

PITTSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS'
CALLED MEETING (BUDGET PUBLIC HEARINGS)

March 28, 2024

VIRGINIA: The Pittsylvania County Board of Supervisors' ("Board") Called Meeting was held on March 28, 2024, in the Board Meeting Room, 39 Bank Street, SE, Chatham, Virginia 24531.

CALL TO ORDER (7:00 PM)

Dalton called the Meeting to Order at 7:00 PM.

ROLL CALL

The following Board Members were present:

Darrell W. Dalton - Callands-Gretna District
Robert M. Tucker, Jr. - Banister District
Kenneth L. Bowman - Chatham-Blairs District
Timothy W. Dudley - Staunton River District
Eddie L. Hite, Jr. - Dan River District
William V. ("Vic") Ingram - Tunstall District
Murray W. Whittle - Westover District

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion to approve Agenda.

RESULT: 7-0 (Approve)
MOVER: Tucker
SECONDER: Ingram
AYES: Dalton, Tucker, Bowman, Dudley, Hite, Ingram, Whittle
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None

PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. FY 2025 School Budget Public Hearing

The Board held a Public Hearing to hear citizen input on the proposed Fiscal Year 2025 ("FY 25") School Budget. Per Virginia law, said Budget will not be considered for adoption until seven (7) days after the Public Hearing.

Dalton opened the Public Hearing at 7:04 PM.

Shelby Alcorn, Banister District, stated she is a special education teacher and head coach at Gretna High School. She stated that County teacher salaries are the lowest paid in Virginia, and she believes there will be a continuance of teacher shortages, if that does not change. She shared that insurance rates are too high, and that coach pay should be considered also.

Chris Farris, Staunton River District, stated he feels that teachers are not supported. The SOL curriculum and timeline they must adhere to, teacher salaries, and benefits are no longer attractive. He then compared County teacher salaries, insurance premiums, and bus driver pay to other localities.

John O'Mara, Callands-Gretna District, stated he feels it would bring meaning to the Budget information provided to the citizens, if the average daily attendance was included.

Dalton closed the Public Hearing at 7:14 PM.

b. FY 2025 County Budget Public Hearing

The Board held a Public Hearing to hear citizen input on the proposed Fiscal Year 2025 ("FY 25") County Budget. Per Virginia law, the Budget will not be considered for adoption until seven (7) days after the Public Hearing.

Dalton opened the Public Hearing at 7:14 PM.

John Owen, Jr., Callands-Gretna District, shared his opposition to the proposed Budget. He stated that the Registrar, and Fire and Rescue have really been increased in this year's Budget. He stated that Schools should be a number one priority and recommended funding the schools but cut in other places.

John O'Mara, Callands-Gretna District, thanked Turille and Van Der Hyde for taking his calls and assisting him when needed. He stated that something is wrong when the Budget is asking for a 40% increase in the tax rate. O'Mara stated there is a substantial Budget for Public Safety, but there has been a decline in the population, which should mean a lower demand for services. He also shared his opinion that the fundraising efforts for the Fire and Rescue Agencies should have accountability.

Ben Davenport, Chatham-Blairs District, shared that he enjoys living here and working with the AILR. He stated there will need to be an effort to provide EMT training and recruitment to get people into the Program, and that the pay would have to be attractive. Davenport further stated the County has been blessed with Volunteer Fire Departments, but that volunteers are coming to an end, because they are fewer and fewer. For this reason, the County needs to be looking out for what Fire and Rescue will need in the future. To take advantage of a major employment expansion in the Region, the County needs to increase its population, which means that new homes will need to be built. This requires investments in utilities, schools, and other support. No one wants to pay more taxes, but inflation has taken its toll and costs have increased dramatically in every area of citizens' lives. Finally, Davenport stated that the County needs to be provided with sufficient funds to provide for the overhead now and the future needs of the County.

Jim Scarce, Westover District, shared his opposition to the proposed Budget and the historic tax increase. He stated there are many things about this Budget and the proposed tax increase that do not make sense to him, and he recently heard that the County has an outstanding number of delinquent taxes, that the Strata Solar Farm Project is projected to bring in approximately \$42M in revenue to the County over the life of the contract, and that the Mountain Valley Pipeline is

projected to go online the second quarter of this year, and will net the County between \$1.2M - \$2.2M per year in revenue. He wants to know where the rest of the money is going and why there is a need for this historic property tax increase.

Willie Fitzgerald, Banister District, stated that he is a life-long County resident, and he is also a member of the School Board. He feels the legislators in Richmond need to do a better job to help the Schools with its Budget. The Schools had a teacher and bus driver shortage this year, but they were still able to exceed SOL testing in every category. Fitzgerald finally stated that County Schools are in the lowest five (5) School Districts in the State when it comes to State funding, even though this is the largest area.

Frank Fox, Chatham-Blairs District, asked if some of the items included in the proposed Budget must be done now, or can some of them be scheduled in a way that we are not doing everything now. He mentioned putting service back in 640 and stated that 640 has been out of business since 2020, and with 100 calls annually, none of the agencies covering it asked for this and neither did the Fire and Rescue Commission. Finally, Fox asked why the Board cannot wait on that Project or try for a Grant.

Dalton closed the Public Hearing at 7:35 PM.

c. Proposed Real Property Tax Increase Public Hearing

As required by Virginia Code § 58.1-3321, the Board held a Public Hearing to hear citizen input on the proposed real estate tax increase.

Dalton opened the Public Hearing at 7:35 PM.

Keith Reynolds, Callands-Gretna District, shared his opposition to the proposed real estate tax increase. He questioned why the County was not included in getting money from the casino in Danville, and stated that the taxes are steadily increasing, and people cannot afford it.

Michael Ingram, Tunstall District, stated he is the President of a Henry County business. He stated that he has looked at the County for developing properties but based on the Board's decision on the proposed Budget, he will certainly have to re-evaluate. Ingram asked the Board to please make the right decision as they represent 45,098 voters.

Danny Alverson, Westover District, stated that it appears that the tax rate is going down, but is it? He stated this increase will have a detrimental impact on all citizens as they try to adjust to out-of-control inflation. Finally, Alverson shared his disappointment with the Board and questioned who it really supports.

John O'Mara, Callands-Gretna District, stated that County Staff views a reassessment as a financial windfall, and the reassessment should be revenue neutral, and the tax rate should be at 40¢. His

taxes are doubling, yet the population of the County is declining. O'Mara finally stated, if this were to be voted on, the taxpayers would vote this tax rate down.

John Owen, Callands-Gretna District, congratulated the Board on the Broadband Project and stated he was one of the first to receive it in the County and is extremely pleased with it. He shared his opposition for the tax increase, and feels the Board needs to cut the Budget. Finally, Owen shared his opposition for the new jail, and recommended putting the jail on a referendum and allow the citizens to vote it down.

George Williams, Westover District, stated he has been a resident in the County for two (2) years now. He feels that this is a 40% windfall and suggested keeping this Budget revenue neutral.

Ronnie Cooke, Callands-Gretna District, stated there has been two (2) reassessments done in the County. Seven (7) years ago he built a new house and the value at that time was basically the cost that he paid for it. When he received his reassessment notice, his property went up 55% and believes this is a paintbrush value increase on properties. Cooke recommended adjusting the rate to a reasonable level, because this is additional money that must come out of citizens pockets. Finally, Cooke stated he understands that controlled increases are to be expected from time-to-time, but an increase of this magnitude is outrageous.

Jim Scarce, Westover District, stated the County lost a financial guru on the Board, which was Bob Warren. He stated that the previous reassessment was a 38% increase, but it was thrown out. The Board brought another company in and this time the property rates increased 59%. Finally, Scarce stated that the County does not get any of the casino money, because controversy with Danville caused Danny Marshall to pull out the legislation.

Vanessa Scarce, Westover District, shared her opposition for the proposed tax increase. She stated it is time for the Board to meet with each County Department Head, examine the Budget, trim the fat, and put the citizens first, especially since citizens are the ones who provide the tax revenue. Scarce stated that she looked over the Budget and could quickly reduce the rate by 4¢, so she believes the Board can look hard and come back with a rate that begins with a "4" and she challenged the Board to be the change.

Steve Matherly, Chatham-Blairs District, also shared his opposition for the proposed tax rate and recommended a tax rate no higher than 46¢. He stated that this is a poor County, and 14.4% of citizens live at, or below, the poverty level. The current poverty level is \$15,000 per year. 25% of citizens in the County are over the age of 65, and 13% of that figure have some type of disability. The median income in the County is \$52,619 and the median value of an owner-occupied house is \$144,100; however, when you add 48% to that value, that home is now worth \$213,268. He stated that the County has the highest for taxes in the five (5) surrounding Counties. Finally, Matherly encouraged the Board to consider this budget and adopt a tax rate no higher than 46¢.

Irvin Moss, Westover District, spoke on integrity and honesty and shared his opposition for the proposed tax rate. He referenced the Megapark that has been empty for years, and there is a "Mini

City" going up in Axton. Moss is retired and on a fixed income, and questioned where he would get the money to pay the extra taxes.

Joshua Jennings, Chatham-Blairs District, and is also a business-owner in the Tunstall District. He shared his opposition for the proposed tax rate and stated that the reduction of the rate is 17¢ higher. There is a lack of disposal income in the County and taxation will touch every household in this community. Jennings encouraged the Board to sit down and look at each Department and line item to see if things are necessary.

Randy Owen, Westover District, stated that he is 39-years old and is disappointed in the number of people his age present at the Meeting, but knows that they are keeping up with what is going on and talking about it. He built a house three (3) years ago and said that his assessment went up 147% in one (1) year. He did landscaping, but that is the only upgrade that he has made to his house. Owen hopes that the elected officials keep their promises.

Julie Griffin, Dan River District, stated that she owns a house in the City of Danville also. She stated that there was a 76% increase in her property, and she lives beside an industrial landfill, which she views as a decrease to the value. People are moving away due to Tyson's or the industrial landfill, because people want to keep this land wholesome and as it is.

Josh Austin, Tunstall District, provided statements to the Board from the *Chatham Star Tribune's* website that referenced the 2023 Board responses to public questions. He thanked Dudley and Hite, because the same stated they would look at what needs to be done and did not make promises to not increase taxes. Austin then read statements from Board Members that were provided to the Chamber and stated that Board members made promises when they ran for office. Finally, stated there has been a lot of input tonight and hopes this Board does better than the last Board and listens to the citizens.

Brandon Robertson, Westover District, shared his opposition for the proposed tax rate and stated that people are moving to escape the high taxes. He suggested setting this up for a referendum in November and finding out what the citizens really want.

Kathy Hodges, Callands-Gretna District, thanked the Board for the job it does, because it is not easy. She stated that she was shocked at the reassessment as her property went up 56%, and they only have four (4) acres of land and a house with a thirty (30) year old roof. She offered suggestions to offset this increase and bring back more revenue that includes eliminating the solid waste fee due to taking in outside trash and she recommended the 45¢ cent tax rate.

Dalton closed the Public Hearing at 8:31 PM.

ADJOURNMENT

Dalton adjourned the Meeting at 8:31 PM.