



Joint Services Committee Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, June 6, 2023

Caucus Room, 12 East 4th Ave. 9:00 AM

Commissions: Floyd County Board of Commissioners
Rome City Commission

Members: Chair Allison Watters, Floyd County
Vice Chair Larry Maxey, Floyd County
Mayor Sundai Stevenson, Rome City
Commissioner Bill Collins, Rome City

I. Call to Order

Chair Allison Watters called the meeting to order.

II. Approve minutes from the April 4, 2023 Joint Services meeting.

The minutes were approved by common consent.

III. Tax Assessment Presentation – Danny Womack

Chief Appraiser Danny Womack stated the assessments were higher this year due to the market. Stated the Board of Assessors is tasked with staying as close to the market as possible, and they do not get a choice in that as they are graded each year by the Department of Audits. Mr. Womack stated they have received a little under 700 appeals so far this year, which is slightly above normal. Stated the deadline for appeals is June 26, 2023. Stated the main questions that are asked are about exemptions. Mr. Womack explained the County M&O, Fire, Solid Waste, City M&O, City Capital all honor the freeze, which means that you are exempt from inflation change. Mr. Womack explained that it is only on homesteaded property. Commissioner Bill Collins asked how someone qualifies for homestead exemption. Mr. Womack explained you must live on the property as of January 1 each year, but you must file for the exemption initially. Stated they advertise the exemption four times from January to April each year to inform the public. Commissioner Collins asked if the school taxes went directly to support the school system. Floyd County School Board Director Glenn White stated that other than a collection fee, the school board does receive the funds. Mr. Womack stated the millage

rate used is from the previous year. Mr. Womack stated each entity has different ways of doing homestead exemptions, which is confusing to the public. Commissioner Collins asked how long the local legislation has been in effect and when should it be looked at to change. Mr. Womack agreed that it is out of date as the market has increased and people that were eligible for school tax exemptions are not anymore because their houses are valued over the eligible amount. Chair Watters asked if the way Rome and Floyd County taxes are done is common. Mr. Womack stated he would not call it normal, but the base exemptions are common. County Clerk Erin Elrod stated most surrounding counties do not participate in a freeze like Floyd County does. Chair Watters stated she believed it would be beneficial to the citizens if the process was simplified. Mayor Stevenson stated it may be helpful to have public forums for citizens and homeowners so they can understand why their taxes are going up. Chair Watters stated it was worth having a discussion on how to simplify this. City Manager Sammy Rich stated it would be ideal to simplify it. Mr. Womack stated what he wished for homestead exemptions, he would pick an age and consider either changing the \$100,000 value to a more accurate number for the current market or leave room for an adjustment for the economy. Stated he would also get the different entities to have the same criteria for homestead value, so it is not as confusing for citizens. Mr. McCord asked Mr. Womack to go back over each entity's exemptions. Mr. Womack went over Floyd County, Floyd County Schools, Fire & Solid Waste, City of Rome, Rome City Schools. Commissioner Collins asked if someone qualified for an exemption, but hadn't applied, will it be applied. Mr. Womack stated the Board of Assessors can take the application, but they cannot apply it until the following year. Mr. Womack stated he has a list of employees and elected officials that he goes through to look for any anomalies as that is something the public looks for. Mr. White stated his recommendation will be for the County School Board to lower their millage rate .25 as that will affect everyone, instead of exemptions that only certain people qualify for. Commissioner Collins asked if Mr. Womack could put together some scenarios that they could review. Mr. Womack also mentioned that the State will be issuing a credit on each homesteaded property that will be on the tax bill.

IV. New Business

A. SPLOST Proposals and Operating Expenses

Mr. McCord stated the SPLOST committee is going well with this being the last week of presentations. Mr. McCord stated as a reminder the new upgrades at Banty Jones need to be discussed in case any of the upgrades will affect the operational cost as the County is responsible for that per the Joint Rec agreement. Mr. McCord stated the ECO Center is also under renovation. Stated the pavilion is currently under Parks and Rec, but it has been discussed adding it to the ECO Center. Mr. McCord stated he is okay with pulling the pavilion out, but they need to decide how to handle the exterior and interior restrooms. City Manager Sammy Rich stated the next step would be to discuss the amendment and then send to both Commissions for approval. Mr. Rich also stated Bekki Fox is supposed to be at the next Parks and Recreation meeting to discuss the Banty Jones Park.

B. Service Delivery Strategy Discussion – Parks & Recreation

See above.

C. Update on Relocation of Rome City Police Department

Mr. McCord stated the County has an architect in place and will begin renovations at the Historic Courthouse, Judicial, and LEC. Stated the agreement says twelve months and it has been six months already. Mr. Rich stated they consulted with TSW for a space needs study. Stated 28,276 is the square footage need and 29,000 square footage for exterior. Mr. Rich stated they are looking at all options, such as constructing a new facility or buying a facility and retro fit it, but they would prefer to construct a new facility. Stated they will present to SPLOST committee this week. Stated the estimate is \$20,000,000. Mr. McCord stated the County has paid \$227,000 to the City in LOST funds since January and they may want to recoup some of that if the City stays in LEC past December.

D. Update on SPLOST Streetscape Project

Mr. Rich went over their SPLOST Streetscape Project on the 5th Avenue Bridge by showing a rendering on the screen to the Committee. Mr. Rich pointed out a new crosswalk and a Hawk Pedestrian Signal, that will flash when a pedestrian presses the button. City of Rome Public Works Director Chris Jenkins stated the lights of the pedestrian signal would be similar to what was on Broad Street at the raised crosswalks, and it is solar powered. Mr. Rich stated it should be minimal change of traffic for the bridge. Mr. McCord asked about timeline. Mr. Jenkins stated a lot of it will be underground utilities, which will involve Georgia Power, AT&T, and Comcast. Stated this was a \$2,000,000 SPLOST project, that will probably be closer to \$8,000,000. Stated they are waiting for a notice to proceed on the 2nd Ave project at any time and it is supposed to be a 30-month project.

V. Other Business

City Clerk Joe Smith stated the State sets the qualifying period and they use the maximum the State allows. Stated the election is November 7, which will include the City commission and SPLOST. Mr. McCord stated Election Supervisor Akyn Trudnak is doing a good job. Stated with the City and SPLOST vote, this will be a 50-50 split.

VI. Adjourn

With no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned.