

LOWNDES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING – HOUSE BILL 581
Tuesday, February 11, 2025 - 6:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Chairman Bill Slaughter
Vice Chairperson Joyce Evans
Commissioner Scott Orenstein
Commissioner Demarcus Marshall
Commissioner Michael Smith

Commissioner Mark Wisenbaker was not present.

Chairman Slaughter called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

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County Manager, Paige Dukes, presented the item, stating Lowndes County is not considering eliminating the current homestead exemption. Lowndes County is sensitive to the impact that taxes have on our citizens and currently Lowndes County is operating at the 2018 general fund expenditure levels, even with inflation over the past year. For Lowndes County, it could cause a considerable shift that would result in a millage increase to all other parcels that are not under a homestead exemption. Lowndes County has significantly rolled the county millage rate back over the last few years, that does not have a meaningful impact on the tax bill when not all local governments and not all local school systems rollback. Lowndes County is aggressively pursuing an additional senior exemption for those 65 years and older. Floating Local Option Sales Tax (FLOST), which is an additional penny that if all local governments in Lowndes County chose to stay in House Bill 581, that penny tax could be put before the public for referendum; if that were to be passed, it would only benefit those that own property, it is paid by everyone as a consumption tax. Mrs. Dukes asked Finance Director, Stephanie Black, to present the House Bill 581 presentation with updates and options. Commissioner Marshall stated that regarding senior exemptions, this is something Lowndes County is looking to do locally and this exemption has nothing to do with House Bill 581. Chairman Slaughter stated the commission would not be commenting or answering any questions from citizens who are speaking tonight. A vote will not be taken tonight. This is the second public hearing meeting and the commission is trying to explore every option available in order to give the citizens of Lowndes County the best options available.

William Spell, Jr., 5360 Golf Drive, addressed the commission and stated he spoke yesterday morning as well. Mr. Spell mentioned to manage money and savings and asked if a department could be created to help with government efficiency. Mr. Spell mentioned more savings in the budget and possibly new sources of revenue.

Patricia Williams, 5367 Golf Drive, addressed the commission stating she is a resident and business owner in Lowndes County. Ms. Williams stated over the past six years property taxes have increased by 41% with the population increasing as well. Lowndes County is growing and bringing in more tax revenue. This is an additional financial burden to the home owners with Lowndes County being the

59th wealthiest county in the state of Georgia. Ms. Williams suggested to enforce existing codes on commercial properties. Many businesses neglect maintenance, leaving dilapidated buildings and neglected lots which devalue neighborhoods. Ms. Williams made comments regarding the Lowndes County Board of Education. Chairman Slaughter did comment to Ms. Williams stating the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners has nothing to do with the Lowndes County Board of Education.

Pam Hubbard, 2642 Moore Crossing Road, addressed the commission to state she is a current resident, homeowner and owns farmland in three different parcels (raising cows and growing pine trees) in Lowndes County. Ms. Hubbard stated she is in favor of Lowndes County opting out. Ms. Hubbard stated the discussion with the citizens is important and tax payers are being given the opportunity to express their frustrations. Ms. Hubbard mentioned she was under the impression if you opt in, the decision making leaves Lowndes County and goes to the state level and she would personally like to speak to the commission rather than being a number that would not be able to get through an unelected official with the state. Lowndes County Schools can make their decision, opt in at a later date and explain why, if it is needed. Ms. Hubbard stated opting out is the reasonable thing to do.

ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chairperson Evans made a motion to adjourn the public hearing, second by Commissioner Smith. All voted in favor, no one opposed. Motion carried. Chairman Slaughter adjourned the public hearing at 6:33 p.m.