McDonough and Griffin and a lot of people want to be in the rural area. He said that people in Newnan, Georgia want to get out of there and move to Lamar County where they can buy a couple acres of land. Mr. Wade said that he understood that the IDA was supposed to be in charge of getting more Industry and asked what happened to the Chinese deal. Chairman Glass responded that when the deal fell through it reverted back to the Chinese and said that they still own the land. He said that it would be nice to market that land because it has the railroad, water on the land, and plenty of power.

Mr. Dave Rumfeldt of 201 Spencer Street, Barnesville addressed the board and said that it was a good idea to raise taxes because of all the good these things it will do for the County and the City of Barnesville.

L.D Parks of 110 Pine Street addressed the board and said that the most valuable thing is the employee. He said that when the employee market gets attractive all around you, you can lose the cream of the crop by not maintaining and being competitive. He said that this includes the schools, the fire departments, and law officers. Mr. Parks said that having a competitive pay scale is the best way to keep them because once you lose them; it is hard to draw them back again. Mr. Parks said that he is in favor of the tax increase and feels that everyone is doing a good job, but requested that they watch the salaries and give the employees a good raise.

Chairman Glass said that in general they do pay less for jailers, maintenance, fire and public works employees but because they work well with the department heads and Constitutional Officers they can get away with the lower salaries. Chairman Glass said that having the right people is the key to delivering good services.

Mr. Bobby Brantly of 216 Liberty Hill Road, Milner address the board and stated that he and some of his friends went over the budget handout that he received at the last Public Hearing. He said that it appears that they trimmed every ounce of fat away and if an emergency arises the board is going to have to work hard to find the funds to cover it. He said that he is concerned with the future for both his children and his grandchildren. Mr. Brantly said that they need to increase the budget

by at least one percent because there will be days and years ahead of them and if they don't, they will be struggling later on. He said if they don't increase the millage rate the budget will repeat itself.

Chairman Glass responded that they do recognize this and they are working to build up funds for a rainy day. He said that it would take about 3 to 4 mills to put this in place at one time. He said that the goal is to reduce the need for a Tax Anticipation Note (TAN).

Vice-Chairman Traylor stated that he teaches skills classes at Gordon State College and he is typically conservative but he said that he never promised anyone that they wouldn't raise taxes. He said that he has worked with Fortune 500 companies on situations like this and this is like running a scaled down project. Vice-Chairman Traylor said that he is seeing this with other counties all over Georgia.

Mr. Jackson said that his son lives in Woodstock, Georgia and the elderly don't pay taxes. Commissioner Thrash responded that Lamar County has a large senior base and that the County does give the elderly citizens a break but if the elderly citizens didn't pay taxes then it would bankrupt the County. She said that large communities have a tax base 4 times the size of Lamar County. Commissioner Thrash explained that larger counties have more industry and businesses than Lamar County and the way to take the burden off the property owner is by having more industry and they are working hard to bring new industry into Lamar County.

Commissioner Horton said that some 15 to 16 years ago the growth towards Gainesville, Ga and Georgia State route 400 was supposed to come to Lamar County. He said that he is hoping that the growth has gone as far as it can go in that direction and it will soon come back this way. He said that he has been in favor of some type of fair tax similar to SPLOST so that it can eliminate the property tax and take the burden off of the property owner. He said that way if you buy a cigarette then you are contributing to Lamar County.

Mr. Brantly stated that it went north because Lamar County doesn't have water and if an industry does come to Lamar County, the County will give out of water. Chairman Glass responded that the water will pass through the City of Barnesville for any type of industry and that the City of Barnesville issues the water in the County. Chairman Glass said that the City of Barnesville has enough water for industry.

Vice-Chairman Traylor said that he was in training recently with Commissioners to the North of Lamar County and they were complaining about the growth. He said that Henry County has been hit hard with traffic and when this comes to Lamar County, they will need to be ready to receive it.

Mr. Eddie Felton of 290 McCollum Road addressed the board and said that he didn't have a problem with raising taxes but said that he heard the County had to borrow money to pay bills. Mr. Felton said that if Lamar County has an IDA why are they not attracting more businesses. He said that they are not doing their job correctly and something is not right. He said that this is hurting the taxpayers and they shouldn't be paying more taxes; they should be bringing new industries into the community. Mr. Felton stated that he had attended a meeting where there was a situation regarding the paving of the parking lot for the new Lamar County Health Department. He said that there were 3 bids and each bid had 3 different sizes. Mr. Felton stated that there are no checks and

balances and we are not doing what we are supposed to be doing. He said that Henry County is booming with growth while some people want Lamar County to remain the same.

Chairman Glass stated that the IDA has one-person full time and a board with eight members and they all work together. He said that there has not been any new large industry since Piedmont Green Power. He said that Continental Tire has expanded and they have added around 103 new employees that came from Porterdale and another city in the Georgia rather than moving those to China. They worked out a deal with the Germans to keep Continental Tire in Lamar County. He said that they have a very low turnover rate and their absentee rate is less than 1 percent. He said that their salary rate is close to \$20.00 an hour. They have great benefits including pet insurance. Chairman Glass explained that a while back Jordan shut down at Thanksgiving and Christmas but they managed to open back up and doubled what they had before. Chairman Glass stated that they are working with Pike and Upson County regarding new industry because there is plenty of land and a solid work force. He said that they may have better luck with the region concept than just one County. Chairman Glass stated that Top Form Construction had moved into the only available spec building in Lamar County. He said that Jason Governo with Farm Supply is currently building a new Farm Supply building and may build another one to rent out. He stated that the City of Barnesville owns the old Carter's Mill building but since it is an old building it may not meet the requirements of some industries. Chairman Glass asked the constituents for leads or thoughts that would help out the community.

Commissioner Thrash agreed with Commissioner Horton and stated that there were unfunded mandates from the State regarding the Criminal Justice reform and said that the County's law enforcement and criminal justice takes up a large percentage of the budget. Commissioner Thrash explained that because of the Criminal Justice reform if someone can't pay their fine, the judge can't go after them and have them pay their fine. She said that she was recently in court where 21 of 22 defenders asked for a Public Defender and stated that the citizens of Lamar County have to pay for this service. If they are put in jail, then the citizens pay for their medicine and a place for them to eat and sleep until their trial and then you have to pay for that too. Commissioner Thrash encouraged the citizens to talk to their legislators. She said that she spends almost every day at the Capital working on this and that the entitlement program is bringing people to their knees.

Mr. Felton said that he agreed with Commissioner Thrash but said that they need community meetings to bring these things to the forefront to help the citizen understand why these things are happening because the vast community doesn't know. Mr. Felton requested that the County Commissioners talk to their constituents to let them know what is going on.

Commissioner Traylor thanked everyone for coming to the Public Hearing. He encouraged the citizens to break bread and share news with their neighbors because they have a powerful voice. He invited those in attendance to stay for the Regular Board of Commissioner meeting immediately following the Public Hearing.

Commissioner Thrash made a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing at 6:49 p.m. and Commissioner Horton seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

THE LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Charles Glass, Chairman

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Ryran Traylor, Vice-Chairman

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Bennie Horton, Commissioner

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Robert Heiney, Commissioner

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Nancy Thrash, Commissioner

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ Carlette Davidson, County Clerk