

AT A PUBLIC HEARING OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA ON WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2011 AT 6:00 P.M. , THE FOLLOWING PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ.

Present: Sherrie Taylor, Chair, District 5  
Gene Morgan, Vice-Chair, District 3  
Eugene Lamb, District 1  
Doug Croley, District 2  
Brenda Holt, District 4  
Debra Minnis, County Attorney  
Arthur Lawson, Interim County Administrator  
Muriel Straughn, Deputy Clerk

1. Public Hearing – First Budget Hearing for Adoption of the Tentative Millage Rate and Tentative Budget for Fiscal Year 2011/2012

Millage Adoption

Chair Taylor called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and turned it over to Interim County Administrator Arthur Lawson.

Mr. Lawson announced that this meeting is the first public hearing to adopt the Tentative Millage Rate and Tentative Budget for FY 2011/2012.

Sr. Budget Analyst Jeff Price made the following points as to the millage rate:

- The budget was predicated on the current 8.9064 mills.
- The proposed rate represents a 0.59 decrease in property values resulting in a reduction of countywide tax revenues of more than \$70,000.
- The calculated roll back rate, which is the rate that the property tax rate would generate the same amount of property tax revenue as last year, is 9.0820 mills.
- He recommended the adoption of the proposed millage rate of 8.9064 and the adoption of the tentative budget for FY11/12.
- Staff recommended advertising the second public hearing for Monday, September 19, 2011 at 6:00 p.m. located in the County Commission Chambers.

He then made the following remarks about the proposed budget:

- Total summary of the budget reflecting all the changes made on August 22 were incorporated in the budget.
- It balances with a reserve for contingency increased to over \$209,000.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COMMISSIONER LAMB AND SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER MORGAN TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED MILLAGE RATE AT 8.9064.**

Commissioner Holt stated the following for the record:

“Even though the state and federal government said they will provide the same services for fewer taxes, it is impossible. In this case, it is impossible also, therefore, unless you raise the millage rate, you raise fees. You can see that with the Driver’s License fees out there. They went from \$24.00 to \$48.00 for a regular driver’s license, plus and extra \$15.00 for late fees. Therefore, you cannot render the same services with a lower millage rate. Mathematically, it does not work.

So, Commissioners, even though we vote for a lower millage rate, that money has to be found somewhere. The state found theirs by raising fees. It is still a tax. They just did it on fees instead of on sales tax and property. So, we are going to have to let the customers and the citizens out there know that before we go and vote on this saying that we are going to keep the millage rate low and we are going to provide the same service. It is impossible to do that. I just wanted to make that comment. “

Commissioner Morgan followed Commissioner Holt by saying:

“I agree with you, Commissioner Holt. It is important for the citizens to understand that by keeping the millage rate the same, which I am in favor of doing, we are actually reducing the tax revenues, which Mr. Price just mentioned. To that end, I am going to disagree with you on this point. We can still provide quality basic services at a very high level. What it requires of us is to simply put together a more responsible disciplined budget where there is less wasteful spending. I think some of that has been accomplished over the last couple of years. We’ve still got some shortfalls on this one, in my opinion, but it is our responsibility to be as efficient as possible and provide those services. “

Holt:

“Commissioner Morgan, I was not implying that you couldn’t deliver services, they just won’t be the same because a dollar buys what a dollar buys. Fifty cents doesn’t buy what a dollar would buy. That is my point and the citizens need to know that. That way, you don’t have as many. You are not able to buy as many EMS trucks of the same quality or hire as many people. You are not going to provide the same services. It doesn’t matter how we say it, it just does not. So, the reality is that we are going to do the best that we can do with what we have, but you are not going to get the same services and I don’t want people to imply that we are going to give them the same service. We have people calling right now asking why the fees are so high. I said to them, “Check with the State of Florida.” Let them know and let Rick Scott and the rest of them know that they did raise the taxes, they did it through fees. It is the same thing. I am saying, as elected officials, we are accountable to the citizens. We have to let them know.

Thank you Madam Chairman.”

Taylor:

“Points are well taken. I think the citizens of this county as well as the state and the nation are well aware of the difficulties that face us all moving forward. I agree on both your points. We have to be mindful of how we spend the dollars, but then we have to let citizens know it is time to tighten our belts and try our best to continue to provide quality services. “

Chair Taylor then called for public comments on the millage rates. There was no response. She then called for a vote on the motion.

**THE BOARD VOTED 5 – 0, BY VOICE VOTE, TO APPROVE THE TENTATIVE MILLAGE RATE OF 8.9064 MILLS. .**

**ADOPTION OF THE TENTATIVE BUDGET FOR 2011/2012**

Chair Taylor called for public comments regarding the tentative proposed budget.

**Michael Taylor**, 120 North Macon St., Quincy, FL - Small Business Service Center Director through the Chamber of Commerce addressed the board and asked them to reconsider the funding for the Chamber of Commerce which would include the \$25,000 for the Small Business Service Center.

**Joseph Moore 4706 Mt. Pleasant Road** – spoke in support of the Chamber of Commerce budget request of \$100,000. He went through the Small Business class sponsored by the Chamber. His desire is to rehabilitate old houses. Once he completes his classes and gets his 501c3, he will begin to apply for grants to start his business.

**Channel Franklin**, Tallahassee, FL –spoke as to the importance of maintaining the small business development center at the Chamber of Commerce. Small business is imperative to the economic health and development of the county. There are options that only small business can provide. She is continuing to work without a salary to those who have gone through this class.

**Charlie Brown 99 Gray Road, Quincy, FL President** of the Gadsden County Chamber of Commerce. He pled for the funding of the full \$100,000 for the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber works very hard for economic development in Gadsden County. It will bring value back into the county.

**Elizabeth Peterson**, 23 Macon St., Quincy, FL – the small business center has served her and her classmates. Even though they have completed the class, they continue to meet on a bi-weekly basis to encourage each other. She said that this class is very important to the citizens of Gadsden County.

Commissioner Taylor responded to public comments.

**Chair Taylor called for motion to adopt the budget. There was no motion.** She then opened the floor for discussion. She asked to relax the meeting rules and just have free flowing conversation.

Commissioner Holt asked for a list of the things that were added to the budget as a result of the last workshop. Mr. Lawson stated that all the items were incorporated into the budget document, but there was not a separate listing of them, however, there were 17 different items either added or changed.

Discussion followed.

**Commissioner Holt** pointed out several things as follows:

- The 2% increase in commissioner's employee salaries was to offset the mandatory 3% employee contribution to the state retirement system. She stated that it was proposed only for the county commission employees. It is not for all the constitutional officers.
- She stated that she would like to compare this version of the proposed budget with the previous version along with the list of changes that was proposed at the last meeting. She wanted to make the comparison to "See what we have done and see if we want to make some adjustments. That is why I wanted the list."

**Commissioner Lamb** made several remarks:

- The board has gone through the budget "time and time again and met for many hours."
- He stated that when he proposed the 2% increase to county employees, it was his intention to only include those county commission employees making less than \$40,000 per year.
- The administrator and Mr. Price did a good job with the budget and he was ready to accept the budget as it was presented.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COMMISSIONER LAMB AND SECONDED BY CHAIR TAYLOR TO ACCEPT THE BUDGET AS IT WAS PRESENTED.**

Commissioner Morgan made the following pleas:

- Economic development is the most important need in this county. Now is not the time to back off from supporting the economic development arm of the Chamber.
- Supported the funding for Lobbying Services to help defend the largest employer in the county (Florida State Hospital)
- Could not support the 2% increase to county employees to offset the state mandated employee participation in the retirement system. It is unfair to other county employees.
- Will not the vote for the budget if it does not support economic development. We are ignoring needs in order to afford a want.

**He asked for: \$75,000 for the Economic Development arm of the Chamber of Commerce; \$25,000 to Small Business Development Center; \$25,000 for lobbying services to defend Florida State Hospital.**

**Commissioner Croley made** several comments:

- County Employees all work for constitutional offices including those who work for the county commission.
- This budget is divisive.
- Did not agree with the approach to the “across the board 2% cut.”
- 2% increase to county employees only. That is not right -employees that work for the constitutional officers did not receive the same increase.
- Cannot support the budget as it is now.
- **Look at Judicial Services - \$17,000** goes to pay travel costs to the judges and their assistants. Would rather keep \$15,000 of it to put toward Economic Development. It started in 2008 when there was a \$2 million increase in revenue. It should be ended.
- Emergency Housing Program – what was budgeted in current year has not been spent. Can’t support it again this year.
- Things in the budget need to change. Start with the 2% increase in salaries unless it is afforded to all county employees.

**Commissioner Holt** responded to remarks about the judicial budget – She recalled that agreement was made with Judge Francis to pay those cost in order to get another judge to come over here to help with overcrowding at the jail. She pointed out the following:

- EMS – needs \$160,000 for transport equipment needs
- \$190,000 due to Preble Rish - not in this budget
- Gadsden County cannot bill Medicare for transports from the Emergency Room to Tallahassee because Capital Regional is already billing.
- She suggested that that the board waits until January to fund any of the items that were added to the budget as a result of the last workshop. Take care of the above bills first. Come back in January 2012 to look at those items again.

**Commissioner Taylor** made the following points:

- The 2% increase that an employee received is to offset the 3% reduction they experienced as a result of the legislation action to have all employees in the retirement system to contribute 3%.
- County Commissioners will not receive the 2% increase.
- To the board and those in attendance she said, “Your needs are not unheard. I am willing to come back and work again, but it is not available right now.”
- The BOCC stayed within the budget during current fiscal year.

**CHAIR TAYLOR ANNOUNCED THAT THERE IS A MOTION AND SECOND ON THE FLOOR TO ADOPT THE BUDGET AS PRESENTED. SHE CALLED FOR A VOTE.**

Commissioner Morgan rebutted, “If you don’t fund economic development at the level they have requested, you are putting wants ahead of needs... The budget doesn’t reflect priorities.” He also said he will go to the public and give them the facts about this budget. He pleaded with them to remove the 2% increase to the employees and to fund the Lobbying Services and to fund the Chamber at \$100,000.

**THE BOARD VOTED – 3 – 2 IN FAVOR OF THE MOTION. COMMISSIONERS CROLEY & MORGAN OPPOSED.**

**UPON MOTION BY COMMISSIONER HOLT AND SECOND BY COMMISSIONER LAMB, THE BOARD VOTED 5 – 0, BY VOICE VOTE TO DIRECT STAFF TO ADVERTISE ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2011 IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FLORIDA STATUTES, THE TENTATIVE MILLAGE RATE AND BUDGET FOR FY 2011/2012 AND THE DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF THE PUBLIC HEARING TO ADOPT THE FINAL MILLAGE RATE AND BUDGET FOR FY 2011/2012 (SEPTEMBER 19, 2011 AT 6:00 P.M. IN THE BOCC CHAMBER VOTE 5 – 0**

There being no further business before the board, the chair declared the meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

**2. Other Items as Necessary**

Nothing else came before the board.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**THERE BEING NO OTHER BUSINESS BEFORE THE BOARD, THE CHAIR DECLARED THE MEETING  
ADJOURNED AT 7:05 P.M.**

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**Sherrie Taylor, Chair, District 5**

**ATTEST:**

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**Muriel Straughn, Deputy Clerk**