

**HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**WORK SESSION MINUTES**  
**5:00 P.M., MONDAY, JULY 22, 2024**  
**ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING**  
**COMMISSION CONFERENCE ROOM (2<sup>ND</sup>/MAIN FLOOR)**  
**130 JACOB'S WAY, CLARKESVILLE, GA 30523**

The Habersham County Board of Commissioners held a work session on Monday, July 22, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. in the Commission Conference Room of the Administrative Building located at 130 Jacob's Way, Clarkesville, GA 30523.

Present was Chairman Ty Akins, Vice Chairman Bruce Harkness, Commissioner Bruce Palmer, Commissioner Dustin Mealor, Commissioner Jimmy Tench, County Manager Alicia Vaughn, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, staff, members of the media and the public.

Chairman Akins called the work session to order at 5:00 p.m.

Commissioner Harkness lead the invocation.

Commissioner Tench lead the pledge of allegiance.

## **TOPICS OF DISCUSSION**

### **a. Discussions Regarding Proposed FY 2025 Budget**

Chief Financial Officer Tim Sims addressed the Commission, stating that the budget that he is presenting to them tonight harkens back to the June 17<sup>th</sup> base budget of \$39,171,485.00 that had no rollback but also no millage rate increase. They used credits from the pension plan as well as making additional cuts to fund the following position requests:

- 3 Full Time Facility Maintenance Technicians
- 1 Full Time Parks and Maintenance Worker
- 1 Full Time IT/AV Technician
- 1 Full Time Network/Service Desk Administrator
- 2 Part Time Animal Care Technicians
- 6 Full Time Firefighters

With the changes that were made, this budget results in no tax increase with a full rollback to a 11.771 millage rate. This means that most individuals should not see a net increase in their tax bills from county taxes, though the school board is expected to vote to keep their millage rate the same which will result in a tax increase on their side. This budget includes a 4% increase for employees, though it has yet to be determined as to what portion would be a merit increase versus a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).

Commissioner Palmer questioned whether instead of just giving the employees a 4% increase, that they could consider doing a 5% increase with 3% being a merit increase and 2% being a COLA that they would not start until January 1, 2025? He stated that this would average out to the same cost as a 4% increase for the fiscal year. Mrs. Vaughn reminded the Commission that when the pay study was done, it gave a low, mid and max pay for each position. She went on to state that any COLA would adjust the low, mid and max pay for all of the positions for both current and future

employees. This helps in keeping the pay scales relevant for a longer period of time. Commissioner Akins asked the thoughts of the other Commissioners for their thoughts on this distribution of the employee increases. Commissioner Tench did not have an opinion he wished to express at the moment, though he said he may have one later. Commissioner Mealor was fine with having the 4% be broken up into both merit and COLA. Commissioner Harkness expressed that, while he respects Commissioner Palmer's years of experience in public service and his opinion about merit increases, that he still feels that the entirety of any increase that is given should be a COLA. He feels that employees that show up to work and do their job should not be dependent on being evaluated for a merit increase for a raise. Commissioner Palmer disagreed, as he feels that merit increases act as incentives for employees to good work to raise their pay. However, he also understands that giving at least a partial COLA increase keeps the pay scale relevant.

Commissioner Harkness inquired about the requested public information officer position having been cut from the budget. Commissioner Akins informed him that the Commission never reached a consensus about this position, and it was removed as a result.

Commissioner Mealor stated that his only concern is regarding the sustainability of this budget, as it is his intention to seek a full rollback of the millage rate next year as well. County Manager Vaughn informed Commissioner Mealor that the budget that is being proposed includes a full rollback of the millage rate, which is only possible this year due to the utilization of accumulated credits in the pension fund. In the past, the Commission has always made the recommended contributions needed to fund the pension plan at 125%, which is more than is required. This means that there were more funds set aside than needed to meet the promised benefits of employees under this pension plan, which built up credits. Using these credits towards the annual contribution amount is a one-time option to free up funds that will not be available going forward.

Commissioner Akins stated that he feels that they have cut the list of requested positions down to only those that are badly needed, however he still realizes that there are departments that may need additional help.

Commissioner Harkness wanted to know how much more this proposed budget for FY 2025 is as opposed to FY 2024, as he had heard that the budget had increased by \$12 million. Mr. Sims informed him that the \$12 million increase was for the entire budget, not the general fund. The proposed FY 2025 general fund has only increased by \$1.9 million from last years. This increase in not from reassessments, it is from real growth in the digest, intergovernmental funding, and other revenues like fees/fines/forfeitures. Real growth is an increase in the tax digest from new parcels, new subdivisions, new commercial properties, etc. The revenue from real growth is around \$984,000. Ms. Vaughn added that the pension funding credits are being used to make up the difference of the increase in the budget. She went on to add that if the Commission is wanting to rollback the millage rate again next year, they will need to keep in mind that any increases to the budget would have to be funded by real growth as they are essentially would be choosing to forego receiving any increased revenue from reassessment growth. Commissioner Harkness asked if the \$984,000 was a guestimate or a hard number? Mr. Sims informed him that the number was pulled from the tax digest given to him by the Tax Assessor's Office. Commissioner Harkness stated that he thought this number would be much higher, as his property values went up significantly. Ms. Vaughn reminded him that because the Commission is wanting to roll the millage rate back, they will not be receiving any new income from reassessment growth, only real growth from things like new construction and new houses. Mr. Sims and Mrs. Vaughn informed

Commissioner Harkness he should see little to no increase in his taxes from reassessment growth, and that if he has the homesteads exemption freeze exemption that he would actually have a reduction in his taxes.

Commissioner Tench requested an explanation of the figures that Mr. Sims had provided. Mr. Sims informed him that the breakdown he is looking at is the one option out of several he has proposed, and that it lists the CIP requests and position requests for which there is thought to be a consensus. The savings/cuts listed at the bottom are what is being proposed to help fund the new position requests and still be able to have a roll back. These savings/cuts include the school system paying 100% for the school resource officers, reduced funding to Partnership Habersham, using accumulated credits in the pension plan, and holding off on the new position hires till October 1<sup>st</sup>.

Commissioner Tench asked Mr. Sims if he had the list that he requested of county vehicles that have been purchased in the past two years? Mr. Sims stated that he does not have this list at this time. He was out of the office last week; however, he knows that his staff was working on getting this list together on Friday. Financial Administrator Kiani Holden was out of the office today due to the passing of her grandmother and was unable to assist him with this while he was getting everything ready for the meeting tonight. Mr. Sims informed Commissioner Tench that he could have this information available for him in the morning. Commissioner Tench stated that he needed to see this information prior to his having anything to say about the budget, as there are things that have recently come to his attention. Mr. Sims informed him that he could provide what they have at this time, however it is raw data, and his staff was working on showing what vehicles were replaced by the new vehicles that were purchased.

#### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

There were no Commissioners who wished to make additional comments.

#### **ADJOURN**

Motion by Commissioner Harkness, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn the work session at 5:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Commission Chairman Ty Akins

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
County Clerk Brandalin Carnes