

**FRANKLIN COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING  
June 23, 2015  
6:00 P.M.**

Present: Commission Chairman Thomas Bridges  
District 3 Commissioner Jeff Jacques  
District 4 Commissioner Eddie Wester

Media: Shane Scoggins, Franklin County Citizen Leader

Staff: County Manager, Beth Thomas  
County Clerk, Elaine Evans

Chairman Bridges called the meeting to order. He said that this is a very difficult issue for the County. He said that there have been four town hall meetings for the FY2016 budget which was attended by 28 people total. Two people came out this morning for the budget meeting. Chairman Bridges thanked everyone in attendance for their interest. He said that no final decision has been made. These meetings are to give the public a chance to give input and find answers and solutions.

Chairman Bridges asked if anyone would like to speak about the FY2016 budget. Rhonda Mullenix was recognized to speak by Chairman Bridges. She said that earlier she was at the Tax Assessors office and they told her about this meeting. Ms. Mullenix said that she understood that there is a millage rate increase being considered. She asked if the Commission Board told anyone why there would be a millage rate increase. Chairman Bridges told Ms. Mullenix that four town hall meetings were held as well as a public hearing this morning. She said that she does not want the millage rate to go up as much as is proposed. He told Ms. Mullenix that the amount is not set in stone. The budget has not been passed, that is the purpose of these meetings.

Chairman Bridges then asked Ms. Mullenix to state her opinion. Ms. Mullenix said that she likes to live within her means. She said that Franklin County is already hurting and she would appreciate anything that could be done to help people. She also asked about the SPLOST if that would offset some of the budget. She also asked the Commission Board to only keep enough of what is needed for operating the County. Chairman Bridges thanked Ms. Mullenix for coming and stating her concerns. He said that basically the Commission Board has the same concerns that she does. The last few years the County budgets have been cut to the bone. The revenue in the County has gone down six percent. Cuts have been done every year in the budgets.

Chairman Bridges said that there are mandates in the County which increase the budget. Some of those mandates are safe roads; health services; fire protection; and Sheriff protection. It is hard to meet these needs because the revenue of the County keeps declining. Ms. Mullenix then asked if the hospital bond will make the property taxes go up eventually. Chairman Bridges said that he did not think so.

Commissioner Jacques said that the County does have the debt service payments on the bond. He said that it is the plan for the County to put this on the SPLOST in November. By approving SPLOST it would not add an additional one cent sales tax it would only continue the current amount. SPLOST approval would allow the interest rate to be refinanced which would save the County money. The refinancing would decrease the time frame of the hospital bond payments as well as decrease the annual payments. This would take the hospital bond payment completely out of the County budget for the duration of the SPLOST. Ms. Mullenix said that it is a necessity that the citizens vote for the SPLOST. Commissioner Jacques said that he will be voting for the SPLOST. Chairman Bridges and Commissioner Wester were in agreement. Ms. Mullenix said that this information needs to be put in the newspaper. Commissioner Jacques said that he would like for the citizens to make an informed decision.

Commissioner Wester said that with refinancing the bond that it will save 1.3 million dollars over the life of the debt. Mrs. Thomas confirmed that this is correct. Commissioner Jacques said that over 30 percent of the sales tax is collected from people who do not live in Franklin County. He said that this is the fairest method of tax collection because everybody pays not just the property owners. He also said that with the hospital continuing it is helping the County by property tax; 300 plus jobs; and potential growth in the designated medical area. Commissioner Jacques said that it is important to note that it is not unusual for counties to have to contribute to the hospitals in their area. He said that Elbert County has had to contribute. He said that Hart County had to add \$500,000 to their budget to cover EMS transports because there is not a centralized emergency room in their county. Commissioner Jacques asked Mrs. Thomas to confirm this information. Mrs. Thomas stated that according to the FY2014 budget for Hart County that is correct. She also said all budget information is available to anyone on the local government website.

Commissioner Jacques said that Habersham County acquired 29.2 million dollars of debt service in order to retain a hospital. If the hospital had left Franklin County the transports of the County would have increased which would have increased the budget. He said that the EMS transports are at 4,400 per year of which between 50 to 73 percent are to the local hospital emergency room. If the hospital had left the County, an additional EMS station would have had to be added as well as an additional ambulance purchased. Because of the hospital the County will not have this additional expense. Ms. Mullenix asked if the County has a good working relationship with Sacred Heart. Commissioner Jacques stated that the relationship is very good and everyone is very thankful that they are in our County. Ms. Mullenix agreed with this. She said that they were very nice. Commissioner Jacques said that if he or his family needed care that he plans to go 10 minutes to Sacred Heart instead of 30 minutes to

another facility.

Chairman Bridges asked if there was anyone else from the public who wished to speak. There was no one else from the public to speak. He said that this is the toughest situation that he has faced since he took office over two and a half years ago. He said that the Commission Board is aware that there are some people who will not have a problem with a millage increase but there are others who will not have as easy a time. Commissioner Jacques said that historically the Commission Board has only passed one tax increase in the last eleven years and that this is not found in many local governments. He said that this is budget public hearing. The millage rate will be determined by the budget that is adopted by the Commission Board. The millage rate public hearings will be in July. Chairman Bridges said that the next public hearing will be at 5:30 p.m. on June 30 with the vote coming at the 6 o'clock work session following the public hearing. The meeting adjourned at 6:22 p.m.

Signed on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2015

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Chairman J. Thomas Bridges

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Robert L. Franklin, District 1 Commissioner

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David R. Strickland, District 2 Commissioner

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Jeff Jacques, District 3 Commissioner

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Eddie Wester, District 4 Commissioner

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Elaine H. Evans, County Clerk