

The Banks County Commissioners held a public hearing on November 19, 2009 at 6:30 p.m. in the Board Room of the Banks County Courthouse Annex with Chairman Milton Dalton and Commissioner Rickey Cain present. Commissioner Joe Barefoot was absent. The purpose of the hearing was to discuss the proposed millage rate increase of 20.66% or 1.75 mills.

Ch. Dalton opened the hearing and asked Tax Commissioner Margaret Ausburn to explain the increase as it relates to the tax bill. She explained that the Homeowners Tax Relief Grant had been discontinued by the governor which would result in \$173.99 not being refunded to the taxpayer with homestead exemption. She also stated that the proposed millage rate would result in a \$70.00 increase in taxes for a \$100,000 home. She also stated this did not take into account any exemptions the taxpayer may receive. Ch. Dalton then asked for public comment.

Those citizens voicing concerns with the proposed increase were as follows:

Ray Holcomb stated property tax is one of if not the most unfair tax today. He stated this was because there were so many people that do not own property that receive some of the same benefits as those that do own property. He stated the property owner has to pay for the services. He asked the Commissioners to look at others ways to meet the needs of Banks County without raising property taxes. Ch. Dalton stated the county was currently running on 11% loss of revenue from the projected revenues for the current fiscal year. He stated the current budget was only for bare necessities. Comm. Cain stated the budget was cut \$1.16 million from last year.

Martha Threatt asked for clarification on the loss of revenues from the projected revenues. Comm. Cain stated it was due to the down economy and less spending by citizens. Ms. Threatt also stated concerns with the percentage increase all at once with the current condition of the economy.

Jerry Loftice stated that the CVB and the Chamber of Commerce could be combined to create a \$35,000 savings. He also stated the Commissioners could forego their raise to create another \$20,000 savings. He stated concerns with various other wastes within the county government.

Gerald Parks stated he worked for the Hall County Tax Assessors office and asked the number of tax parcels that are in Banks County. Ch. Dalton stated approximately 10,000. Mr. Parks also asked how many were under conservation use. Chief Tax Appraiser Kevin Whitman stated approximately 1,300. Mr. Parks also asked how many parcels were exempt. Mr. Whitman stated between 130 and 140 parcels. Mr. Parks asked how many employees worked for Banks County. Personnel Officer Judy Greer stated approximately 175 fulltime and some part-time. Mr. Parks also asked about the rate of tax collection. Ms. Ausburn stated the collection rate was running around 92% at present for 2008 and late notices had been sent. He stated concerns with the increase and that employee furloughs should be considered. Comm. Cain stated he felt the conservation acreage requirement should be increased from the 10 acre minimum to a 25 acre minimum.

Roy Gowder voiced concerns with increased property taxes during the current economic situation and for those on a fixed income.

Mitchell Bennett stated the increase was not the taxpayers' fault but the government's fault.

Tony Powell asked what specifically would the increase cover. Comm. Cain stated it was for general operations. He further stated hiring freezes were done in the past as well as millage cuts. Mr. Powell asked that the Commissioner reconsider the budget for reductions and for other ways beside property tax to meet the need. Comm. Cain stated it may require service cuts. He also stated that if industry could be recruited it would help alleviate some of the burden on the taxpayer.

Ch. Dalton stated the next public hearing would be November 30, 2009 at 6:30 p.m.

There were no further comments and the hearing ended at 7:03 p.m.

Chairman

Clerk
