

Houston County Commissioners Meeting
June 8, 2020
Warner Robins, Georgia

The Houston County Board of Commissioners met in Special Called Meeting at 4:00 p.m. on Monday, June 8, 2020, at the Houston County Annex in Warner Robins, Georgia, with Chairman Stalnaker presiding and Commissioners Walker, Thomson, McMichael and Robinson present. Also present were County Attorney Tom Hall, Director of Administration Barry Holland, Director of Operations Robbie Dunbar, Director of Personnel Ken Carter, Fire/HEMA Chief Chris Stoner, Dan Perdue, Mark Byrd, and Walton and Becky Wood.

County Attorney Tom Hall gave the Invocation.

Director of Administration Barry Holland led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Stalnaker reminded everyone that the next regularly scheduled Board meeting would be at 3:00 p.m. on June 16th in the Jury Assembly Room at the County Courthouse in Perry during which the Board will adopt the FY21 budget.

Chairman Stalnaker closed the regular portion of the meeting and opened a Public Hearing.

Chairman Stalnaker then presented the proposed FY21 budget and remarked that although it was a tough budget to prepare, we are very fortunate to be in the sound fiscal position that we are in. Ours is not a unique situation in that all local governments are faced with the same challenges this coming year on revenues. He thanked the constitutional officers, elected officials, department heads and employees for the current FY20 budget management. As we finish out FY20 we expect to be within our total budget expenditures and meet our total revenues having another sound fiscal year. The final numbers will not be in until September or October. The County is in sound financial shape with no general obligation debt and has maintained its fund balance. The fund balance, or reserves, will not be needed to balance the proposed FY21 budget. Although the proposed FY21 budget does not include salary adjustments there are no furloughs recommended as of now. We will continue to look for sustainable opportunities for additional employees and compression reduction in salaries. Even though 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 \$4.6 million out of balance. The Chairman indicated that the General Fund proposed budget totals \$61,143,440, as compared to the amended FY20 budget of \$62,838,423. He projects no millage rate increase from the current 9.935 mills for residents. The Fire millage is also projected to remain at the current level of 1.177 mills. The millage rate has remained at 9.95 mills or less for eleven years and the Fire Tax has remained at 1.18 mills or less for fourteen years. In 1990, the millage rate was at 8.97 mills and thirty years later there has been less than a one mill increase. In 2009, the millage rate temporarily, for one year, went up to 10.45 mills to cover the cost of the Code Red siren system which was approved by the voters. The millage rate will be set late July or early August. The County's ability to raise the millage rate is greatly restricted by the tax cap. This is a proposed balanced budget with no millage rate increase and none of the Commissioners have any appetite for raising taxes. The proposed budget includes a contingency of \$1,000,000 which is needed for unanticipated emergencies; some fall back should the tax digest return less than anticipated.

He then gave a presentation highlighting the General Fund Budget, as well as the various enterprise and special revenue funds. The total proposed budget of \$132,314,022 is broken down as \$61,143,440 General Fund; \$4,483,801 E911 Fund; \$2,938,378 Fire District Fund; \$34,352,203 SPLOST Fund; \$7,542,000 Water Fund; \$9,069,200 Solid Waste Fund; \$12,230,000 Internal Service Fund; and \$555,000 Special Revenue Funds.

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The General Fund budget of \$61,143,440 is comprised of taxes of \$49,053,941; permits and fees of \$5,634,715; inter-governmental revenue (grants) of \$3,235,174; court fines of \$2,226,645; and other revenue such as interest earned of \$992,965. The single largest source of revenue in the General Fund are taxes namely the real property tax. General Fund expenditures break down into the following divisions: Administrative Services which includes the Governing Body, Executive, Board of Elections, Legal Services, Personnel and the Audit totaling \$2,028,128; Developmental Services which includes Middle Georgia Regional Commission, Building Inspections, Planning and Zoning, Development Authority, 21st Century Partnership and the Perry-Houston County Airport totaling \$1,051,174; Financial Services which includes Accounting, Purchasing, MIS, Tax Commissioner, Tax Assessors, Board of Equalization, Risk Management (Health), and the Contingency totaling \$7,441,341; Health & Leisure Services which includes Physical and Environmental Health, Mental Health, Vital Statistics, Mosquito Control, Victim Assistance Programs, Welfare Administration (DFCS), Pauper's Burial, Recreation, Libraries, Agricultural Resources, and Forestry Resources totaling \$2,216,391; Public Safety which includes Sheriff's Department, HEAT-GOHS, School Resource Officers, Juvenile Investigations, Detention Center, Coroner, E-911, Animal Control, Houston Emergency Management Agency (HEMA), Code Red, and EMS Ambulance Service totaling \$28,111,766; Public Works which includes Public Buildings, Public Works Administration (Engineering), Highways and Streets – Local, Highways and Streets – State, Storm Drainage, and Traffic Engineering totaling \$9,729,341; and finally Court Services which includes Judges of Superior Court, Clerk of Superior Court, District Attorney, Judge of State Court, Clerk of State Court, Solicitor of State Court, Superior Court Accountability Court, Magistrate Court, Probate Judge, Juvenile Court, and the Public Defender totaling \$10,565,299.

The E-911 Fund revenues come from fireworks excise tax, non-prepaid charges, prepaid wireless charges, and rents and is subsidized by the County and the three cities of Warner Robins, Perry and Centerville for a total of \$4,483,801. The expenditures, of which personnel services are the largest by far, equal the revenues at \$4,483,801.

The Fire Fund revenues come largely from the fire tax, from which the 1.177 millage produces nearly \$2 million, and the insurance premium tax of \$910,434. The revenues total \$2,938,378 and equal the expenditures of which personnel services are the largest by far.

The Water Fund revenues are comprised of charges for services, other sales, delinquency charges, new service fees, connection and reconnection fees, interest earned and rents. By far, the charge for services which represent the water sales to customers, is the largest revenue source for the Water Fund. The revenues and expenses balance at \$7,542,000.

The Solid Waste Fund revenues are comprised of refuse collection fees, landfill use fees, insurance premium taxes, landfill penalties, the sale of methane gas, property sales and other minor sources for a total of \$9,069,200. The user fees of refuse collection and landfill use fees, or tipping fees, are the largest sources of revenues in the Solid Waste Fund. Expenditures equal the revenue sources of \$9,069,200 and are shown under the Solid Waste Collection department at \$4,545,349 and the Solid Waste Disposal Department at \$4,523,851.

Both the Water Fund and the Solid Waste Fund operate as enterprise funds which mean that they are financed wholly by user charges and other revenues generated. These funds do not utilize any tax dollars to operate.

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The SPLOST Fund totals \$34,352,203 and accounts for certain small equipment, general supplies and materials, other capital equipment (over \$5,000 individually), buildings, vehicles, library books and equipment, roads infrastructure, water infrastructure, professional services, communications, intergovernmental distributions to the cities of Warner Robins, Perry and Centerville, and finally payments to other agencies.

The Internal Service Fund accounts for the County's health and other insurances, worker's compensation, and property and liability insurance and totals \$12,230,000.

The Special Revenue Funds account for the Sheriff's Department Drug Fund, the Jail Inmate Fund, the Law Library Fund, the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant, and the District Attorney's Drug Fund and total \$555,000.

Chairman Stalnaker once again thanked all employees, department heads, elected officials and constitutional officers for doing their part. His hope was that people would appreciate the position that we are in and commented that there are no planned changes to employee benefits at this time. He then opened the floor for comments from the Commissioners.

Mr. Thomson expressed his hope that everyone would appreciate all the hard work that went into this proposed budget and thanked the Chairman, Barry and Sandi for their efforts.

Ms. Robinson thanked everyone for their hard work on the proposed budget.

Mr. Walker commented that there were a lot of fingerprints on this proposed budget and thanked everyone involved. He also thanked the voters for their continued support of the SPLOST programs.

Chairman Stalnaker reminded everyone that Houston County operates under a tax cap and that there really is very little room for the Board to raise the millage rate to generate more tax dollars. Although it is not necessary at this time, he thought it wise that the Board leave themselves a little room in the future in case they did have to raise the millage to the cap.

Mr. McMichael recognized the hard work of the employees, department heads and the County leadership toward achieving this proposed balanced budget.

There being no public comments on the proposed FY21 budget Chairman Stalnaker closed the public hearing and opened the floor for any other public comments.

Walton Wood, 426 Sandefur Road, Kathleen thanked the Chairman for his help in resolving an issue for a military member that had an issue concerning a water refund. He remarked that Houston County was a great place to live and appreciated the compassion and support that the County shows for the military members and all of its citizens. He also recognized Mr. Byrd and Mr. Perdue and thought it great when people were ready to step up when others retired.

Kristin Moriarty, Managing Editor at the Houston Home Journal, thanked Chairman Stalnaker for addressing a complaint about a blighted property.

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Chairman Stalnaker commented that he visited the house in question and through the efforts of Corp. Little of the Sheriff's Department and Mr. Dunbar the property has been cleaned up. He thanked Ms. Moriarty for her efforts and that of the Houston Home Journal covering events and news in our community.

With no further public comments, Chairman Stalnaker reminded everyone that the next Board meeting would be at 3:00 p.m. on June 16th in the Jury Assembly Room of the County Courthouse in Perry during which the Board would formally adopt the proposed FY21 budget by resolution. Also, the Board will hold a special called meeting at 9:00 a.m. on June 26th in the Board Room at the Warner Robins Annex building for the purposes of paying fiscal year-end bills.

Motion to Adjourn by Mr. McMichael, second by Mr. Walker and carried unanimously by all, meeting adjourned.

Barry Holland
Director of Administration

Chairman

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner