

**FRANKLIN COUNTY**  
**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES**  
**July 21, 2015**  
**10:00 A.M.**

Present: Commission Chairman Thomas Bridges  
District 3 Commissioner Jeff Jacques

Media: Shane Scoggins, Franklin County Citizen Leader

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

Chairman Bridges called the public hearing to order and welcomed everyone. He said that the agenda item is the millage rate. Chairman Bridges then gave an opportunity for public comment.

Chairman Bridges recognized Gabe Martin. Mr. Martin said that previously he had spoken against raising the millage rate. He said he appreciated the opportunity to be heard by the Commission Board. Mr. Martin said that he is not happy about having to pay more taxes but that from what he has read he understands the need. He also said that he would support the decision by the Commission Board to increase the millage rate. Chairman Bridges thanked Mr. Martin for his input. He said that it was a tough decision for the Commission Board to have to increase the millage rate.

Chairman Bridges said that one of the main reasons for the millage increase is because of declining county revenues. The tax digest is lower, therefore tax collections have decreased. The tax digest is lower than what it was in 1999. Another issue is that the previous Commission Boards did not go up on taxes except for one time. Chairman Bridges stated that his personal opinion was a gradual increase would have been better for everyone. Gabe Martin said that he has been around government all of his adult life and it is a shame that only three people are concerned enough about county business to show up for a meeting. Chairman Bridges said that hopefully the reason for this is that the media releases have informed the citizens. The county information published in the *Franklin County Citizen Leader* by Shane Scoggins is very informative. He thanked Mr. Scoggins for putting the information out to the public.

Chairman Bridges said that there were seven meetings in June concerning the budget, four town hall meetings and three public hearings. This information was given to each person attending these meetings as well as was published in the *Franklin County*

*Citizen Leader*. The information was also given to MJ Kneiser of *WLHR*. He said that the he and the Commission Board will continue to listen to everyone and take things into consideration before the vote at the July 28<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Stan Griffith was welcomed as a newcomer to Franklin County. He thanked Chairman Bridges for the opportunity to speak. Mr. Griffith said that he moved to Franklin County in 2014 because of relocation for a job. He said that he has worked with other agencies for over 20 years on budgets. He said that he understands that there are services that are necessary. Mr. Griffith stated that his comments were not to complain about an increase but he wanted to understand the reasoning behind the increase and whether other alternatives were considered. He said that he lives in an unincorporated portion of Franklin County. There is not school bus service to his road. He also lives in a portion of the County that has an ISO rating of 10 although he lives within two miles of a fire station which is located in another county. The two counties do not have an agreement which is why the ISO rating is so high in his portion of the County. Mr. Griffith also said that if law enforcement is needed in this area that Stephens County deputies respond instead of Franklin County. He said that his water service comes from a different county. From the perspective of the unincorporated citizens they are not getting many services for their taxes. He asked that the alternatives be reviewed again.

Chairman Bridges thanked Mr. Griffith for his comments. He asked County Manager Beth Thomas to look into the fire protection issue. Commissioner Jacques said that agreements have been made before with other governments. He said that the Commission Board needs to investigate how to best provide the services. Chairman Bridges said that he is sure that there are people in Stephens County who face the same situation. He said that he would like to explore options with Stephens County to provide adequate services. Mr. Griffith said that the increase in the millage rate is small compared to the increase in the insurance because of the ISO rating. Chairman Bridges said that the County has worked diligently on getting the water lines run to most of the county which has helped the citizens tremendously.

Chairman Bridges welcomed a concerned citizen to speak. This citizen thanked the Commission Board for going with the higher millage rate. He then said that he thought that the County needed to hire someone to go out and read water meters. Chairman Bridges said that was a machine error for the water meter not to read correctly. Once the error was caught it was corrected. The citizen said that he did not like the increase but he understood the need for it. He went on to say that the *Franklin County Citizen Leader* had published all of the information needed to understand the need for the millage increase. Chairman Bridges said that he appreciated the work by Shane Scoggins on getting the word out to the public.

Chairman Bridges said that he thought communication is the key to helping our citizens understand. He said that he appreciated the articles that County Manager Beth Thomas has worked on for publication in the *Franklin County Citizen Leader*. He also thanked Shane Scoggins for the articles that he has published. Chairman Bridges said that *WLHR* has also been instrumental in getting the information out to the public.

Commissioner Jacques said that there has been a tremendous amount of dialogue ongoing with county citizens. Each commissioner has met outside of meetings and talked with concerned citizens. The concerned citizen stated that he thought that people needed to attend the meetings and talk to the Commission Board. Chairman Bridges said that it is frustrating that more citizens are not willing to come and gain information about the County. Mr. Griffith asked Chairman Bridges if this would be enough of an increase or would there be more increases in later years. Chairman Bridges said that the digest is down but the County does not know the future. Commissioner Jacques said that there is not a plan or a direct intent to raise taxes again next year. He said that historically the Commission Board has worked to keep taxes lower. There has only been one tax increase in the past eleven years.

Commissioner Jacques said that because of the drop in the tax digest that one mill now generates \$545,000 in revenues instead of the previous \$670,000. He said that the revenues have steadily declined over the years. State mandates which are forced on the County also make for financial hardships. Commissioner Jacques said that with the requirements that have been set forth by the Sheriff's department over one mill of the increase is to go toward funding this. Mr. Griffith asked if the loss of revenue is due to the loss of residents or to the loss of businesses. Commissioner Jacques said that it is not the loss of residents. The population of Franklin County has remained steady. There are two factors that have caused the County revenues to decrease, property values deprecating and lower real estate sales. Conservation use properties have also decreased tax collections.

Mr. Griffith asked what the justification was for the Sheriff's department increase. Commissioner Jacques told Mr. Griffith that the Sheriff has presented a budget. It would be best for the Sheriff to explain the budget increases. Commissioner Jacques said that the Sheriff's budget does include additional personnel and higher inmate housing costs. He stated again that the Sheriff is the one who would need to explain the budget needs. Mr. Griffith then asked if the inmates contribute or off-set any of their expenses. Commissioner Jacques said yes. County Manager Beth Thomas said that the inmates handle the cleaning of most of the county buildings. The concerned citizen asked about the cost of inmate housing. Commissioner Jacques said that at this time Franklin County is paying for housing out instead of getting funds in for housing. Because of the capacity level and separation of inmates Franklin County is having to house out. The next question was if the jail would be expanded. Commissioner Jacques said that the jail expansion will be put on the next SPLOST for consideration. This would be an extension of the one cent sales tax. Chairman Bridges said the jail expansion and the hospital would be two of the issues for consideration for the next SPLOST.

Chairman Bridges said that he is available along with the Commission Board and County Manager Beth Thomas to answer questions and take comments from the citizens of the County. He asked if there were any other questions or concerns. There were no further comments from the public. The meeting adjourned at 10:27 a.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