

Upton County Board of Commissioners
August 9, 2016 Meeting Minutes

Call to Order

Chairman Blackston calls the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. All Commissioners were in attendance. County Attorney Heath English was also in attendance. The Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Blackston.

Minutes

A motion was made by Comm. Wilder, with a second from Comm. Ellington, to adopt the minutes from July 26, 2016 regular meeting. The motion carries.

Chairman Blackston – Yes Commissioner Ellington – Yes
Commissioner Wilder – Yes Commissioner Spraggins – Abstain
Commissioner Hudson – Yes

A motion was made by Ellington, with a second from Comm. Spraggins to amend the agenda to discuss a tentative millage rate. The motion carries.

Chairman Blackston – Yes Commissioner Ellington – Yes
Commissioner Wilder – Yes Commissioner Spraggins – Yes
Commissioner Hudson – Yes

Public Comments

Rev. Patrick Allen asked if it would be possible to get computers at the Civic Center. He would like for them to be available for citizens to use and for programs to be taught. They would like to start with five computers.

Jim Wheelless stated they have the option of putting this in 2017 budget. He will speak with Robert Haney to get the cost of the computers.

Commissioner Spraggins added that they will have to budget someone to teach the computer courses also.

Commissioner Hudson asked if this could come from the SPLOST funds. This is something that will have to look into.

New Business

- a. Mr. Wheelless has been working with former Tax Commissioner Mr. Berry Cook. Overall tax digest decreased by \$9 million. County wide 1 mill of tax will equal \$535,000 and in the unincorporated part of the county 1 mil will equal \$351,500. There will be no increase in the millage rate:

9.77 County Wide
2.44 Unincorporated
6.55 Joint Projects
18.76 Total

Mr. Wheelless explained to the board that he needed them to tentatively set the millage rate so that it can be advertised for two weeks. The advertisement will have the hearing set for Thursday, August 24, 2016 @10:00 am in the City County Meeting Room. Once this tentative millage rate is set it cannot be increased.

A motion was made by Comm. Hudson with a second from Comm. Ellington to tentatively set the 2016 millage rate. The motion carries

Chairman Blackston – Yes Commissioner Ellington – Yes
Commissioner Wilder – Yes Commissioner Spraggins – Yes
Commissioner Hudson – Yes

- b. Richard Akins with Rindt-McDuff Associates explained the Highway 19 sewer project could be done along with the D.O.T. widening. This will be approximately 8,300 L.F. of sanitary sewer mains. One section will connect to an existing sewer near Granada Circle and extend approximately 5,600 L.F servicing approximately 1,1 L.F. of Highway 19, between Jeff Davis Road and Aviation Drive. The second segment will connect to the existing sewer at the intersection of Highway 19 and West County Road and extend north approximately 2,700 L.F. along Highway 19. The project will cost around \$1.6 million.

If the County wishes to proceed with the project funding is available through a Clean Water Fund through GEFA. This is a principle forgiveness program and the County could get up to

\$400,000 in forgiveness. The interest rate for this is 2.09 and there is an additional cost of \$19,800 for environmental cost and Rindt-McDuff.

A motion was made by Ellington, with a second from Comm. Spraggins giving Rindt-McDuff permission to go ahead with the project. The motion carries.

Chairman Blackston – Yes Commissioner Ellington – Yes
Commissioner Wilder – Yes Commissioner Spraggins – Yes
Commissioner Hudson – Yes

- c. Jeff Stribbling, Chairperson for the Chamber of Commerce and Unite Upson. He explained that Upson County has lost over 3,500 jobs since 2000. The Unite Upson group is to improve branding and marketing in the County and sell the to Project Leader, so they can bring in prospects. He believes that a sign ordinance will help with this. He explained that the Unite Upson Committee has worked for 2 ½ years on the sign ordinance trying to help improve the look of the community, and this work was done, he found out that the Board of Commissioners had signed a plan with short and long term goals that included a sign ordinance.

Trennis Dumas stated that she is a business owner and member of the Chamber. Unite Upson got together and grouped the strengths and weaknesses of the county, they drove in 4 directions of the county looking at some concerns that had been discussed. After discussing the finding the tried to find the standards for signs. They reviewed what the City and County had, reviewed GMA and the model sign ordinance from the state. Mrs. Dumas, Mr. Bobby Ellington Mrs. Gail Hammock met and pulled information from a larger document to make one sign ordinance. She added that what was presented to the Board of Commissioners was something that the City had already had, but whenever someone wanted a sign ordinance they could never get anything specifically on a sign ordinance because it was part of a bigger document. She added that in the ordinance that was presented, no one would be asked to change their current sign, they would be grandfathered in. Only if something happen to the sign or the business changed would they be asked follow the new ordinance. She stated that when she first came to Thomaston to see the building she for her business she passed it because another sign was covering her sign up. Mrs. Dumas added that the state of Georgia is broken down into region. Upson County is in region 4 with 10 other countie and Upson County is the only county that does not have a sign ordinance. She believes that every other county in the region had concerns on being sued, but they chose to be progressive and have a standard for what is and is not appropriate in their community. She would like so see the City/County have some control on what type of signs are used.

Gary Maxwell, a sign contractor for businesses. He asked the board if they were waiving their right to tell someone if they can put a sign up regardless of its apperance or content?

Chairman Blackston explained that the question posed was, is the board interested in working on a sign ordinance at this time and the vote was 3-2 not to work on a sign ordinance. He explained that it doesn't mean it is not a need for one. The one that was presented had things needed work on. Adding that when United Upson started the process of the sign ordinance the board made the comment that a sign ordinance was not priority. He does not see where a sign ordinance will help job creation, education or graduation levels.

Mr. Maxwell went on to explain that over the years of working in Thomaston and Upson County he has never been able to find and ordinance stating the requirements of a sign. He gave examples of him putting signs up and the City later telling the business they had to remove the sign because the did not receive a permit for the sign. He asked how can officials request a sign to be removed if there is not an ordinance.

Lori Smith stated that at the Unite Upson meeing Mr. Jim O'Brian stated that if a retail was looking to come into the community and it did not have a sign ordinance, they would be removed from the list.

Commissioner Spraggins stated that a lot come out after the sign ordinance against. He would like Lori to meet with the ones that voted against the ordinance, so they can know exactly what they are voting for.

County Manager, Commissioners and County Attorney Comments

County Manager Jim stated that he meet with boat Jeff Bishop DNR about the 36 boat ramp. Freddy Harp resigned from Planning Commission and OBA and the position are available.

UL Marching band looking for donations for their halftime shows.

There will be a meeting on August 10 with the EPD for the closing of the inert landfill Skelton Road.

Commissioner Wilder thanked the United Upson group for their presentation. He added that he has not missed meeting and he supports a sign ordinance. He would like the Commissioners to reconsider working on a sign ordinance.

Commissioner Ellington stated that echoes Comm. Wilder on the sign ordinance. Thanks the ones that put the back the badges together, it was a great success.

Commissioner Hudson had no comments

County Attorney Heath English had no comments.

Chairman Blackston stated they had an OBA meeting and all of the property that belongs to Upson County will be deeded back over to the county. He stated that some good things are getting ready to happen in Upson County.

Commissioner Spraggins thank everyone for their prayers during his illness. Jim and the county has done a great job at keeping the budget in line

Adjournment

Comm. Wilder made a motion to adjourn at 7:05 pm, with a second by Comm. Ellington to adjourn the meeting.

Chairman Rusty Blackston

Commissioner Steve Hudson

Commissioner Frank Spraggins

Commissioner Lorenzo Wilder

Commissioner Ralph Ellington

Jim Wheelless, County Manager