

**HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS CALLED MEETING
6:00 P.M., MONDAY, JUNE 14, 2021
HABERSHAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE
JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM
295 LLEWELLYN STREET
CLARKESVILLE, GA 30523**

A called meeting of the Habersham County Board of Commissioners was held on Monday, June 14, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in the Jury Assembly Room of the Habersham County Courthouse in Clarkesville, Georgia.

Present: Chairman Dustin Mealor; Commissioner Bruce Harkness; Commissioner Jimmy Tench; Commissioner Bruce Palmer; County Attorney Donnie Hunt, County Manager Phil Sutton; Deputy Clerk Brandalin Carnes; Department Directors; Individuals from the Media and Public

Chairman Mealor called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Commissioner Harkness lead the Invocation.

Chairman Mealor lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

By permitting opponents or speakers to present public comment to the county, the county does not acquiesce or waive its ability to challenge to the legal standing of the speaker(s) in the event of litigation.

1. First Reading of the Proposed FY2022 Budget
2. First Reading of the Proposed 2021 Millage Rate

Tim Sims, Finance Director, addressed the Board and reviewed a presentation that covered both the proposed FY 2022 budget and 2021 millage rate.

Tim Sims, Finance Director, asked the Commission if they had any questions regarding the proposed FY2022 budget or the Proposed 2021 millage Rate.

Commissioner Harkness wanted to know for what purpose the county gives money to the Forestry Commission? Finance Director Tim Sims explained that for the counties \$7,600 spent we get \$23,000 of matching funds for the purpose of forest fire protection and lookout.

Commissioner Harkness asked how many employees are at the extension office? Finance Director Tim Sims stated that the county only pays for one part time employee and the rest are funded by the University of Georgia and grants.

Commissioner Harkness asked why the revenue for the county budgets total proposed funds for FY2022 is \$54,791,257 but the FY2022 proposed budget total is \$27,819,717. Finance Director Tim Sims explained that the \$27,819,717 amount is the General Fund which is only one of the funds which makes up a portion of the \$54,791,257 total. The general funds is revenue generated from property taxes. The other funds come from other sources.

County Attorney Donnie Hunt invited members of the public to address the Commission regarding questions or concerns related to the Proposed FY2022 Budget or the Proposed 2021 Millage Rate.

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Rhonda Gladden, Clarkesville resident, voiced her concern that the advertised notice regarding the millage rate and tax increase in the newspaper was misleading. She stated that the way the advertisement was worded makes it sound as though last years rate was 10.994 when it was actually 11.682 and she states that not rolling the mileage rate back from 11.682 this year would cause her taxes to increase to 15.41%, not the 6.26% advertised increase. Tim Sims, Finance Director, responded by saying the wording on the notice is what is legally required. The 10.994 rate is from the State Department of Revenue worksheet. It is the millage rate the county would have had to roll back to had the budget been revenue neutral. The advertised 6.2% increase is an average for all properties across the county tax digest, but some individuals may have a greater or smaller tax increase based on how appraisers valued the property.

Peggy Brownery, Batesville resident, stated that with the bulk of revenue for the county being property taxes, she is concerned with what she says is a loophole in the homestead exemption. She stated that once one reaches the age of 65, the exemption is based on the finances of the individual who applies for the exemption, not the household's income. In this way, households with significantly large total incomes can dodge paying 100% of the school M&O tax and significantly reduce their other property taxes so long as they move finances around so that the individual applying has \$12,000 or less in income. She states that to be fair to all property owners, the income qualifications for the homestead exemption should be based on total household income, not the individual. In doing so, Peggy states the county would bring in more income from the people that have large assets but have been exploiting the loophole and their would be no need to ever increase the millage rate for everyone else.

Lynn Dockery expressed concern for contingency fund, wanting to know why the sudden increase occurred? She also wants to know how many full time firefighter were employed by the county considering the budget? Ms. Dockery went on to state that the Recreation Department needs to start funding itself through its programs rather than relying on taxpayer dollars. She also wanted the Board to know that her property taxes went up by 40% , and thus she wants to know if the budget was figured before the tax digest came in or after, stating that if they knew the taxes were going to increase by that much, they should have had a rollback on the milage rate.

Habersham County Pickle Ball Club members Christine Tekippe and Peggy Fortson gave a presentation regarding the growth of pickleball as a sport in Habersham County and the need for a pickleball complex. They are requesting that the Board consider approve the funding needed for building such a complex and state that it would rapidly pay for itself in annual membership fees and sponsorships as well as bring tourism dollars into the county.

ADJOURN: 6:56

Motion by Commissioner Palmer, Seconded by Commissioner Harkness and voted unanimously to adjourn.

Respectfully Submitted,

By: _____
Chairman Dustin Mealor

Attest: _____
Deputy Clerk Brandalin Carnes