

MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING
IN-PERSON & ZOOM
MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2020

Members Present:

Mayor Steve Lawrence
John Foust
Kirk Raffield-zoom
Jim Looney
Dr. Sonny Proctor-zoom
Anne Sneve

Staff:

Brandon Douglas
Beverly Ragland
Lindsey Williams
Tara Benson
Steve Roper-zoom
Rachael Childers-zoom
Jasper City Hall Lobby-zoom
Lonnie Waters

Guests in Attendance:

Jasper City Hall (lobby)-zoom
Donnie Low-zoom
Susan Horton
Amberle Godfrey
Dr. Robert Keller
Nathan B. Barfield
iPhone-zoom

Members Absent:

Legal Counsel:

R. David Syfan-zoom

Press:

Mari Livsey – Know Pickens
Max Caylor-Pickens Progress

Mayor Steve Lawrence asked Councilmember Jim Foust if he recognized a quorum. See a quorum, Mayor Lawrence opened the public hearing at 5:30 PM. He requested City Manager Brandon Douglas to provide the invocation. He requested Councilmember Anne Sneve to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Lawrence advised that an agenda is in front of them and he entertained a motion to adopt the agenda. Councilmember Foust made a motion to adopt the agenda with Councilmember Jim Looney providing a second. Motion to approve carried unanimously.

Mayor Lawrence recognized City Manager Douglas and asked him to bring forth information. City Manager Douglas identified the public hearing as being the third and final of three public hearings as required through the Official Code of Georgia (O.C.G.A.) regarding millage rate. These public hearings are required when the rollback rate is not recommended to be used when taxes are calculated from the tax digest. At the September 14, 2020 regular council meeting, council did approve the recommendation to advertise a millage rate of 6.780 mills. Those ads were published as required. An administrative hearing was held at 9:00 a.m. on September 24, 2020 with no public in personal attendance. The second public hearing was held at 6:00 p.m. on September 24, 2020 with attendance both in person and via zoom whereas comments were made and taken into consideration. Staff has been working with the departments and the elected to identify a millage rate that will sustain the general fund over time. Based on comments from previous public hearings, no additional analysis has been generated for dissemination other than what has already been disclosed, however there will be a revised handout provided. Tonight's discussion will be about the millage rate. We will go through a separate process at the staff level to develop the 2021 budget. That will begin on October 22, 2020. Once the millage rate is adopted, we will finalize the budget with an anticipated adoption date at the December regular meeting.

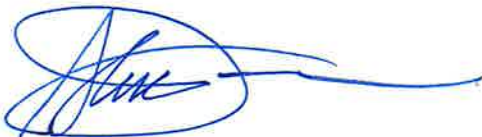
Mayor Lawrence announced that Finance has identified an approximate 5-6% reduction in expenditures for 2021, therefore 6.78 mills may not be what was needed at this time to have a balanced general fund budget. Finance Director Beverly Ragland was asked to bring forth information. Staff has worked with the departments to determine a millage rate of 5.655 is needed to generate revenues to have a balanced budget. This is an increase of 1 mill over the 2019 rate of 4.655. We feel like there have been adequate cuts identified for this to happen. We have just begun the budget process and foresee a final draft of the budget being available at the end of October. Mayor Lawrence confirmed the recommended millage rate from staff was 5.655. City Manager Douglas proceeded to present an updated handout that had been presented at an earlier public hearing with the updated millage rate. The illustration gave information on how the change of millage rate from 4.655 to 5.655 impacted their tax bill based on property value. A printed version of what was presented was handed out to the press and persons in attendance. A home with a value of \$140,000 would have an annual increase of \$56.00 at the 5.655 millage rate versus a \$119.00 increase at the 6.78 millage rate.

Mayor Lawrence asked the council if they had questions for staff. Councilmember Sneve commended the work staff had put in. After some technical difficulty with zoom, Councilmember Raffield gave a thumbs up. Councilmember Proctor also gave appreciation to staff and reiterated how he was glad SPLOST funds were available to redirect purchases from the general fund budget so the millage rate could be lowered. After council had no further comment Mayor Lawrence opened discussion for members in the audience to come forward. Susan Howard of 308 Hood Road, Jasper, GA was first to comment. She was at the public hearing on September 24 and gave comment at that time as well. She mentioned that a high millage rate might keep businesses from coming to Jasper. She did not want

Jasper to become crowded, but businesses are needed to provide jobs for the young people here. She expressed her gratitude that a solution was found to allow a lower rate. Dr. Robert Keller of 4805 Hwy 53 West, Jasper, GA was the next to comment. He understands that a City needs money to operate. He identified public safety as being a service that is vital to a community. He also reminded people in attendance that council were all residents and were voting for a tax increase that would cost them too. He then presented the City with a check for \$1,000. He commended council for their efforts during a time of hardship for their endurance of criticism for stepping up and doing something that had not been done in 20 years. He does not live in the city, but he enjoys the city and wants to see others in our community step up as well. Mayor Lawrence commended the council and his appreciation for the transparency this board has shown. This board is not spending unnecessarily and concluded it was a time to take steps to keep sustainability in the general fund. They will press forward in doing what was necessary to "fix our own house". He thanked the people in attendance for their comments. He went to zoom and asked for comments. A gentleman from the lobby on zoom was directed to council chambers. Nathan Barfield of 103 Hobson Rd, Jasper, GA approached council with comments. He claimed to be present as a spokesperson for many that did not show. People have concerns about how money has been spent. He brought up a County judge that was accused of stealing money. He claimed that he saw that a lot of money had been spent on overtime. He asked the board if they wanted to rebut and was told they were there to listen to his comments only. He suggested additional people be hired at a cost savings instead paying overtime. He felt like more information was needed for public to understand why there needed to be a tax increase. He explained a collected small increase from a lot of different things make it hard on families. He needs a detailed explanation. Mayor Lawrence explained the millage rate that would be adopted was lower than the advertised rate. He wanted explanation on why a higher rate was advertised. He wanted an answer on how the budget was balanced in the past. City Manager Douglas explained the budget process and Mr. Barfield wanted to know why the millage rate came before the budget. City Manager Douglas explained the timeline of receiving the digest and how that fell before the beginning of the fiscal year in January. Mr. Barfield asked if property taxes were used to balance the budget. City Manager Douglas explained how property tax was only 29% of all general fund revenue and how other sources of revenue were economically driven. One example given was the reduction in TAVT proceeds causing a use of fund balance of \$118,000 in 2019. Mr. Barfield expressed his gratitude of the explanation and felt he understood much better as a result. City Manager Douglas expressed the purpose of public hearings was an opportunity to have an open dialogue regarding the process that is prescribed by O.C.G.A. Councilmember Sneve expressed her appreciation for to the public present for their involvement. Councilmember Raffield also thanked the public in attendance. He appreciated the professional interaction among everyone present.

With respect to no further public comment Mayor Lawrence asked for a motion to adjourn the public hearing. Councilmember Foust provided the motion and Councilmember Sneve provided the second. The motion passed unanimously.

The public hearing was adjourned.



Steve Lawrence
Mayor



Beverly Ragland
Finance Director/City Clerk

STATE OF GEORGIA
COUNTY OF PICKENS

AFFIDAVIT RE: CLOSURE OF OPEN MEETINGS

Personally, appeared before the undersigned officer, duly authorized under the laws of the State of Georgia to administer oaths, Steve Lawrence, who in his/her capacity of Mayor or the person presiding over the meeting of the Council of the City of Jasper, Georgia, and after being first duly sworn, certifies under oath and states to the best of his or her knowledge and belief the following:

At its meeting held on October 5, 2020, the Council voted to go into closed session and exclude the public from all or a portion of its meeting. The legal exceptions applicable to the exempt matters addressed during such closed meeting are as follows:

(check or initial as appropriate)

- Discussing or deliberating upon the appointment, employment, compensation, hiring, disciplinary action, dismissal, periodic evaluation, or rating of a government officer or employee.
- Privileged consultation with legal counsel pertaining to pending or threatened litigation, claims, administrative proceedings or settlements. [OCGA 50-14-2]
- Discussing the future acquisition of real estate. [OCGA 50-14-3(4)]
- Staff meetings for investigative purposes under duties or responsibilities imposed by law. [OCGA 50-14-3(1)]
- Tax matters made confidential by state law. [OCGA 50-14-2]
- Inspection of facilities under jurisdiction of the City. [OCGA 50-14-1(a)(2)]
- Meeting with a governing body, officer, agent or employee of another agency at a location outside the geographical jurisdiction of the City or such other agendas and at which no final action is taken. [OCGA 50-14-1(a)(2)]
- Other. (Explanation required.)

I certify that the subject matter of the closed meeting or the closed portion of this meeting was devoted to the matters of official business or policy within the exceptions provided by law as set forth above.

Beverly Ragland
City Clerk

[Signature]
Mayor

(seal)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 5 day of October, 2020.

Tara M Benson

Notary Public
Pickens County, State of Georgia

My Commission Expires: OCT 1 2023

