



**FRANKLIN COUNTY**  
**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES**  
**July 31, 2017**  
**5:30 P.M.**

**BOC:** Commission Chairman Thomas Bridges  
District 2 Commissioner Dr. Jason Macomson  
District 3 Commissioner Jeff Jacques  
District 4 Commissioner Eddie Wester

**Media:** Shane Scoggins, Franklin County Citizen

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

Chairman Bridges called the public hearing to order and welcomed everyone. He said for the next 30 minutes the millage rate will be discussed.

**John Hylton** came forward and thanked the Commissioners for the thankless job that they do. He expressed to the Commissioners that this is not directed to them personally but this is how he feels. A comment was made that the County is just like a business and there is a big difference between government and businesses. Mr. Hylton said businesses cannot force their customers to pay them extra money if there is a shortfall, government can. Businesses have one or two options when things get tight. Cuts are made or ways have to be found to increase revenue. The business cannot force their customers by taking property but the government can. If a citizen does not want to pay extra for services the government in general can force them to pay but a business cannot.

The question Mr. Hylton posed to the Commission Board is what is being done to make sure you are doing everything in your power to generate additional revenue without increasing taxes. There are ways to do this by bringing businesses into the County. Mr. Hylton also questioned if every penny in the County is spent wisely. He said if the Commissioners cannot answer these questions they need to search their hearts. The Commissioners are elected to make the decision that is right for the County although it may not be an easy one. Mr. Hylton said if taxes are continually raised at some point people may not want to move into Franklin County. He said that taxes were not directly raised this time but the Commission Board has the opportunity to roll back the millage so the revenue is the same as last year's. Two years ago at the tax increase hearings the statement was made that this would be enough so that the County would not have to come back to the citizens. He said the burden is back on the citizens of Franklin County. If the taxes continue to increase there will be people who will have to sell their homes and move out of Franklin County and this is not what needs to happen. He asked that the Commissioners look under every stone to try to get additional revenue into the County and challenged them to do so. He said if they were



*not willing to do this that someone else needs to come into office that will. He thanked the Commissioners for being allowed to speak and express his views.*

**Joel Bufford** questioned if there is anyone trying to bring retail into the County. He said the IBA is to bring industry into the County but is anyone trying to do anything about retail. Commissioner Jacques said his first thought is the Chamber of Commerce should do that. Dr. Macomson said that the cities work to bring retail in also. Mr. Bufford asked what has really come into Franklin County. He said the best way to turn the County around is sales tax, so what has really come into the County. Commissioner Jacques said Cracker Barrel and it will be one of the premier sales tax generators in the County. Commissioner Wester said at the June IBA meeting it was mentioned that an industry is looking to locate in Franklin County. This business is projected to employ eight to 10 people to begin with. Mr. Bufford said that he is not criticizing he is just looking at the business aspect.

Why is the IBA not trying to get business to come in was asked by Mr. Bufford? He suggested that a Lowe's locate in Franklin County. Commissioner Jacques said this is a decision that would be made by the business and they would probably locate in one of the cities. He said that the sewer expansion is moving along and this will be at the development corridor of Hwy 59 to Hwy 51 to Hwy 320 to Hwy 106. This will provide the infrastructure that is needed for proposed businesses to come into the County. Commissioner Jacques said that the County is working toward economic growth with the limited revenue available but he is a believer in sales tax also. Mr. Bufford questioned again why there isn't an organization to bring in retail business. Commissioner Jacques said because of infrastructure and population densities those types of businesses are more likely to locate within the cities. He said the County does work hand in hand with the Chamber of Commerce and others to recruit business.

**Commissioner Wester** asked Mr. Bufford if he remembered what he asked at the IBA meeting about why they were not looking at retail. Mr. Bufford said yes. Commissioner Wester said the answer from the IBA is that they don't do that. Commissioner Jacques said this is the way that they are lawfully established by their charter. Mr. Bufford said he understood that but why is there not something set up to bring retail into the County. Commissioner Jacques said the reason is it would take additional money to set up a board and personnel to be added. He said the County has just gone through a very hard time and is striving to provide the essential services. This has not been on the radar because the money to look at this is not available. Commissioner Wester said that he agrees that this is needed. Dr. Macomson said the City of Lavonia makes a huge effort to recruit business. He said companies will not locate if they do not think the demographics will support them. The good thing about Cracker Barrel coming in is that once it is profitable other things will locate although it may take years. Commissioner Jacques said that the infrastructure has to be in place to support growth. The cities have this and the County will have it with the planned sewer expansion.

**Dr. Macomson** said sometimes when businesses start to locate that they find opposition from local merchants. The businesses have to work through this. The IBA



and the cities work together to bring industry in. Mr. Bufford said that he knows things take time but if too much time is allowed then people will move somewhere else where it is cheaper to live. He said he has lived in Franklin County almost 37 years and not too much has changed. It is frustrating to not see retail being brought in.

**Commissioner Jacques** said even with the property tax levy the increased assessments are lower than they were eight years ago with significant increases in law enforcement services and increases in EMS. Mr. Hylton questioned Commissioner Jacques if his property taxes were lower now than then. Commissioner Jacques said he was talking about the digest as a whole not property taxes. Mr. Hylton said as individuals' their property taxes are not lower. Commissioner Jacques said one mill in the digest today is equal to less than one mill eight years ago. One of the biggest obstacles to the County budget is State mandates. The addition of excise tax for each gallon of fuel added about 27 cents a gallon to the budget. Three cents of sales tax was removed from energy on the larger industries. LOST, SPLOST and ESPLOST were removed. Commissioner Jacques said he asked a State official why they removed the County portion and did not remove the State portion. The TSPLOST adds a penalty to the County because the citizens voted against it. This penalty adds 30% to the budget on the GDOT funds which usually is around \$100,000 to \$150,000 each year. The TAVT has been reduced from 45% to 40%. With the elimination of the ad valorem tax on vehicles the reduction to the County is greater. Insurance for volunteer firefighters was added this year. The trucking taxes also were redirected and the County has suffered. The unfunded mandates from the State cause financial hardships on the County budget.

**Chairman Bridges** told Mr. Hylton that he asked himself constantly if he is doing everything possible to squeeze from the budget. He encourages the citizens to bring to the attention of the Commission Board if there is something that needs to be corrected. The Commission Board does not have control over the spending of the constitutional officers. The County also provides health services, law enforcement and maintains roads. Chairman Bridges told Mr. Hylton if everyone had stayed in budget this past year there would have been money to put in reserves. Mrs. Thomas said two years ago Mr. Hylton said the County needs to be focusing on reserves. She said \$800,000 would have gone into reserves this past year if everyone had stayed in budget instead about \$250,000 will go in reserves. Chairman Bridges said that the County is similar to his bank going up on interest. Mr. Hylton disagreed and said no a choice can be made who to bank with but the citizens don't have that choice about paying property tax.

**Mr. Hylton** said that the citizens in the County need to be made aware of departments not staying in budget. Commissioner Jacques said that Mr. Scoggins (Franklin County Citizen Leader) and others have done a great job in doing such. Mr. Hylton said this information needs to be brought to the forefront every time those budgets are talked about. People in the County need to understand that this is part of why taxes go up. Chairman Bridges said he thinks that the citizens as a whole understand this. Mr. Hylton said if they did there would have been more things said. Commissioner Jacques said part of the problem is that are not that many people who



come to the meetings. Some people don't read the newspaper so they are not aware of what is going on in the County. He also told Mr. Hylton that the majority of the increased revenue is going to pay for the employee raises of which are well-deserved, increased expenses especially in law enforcement and the unfunded State mandates. If the State mandates were taken away the County would not have short falls.

**Milton Bellamy** said if you are not part of the solution then you are part of the problem. He expressed concerns over four major problems in the County and said there is no easy fix. The first problem is gross underassessment of residential property as used for tax purposes. Mr. Bellamy said this creates an unfair and unequitable taxation. He said if this problem was ever solved it would take years of work and would be very painful but it will probably never be fixed because of citizen outcry. Chairman Bridges asked Mr. Bellamy if he had gone to the Assessors Board with this problem. Mr. Bellamy said that he has zero faith in the ability of being able to get a fair shake from the Board of Tax Assessors or anyone that has tax assessors in their name. He has been through this process before and there is nothing fair with it.

The second problem Mr. Bellamy discussed was bloated County employment. He said he thinks there are too many employees because the County cannot afford the ones they have. The third problem Mr. Bellamy spoke about is that one of the reasons that there is not enough money to support the employees and other things is because of tax breaks given. He said that the ad valorem tax made it harder on the County. The GATE card for farmers has cost the County a lot of money. The bill that allowed farmers to put their land in conservation has also cost the County a lot of money. Mr. Bellamy said taxpayers are subsidizing tax breaks for specific groups. Commissioner Jacques told Mr. Bellamy he was correct. As property values start increasing many people put their land in conservation further reducing the digest. Mrs. Thomas said 72% of the land mass in Franklin County is in conservation. Mr. Bellamy said this has really hurt the County. He said the people who get the tax breaks are the ones most able to pay taxes.

Mr. Bellamy said that part time commissioners are not the right governing authority for Franklin County. He said three full time commissioners would be the right amount to govern the County. Commissioner Jacques said historically Franklin County operated in that manner but through a referendum with overwhelming majority the citizens voted to transition from a full time commission chair to a county manager form of government. The methodology was for the politics to be taken out as much as possible and for the county manager to dilute some of the aspects. Mr. Bellamy said too often Commissioners are asked to solve problems with two hands tied behind their backs and one foot chained to a fence post. The Commissioners have to answer to the electorate for things that they have no control over. The citizens are the ones who lose when the department heads do not stay in budget. He hopes that something can be done for the betterment of the County.

Mr. Bellamy said that he understood that at the end of the year the County is projected to have \$3,600 in the bank. He said this is not a lot of money. He questioned what would be done if something happens. Mrs. Thomas said that something would



have to be cut. Mr. Bellamy spoke about the exits from I-85. He said that the only exit in Franklin County that has built up is the Hwy 17 exit. Opportunities have been squandered through the years for building these exits up. Commissioners and citizens need to be calling the senator and representative for Franklin County daily for help.

**Commissioner Wester** said Franklin County only has one representative and one senator in Atlanta. He said the rural representatives' and rural senators' should band together to take on Atlanta. There are more rural areas in Georgia than metropolitan areas. Mr. Bellamy said that they band together for taxes and other things and the representatives and senators need to be undated with requests for help for Franklin County. Communication is the key. Mr. Bellamy said that he would love for the Commissioners to come up with a great plan for the County.

Chairman Bridges closed the public hearing at 6:35 p.m. There was a 10 minute recess between the public hearing and the start of the work session.

Signed on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2017

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Chairman J. Thomas Bridges

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Robert L. Franklin, District 1 Commissioner

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Dr. Jason Macomson, 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