



FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
July 27, 2017
6:00 P.M.

BOC: District 4 Commissioner Eddie Wester

Media: Shane Scoggins, Franklin County Citizen

Staff: County Manager Beth Thomas
County Clerk Elaine Evans

Commissioner Wester called the public hearing to order at 6:00 p.m. He explained that commissioners are not required to attend public hearings. Chairman Bridges attended Tuesday night's meeting but had to be at a GMRC tonight. Commissioner Jacques is on vacation. Commissioner Franklin and Dr. Macomson had prior engagements as well. All of the commissioners take the business of the County very seriously. Commissioner Wester said the minutes will be distributed to the other commissioners before Monday night's meeting.

***Don Pratt** questioned why the decision was made to leave the millage rate the same since the assessments went up and the revenue up. Commissioner Wester said that this was the purpose of the discussion. Things have been looked at to see what could be cut from the budget to be able to roll the millage rate back. There have also been things that have come up that had to be placed into the budget. Commissioner Wester said that one of the additions is the State mandated insurance coverage for firefighters. He said that as a firefighter he was all for this until it passed and he found out the State is not paying for it and the cost for the insurance is being passed on to the counties and cities. Mrs. Thomas said the cost is about \$400 per firefighter per year. Commissioner Wester said that another thing that was added to the budget this year is a supervisor unit for the EMS. This was added so that there will be EMS coverage in the County during the out of county transfers to take care of the citizens. Mrs. Thomas said that this added \$185,000 to the budget. Commissioner Wester said this was less expensive than adding another EMS station. Mrs. Thomas said the cost to add another station would have been \$500,000 to \$800,000. Commissioner Wester said that this was the most fiscally responsible way for the County to go for now. Mr. Pratt questioned if the final millage rate has been set. Commissioner Wester said the vote be Monday night at the work session. Mr. Pratt asked could the millage rate go up. Commissioner Wester said absolutely not. He said that no one on the Commission Board has asked for a tax increase. This had to be advertised as a tax increase due to the increased assessments.*



Mrs. Thomas said the value went up therefore revenue went up but it is due to the value. Mr. Pratt said if the values had not gone up then the millage rate would have had to gone up. Mrs. Thomas said yes or keep cutting the budget. The Road department has 11 employees. In Stephens County there are 24 employees and Hart County has 22 employees. Franklin County has 25% more roadway and half the number of employees to maintain it. Cuts have been made for years and years. Now that the values are going up this has to be utilized. Staff has not been added other than the EMS supervisor unit. Mrs. Thomas said the County does as much as possible with as little as possible. Mr. Pratt asked if the County controlled the school taxes. Commissioner Wester said no that was controlled by the school system. Mr. Pratt said that they live on the lake and they pay the highest taxes in the County yet they are not getting that percentage of services. He said their road is horrendous. Commissioner Wester asked if it was a dirt road. Mr. Pratt said no, it was paved about 20 years ago. Commissioner Wester asked the name of the road. Mr. Pratt said the road is Knottywood Drive. He said there are other problems in the neighborhood with abandoned and overgrown mobile homes and they have made numerous complaints about this but nothing happens. The Knottywood community does not feel that they get a lot of services for what they pay in taxes.

Terri Pratt said she is the one who started contacting the County Marshal Chris Ayers about the abandoned property and her initial contact was for abandoned stray pets. Mrs. Pratt said that some of the abandoned homes now have multiple stray animals living and breeding in them. She said the neighbors are feeding the animals. The abandoned homes are falling apart and she is concerned about children in the neighborhood playing in and around these homes. Mrs. Pratt said she has been online and has seen where people in her neighborhood are not paying their taxes. She is concerned that side of the road trash pickup is not provided. The County Marshal is only one person and Mrs. Pratt suggested that someone be added to help Mr. Ayers be able to catch the people who trash the sides of the road and have abandoned their properties. She said if she lives there and pays her taxes then everyone else should too. Commissioner Wester said he agrees. Mrs. Thomas told Mrs. Pratt the tax collection rate for Franklin County is one of the best at 98%. She said in the Gumlog area a lot of the properties are unsaleable but the Tax Commissioner does his best to collect. The County does not like these situations either.

The problem of abandoned homes has been an ongoing problem for 13 years. Commissioner Wester said that this will be discussed with the other commissioners. Mrs. Thomas said a lot of counties and cities are facing this issue of how to fund a blight program. She said that the County cannot come onto properties without a policy. Mrs. Pratt said the mobile homes do not bother her but the abandoned homes are dangerous to children and a good place for stray animals to breed. Mrs. Thomas said Mr. Ayers has to work through the confines of the law by taking the cases to Magistrate Court. Commissioner Wester said this can be placed on the agenda for Monday to get the other commissioners ideas.



William Pitts said the Lavonia Water department has come out and dug up the road (Knottywood Drive) for leaks and then come back to patch and it doesn't work. There are sunken in places all up and down the road. He said his taxes go up each year. Commissioner Wester said during the economic downturn the County used the reserve funds instead of raising the millage rate. This was done to cover expenses. Because of having to use these reserves the County no longer has any reserves. Mr. Pitts said he was told that the real estate market has gone up and that is why the assessments have gone up. He said he never got a break when the market was down. Mr. Pitts also said senior citizens need a break from school taxes. Commissioner Wester referred Mr. Pitts to the school board for this issue.

Mr. Pratt questioned how things are zoned in the County because of the information listed on QPublic. Mrs. Thomas told Mr. Pratt that the zoning map for the County and QPublic do not align. Commissioner Wester explained to Mr. Pratt the Planning Commission does a great job in protecting the County by overseeing applications. The zoning in the County also protects the cities by not allowing harmful businesses to locate in their back door.

Milton Bellamy stated that he is a fixed income retiree person who moved back to Franklin County 12 years ago. He said everything is taken away a nickel and a dime at a time. From what was said in a previous meeting it was perceived that no one is in charge of the Tax Assessors Board. Mr. Bellamy said this is wrong, that everyone needs to be accountable. He said that the work of the Tax Assessors is the reason for the tax increase. Mrs. Thomas said local government is an extension of the State. Cities because of their charter often have more power than the counties. Tax assessment is a branch of the State government. The Board of Commissioners appoint members to the Board of Assessors. Mrs. Thomas said once the Commissioners appoint the members they are an independent board to operate under the State guidelines. The three member board is responsible for the hiring and firing of the Tax Assessors employed and they are audited on their work by the State.

Mr. Bellamy said that he was told by a County employee that the reassessment was presented to the Board of Commissioners in 2016. The Board of Commissioners said no because the taxes had just risen in 2015. Mrs. Thomas said the Board of Commissioners cannot judge or decide on an assessment. She said the Board of Assessors can but not the Board of Commissioners. Mr. Bellamy said he may have misunderstood this.

Documentation was presented to Mr. Bellamy by the Tax Assessors office to determine the value of his property. He said this was given to him after he asked for it. The process was explained that there is a computer program that the Tax Assessors use that said that there had to be an across the board increase. Mr. Bellamy said the assessments were not the same percentage for everyone. He learned this by talking with neighbors. Mr. Bellamy said he did not know how to appeal an assessment that was determined by a computer program. This is not the way to assess property by a computer program that can be manipulated. Mr. Bellamy stated he has paid more in



taxes in 12 years in Franklin County than he did in 33 years in Cobb County.

***Mr. Pratt** questioned why the State mandates what the counties do. Mrs. Thomas said the assessment value is based on sales data comparisons. She said that the State used to get revenues from this but now they get revenues other ways. Commissioner Wester said the State mandates are shocking at how much money the counties and cities have to come up with to cover them. He said it is hard for the counties to have to come up with money to take care of the citizens of the County. This is dealt with on a daily basis by the County. Commissioner Wester said the reduction in taxes from several different things hurt the County. He said rural counties have had a hard time with the State mandates. Mrs. Pratt asked if town hall meetings would be possible for education. Commissioner Wester said Representative Alan Powell and Senator John Wilkinson both hold meetings on a regular basis. He also said that Shane Scoggins is planning to educational articles on government in the Franklin County Citizen Leader.*

***Ellen Register** said the Road department needs a pat on the back from the people on her road and they are very appreciative. Mrs. Thomas asked what road. Mrs. Register said Pearwood Road, a dirt road but it is wonderful now. Commissioner Wester said John Phillips and Ralph Herren do a good job of working together for road maintenance. He said Mr. Phillips would also look at Knottywood Drive.*

Commissioner Wester reminded everyone of the next public hearing at 5:30 p.m. on Monday night. The meeting adjourned at 7:07 p.m.



Signed on the _____ day of _____, 2017

Chairman J. Thomas Bridges

Robert L. Franklin, District 1 Commissioner

Dr. Jason Macomson, District 2 Commissioner

Jeff Jacques, District 3 Commissioner

Eddie Wester, District 4 Commissioner

Elaine H. Evans, County Clerk