

Houston County Commissioners Meeting
June 12, 2018
Warner Robins, Georgia

The Houston County Board of Commissioners met in special called session at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday June 12, 2018 at the Houston County Annex in Warner Robins, Georgia with Chairman Stalnaker presiding and Commissioners Walker, Thomson, Robinson and McMichael present. Also present were County Attorney Tom Hall, Director of Administration Barry Holland, Director of Operations Robbie Dunbar, Director of Purchasing Mark Baker, Chief Building Inspector Tim Andrews, Houston County Sheriff Office Sgt. Guy Fussell, Chairman of the Board of Tax Assessors Bill Fowler, Tax Assessors Board Member David Grossnickle, Walton and Becky Wood and Ansel Peck.

County Attorney Tom Hall gave the invocation.

Director of Administration Barry Holland led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Stalnaker announced that there would be a short Executive Session for Attorney / Client matters following the conclusion of the budget hearing.

Chairman Stalnaker then presented the proposed FY19 budget and remarked that although it was a tough budget to prepare that we are very fortunate to be in the sound fiscal position that we are in and thanked the constitutional officers, elected officials, department heads and employees for the current FY18 budget management. Although each department turned in very realistic budgets and it is not uncommon to be out \$2 to \$3 million, initial budget requests indicated that the budget was approximately \$3.8 million out of balance. He related that although there is very little in new revenue, the County is in sound financial shape with no general obligation debt and has maintained its fund balance. The County will not use any prior year General Fund Balance to balance the FY19 budget. The Chairman indicated that the General Fund proposed budget totals \$57,341,147, as compared to the amended FY18 budget of \$55,745,843, and projects no millage rate increase (remaining at 9.935 mills) for residents. The Fire millage is also projected to remain at the current level of 1.117 mills. The millage rate has remained at 9.95 mills or less for nine years and the Fire Tax has remained at 1.18 mills or less for twelve years. Chairman Stalnaker pointed out that that a large portion, just over \$1 million, of this increase in the proposed FY19 budget is due to the addition of the School Resource Officer (SRO) budget that has been established under the Sheriff's Department. This has been done at the request of the Board of Education and will be revenue neutral since the Board of Education will reimburse all expenses incurred. This is a proposed balanced budget with no millage rate increase and none of Commissioners have any appetite for raising taxes. The proposed budget includes a contingency of approximately \$1.6 million before the COLA. The balance is needed for unanticipated emergencies; some fall back should the tax digest return less than anticipated.

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The budget does include a two percent cost-of-living adjustment for employees; however, merit and longevity pay increases will remain suspended for all County employees. Cost savings realized through excellent budget management by department heads, elected officials, constitutional officers and employees was significant in being able to provide the 2% COLA. Although there are many new personnel needs with departments funded by the General Fund any new positions or reclassifications will have to be deferred for future years' consideration. Chairman Stalnaker did reiterate that the County plans to meet with department heads and elected officials in the next six months to generate a personnel needs plan so that when the County is able to fund new positions or reclassifications we will have a prioritized list to work from.

Chairman Stalnaker then gave a detailed presentation highlighting the General Fund Budget, as well as the various enterprise and special revenue funds. The total proposed budget of \$116,622,681 is broken down as \$57,341,147 General Fund; \$4,208,277 E911 Fund; \$3,343,821 Fire District Fund; \$23,188,746 SPLOST Fund; \$7,081,500 Water Fund; \$7,789,190 Solid Waste Fund; \$13,140,000 Internal Service Fund; and \$530,000 Special Revenue Funds.

Chairman Stalnaker once again thanked all employees, department heads, elected officials and constitutional officers for doing their part.

Chairman Stalnaker opened the floor for comments from the Commissioners.

Mr. Walker thanked the Chairman for his leadership and also the employees, department heads and elected officials.

There being no further comments the meeting continued.

Chairman Stalnaker then opened a Public Hearing on the proposed FY19 budget.

Walton Wood, 426 Sandefur Road, Kathleen thanked the Board for their attention to detail concerning the proposed budget and remarked that although the 2012 SPLOST collections were running some \$20 million behind projections the projects were still being completed. He thanked the Chairman and each Commissioner for their dedication and also commended the outstanding public safety enjoyed here in Houston County.

Ansel Peck, 109 Latham Drive, Warner Robins complimented the Board, elected officials and County staff for their dedication and diligence concerning the proposed budget.

Erikka Williams, 503 Box Elder Court, Bonaire, Houston County Chief Assistant District Attorney, remarked that ten years is too long for employees not to receive a merit increase and that the County had no plan to reinstate them. She complained of the salary compression in that a new employee comes in making the same or more than an employee with years of service with the County. She felt that the County is losing valuable employees and that an actual plan to reimplement the merit system is crucial. She contended that although employees had received COLAs over the past ten years that she did not consider those pay raises only adjustments.

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Chairman Stalnaker indicated that in the past seven years employees had received pay increases in the form of COLAs totaling 18.5%. He further explained that the County pays \$13,000 per employee for health insurance; has spent \$11 million plus in 2017 on health insurance with the employee only paying \$10 per employee for POS coverage and \$15 per employee for PPO; and that the County has the best retirement plan where the employee contributes only 4% of their salary while the County contributes 24%. He reiterated that the County has gone to great lengths to maintain these benefits for the employees and that Ms. Williams should take that into account when speaking of salaries and lack of pay increases.

Venita McCoy, 118 Millcreek Way, Warner Robins, Assistant District Attorney – Juvenile Division, remarked that she is a ten-year employee and has received no merit pay increase during that time. She was concerned that there is no opportunity to advance and no plan from the Commissioners to reinstate the merit system.

Gina Bowling, Houston County Juvenile Court Clerk, would like to see the merit system reinstated so that the County could retain its very valuable employees and improve morale. She also compared her salary to the Clerk of the State Court and is unhappy that she makes \$20,000 less for what she felt was a comparable position.

Robbie Dunbar, Director of Operations, stated that although he would love to see merits reinstated for all employees he understood the revenues were not there to support them and he thanked the Board for holding the line on employee benefits among them the fully-funded pension plan and the very best health insurance plan.

With no further public comments, Chairman Stalnaker closed the public hearing on the FY19 budget and stated that no action would be taken tonight and that the Board would adopt the FY19 budget at next Tuesday's regularly scheduled meeting at 6:00 p.m. at the Warner Robins Annex.

Chairman Stalnaker recognized the Chairman of the Board of Tax Assessors Bill Fowler.

Mr. Fowler explained that although the County has a tax digest of approximately \$4 billion the growth experienced over the previous year only amounted to roughly 2% or approximately \$88 million. That number represents the 100% value not the taxable 40% value and that small amount of growth on a \$4 billion digest generates very little new revenue. It takes a very large amount of growth to generate tangible increases in revenue. Mr. Fowler also commented that the Board may consider a true merit system in which not everyone would automatically receive the increase but that it would be based upon individual performance alone.

Mr. McMichael remarked that this was a good proposed budget and that he was sorry that the Board could not do everything that was asked of them.

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Mr. Walker commented that the Board was significantly aware of the employees needs and thanked those that came and spoke during the hearing.

Ms. Robinson thanked everyone for coming and remarked that she appreciated each and every County employee for their efforts. She further remarked that the County needed real growth in the digest to generate the revenue needed to take care of the personnel needs but clarified that SPLOST funds could not be used for personnel services only on capital projects such as the beautification projects that the County is undertaking in our community.

Mr. Thomson remarked that the tax cap the County operates under since 1982 could only be removed by referendum. The voters would have to vote in the affirmative to remove it and that is not likely to happen.

William Davis, Houston County MIS IT technician, asked if there was any advantage to giving a 2% merit increase versus the proposed 2% COLA.

Chairman Stalnaker explained that the merit system in based on a 4% model and the general consensus was that there would be no benefit in calling the 2% COLA a merit increase.

Chairman Stalnaker asked the Board for a motion to enter into Executive Session.

Motion by Mr. McMichael, second by Mr. Walker and carried unanimously to enter into Executive Session for Attorney / Client matters per O.C.G.A. § 50-14-2(1).

As there was no action taken, upon returning the regular meeting continued.

Motion to Adjourn by Mr. Walker, second by Mr. Thomson and carried unanimously by all. Meeting adjourned.

Barry Holland
Director of Administration

Chairman

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner

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EXECUTIVE SESSION AFFIDAVIT
STATE OF GEORGIA
COUNTY OF HOUSTON

AFFIDAVIT OF PRESIDING OFFICER

Tommy Stalnaker, Chairman of the Houston County Board of Commissioners, being duly sworn, states under oath that the following is true and accurate to the best of his knowledge and belief:

1.
The Houston County Board of Commissioners met in a duly advertised meeting on June 12, 2018.
2.
During such meeting, the Board voted to go into executive session.
3.
The executive session was called to order at 6:26 p.m.
4.
The subject matter of the closed portion of the meeting was devoted to the following matter(s) within the exceptions provided in the open meeting law:

X Consultation with the county attorney or other legal counsel to discuss pending or potential litigation, settlement, claims, administrative proceedings, or other judicial actions brought or to be brought by or against the county or any officers or employee or in which the county or any officer or employee may be directly involved as provided in O.C.G.A. § 50-14-2(1);

Discussion of tax matters made confidential by state law as provided by O.C.G.A.

§ 50-14-2(2) and (insert the citation to the legal authority making the tax matter confidential) _____;

Discussion or voting on:

Authorizing a settlement as provided in O.C.G.A. § 50-14-3(b)(1)(A);

Authorizing negotiations to purchase, dispose of, or lease property as

provided in O.C.G.A. § 50-14-3(b)(1)(B);

Authorizing an appraisal as provided in O.C.G.A. § 50-14-3(b)(1)(C);

Entering a contract for the purchase, disposal of, or lease of property as provided in O.C.G.A. § 50-14-3(b)(1)(D);

Entering into an option to purchase, dispose of, or lease property as provided in O.C.G.A. § 50-14-3(b)(1)(E);

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Discussion or deliberation on the appointment, employment, compensation, hiring, disciplinary action or dismissal, or periodic evaluation or rating of a county officer or employee as provided in O.C.G.A. § 50-14-3(b)(2);
Interviewing candidates for executive positions as provided in O.C.G.A. § 50-14-3(b)(2);
Other (describe the exemption to the open meetings law):

as provided in (insert the citation to the legal authority exempting the topic)

5.

During the course of the closed session devoted to exempt topics, an incidental remark regarding a non-exempt topic or an attempt to discuss a non-exempt topic was made.

The attempt was immediately ruled out of order and attempts to discuss same ceased immediately.

The attempt was immediately ruled out of order. However, the comments did not cease, so the closed/executive session was immediately adjourned without discussion or action being taken regarding any non-exempt topic.

6.

Minutes were taken of this meeting and will be filed and held for in camera inspection only.

This _____ day of June, 2018.

Tommy Stalnaker, Chairman
Houston County Board of Commissioners

Sworn to and subscribed
before me this _____ day of
June, 2018.

Notary Public
My commission expires:
