

PUTNAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



117 Putnam Drive, Suite A ♦ Eatonton, GA 31024

Minutes

Tuesday, August 15, 2023 ♦ 6:00 PM

Putnam County Administration Building – Room 203

The Putnam County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, August 15, 2023 at approximately 6:00 p.m. in the Putnam County Administration Building, 117 Putnam Drive, Room 203, Eatonton, Georgia.

PRESENT

Chairman Bill Sharp
Commissioner Gary McElhenney
Commissioner Daniel Brown
Commissioner Jeff Wooten

STAFF PRESENT

County Attorney Tom Watkins
County Manager Paul Van Haute
County Clerk Lynn Butterworth
Deputy County Clerk Donna Todd

Opening

1. Welcome - Call to Order

Chairman Sharp called the meeting to order at approximately 6:00 p.m.
(Copy of agenda made a part of the minutes on minute book page _____.)

2. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the Agenda

Motion made by Commissioner Brown, Seconded by Commissioner Wooten.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Brown, Commissioner Wooten

3. Invocation

Pastor Joe Ezzard, Smithboro Baptist Church, gave the invocation.

4. Pledge of Allegiance (JW)

Commissioner Wooten led the Pledge of Allegiance.

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Zoning Public Hearing

5. Request by Peyton Robinson to rezone 1.1 acres at 905 Harmony Road from C-1 to C-2 [Map 102D, Parcel 044, District 3]

Attorney Tom Watkins read the rules for public comments

Mr. Peyton Robinson spoke in support of the request. No one signed in to speak against this item.

Planning & Development staff recommendation was for approval to rezone 1.1 acres at 905 Harmony Road from C-1 to C-2 [Map 102D, Parcel 044, District 3].

Motion to approve the request by Peyton Robinson to rezone 1.1 acres at 905 Harmony Road from C-1 to C-2 [Map 102D, Parcel 044, District 3].

Motion made by Commissioner Brown, Seconded by Commissioner McElhenney.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Brown, Commissioner Wooten

Items 6 and 8 were handled together.

6. Request by Steven A. Rowland, agent for Norman E. Coleman Jr. to rezone 8.85 acres at 886 Milledgeville Road from C-1/C-2 to C-2 [Map 087, Part of Parcel 028, District 4]

8. Request by Steven A. Rowland, agent for Norman E. Coleman to rezone 4.71 acres on Milledgeville Road from C-1/C-2 to C-2 [Map 087, Parcel 029, District 4]

Mr. Steven Rowland spoke in support of items 6, 7, and 8. No one signed in to speak against these items.

The Planning & Development staff recommendation for items 6 and 8 was for approval to rezone 8.85 acres at 886 Milledgeville Road from C-1/C-2 to C-2. [Map 087, Part of Parcel 028, District 4] and 4.71 acres on Milledgeville Road from C-1/C-2 to C-2. [Map 087, Parcel 029, District 4] with the following condition:

- 1. The developer shall develop and maintain a 50-foot undisturbed buffer or berm along the property lines that abut Map 087, Parcel 032 as stated in Section 66-107(g) of the Putnam County Code of Ordinances.

Motion to approve the requests by Steven A. Rowland, Agent for Norman E. Coleman, Jr., to rezone 8.85 acres at 886 Milledgeville Road from C-1/C-2 to C-2. [Map 087, Part of Parcel 028] and 4.71 acres on Milledgeville Road from C-1/C-2 to C-2. [Map 087, Parcel 029] with the following condition:

- 1. **The developer shall develop and maintain a 50-foot undisturbed buffer or berm along the property lines that abut Map 087, Parcel 032 as stated in Section 66-107(g) of the Putnam County Code of Ordinances.**

Motion made by Commissioner Wooten, Seconded by Commissioner McElhenney.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Brown, Commissioner Wooten

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7. Request by Steven A. Rowland, agent for Norman E. Coleman to rezone 47.81 acres at 886 Milledgeville Road from C-1/C-2 to AG [Map 087, Part of Parcel 028, District 4]
Staff recommendation was for approval to rezone 47.81 acres at 886 Milledgeville Road from C-1/C-2 to AG. [Map 087, Part of Parcel 028, District 4].

Motion to approve the request by Steven A. Rowland, agent for Norman E. Coleman to rezone 47.81 acres at 886 Milledgeville Road from C-1/C-2 to AG [Map 087, Part of Parcel 028]

Motion made by Commissioner Wooten, Seconded by Commissioner Brown.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Brown, Commissioner Wooten

Mill Rate Public Hearing

9. Presentation of Proposed 2023 Mill Rate (staff-CM & Fin)

County Manager Van Haute reviewed the proposed property tax increase. He advised that the board has tentatively adopted a millage rate which will require an increase in property taxes by 7.17 percent. This tentative increase will result in a millage rate of 6.400 mills, an increase of .428 mills. Without this tentative tax increase, the millage rate will be no more than 5.972 mills. The proposed tax increase for a home with a fair market value of \$300,000 is approximately \$47.08 and the proposed tax increase for non-homestead property with a fair market value of \$225,000 is approximately \$38.52.

10. Comments from the Public

Mr. Billy Webster reminded the board that he spoke at the last mill rate public hearing and his opinion is still the same. He commented that the past 6 years had balanced budgets without mill rate increases. He also suggested that the budget public hearing should come before the mill rate public hearing, for future reference.

Mr. Charles Gray commented that property values have increased, and inflation has devastated a lot of budgets. He stated that people on fixed incomes make up a lot of the county and that the board should consider the impact of a tax increase and possibly no tax at all for fixed income families.

Ms. Jennifer Ray commented that the board should sharpen their pencils and work with the money that they have.

Mr. Charles Ray signed in to speak but passed.

11. Comments from Commissioners and/or Staff

None

Budget Public Hearing

12. Presentation of Proposed FY24 Budget (staff-CM & Fin)

County Manager Van Haute presented the proposed FY24 budget at \$25,449,731 with \$258,363 appropriated from the fund balance. He advised that it would be necessary to take \$3.5 million from the fund balance to balance the budget, which could negatively affect our bond rating in the future. He also commented that the Fire Department budget has increased in recent years due to a shortage of volunteers and the need to hire full-time personnel.

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13. Comments from Commissioners and/or Staff

Commissioner Brown thanked County Manager Van Haute for explaining how our budget, fund balance, and bond rating are all connected. He expressed hope that the taxpayers will vote yes on the bond issue for road paving.

14. Comments from the Public

Mr. Tom Thompson reminded the board that he submitted a list of priorities after the last meeting and hoped they were reviewed. He commented that the hospital is second only to public safety and thanked the board for the proposed increase for the hospital. He stressed the need to keep the hospital out of financial distress and asked the board to consider fully funding their budget request.

Mr. Dale Bills echoed Mr. Gray's comments from earlier in the meeting regarding citizens on fixed incomes. He commented that property values and taxes have gone up. He asked the board to be more frugal and cautioned everyone to watch the school board budget as well.

Mr. Charles Ray asked if the documents displayed were available to the public. County Manager Van Haute advised that they are available, and requests could be sent to Finance Director Cook.

Ms. Jennifer Ray suggested the county try harder to get more volunteer firefighters. She commented that everyone is being hit with higher bills and assessments have skyrocketed.

Regular Business Meeting

15. Public Comments

Mr. Don Hill commented on the proposed short term rental ordinances and asked the county to include a short paragraph that addresses homeowners' associations that have covenants that restrict short term rentals.

Mr. Harley Wood commented on short term rentals in the R-1R zoning district.

Ms. Erin Olson questioned the definition of the word "expire" in the proposed new short term rental ordinance. She also suggested a higher application fee and contacting the legislature regarding the hotel-motel tax percentage given to the Chamber of Commerce. She expressed desire to continue the moratorium until District 3 is represented.

Mr. Mike Sleeth commented that short term rentals should never have been allowed in the R-1R zoning district and that 400 total short term rentals are too many.

Mr. Phil Armstrong thanked the board for what they do and expressed concern about short term rentals and covenants. He requested the ordinance include alerts about restrictive covenants.

Mr. Jim Berardicurti commented against the current proposed short term rentals and requested that no decisions be made until District 3 is represented.

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Ms. Peggy McWhorter requested a higher license fee for short term rentals and suggested waiting until the new ordinances have proven to work before allowing additional short term rentals. She requested the percentage of short term rentals located on lake properties.

Mr. Stephen Mallinson commented on the negative impact of short term rentals and against the grandfathering of short term rentals in the R-1R zoning district.

Mr. Peter Crocket commented that timing and oversight were not considered during the resurfacing of Old Phoenix Road.

Pastor Joe Ezzard signed in to speak but declined.

16. Consent Agenda

a. Approval of Minutes - August 4, 2023 Regular meeting (staff-CC)

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda

Motion made by Commissioner McElhenney, Seconded by Commissioner Wooten.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Brown, Commissioner Wooten

17. Jimmy Davis Park Update (staff-CM)

County Manager Van Haute provided an update on recent work at Jimmy Davis Park.

- Lower parking lot will be paved soon.
- The well is in place and irrigation will be connected to it as soon as power is turned on.
- There has been no interest from local contractors to provide metal fencing. The county will order the material and bring in welders and make it ourselves.
- Security cameras have been installed and are synced with Putnam County Sheriff's Office and Eatonton Police Department.

Commissioner Brown asked about a donation of picnic tables from the school system. County Manager Van Haute advised they were not suitable for outdoor use.

Reports/Announcements

18. County Manager Report

None

19. County Attorney Report

None

20. Commissioner Announcements

Commissioner McElhenney: thanked everyone for attending tonight and expressed his desire for full house attendance at every meeting. He told the audience that commissioners want to hear from their constituents.

Commissioner Brown: echoed Commissioner McElhenney's comments and advised that commissioners do research issues and listen to the people.

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Commissioner Wooten: thanked Public Works for all their hard work and advised that they are out now doing storm cleanup. He commented that Putnam County has good employees that need to be paid well. He stressed that there is no internal interest on this board other than doing the right thing for the people of the county. He reminded everyone that the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) is paid by everyone, not just property owners. He stressed that there were no secret meetings held and that he was somewhat offended by those accusations. He thanked everyone for attending and voicing their opinions.

Chairman Sharp: thanked the staff for the marvelous job they do. He also thanked the board for their hard work and thanked the citizens for attending tonight.

Executive Session

21. Enter Executive Session as allowed by O.C.G.A. 50-14-4 for Personnel, Litigation, or Real Estate

Executive Session not needed.

22. Reopen meeting following Executive Session

Executive Session not held.

23. Authorize Chairman to sign Affidavit concerning the subject matter of the closed portion of the meeting

Executive Session not held.

24. Action, if any, resulting from the Executive Session

Executive Session not held.

Closing

25. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting.

Motion made by Commissioner McElhenney, Seconded by Commissioner Wooten.

Voting Yea: Commissioner McElhenney, Commissioner Brown, Commissioner Wooten

Meeting adjourned at approximately 7:32 p.m.

ATTEST:

Lynn Butterworth
County Clerk

B. W. "Bill" Sharp
Chairman

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