

**SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
PIKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

The Pike County Board of Commissioners held a Special Called Meeting on Tuesday, September 24, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. in the Pike County Courthouse, Main Courtroom, 16001 Barnesville Street, Zebulon. Chairman Briar Johnson convened the meeting and Commissioners Tim Daniel, Tim Guy and James Jenkins attended. Interim County Manager/ County Attorney Rob Morton and County Clerk Angela Blount were also present. (O.C.G.A. § 50-14-1(e) (2)). Commissioner Jason Proctor arrived at 6:05 p.m.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**Chairman Briar Johnson
2. **INVOCATION**.....Silent Invocation
3. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**.....Chairman Briar Johnson
4. **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA - (O.C.G A. 50-14-1 (e) (1))**

Motion/second by Commissioners Daniel/Guy to approve the agenda, motion carried 4-0.

5. **NEW BUSINESS**

- a. **PUBLIC HEARING:** To receive public input on the notice of proposed property tax increase.
 1. Board discussion of proposed millage rate.

Commissioner Jason Proctor arrived at 6:05 p.m.

Chairman Johnson opened the floor for the Public Hearing.

Buzz Busby addressed the Board stating he disagrees with the proposed tax increase. Mr. Busby noted three years in a row taxes have increased. Taxes started increasing when COVID-19 was active and there was no respect for the people in Pike County for what they were going through during the COVID-19 outbreak. Mr. Busby stated he guessed the Board was trying to keep up with Griffin because they like to increase taxes. Look at how many people who are in attendance at the meeting that are 65 years and older who are trying to make it on what they have, and the county wants to throw this burden on top of them with a possible tax increase. Mr. Busby noted he received his house appraised and it was a little over \$400,000.00. If the Board is willing to pay \$360,000.00 for his property, he will sell it to them so that he will not have to worry about paying a tax increase. Mr. Busby worked in the school system for several years and has lived in the county for 20 years and he knows how the county operates. This is not the time to have a tax increase when it is an election year for the President of the United States to burden the citizens that are 65 years old and older that has a fixed income that does not increase to the correspondence to the amount of money the county wants. Mr. Busby noted he is 77 years old, and he cannot go out and get a job and bring in more money for the Board to just keep taxing the citizens. The Board needs to dig internally and look for the funds and stop taking away from the citizens of Pike County. Pike County is one of the best counties in the State of Georgia. Mr. Busby told the Board not to ruin it.

Sharon Stephens addressed the Board stating a property tax increase may seem like an easy solution on paper, it is not. Raised property taxes influences retirees that live on fixed incomes, and small businesses are fighting to keep their doors open in challenging times. Everyone wants to see Pike County excel. The county must look for a smart financial solution, tightening the budgets, re-evaluating the expenditures and advocating for revenue sources. Every alternative should be explored before raising property taxes. Ms. Stephens asked the Board to stand against the property tax increase.

Jeannie Hicks addressed the Board stating she lives in Mill Pond and one of the first things they heard when they moved into this neighborhood was that Pike County did not want this development, they wanted to stay small. Ms. Hicks noted that she and her husband have lived in three different counties and Pike County offers the least number of services and has higher taxes. Ms. Hicks asked the Board why they are considering a tax increase and what the tax dollars are being spent on now. Ms. Hicks noted she has heard infrastructure and internet. Who is that for? Ms. Hicks would like to see the budget and is requesting her Commissioner to call her and explain to her why they are proposing a tax increase. From the little investigation that Ms. Hicks noted she has done, Pike County is doing things backwards. If Pike County wants to grow and attract businesses, you do not do it by throwing money into infrastructures and the internet. You talk to the businesses, and you tell them what Pike County can offer such as tax breaks for five years.

Jim Cairns addressed the Board stating that Lamar, Upson and Monroe counties have 8% sales tax and Pike County only has 7%. Mr. Cairns asked if the Board has discussed not increasing the property tax but increasing the sales tax.

Cherry Thomas addressed the Board stating she sent all the Commissioners an email and was not sure if they received it because only one Commissioner acknowledged receiving the email. Ms. Thomas noted in the last meeting that the Board of Commissioners had, the Interim County Manager mentioned that the tax increase could be avoided, it would lower the fund. In the email, Ms. Thomas asked the Board not to approve the tax increase. Every budget in

the county needs to be reviewed and cut it. Ms. Thomas noted she has enough experience with the government to know that once a department gets a budget, if they have money there, they try to spend what it is because they do not want to lower their budget next year. That is just wrong. People cannot afford groceries or power bills, and they do not need to be hit with a tax increase. There has to be a way not to increase the taxes and the Board can be proud to say they found a way so taxes would not have to be increased. If it is not necessary, then you do not buy it. The government is no different than the private sector.

David Peters addressed the Board stating he has lived in Pike County for 23 years, he is 71 years old and retired, and his wife is disabled. Five years ago, the county had a big assessment because the county almost got sued by the state because they had not done their tax assessments in years. Several homes increased, almost double because of the assessments. Mr. Peters stated he cannot afford a tax increase. Pike County needs to do better. Majority of the people in attendance at the meeting are retired on fixed incomes that do not get 7% on one year's income. With the proposed tax increase, it is pushing people out of the county.

Chairman Briar Johnson noted at the last Public Hearing, Janie Cairns asked about the Development Authority and what they were doing to attract businesses because she has not seen any new businesses in the county. Chairman Johnson noted there are seven vacant lots left in the Industrial Park. The Thomaston Milk Company that is currently located in Thomaston, GA is relocating to Pike County. There are three business owners that live in Pike County and own businesses outside of the county that have now located their businesses in Pike County: Accessory Aero Group, Martin and Company and Metal Fabricators. Chairman Johnson noted in a prior meeting that Cherry Thomas made a comment about looking at the budget and see where it can be cut, and she would be happy to volunteer to do that. The county already has that position, and it is called the County Manager. When Department Heads meet with the County Manager and the Finance Administrator during budget time, they have a wish list. Chairman Johnson noted with the prior County Manager he did not give most of the Departments their wish list. The county has cut and cut and cut department budgets. Chairman Johnson noted this is not an easy decision for the Board. Chairman Johnson noted the budget is available on the website and a hard copy is available at the Board of Commissioners office. The fee to obtain a copy of the budget is \$.10/ page and Chairman Johnson stated he would cover the costs for anyone at the meeting to receive a copy of the budget.

No motion entertained, Public Hearing only.

6. EXECUTIVE SESSION - NONE

7. ADJOURNMENT

Motion/second by Commissioners Daniel/Guy to adjourn at 6:29 p.m., motion carried 5-0.

J. Briar Johnson, Chairman

Angela Blount, County Clerk