



Where Community Connects

CITY COUNCIL MILLAGE RATE PUBLIC HEARING #2 SUMMARY MINUTES

FRIDAY, JULY 19, 2024 10:00 A.M.

Mayor & City Council

Mayor Anthony S. Ford At-Large
Mayor Pro Tem Kyle Berry – Council District 3
Councilmember Elton Alexander – Council District 5
Councilmember Yolanda Barber – Council District 4
Councilmember LaKeisha Gantt – Council District 1
Councilmember Alphonso Thomas – Council District 2

Administration

Frederick Gardiner – City Manager
Vanessa Holiday – City Clerk
Cassandra Lester – Deputy City Clerk
Lakeisha Gaines – Interim City Treasurer
Quinton Washington – City Attorney

Mission: To provide visionary leadership and superior municipal services that enhance the quality of life for citizens while creating a welcoming business atmosphere focused on sustainability and expansion of tourism and cultural events.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Ford at 10:05 a.m.

Invocation by Mayor Pro Tem Berry

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all in attendance.

City Clerk, Vanessa Holiday was asked to proceed with a verbal roll call. All members were present except Councilmember Gantt and Councilmember Thomas.

Motion to adopt the Agenda was made by Councilmember Alexander; seconded by Councilmember Barber. The motion passed unanimously 3-0.

Mayor Ford read the Public Hearing Rules and Procedures

PUBLIC HEARING #2

1. Council Consideration of Millage Rate
Presented by Frederick Gardiner - City Manager

Mr. Gardiner noted this is the second of three public hearings required, referenced the addition of nearly 7,000 residents and the impact the city's growth has had to the city and its budget; noted the millage rate supports the city's budgeted

services; noted the 4.4 % increase to the city's property digest by Georgia Law is considered a tax increase, and that the city advertised a higher rate of 6% last year knowing the adopted rate would be lower, and approved 3.77%, and will follow the same process this year by advertising 4.25% as a placeholder.

Mr. Gardiner noted the city has a Property Tax Digest of \$7.1 million and reviewed the Property Tax Analysis report citing an example of a property that lost value from \$312,000 to \$302,000; reviewed the Preliminary General Fund FY25 at a Glance report; noted the Tax Distribution by Government Entity and the percentage of tax with the City of Stockbridge at 3.77 mills (11.2%); Henry County Water Authority at 2 mills (5%); Henry County at 10.511 mills (26%); and the Henry County Board of Education at 23.628 mills (59%); and noted there will be a final Millage Rate Public Hearing and adoption on July 22nd; and noted there will be Referendum on the November 2024 Ballot to allow for a City of Stockbridge Homestead Exemption and city residents must apply with the City of Stockbridge as this exemption is separate from the Henry County Exemption.

Mayor Ford recognized Tax Commissioner Michael Harris, and State Representative Demetrius Douglass in the audience.

Councilmember Alexaner thanked Mr. Gardiner for the presentation and asked that Mr. Gardiner confirm staff's recommendation of 3.77% with no homestead exemptions for city of Stockbridge residents for two years (2024 and 2025), and setting the millage being set last year at the lowest rate last year, giving exemptions up front, and taking pressure off residents; and noted residents were paying 1.904 % taxes to Henry County for Public Safety. Mr. Gardiner confirmed.

Councilmember Barber noted she wants to take a deeper dive into the city's finances, noted her acceptance of the 3.77 millage rate last year, however, the city needs to review expenses and look at decrease the budget.

Tax Commissioner Michael Harris added that the Henry County Board of Commissioners is considering an increase in taxes for Special Service Districts, and the Henry County Board of Education, is considering a 1.6mil decrease, and noted the County will meet on July 30th at 1:00 p.m. regarding the millage, and the School Board will meet on July 22nd at 4:30 p.m. regarding the millage.

Councilmember Alexander reference Deputy Tax Commissioner Lynn Carter's comments from the first hearing where she explained the County's Frozen Exemption for homeowners, and noted the major impact of taxes is the Board of Education at 60% and the County at 26% and encouraged the public to attend those meetings.

Mr. Harris noted the Board of Education offers exemptions based on age.

Public Hearing Opened

Speakers in Favor of No Millage Rate Increase and remaining at 3.77:
Suzette Wilkinson, Regina L. Ubadiniru, Jocelyne Williams, and Mary Scott.

Speakers Opposed: No Speakers
Public Hearing Closed.

Mr. Gardiner noted everyone in Henry County pays taxes for Public Safety, and the City of Stockbridge has Sanitation Services billed annually via the tax bill, and is a fee, not a tax.

Mr. Harris noted the bill was re-designed to show the difference between taxes and fees, and the back of the bill references the homestead exemptions.

Mr. Gardiner noted the City of Stockbridge is on a January 1 - December 31 calendar year, and the County is on a July 1 – June 30 calendar year, and the July Public Hearing dates are statutory by law.

Mr. Aaron, the Public Works Director, confirmed that the Sanitation Fee includes garbage pickup, bulk pickup, recycling, and yard waste, and that the City of Stockbridge has absorbed the (CPI) Consumer Price Index increase of 5% received from the vendor.

Councilmember Alexander noted that if the City of Stockbridge had not implemented police services, residents would have paid more if the County approves the increase; and noted the utilizes and Audit firm annually, noted in the past, the city was not spending a much for certain services, and is now spending more, and making improvements to make the city better, and stands behind the audit and the City Manager.

Mr. Gardiner agreed, noting the audit process is the same for all cities, and addresses GAAP Policies with a report of corrections and recommendations for areas of improvement, and noted the fund balance when the majority of the officials took office has decreased, much has gone to the building up of downtown and public investments have been made, noting the city needs more private sector investments, and noted the Council will received the FY2025 next month.

Councilmember Barber stated that she has been asking questions regarding the city's financials for months to compare revenue and expenditure details and trends, and the requests went unanswered; noted staff is hired to do a job, and elected officials are to represent the people, and be able to explain to the public the financial status of the city; noted budget amendments should be presented to the public, and they are not; noted the city spent over \$120,000 for a software program to be transparent, and it is not up and running, and that she will continue to ask for information; referenced requests for a mid-year budget review that is scheduled for July 30th; noted requests for the city's Auditor Report for the year 2022 several times, and finally received the report in April 2024; noted it was her understanding that the millage tax approved last year was to fund police service, and is being used to supplement the Amphitheater, whose budget was set at two million dollars, and does not know the expenditures; noted the full Council is not receiving monthly profit & loss statements to determine whether a millage is needed; and asked if the Senior Sanitation Program is being offered.

Mr. Aaron confirmed that the program is active, and seniors who meet the criteria will receive a 75% discount, with applications due by May 31st.

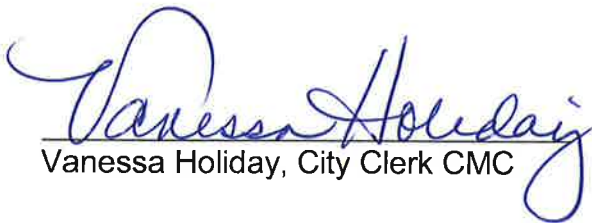
Mayor Pro Tem Berry thanked everyone for coming out; reminded everyone about the Ballot Referendum for Homestead Exemption on November 5, 2024 and asked that residents extend the message to their neighbors; thanked Tax Commissioner Michael Harris for providing information and knowledge to the homeowners regarding tax exemptions; noted the proposed millage rate is set to be 3.77, the same as the current rate, and to dispel the rumors of an increase; noted the Board of Education is scheduled to adopt the millage at a meeting on July 22nd at 4:30pm, and the Henry County Board of Commissioners is scheduled to adopt the millage on July 30th at 1pm; and noted that had the city of Stockbridge not implemented a police department, Stockbridge residents could have received a proposed public safety tax increase from the County for 1.9% to 4.7%.

Mayor Ford noted the next City of Stockbridge Public Hearing will take place on Monday, July 22, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. in the Council Chamber.

Councilmember Alexander extended birthday wishes to Mayor Pro Tem Berry.

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:25 a.m. was made by Councilmember Alexander; seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Berry. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Respectfully submitted by:


Vanessa Holiday, City Clerk CMC


Anthony S. Ford, Mayor