

PUBLIC HEARING
BIBB COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
JUNE 20, 2008 - 10:00 A.M.
COMMISSIONERS BOARDROOM

A public hearing of the Bibb County Board of Commissioners was held on Friday, June 20, 2008 at 10:00 a.m. regarding the proposed FY 2009 Budget.

Commissioners present were Chairman Charles W. Bishop, Commissioner Bert Bivins, III, Commissioner Elmo A. Richardson, Jr. and Commissioner Joe O. Allen.

Commissioner Lonzy Edwards was absent.

Staff in attendance was Steve Layson, Chief Administrative Officer; Deborah Martin, Finance Director; Christy Iuliucci, Assistant Finance Director; Tony Rousey, Director of Information and Technology Services and Shelia Thurmond, Clerk of the Board.

Others in attendance included Sheriff Jerry Modena, Chief Deputy David Davis, Chief Deputy Russell Nelson, Danny Thompson, Finance Officer – LEC; Major Leonard Thomas and Captain Helen Jackson.

News Media included WMAZ TV 13, FOX 24 and MGT News.

Chairman Bishop called the Hearing to order and stated that the purpose was to receive input from the public, at-large, on budget concerns. He stated that each person would be allowed five minutes to speak. He added that their comments would be received for informational purposes and will be considered at some time during the process as the Board formalizes the budget.

Chairman Bishop stated there were several people who had signed up to speak and that he would call on each one as his or her appeared on the list.

Speaker Number One: Carl Brown

Mr. Brown spoke on the potential increase in bus fare by the Macon Transit Authority due to the County's vote not to increase MTA's funding for FY 2009.

Chairman Bishop responded that he could not answer any questions about increases in bus fare, but would refer them to the Macon Transit Authority.

He added that this forum was strictly about the budget document and the proposed funding for FY 2009.

Speaker Number Two: Rose Marie

Ms. Marie spoke specifically on how the County General Fund provides funding to the various County-supported agencies including the Macon Transit Authority. She spoke

about the rising cost of fuel, utilities and food. She inquired about the decrease in Federal funds for the Macon Transit Authority and other agencies and asked if there were any other contributors (i.e. politicians). She also asked if there were any other helping hands, such as personal loans that are given “under the table” that could help with this situation, adding that she knows that is illegal. She continued that she wanted a full explanation on what’s happening with the funds and if there is a decrease in Federal funding. She then asked what the Board of Commissioners will do for the people of this community.

Chairman Bishop responded that he could not answer her questions but would be glad to talk with her, one on one, after the hearing in an effort to give her some information on where to go to get her questions answered.

Speaker Number Three: Claire Smith

Ms. Smith stated that she has been a volunteer at the Museum of Arts and Sciences for over 30 years and that she was here to speak on that subject. She stated that the Museum has provided programming and educational opportunities for the citizens of Macon and Bibb County for over 50 years. She stated that they try to fill in gaps for the Board of Education. She added that Geography is no longer taught in our schools and they feel a definite need for presenting that type of information. She stated, too, that they are working diligently to raise private funds and had not asked for an increase from the County in at least three years. She stated further that the County had asked them to reduce their dependence on County funding, which is something they have diligently tried to do and been successful in that effort. She continued that they have more visitation than any other museum or attraction in the County, serving 80,000 visitors last year – 20,000 of which were school groups. She stated that an 11% cut is about \$39,000 which is tremendous in their budget and asked that the Board consider restoring that amount to the museum or even part of that amount. She continued that they have found sources for private funding and fundraising and continue to do more with that. She expressed appreciation to the Board for what it does for the museum and added that she thinks that the museum contributes greatly to the quality of life in Macon and Bibb County.

Speaker Number Four: Louie Hargrove

Mr. Hargrove stated that he was present to talk about Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Mental Retardation, which he has been advocating for about 30 years. He stated that the County’s amended budget for FY08 was \$553,224.00. And it is been decreased to \$492,369.00 or \$60,855, which is an 11% cut for FY09. He stated that there are many people in the community in need of mental health service. He mentioned that there is not a long term treatment facility here. He added that politicians have been talking about it for years while he’s been talking about it for 30 years because he has been on both sides of the tracks. He stated that HB 100, which is about privatizing MHMRSA services in Macon-Bibb County and Community Service Boards all around the state of Georgia, is not working for the simply reason, the wrong people are in place. He stated that they are misappropriating the money, they’ve got the buddy-buddy system in place, and administration is getting all of the money, and clients and patients not getting the service they deserve. He stated this is the reason there are so many people on the streets and down at Central City Park lying all out, which he added is the one place they can go to get baths and clothes, if they so choose, and if they know left from right, which he added many of them do not. He stated that there needs to be somebody out there to help these people. He stated that, right now, the CEO over at River Edge is not doing his job. He stated that

the wrong people are in place over there. He mentioned that he knew that Frank Fields will be retiring pretty soon and added that he did the same thing at Parkside down in Dublin – stating that he “messed the system up, then he ran which he is fixing to do right here in Macon.” He continued that he was over there for 18 years and he knows what he is talking about. He stated that he’s seen it, monitored it and still monitors it today. He stated that he was booted out after 18 years, adding that they came up with some phony charge that didn’t go anywhere. He continued that he has always advocated for the poor and economically disadvantaged and asked the County, if it ever gets the right people in place, to please give Mental Health money because it’s needed. In closing, Mr. Hargrove stated that he understands where the County is and, right now, it should not give them nothing, under Frank Fields and his administration because he is not doing his job. And addressing Commissioner Allen, he stated that he hopes he doesn’t vote on the budget for River Edge because it would be a conflict for him, adding that he hopes Commissioner Allen understands and that no offense is meant. And adding a footnote about the transit system, Mr. Hargrove stated that something does need to be done about it, adding that it’s terrible and the right people aren’t in the right place. He continued that Macon is a great town with beautiful people and that everyone needs to work together in order to grow.

Speak Number Five: Jacqueline Glover

Ms. Glover stated that she was present to talk about the Transit Authority. She stated that, right now, management was in place and what they need is the funding. She stated when the budget was originally done in February, the price of gas was only \$2.80. She stated that now that gas is \$4.00 and above. She stated what is needed is for the budget to be increased to the amount that was asked for because, if not, it will come to a point where the services will have to be cut. She continued that when you start talking about services with transportation, you’re looking at stunting the growth of the city and county because businesses, next to education, when they come into a place, they look at your transportation system; they’ve got to have people be able to get to the jobs, and the people who are going to clean and do the grunge work and help them get their stuff setup don’t have fancy cars to jump in. She added that she was legally blind and uses the Para-transit service and sometimes the regular transit system. She stated that what happens with the regular transit system greatly affects the Para-transit system. She stated that they need for the Board to look at the Transit Authority’s budget and approve it so they will have time to go in and work on getting other sources of funding which is actually being worked on over there, but they need some more money right now. She stated that if the funding gets cuts, it going to hurt some businesses also. She continued that the people who work in retail, until 9:00 or 10:00 at night, they aren’t going to have a job. Ms. Glover added that she knows the County is giving the Medical Center basically all of the money they are asking for, but the people who are working the menial jobs do try to pay their bills, but what’s going to happen is that they are not going to be able to pay, so, if they get sick, there will be more indigents at the hospital and then, next year, the Medical Center is going to come back and ask for even more for indigent care. She continued that the transportation system is needed in this city, adding that there are people who wholly depend on it; they have no other means for getting around, and when the Transit Authority has to raise the rider’s fee, the fee for Para-transit goes up and people who ride Para-transit already pay double what the regular transit service pays. She stated that she understands that because it’s more detailed, but asked the County to figure out another way to keep the people in Macon employed, the poor especially. She concluded that she, like everybody else, doesn’t want to pay any more taxes on her house, but something has to be done.

Speaker Number Six: Nancy White and Sam MacFie

Ms. White (Member, Macon City Council) addressed the Commission in her capacity as an employee of the Coliseum Hospital stating that they laud the County for almost doubling the funding for indigent care over this year over last year. She stated that indigent care is really a critical problem in our community and it's really being exacerbated by the suffering economy. She stated what they were here to advocate today is what they advocated for last year and that is that this Board develop a fair and equitable way to distributed what it allocates each year in its budget cycle for indigent care. She stated there is not just a single provider of indigent care in this community; the Coliseum provided \$4 million of indigent care last year and in addition, there scores of physicians that provide indigent care. She stated what they would like to see the County develop is a system where they put the money in a pot and on a pro rata basis distribute it to other providers.

Mr. MacFie stated that it would seem from a budgetary prospective, whether it's a government or a business or an agency, that it would be better to have that continuity from year to year just from a large budget item like indigent care. He stated that rather than it being \$1.9 million one year and \$4 million another year, it would seem like it would be a better financial budgetary process to have a set amount that would be some percentage of the overall tax receipts or a percentage of the budget. He continued that they were not here advocating that it needs to be a certain amount, but what they think is that it would be better to have a set amount each year so there would be some continuity and predictability, and then again, if the number were \$3 million for example, then the Medical Center, Coliseum and all of the physicians and health care providers that do provide indigent care and can document that to the satisfaction of the County, then be eligible for some pro rata share. He stated that he thinks this would take a larger, global view of indigent care funding as opposed to having it directed toward one health care provider. He also stated that he thinks it would take them off of a little bit of a hot seat when it comes to the outside agencies that may be wondering why their budgets have been cut back. He stated that he thinks this is a positive recommendation and again, they are not here asking for the money, but asking for the County to look at how it funds indigent care and expand the definition of those providers that are eligible for that money.

Chairman Bishop stated that they would take those in the context of being public comments because they have been through the budget process and agencies have had a chance to address theirs at that time.

Speaker Number Seven: Mr. Ed Walsh

Mr. Walsh stated that he was present representing the commercial real estate and development community related to Planning and Zoning. He stated they, over the last five years, had a huge increase in their fees, and the cut that y'all are about to make in their budget request is going to require another 40% increase in their fees. He stated that they are on the front lines of development for this community; we're the guys out there trying to make new deals happen and bring prospects to this community to build buildings, create revenue through real estate tax and create revenue through sales tax. He state that he had already talked to all members of the Board privately but wanted to be on public record that this is not the place to cut. He stated that this was the equivalent of raising your prices if you're selling a product because you need to reduce cost. He stated that the County doesn't need to make it less competitive to do business here, but more competitive. He

continued that at a minimum, the fees ought to be kept where they are. He stated that he thinks Mr. Edwards asked the question, "Tell me one person that's gone to another community because of our fees." He stated that he could tell the Board that people don't come to this community because of our fees. He stated that he had a gentleman that wanted to a mini warehouse project on Hartley Bridge Road. He stated that the application fee alone, just to find out if he could do it, was \$5,000.00 and he just said, hey, I'll go to Houston County, pay \$150.00 and they'll tell me yes or no and he doesn't have quite as much at risk. He asked the Board to look at this real hard before it raises the fees at Planning and Zoning because it's not a lot of money in the County's budget, yet it's upfront and it's the front door of this community. He continued that a lot of people, the first time they get here, say it's a tough place to do business, it's expensive to do business and that's not what they need. He also stated that he knows the Board realizes the amount of revenue been generated out of all the new commercial projects in this community, just in the Bass Road and Riverside Drive area. He added that there has been almost \$200 million in new development out there and they need to keep it going and not do things that will impede that.

Speaker Number Eight: Wade Horton

Mr. Horton stated that he was addressing the Macon Transit Authority. He stated that it doesn't affect him directly, but indirectly, it affects us all because there are so many people that depend on the service. He stated that he hopes the commissioners find it in their hearts to reconsider the funding. He stated that it was his understanding there is a 60-40 agreement between the County and City, and that the City has appropriated additional funding for this purpose. He stated that it is his hope that the County would also do the same thing because sometimes we have to put ourselves in this situation. He stated, for instance, with the commissioners and other county officials, when they leave this building, they are going to get into a county-owned vehicle, with county-owned gas and when you run low on the gas, and you can go down and fill out a county ticket and put it in a box and get the gas. He stated that they had the leisure of riding in county-owned cars with county-owned gas. He added that a lot of other people have to carpool, on city transportation and if this transportation is taken away from them, they have no way to get around; their livelihood is going to be cut. He continued that these people shop, work, go to the theaters, help fund a lot of these businesses that help pay taxes in order for county officials to buy the cars they ride in and to furnish the gas. He asked that when the Board considers the budget to consider themselves, their brothers, sisters, cousins and neighbors because they, too, are affected indirectly because somebody in their family, some of their friends and probably some people that will come to this city to just experience Macon. He stated that if they want people to have a good experience of what Macon has to offer, they need to put their best foot forward and sometimes that mean digging deep, going where they don't want to go to get what is needed for this situation. He added that sometimes they get caught up in different turf battles, the county does this and the city does this. He stated that the sheriff of Bibb County patrols inside the city as well as outside. He stated it was his duty by law to enforce the laws inside and outside the city. Mr. Horton further stated that many of the commissioners' territory in which they represent, largely, is part city-part county. He stated that no one on the Board represents the county only or unincorporated Bibb County. He stated that it was all in one, and, so they have to work together if they want to move forward and not go backwards. Again, he asked that when the board deliberates on this budget, that they step back and engage themselves into this thing and say, if these people were voting on me, to take my car away, what would I say, how would I address them, what would I want them to do, what

would I want them to see about me that would influence them to let me keep my county vehicle. He added that city transportation is their vehicle and it's being threatened to be taken away. He stated that he knows it's not the county's or the city's fault or the transit authority's fault that gas went up. Again, he asked that when the commissioners are deliberating on this budget to put themselves in it and know that it's going to affect them, maybe not directly but indirectly.

Speaker Number Nine: Peggy Mohammed

Ms. Mohammed stated that when she attended the Commission meeting this past Tuesday night, Chairman Bishop had stated that this commission didn't have a contract when they made the decision to give a certain amount of money the Macon Transit Authority. She stated that she thought he had said it was an 80-20 initially, then it went to 60-40.

Chairman Bishop responded that he'd have to look at the minutes to see what was said. He also stated that he didn't want to get into debating the issues and that they're talking about the budget now. He told her if she'll talk to him after the hearing, he'll get her the numbers and they'll talk about them. He stated that he does recall referring to an 80-20 and then a 60-40, but this hearing is not so much for questions as answers about what the contracts are, but about her input into the budget process. He stated that if those were her comments, he'd take them into consideration if she disagrees with some item in the budget.

Ms. Mohammed asked if that was not a part of the budget, allocating money to MTA, because from what she understands from the Mayor's Office, the County gives a certain percentage and the City gives a certain percentage.

Chairman Bishop responded that it was in the budget and directed her attention a copy of the budget which Ms. Martin, Finance Director, had on hand. He stated that the budget, pretty much, speaks for itself because the Board couldn't go back line item by line item through the budget. He reiterated that they would listen and take her comments into consideration as they finish the budget process.

Ms. Mohammed stated that the working poor really needs this service and depends on this service and don't need to get the service cut. She stated that they are willing to accept the increase, but they don't need the service cut and that's the bottom line. She continued that the service is not that great as it is now, but it's better than no service at all and people do need to get around and do their errands on Saturday. She stated that they want to cut the service on Saturday and want to cut it down to 6:00 p.m. on weekdays. She stated that people needed the service after 6:00 p.m. She asked that the Board really consider the public and their needs for the transportation.

Commissioner Bivins stated that Ms. Mohammed was talking about the budget. He stated that she was talking about the amount of money this Board provides to the Transit Authority.

Chairman Bishop stated that he did not mean to imply that she was not talking about the budget. He stated spoke directly to Ms. Mohammed stating that if she took his comments to mean that he didn't think she was talking about the budget, he understands that she is talking about the budget process. He stated that, hopefully, she can look at the budget

book and if she has any questions about it, Ms. Martin would be glad to answer the actual percentage and so forth that's in the budget, but what they're trying to do today is to get the comments and give everybody a chance to speak on their budget item.

Speaker Number 10: Wright Tilley

Mr. Tilley stated that he has the utmost respect for this Board of Commissioners and he certainly understands the difficult financial decisions they have to make for the good of the county. He stated that he was here today because he cares about the future of the Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful Commission. He stated that they were the pilot program under the Keep America Beautiful Clean Community system that began back in the 70's. He stated that they've done many great things over their 30 plus years for this community relating to beautification, environmental education, solid waste minimization, recycling and of course, the creation of the annual Cherry Blossom Festival. I'm concerned about the pattern of recurring budget cuts, not only with the county, but also with the city, and the reduction in funding over the past five to six years. He stated from 2004 to 2009, KMBBC's combined budget from the county and city has been cut \$50,659.00, which doesn't sound like a huge amount, but that's 30% and while the budget cuts have come, their operating expenses continue to increase. He stated that they've cut and cut deep, even to the point of eliminating pension benefits for their existing employees. He also stated that because of their organizational structure, they're a 501 c1, an instrumentality of government, they were created by ordinances of the city and county and they rely primarily on the county and city for funding. He continued that they have made some progress in getting supplemental income into their budget from selling recycling products and from a few projects specific donations and grants. He stated that's a tough sell; it's not a tough sell because environmental issues are not popular right now; it's a tough sell because there's no tax incentive to giving to an instrumentality of government. He stated that they have found that many foundations and businesses can only give to 501 c3's. He stated that he brings this up because their situation and their structure is somewhat different than some of the other outside agencies that the county funds. He understands that the most fiscally, financially equitable way is to cut everybody at the same percentage, but that doesn't take into consideration the organization's structure and the contributions to the community. He stated that he does not know the answer but he is concerned about continuing cuts next year and the next year. He stated, too, that he realizes the County has a balanced budget and can't spend more than what comes in. He then asked the Board if it sees County revenues increasing anytime in the next few years and how they can as citizens of Bibb County help facilitate that so that they don't lose valuable community programs and agencies.

Speaker Number Eleven: Captain Helen Jackson

Captain Jackson stated that she was present to voice her concern about the 4% Merit raise that was given to the employees of the Bibb County Sheriff's Office. She stated that she was working on 28 years at the Sheriff's Office. She stated that while she has worked there, she has always done her best. She stated that she was one of the hardest working captains at the Sheriff's Office, but when she found out yesterday that they're not going to get a raise, she was hurt by that. She stated that she was raised by her parents that when they had, everybody got. She stated that she and other officers are locked in longevity and cost of living has gone up and they're not going to get a raise. She stated that they ring her phone at night, she answers, gets up out of her bed and go down to the jail. She stated that they have reduced their overtime, reduced the prisoners and if the County is going to

give a 4%, she would like to see all of them get a 4% and not be left out. She stated that she wants the Board to take this into consideration.

Chairman Bishop stated that this concludes the people who signed up to speak. He thanked everyone for coming today and stated that they understand their concerns and each commissioner present has heard them and has his own mind to make up involving these matters. He stated that it would be impossible to increase the millage rate to raise \$11 million which would raise taxes in Bibb County by approximately 4 mils. He stated that he hopes they will consider that, too, as they leave here today, adding that they had to make some tough decisions collectively and each person here has certain agencies and certain considerations and they've tried to collectively work with the money that they had appropriated by taxes and although they have had some increases, this is balancing the budget and, he thanks everyone for their input and as they go through the process, they will take them into consideration.

There being no further business on motion duly made and seconded, the Public Hearing was adjourned at 10:37 a.m.

Shelia Thurmond, Clerk of the Board