

Council Minutes
City of Gordon
Public Hearing on Mill Rate
September 24, 2018

The Council of the City of Gordon held a Public Hearing on Monday, September 24, 2018 at 5:30 p.m. at the Gordon City Hall located at 115 College Street. The purpose of the Public Hearing was to receive public input on a proposed mill rate increase as advertised. (Copy of ad for the mill rate increase attached.) Members present were Mayor Kenneth Turner and Council Members Bruce Daniel and Rose Lawrence. Council Members Freddie Densley, Terry Eady, Phyllis Payne and George Wynn were absent.

Mayor called the Public Hearing to order.

Mayor explained the purpose of the Public Hearing is to receive public input on the proposed mill rate increase from 6 mills to 7.3 mills. Mayor then gave background on why the 1.3 mill rate increase is needed.

Mayor then opened the hearing up to the public for questions, input, etc.

Doretha Whipple introduced herself as a prior Council Member and stated she has been looking at the proposed budget and inquired if there was any way to cut the budget without having to raise property taxes.

Mayor Turner praised the prior Council for the cuts they had made to last years budget and explained that the current Council did not see where any other cuts to the proposed budget could be made to avoid a tax increase. Mayor stated the city has been going in the hole an average of \$424,000.00 per year and we have to stop the bleeding somehow and the only way to balance the budget is to increase the property taxes.

Former Mayor Mary Whipple-Lue asked Mayor Turner to elaborate a little more on the \$424,000.00 that he referred to.

Mayor Turner explained that as far as he could tell, without going back and studying the last four years, it looked like sales tax and other things were much lower which resulted in lower revenue than expected.

Ms. Whipple-Lue then inquired if all the Council has agreed to this and went on to explain why she was asking this question. She also asked Council to look at other alternatives to meet the budget rather than raising taxes, such as paying staff out of another department and a reduction in legal fees.

Mayor Turner explained that it would not save money to move labor cost from one fund to another because both funds are losing money or not taking in enough money to cover the costs.

Mayor stated the legal fees averaged approximately \$75,000.00 per year, but the city was going in the hole \$424,000.00 each year. So if you deduct the \$75,000.00, you are going in the hole \$350,000.00. So taking away the legal fees does not solve the problem.

Former Council Member Doretha Whipple stated that the reports for the last four years stated that we was in the hole. She stated she does not remember the audit report saying that.

Mayor Turner stated that he has given her a copy of the last audit report and he was just reading from it as stated in the report. He stated that the current Council has not had an audit yet.

Former Mayor Whipple-Lue asked if money has been appropriated for the Fall Line Festival. She stated that if the city is in such a deficit, it would not make sense to have the festival.

Mayor Turner explained there is no money left in the current budget to hold the Fall Line Festival this year. Main Street Gordon has raised the money to hold the festival this year without city funds.

Council Member Lawrence explained that there are no funds available in this budget to give money to Main Street Gordon to help with the festival this year. So in order for them to have the festival they had to tap into resources outside of the city because the city does not have the money to fund this years festival.

Former Council Member Doretha Whipple said the auditor said it was \$26,000.00 over the budget. That could have been the \$20,000.00 if you wanted to have it because the auditor said you got \$26,000.00 to play with. So you could have done that with that \$26,000.00.

Council Member Lawrence responded by saying we couldn't play with the Fall Line Festival because we are trying to fix the budget and save as many resources as we can save, the least of our problems is the Fall Line Festival. We were talking about balancing the budget so that we could run the city. She also stated that the auditors summarized it and put in notes of what they said. One of the auditors notes said that you've got this much money to last you throughout the year, if you spend that money and you are not taking any money in, you are broke. The auditors also told us to put our foot on the brakes if we did not have a means of bringing funds in. So that's what we did as a group. She quoted that the auditor said your SPLOST Funds are looking good, but we need to put our foot on the brake with the General Fund. So the brakes were put on with the Fall Line Festival.

Donald Anderson said he has just seen a new police vehicle and questioned if the city had to buy

a new vehicle every two or three years.

Mayor explained that the city does not have to buy a new vehicle each year and then explained that the Police Department needs vehicles in good working condition so they can respond quickly.

Council Member Lawrence stated that city vehicles are paid for out of the SPLOST Fund and not out of the General Fund.

Former Council Member Doretha Whipple stated she doesn't understand where the money is going and that maybe we need to do a forensic audit.

Mayor Turner said the money has been accounted for in the audit.

Former Mayor Whipple-Lue stated she wants to hear from Council Member Daniel about the Fall Line Festival because she knows we did allocate the monies to pay for the festival last year.

Councilman Daniel stated that in the last budget a full-time manager for Better Hometown was included. This position has been eliminated from the budget. It was Council's recommendation that the Fall Line Festival not be held this year. The Better Hometown took it upon themselves to raise the money to hold the festival without any city money. The city has nothing to do with it other than to provide the space for the festival which is leased from the Railroad.

Former Mayor Whipple-Lue referred to an event in which Mayor Turner spoke at BASF in 2013, she thinks, and he said that he was leaving the city in good financial standing. She said once they got into office that the staff and administration were telling them different. She went on to elaborate.

Mayor Turner responded by saying we are not here attacking the past administration, but we can't ignore the facts. He went on to explain that the audit was a legitimate audit and he is quoting the facts from that and that the present Council is trying get the city back on track.

Former Council Member Doretha Whipple asked if the city was planning on getting disability insurance and then stated she sees they bringing that back for the City Council, that they've got it in the proposal.

Mayor Turner said there has nothing been done in regards to getting disability insurance, but hopes that we can in the future. It is not in this budget.

Former Council Member Doretha Whipple said, I'm sorry, that was group insurance I was looking at.

Sandra Edwards said so what you are saying, I understand about the taxes, the millage rate has to go up, so what you are saying, the General Fund, we're not broke yet are we.

Mayor Turner explained that the General Fund has been operating in the hole \$424,000.00 per year for the last four years. That's worse than being broke. If the city had not had the Georgia Fund 1 reserve money it would be in bankruptcy and shut down. He went on to explain that the reserve money is almost gone and that we can't continue spending money at that rate and it has to stop at some point. He again explained that is why the mill rate is being increased in order to have a balanced budget rather than pulling more money from the Georgia Fund 1.

Donald Anderson asked if council has considered raising commercial licenses.

Mayor Turner stated there would be very little extra income if commercial licenses were raised. License fees have not been raised.

Mayor Turner stressed that the last administration and the current administration has looked at everything they can in order to cut the budget.

Donald Anderson then inquired if stores, BASF, etc. were sharing this tax increase.

Mayor Turner explained they pay taxes the same way we do with the same mill rate.

Charles Austin asked what the city is doing about the abandoned houses in Gordon.

Mayor Turner explained that they have to pay property taxes on the abandoned houses. The city has a committee and will be addressing the blight issues.

Gloria Danielly said based on the audit and the budget as explained, would it be possible for the auditor to come back and explain the audit reports again.

Mayor Turner stated the auditor left us a copy of it and all we have to do is look at it. He left us the basic facts that we have to stop the bleeding. He also stated that copies of the last audit and proposed budget have been available to the general public for the last two weeks.

Gloria Danielly then inquired if there would be another Public Hearing on raising the mill rate.

Mayor Turner stated there will be another Public Hearing on the mill rate on October 1st at 5:00 p.m. and the mill rate will be voted on at the regular Council Meeting at 5:30 p.m. on October 1st.

Former Council Member Doretha Whipple said at first you proposed raising the mill rate 2 mills and then changed it to 1.3 mills and she then questioned why.

Mayor Turner explained why the proposed mill rate was lowered. The city only wanted to raise the mill rate enough to balance the budget.

Donald Anderson inquired if fines paid from tickets at the Police Department go into the General Fund.

Mayor Turner confirmed that fine fees do go into the General Fund.

Donald Anderson went on to say that the city has installed a speed bump on Elam Street and suggested that it would seem more worthy to put a police officer out there to catch speeders and collect revenue from the fines rather than installing a speed bump.

Mayor Turner said he understood what he was saying, but an officer just can't be there all the time. Fines have increased considerably over what they have been for the last several years. The speed bump was basically put there as a test to see how the general public would accept it. More speed bumps are being considered based on the recommendations of the Police Department.

Charles Austin requested the city put a speed bump in front of his house to reduce speeding.

Donald Anderson again stated that if you put up speed bumps everywhere you are decreasing your revenue.

Mayor stated he understood but the main issue is public safety.

Gloria Danielly asked if the 1.3 mill rate increase would provide enough money for the General Fund so that next year we won't be subjected to another increase in millage rate.

Mayor Turner stated you can't always know for sure due to sales taxes and the economy. If the sales taxes and economy remain about the same as they are now, the city would not expect to have to raise the mill rate again for several years.

Council Member Lawrence explained that when the Council has work shops they go round for

round on what they can do to keep from raising the mill rate. She also referred back to earlier in the meeting when money for training was discussed. She explained that the Newly Elected Officials training is the only mandated training for Mayor and Council Members. The Council agreed for the Mayor to go to the GMA Convention and he brought back the information to the council. The city also has a liaison contact, Pam Helton, who can be contacted to answer any questions the city may have about the materials provided at the convention. Training and travel expenses were cut in the budget in order to save thousands of dollars by letting one person attend and be a trainer of trainers.

Former Mayor Whipple-Lue asked what the demographics are for the city of Gordon. She stated she was not aware of any deficits when the past administration was in charge. She also made comment that Council Member Lawrence said this council has chose to use the liaison and all and that's what this council has chose to set up for this administration.

Mayor Turner asked her was she saying they didn't have the same resources we are talking about.

Former Mayor Whipple-Lue stated we had the resources in place. She stated that the resource administrator, Ms. Brown would let us know what we could or could not do. She then asked what are we doing here since we are in a deficit, the people, the demographics of the taxpayers here.

Mayor Turner said it is an aging community, but I'm not sure if I'm on the right track where you are going with this.

Former Mayor Whipple-Lue stated the majority of the folks in this city are the older people and expressed her concern over the burden that is being placed on them.

Mayor Turner stated he understood.

Mayor Turner stated another Public Hearing on the mill rate will be held on October 1, 2018 at 5:00 p.m.

Mayor closed the Public Hearing at 6:22 p.m.

Oct 1, 2018
Approved & Adopted

Kenneth L. TURNER
Mayor

Jessica Ann
City Clerk

Council Minutes
City of Gordon
Public Hearing
September 24, 2018

The Council of the City of Gordon held a Public Hearing on Monday, September 24, 2018 at 6:30 P.M. at the Gordon City Hall located at 115 College Street. The purpose of the Public Hearing was to receive public input on the Proposed Budget for the Year Ended September 30, 2018. (Copy of 2018-2019 Proposed Budget and Budget Hearing Public Notice as advertised in The Wilkinson County Post attached.) Members present were Mayor Kenneth Turner and Council Members Bruce Daniel and Rose Lawrence.

Mayor Turner called the Public Hearing to order.

Mayor explained the purpose of the Public Hearing is to inform the public and receive input from the public on the Proposed Budget for 2018 - 2019.

Mayor highlighted several items in the budget and stated that the proposed budget does include a 3% across the board raise for all employees.

Mayor stated he is confident the proposed budget will help us achieve our goals for the city.

Three hundred dollars for the SAVE Program to be added to the proposed budget.

Mayor called for comments from the public. Having none, a motion was made by Council Member Lawrence and seconded by Councilman Daniel to adjourn the Public Hearing at 6:40 p.m. Voting for the motion were 6 ayes and 0 nays. Motion carried.

Oct. 1, 2018
Approved & Adopted

Kenneth L. Turner
Mayor

Jourana Bior
City Clerk