



Where Community Connects

CITY COUNCIL MILLAGE RATE PUBLIC HEARING #3 SUMMARY MINUTES

MONDAY, JULY 22, 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 10:02 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.

Motion to adopt the Agenda was made by Councilmember Alexander; seconded by Councilmember Barber. The motion passed unanimously 4-0.

Mayor Ford read the Public Hearing Rules and Procedures

PUBLIC HEARING #3

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

Mr. Gardiner noted this is the final of three required public hearings and adoption of the millage rate, which is used to fund general operations for FY2025; noted in 1990 there were 3,000 residents in the city of Stockbridge and today that number is close to 40,000 residents; noted the impact of the addition of nearly 7,000 residents and the impact the city's growth has had to the city and its budget, specifically Public Works and the Police Department; noted the millage rate is driven by the Tax Digest which had a 4.4 % increase, and noted that an increase in the city's property digest by Georgia Law is considered a tax increase; and noted the city advertised a higher rate of 4.25% as a placeholder, and staff is recommended the rate remain at 3.77%.

Mr. Gardiner presented the Property Tax Analysis; reviewed the Preliminary General Fund FY25 at a Glance report, noting the FY2025 balanced budget as submitted by staff departments; reviewed home values and rates vs assessed values; 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 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.

Tax Commissioner Michael Harris noted the process going forward is to adopt a millage rate today, and noted the Board of Education and the City of McDonough will also adopt a millage rate today, and the Henry County Board of Commissioners will adopt a millage on July 30th; noted his office will complete the Tax Digest and submit it to the state to begin the process of collecting taxes; noted tax bills go out to homeowners the late August/early September, and that if you don't receive your tax bill, it is available online. Mr. Harris noted the Board of Education will meet to set the millage rate today at 4pm and the County will meet on July 30th at 1pm to set the millage rate.

Councilmember Alexaner thanked Mr. Harris and referenced the Frozen Exemption.

Mr. Harris noted the County's Frozen Exemption where homeowners continue to pay taxes at the assessed value when you purchase your home although your property value increases over the years; and noted there are other exemptions for homeowners with certain criteria and deadlines to apply, noting if you are 62 on January 1, you need to apply for the Age 62+ exemption; noted the County is proposing a 3 mil net increase in taxes with the police portion going from 2.9 to 4.7.

Councilman Alexander noted the city's exemptions were up front, and referenced the November 5, 2024 Ballot Referendum for Homestead Exemptions that include L1, Age and Septic.

Mr. Aaron, the city's Public Works Director referenced the City's Annual Sanitation Fee that is placed on the Tax Bill, and noted the services include garbage,

recycling, limb/grass clipping pickup, and bulk pickup.

Councilwoman Gantt joined the meeting at 10:28 a.m. and apologized for her lateness due to her attendance in court.

Public Hearing Opened

Speakers in Favor of No Millage Rate Increase and remaining at 3.77:

Guan Martin, Richard M. Cook, Jocelyn Williams, Loretha Martin, and Clair Kellam.

Speakers Opposed: No Speakers

Public Hearing Closed.

Councilman Thomas emphasized that the City of Stockbridge governing body has no control over the taxes assessed by the Henry County Board of Commissioners or the Henry County Board of Education.

Mayor Ford asked Mr. Gardiner to address the question regarding notification to residents.

Mr. Gardiner noted the city is required to advertise in the Legal Organ, and did so, and also posted the information on the city's website, however, going forward, the information will be included on the water bill, noting only a small fraction of residents are on city water and will receive that information, as most residents receive their water from Clayton County and Henry County Water Authorities.

Mr. Gardiner referenced the legislative process for the upcoming Homestead Exemption Referendum that will be on the November 2024 ballot for Stockbridge residents which will include L1, Age 62+ and Septic Exemptions; noted by law the millage rate public hearings must be held in July.

Mr. Harris noted the bills must be mailed to homeowners by September.

Councilmember Barber requested staff notify residents of updates and to reactivate the city's quarterly newsletter to share news and information with our citizens; noted that regarding the millage rate, there needs to be an accounting of how the tax dollars are being spent; noted the governing body needs to be provided with financial information on revenues in and expenses of the city so she, as an elected officials can make informed decisions, noting she does not know the city's financial status and therefore does not know if the 3.77 millage tax is warranted, and may not be needed at all; noted staff moves when three votes are received from the Council, and is why her questions regarding the city's finances were unanswered.

Councilmember Gantt noted the Stockbridge City Council cannot control the economy, however, it is the responsibility of the governing body to be fiscally responsible and looking out for the best interest of Stockbridge; noted she recognizes the price of everything is going up, and that is not in the city's control; referenced the meeting times, and noted there was a meeting held at 6:30pm to accommodate those residents who were unable to attend the 10am meetings;

noted that when you look at your tax bill, the City of Stockbridge did not raise taxes; and that the 3.77 millage rate was implemented because the residents of Stockbridge wanted to implement a police department, noting those tax was necessary to fund the police department.

Councilmember Thomas stated that the citizens of Stockbridge elected this body and trust this body to make good decisions for Stockbridge residents; noted there are operations that go on in the city that include roads, infrastructure, parks and overall operations, and they all come at a cost; noted there was a police department 40 years ago, and there was a millage tax, and when the police department dissolved, the millage tax went away, as it was not needed, however, when the police department came back, so did the millage tax; noted the officials just want to provide its residents with a good quality of life, work with a professional staff, and be proactive; and agreed with Councilmember Barber to go back to sending out the quarterly newsletter.

Mayor Pro Tem Berry stated to the residents, that the Council has heard them and rest assured, the action taken by the City represents the voices of the City of Stockbridge residents; noted he understands the hardship of the current economics and the struggle with expenses, as he too is a resident and is affected by increasing costs, being married and a father to seven children and everyone working hard to stretch their dollars; noted he understands people are hurting, and emphasizes with all; noted the individuals in these seats are serving with integrity, appreciates everyone on staff for doing a good job; and wants the residents to know their money is going to good use; and extended an information to reach out with any questions or concerns by phone, email or text.

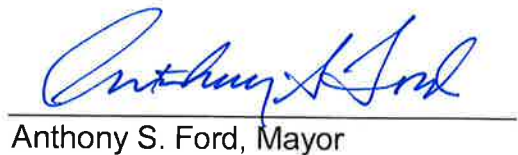
Councilmember Alexander thanked the councilmembers for their comments, and stated to the residents that everyone on this Council cares about the community and that it was the right decision to start up the police department and stands by that decision.

Motion to adopt the Millage Rate of 3.77% was made by Councilmember Alexander; seconded by Councilmember Thomas. The motion passed 4-1 (Barber Opposed citing she does not know if the millage rate is necessary because the Council has not been apprised of any financial regarding the city's income, revenue, police department, public works, or amphitheater; and that the city needs to be transparent).

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:15 a.m. was made by Councilmember Gantt; seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Berry. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Respectfully submitted by:


Vanessa Holiday, City Clerk CMC


Anthony S. Ford, Mayor