



120 North Essa Street, Lake Park, Georgia 31636
City Hall 229-559-7470
Fax 229-559-7499

City of Lake Park
PUBLIC HEARING Minutes
October 21, 2024
6:00 pm

Members Present were Mayor Jena Sandlin, Mayor Pro Tem Oscar Griffith, Council Members Michelle Lane, Carl Spano and Busby Courson.

Staff Present: City Clerk Lisa Johnson, Deputy Clerk Christian Crews, Police Chief Ed Yarbrough, Officer Isael Estrada

Mayor Jena Sandlin called the meeting to order.

Mayor Sandlin thanked everyone for coming and stated that this would be the final of three Public Hearings to discuss the millage rate for this year. Because there have been a lot of changes and needs that have come to their attention, the Council has decided to take the time to review the costs associated with those things and hold these Public Hearings to allow members of the Public to ask questions and give their input. Mayor Sandlin asked if any Member of Council wanted to say anything before the Council opened the floor for Public Comment. She stated that citizens would be limited to three minutes to speak and asked that members of the public who have spoken at previous hearings please allow any new comments to come forward first. At a request from Council Member Spano, Mayor Sandlin then led the invocation and pledge.

Council Member Spano spoke and stated that since the last two Hearings, the Council had taken to heart the comments heard from the Public and had sat down with the Clerk to review budget cuts, including a reduction in healthcare benefits for employees and several other line items. This enables him as the Budget Officer to recommend tonight to the Council that they hold the existing millage rate of 6.219, rather than raise it to the previously proposed 6.5. What this means for residents is that an existing resident in the City whose property values have not increased would pay City property taxes in the same amount as last year. He noted that the 2023 millage rate was actually a reduction of more than a mil. For new residents in the City, the tax rate will be set to the same rate that was in place last year at the assessed amount for new properties. This will make up most of the money the City needs, not from existing residents. He stated that he would be glad to answer any questions or public comments.

Mayor Sandlin then announced that the floor would be opened for public comment, asking residents to please limit their comments to three minutes and to speak clearly when they state their name and address.

- Gloria Luke – 201 4-H Club Rd – asked first if the Mayor or any Council Member has the authority to fix tickets or to tell the Police to give warnings and not actual tickets. Mayor Sandlin responded that this was not a topic for tonight, and the Council is hearing comments only on tax. Mrs. Luke responded that citations pertain to revenue, and the Mayor responded that comments would be limited to property taxes. Mrs. Luke stated that she would move on, and that the question had been presented as a question regarding revenue, because she was interested in revenue, and it was not intended as a slap, but simply a comment. Her next comment was that she had noticed that the Council was rezoning a lot of commercial property to residential, which would ultimately place the burden of property tax revenues on residents.
- Arthur Keckley – 315 4-H Club Rd – was going to mention something but given that Mrs. Luke has been told that this was not a topic of discussion, he would wait until the regular meeting. He thanked the Council for listening to the people and putting in the effort to respond to the concerns.
- Susan Keckley – 315 4-H Club Rd – Asked if the Council had yet had any discussions about Hurricane Preparedness in the wake of Helene. The Mayor responded that the City had, and the City Clerk has kept in touch with the County throughout preparedness. Mrs. Keckley clarified that she meant regarding establishing shelters in the community, perhaps at the school.
- Patricia Brown – 809 Main St – asked if members were not able to speak on anything but taxes; Mayor Sandlin responded that the Council was here for property taxes. It was explained to Mrs. Brown that Public Hearings are generally kept to a specific topic to be addressed, but the Council would resume Citizens Concerns at the next regular meeting.

Council Member Spano responded to Mrs. Luke’s comment, acknowledging that the majority of the property inside the City Limits is residential; Lake Park is what is known as a “Bedroom Community”, which is primarily residential, and in such communities, the burden for paying the taxes that will provide adequate operating expenses does fall on the residents. He explained that continually taking the full rollback each year is the equivalent of planning to operate on the same amount every year, which is simply not possible. Mrs. Keckley asked how much area the City comprised and was told approximately 2.8-mile radius. Mrs. Luke asked if the City has Mutual Aid Agreements with the County for fire and police protection, and it was explained that there was an agreement, but the City fire and police respond primarily at the request of the Council. Mrs. Brown asked what the population of the City of Lake Park is, and Council Member Spano responded that the census reported 976 in 2020, but the current population was closer to 1,300. Mrs. Keckley asked for clarification, noting that the Minutes of one of the earlier Public Hearings stated that the City was paying \$150,000 for Fire Radios and asked if that was per year. Mr. Spano stated that it was a lease purchase agreement for \$15,000 per year, and that if the Minutes stated \$150,000 per year it was likely a typo.

Mayor Sandlin thanked everyone for coming and adjourned the meeting so the Council could go into the Called Meeting.


 Jena Sandlin, Mayor

Seal


 Lisa Johnson, City Clerk

5 November 2024
 Date