

HAYWOOD COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Special Meeting
Public Hearing
May 21, 2015

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Mark S. Swanger convened the Public Hearing at 5:00 p.m. in the Historic Courtroom at the Haywood County Historic Courthouse, Waynesville, North Carolina, with Chairman Mark S. Swanger, Vice-Chairman J.W. "Kirk" Kirkpatrick III, Commissioners L. Kevin Ensley, Michael T. Sorrells and Bill L. Upton present. Staff members present were County Manager Ira Dove, Asst. County Manager/HHSA Director Stoney Blevins, Finance Director Julie Davis.

Chairman Swanger stated that this is a special called meeting of the Haywood County Board of County Commissioners for the public hearing of the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2015-2016.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Swanger led the Pledge of Allegiance.

INVOCATION

Commissioner Sorrells offered the invocation.

A notice of a public hearing to receive public input on the proposed Haywood County Budget for Fiscal Year 2015-2016 was published on May 15, 2015.

Chairman Swanger opened the public hearing for input regarding the Fiscal year 2015-2016 proposed budget and recognized Ira Dove, County Manager. Mr. Dove noted that at the regular meeting on Monday, May 18th, he provided an extended version of the proposed budget. He stated that tonight he will give a shorter version, plus discuss some questions that have come to his attention. He said that the budget can be found on the County website, and also a hard copy is available for review in the County Manager's office. Mr. Dove provided a power point with an overview of the proposed budget. He reviewed the demographics and economic indicators and discussed the goals fixed by the budget.

- Increased funding to the public schools
- Contingency to cover expenses of Charter Schools
- Increased funding to the Community College
- Continue planning and begin construction of a new EMS and Emergency Management Facility
- Increased salaries of Haywood County employees to make them more competitive
- Adequate maintenance on the facilities owned by the County
- Takes into account the review of the Work Force in Public Safety areas, and fixes temporary labor usage in Detention
- Reviews salaries and gave raises to the lowest paid workers first. All full time employees will make at least \$9.69 per hour
- Provides safe, convenient service in Solid Waste and complies with all regulations; specific projects include the Francis Farm remediation and upgrades to convenience centers
- Maintains current levels of service to the public including maintenance of current operations schedule
- Begins planning, needs assessment and subsequent construction of a new animal services facility – he noted that the County is attempting to obtain a USDA loan
- Maintains funding to community clubs
- Maintains the Wellness Center and health benefits for employees
- Increases 401K contribution; adds a 2% COLA
- Continues merit pay 0-2%; maintains holiday and longevity pay
- Maintains adequate contingency

He stated that the tax rate is proposed to increase to 56.61 cents per \$100 valuation and the General Fund expenditures are proposed to increase by \$3,870,995 (5.60%). He said that many issues have been put off from the previous years, and he feels that the budget the County is looking at will focus on fixing those problems.

He discussed Revenues and Expenditures, Sales Tax History, Education, General Government, Central Services, Cultural and Recreation, Health and Human Services, Public Safety, Detention, Sheriff's Office, Economic and Physical Development and Debt Service.

He discussed the Salary Review and made the following recommendations:

- Minimum hourly rate to \$9.69
- 2% COLA
- 2% employer contribution to the 401K (1% increase)
- Do our best to hire, train and retain employees
- Compensate workers fairly based on regional standards and provide them with tools and training needed to do their jobs
- Clear discretion to compete in small departments critical to economy

Mr. Dove explained the year in the Solid Waste department, highlighting the work done at the Francis Farm landfill and the convenience centers. He noted that the Francis Farm landfill accounts for the major part of the increase for Haywood County citizens.

He reviewed the Summary of Recommendations by Fund:

- General Fund - \$72,939,354
- Special Revenue Fund – (E-911) - \$376,063
- Special Revenue Fund – Solid Waste - \$6,266,987
- Special Revenue Fund – Road Districts - \$184,603
- Special Revenue Fund – Fire districts - \$3,893,688
- Special Revenue Fund – Junaluska Sanitary District - \$195,000
- Special Revenue Fund – Law Enforcement Officer Separation - \$58,131
- Southwestern Child Development Center Fund – \$3,000,000 this is all pass through money
- Internal Service Funds - \$6,150,857

The total for the larger ticket items is \$3,320,296.06.

He stated that taxes are based on the services provided. It said that it is not a simple number. Tax valuations have to be looked at, the number of people served, the number of parcels of land and average values of that land. He spoke of the County owned properties that are for sale. He noted that the County owned flood properties by law are not allowed to be developed or sold, however they could be used for gardens and to mow.

He advised the public that comments can be made at the June 1st regular Board meeting, also at the June 15th meeting. He said that any time, comments can be dropped off at the County Manager's office or mailed to 215 N. Main St. Waynesville, call 452-6625, or emailed to comments@haywoodnc.net.

Chairman Swanger noted that several people had signed up to comment. He asked that comments be limited to three minutes to allow everyone a chance to speak.

Chuck Francis addressed the Board. He expressed that he was thankful of the great working relationship that the School Board has with the Board of Commissioners. He thanked them for how well the funding formula has worked for the school system. He noted that the concerns with the budget and the concerns of how the new charter school would affect the budget were addressed, and he thanked the Board.

Penny Wallace addressed the Board. She stated that she is the Treasurer of Haywood County Spay/Neuter. She urged the Board to increase the salaries of the workers in Animal Services. She stated that she thinks the proposed budget of \$180,181 for the six employees seems too low. She asked the Board to continue the plans to build a new shelter and to ensure education of the staff and the funding for it. She noted that with several non profits working at the Shelter, they provide many of the services that need to be done for the animals through grants and their own funding, which is close to \$500,000.

Yvonne Wadham addressed the Board. She expressed concern over the tax increase and how the increase cannot be afforded by many people. She thinks that the trickle down effect will go throughout the County. She said that she believes more can be done with the county owned property rather than purchasing more. She said that she sees people that need help, and asked the Board not to put the burden on the taxpayers. She thanked the County Manager and the Board for all they do.

Jack Wadham addressed the Board. He thanked the commissioners for allowing him to speak. He said that people across the County have worked hard all their lives. He noted that retirement and welfare have not increased, and it is hard for people to make ends meet. He said that as a landlord, it is hard to get people to stay long and pay rent. He asked the Board to set spending aside for now and build the projects later when the economy is better without increased taxes.

Jason Shultz addressed the Board. He stated that as a renter, he cannot come up with any more money than he does now. He said that he used to work across the state foreclosing houses and he sees how tough it is in this county. He said that costs of everything keep going up. He feels raising taxes will make it harder on people like him.

Dr. Anne Garret addressed the Board. She thanked the Board for the revised budget resolution that recently passed. She noted that the County funding accounts for 27% of their Haywood County School's budget. Haywood County ranks 21st in the state in school budgets supported by the county. She said that the resolution passed in support of re-establishing the funding for the lottery for capital outlay is greatly appreciated.

Dr. Barbara Parker addressed the Board. She thanked the Board for what they do for the community and the faculty and staff at the community college. She assured the Board that HCC was very careful in the considerations of their requests to the Board. She stated that some of the requests would enable them to purchase a new van, replace a security vehicle, and do additional paving, curbing and sidewalk projects.

Kenneth Henson addressed the Board. He expressed his concern over Mr. Dove's salary. He questioned Mr. Dove over the proposed increase in his salary being 16%. He asked Mr. Dove if this was true. Mr. Dove stated that he would receive the proposed COLA and the merit raise if the Board chose next May. Mr. Henson said that the janitorial and Sheriff's Office staff need the raises, but the County should cut out excess spending. He feels that the County should have known previously the issues with the Francis Farm landfill. He feels that the Jonathan Creek property should have been researched more before purchasing. He believes that there are other ways to do more for the County without raising taxes.

Juanita Dixon addressed the Board. She thanked the Board for all they have done for the seniors in the County. She said that while sitting on the block grant committee, she has seen the cuts that have been made from the State. She said it is harder and harder to do things for the seniors. She stated that she feels the increase of the minimum pay would help, but it would still leave people close to poverty level. She stated that the Board needs to raise the wages of the County employees and she will gladly pay the increase in her taxes to help with this.

Jimmy Rogers addressed the Board. He said that he is a member of the Haywood County School Board, and thanked the Board for the help with the funding formula and what has been done for the schools. He expressed concern over the Francis Farm landfill, stating that he is worried about the safety and health of the workers at the bus garage. He requested that if something has to be done with the property, that consideration is made of placing the employees where they will be safe. He suggested the Animal Services be located there. He expressed concerns over the administration building of the school board, and the safety of those that work there.

Dale Burris addressed the Board. He stated that although he is the Facilities and Maintenance Director for the County, he is there to speak as a citizen. He thanked the people that made the comments on the hard work done by the employees that make very little. He said that no one wants tax increases, but if it was to help the quality of life for the people that need the increase from minimum wage, he would pay it.

Denny King addressed the Board. He stated that he agrees that some County employees need an increase in pay. He thinks that the budget should be kept as low as possible. He noted that at the last meeting, his wife addressed the Board. He stated that later in the meeting, Mr. Kirkpatrick remarked that some of her comments were inaccurate and misleading. He said that he feels that it appears that this comment was to keep the public from speaking and also divert attention away from the proposed tax increase. He feels that his wife was correct. He spoke of the 2011 revals, and feels there is no reason for his or his neighbors increases. He feels that the way the taxes are adjusted should be reevaluated.

With no further people to address the Board, Chairman Swanger closed the public comment time of the hearing.

Vice-Chairman Kirkpatrick said that he appreciated the comments made tonight. He said that it is good that there is public input on all sides, and that we should be thankful that we are in a place that people can do that. He stated that it has been a difficult budget, and that if it is decided to raise the tax rate, it is also raises their own taxes. He said that he sees personally where prices are up in all areas, and that is difficult. He thanked Mr. Dove for the county comparisons tonight, noting that he did not know that information and apparently Haywood County has done well. He stated that he has no intention of humiliating anyone with his statements, and he does not like the fact that sometimes things can be misleading, recognizing that everyone is welcome to express their feelings. He explained that the 23% decrease in his personal property where he lives came because the tax value of the property was substantially more than the purchase price. He said that when he paid the purchase price, the tax value came down to that price. He said that this is an example of a misleading statement that he pointed to at the last meeting. He expressed his appreciation for everyone in attendance at tonight's public hearing.

Commissioner Ensley thanked everyone for coming out tonight. He commented that in our school system, we get more than what we pay for. He noted that the average test scores in Haywood County are higher than the charter school average in the state. He also commented on the work that the Sheriff has with the faith based programs, and that through studies, it is proven that these programs work. He commended the Sheriff on his vision with this and expressed his appreciation to the churches that have helped. He said that the jail population has gone down and this in turn also saves the county money. He thanked the Solid Waste Committee for their hard work. He said because of Francis Farm, the availability fee has had to go up. He said because of privatizing at the landfill, the fee in 2011 was kept down, and this was all done by being proactive. He supports getting a new animal shelter built. He noted that the County debt is lower than 2008 by several million dollars. He encouraged everyone to look at the positive and being proactive on the ways to support the County.

Commissioner Sorrels thanked everyone for coming out tonight, and assured everyone that the issues facing the Board within the budget is not something that is looked at lightly. He noted that there are issues that have been there for years, and if they are not addressed now, next year could be double or triple. He said that hopefully this can be sustained for years to come.

Chairman Swanger thanked everyone for coming tonight. He commented that since 2008, no employees had received raises and thanked the employees for the loyalty shown to the County. He reminded everyone that when services are needed, those employees are there to provide them to the citizens. He echoed the comments from Commissioner Ensley concerning Animal Services. He noted that without taxes, you don't have civilization, and taxes are a necessary evil. He said that the tax rate is lower now than when most of them took office in 2002. He said that the commissioners are doing the best they can, and some things cost money, many being mandated by law.

Commissioner Upton thanked everyone for getting up and speaking before a group of people tonight, commenting on how hard that is to do sometimes. He said that all ideas will be taken into consideration. He commented that it is a good feeling about the County when other express their opinions.

Mr.Dove clarified that the average ad valorem tax increase would be about \$37.00 per household.

Chairman Swanger responded to a citizen concern that the tax increase would negatively impact farmers, and stated that it will not affect land use.

He thanked everyone for coming to the public hearing and adjourned at 6:21 p.m.

The DVD is attached by reference to the minutes.

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CHAIRMAN

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