



BROOKS TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

Monday, August 22, 2022

Council Member Scott Israel led the Invocation, and Mayor Langford let the Pledge and called the meeting to order.

Mayor: Daniel Langford

Council Member present: Ted Britt
Kay Brumbelow
Brian Davis
Scott Israel

Absent: Todd Speer

Mayor Langford stated this is a Public Hearing to consider the millage proposal before us and to have the millage rate go from 1.0 mills to 1.64 mills, which is a 64% increase in property tax which makes it an 83.04% increase in Net Taxes % Increase, which is fairly substantial and is the purpose of this meeting.

Mayor Langford opened the Public Hearing at 6:24 p.m. to hear public comments.

Caroline Smith – 210 McIntosh Rd – I would like to get the history of how the millage rate came about and its justifications. Has the budget increased more than the income to support the millage increase? How many staff members does the Town have?

Mayor Langford stated that for years and years, the Town did a rollback and didn't increase taxes. There have been very few tax increases in the 12 years as Mayor and ten years prior to that on Council. It is a cumulative effect. The budget has increased by about 10% higher than last year; most revenues come from non-property tax sources. Property Tax is 5th in line as revenue. Mayor Langford stated there are five employees, M. Ungaro, Town Manager; L. Spohr, Town Clerk; F. Quick, Maintenance; W. Couch, Cemetery Maintenance; K. Bradley, Deputy Clerk, and Librarian.

Donald Britt – 1040 Hwy 85 Connector – Hardy Hall and the Chapel how much revenue is coming into the Town, and how much money is it making money? Is it worth keeping them, or why not sell them? When will the tax increase take effect?

Mayor Langford replied that Hardy Hall and the Brooks Chapel rent per the actual statements were just under a thousand dollars. Council Member Scott Israel replied that he likes the idea of having a Chapel in the Town, and it was bought before he was on Council and that it was not a significant purchase; plus, it is good for Brooks and wishes it was used more often. It's a good reflection on the citizens of Brooks and the Town. Mayor Langford replied that the increase will take effect this fall, as it is due by August 31st for the County to turn it into the Department of Revenue on

September 1st. M. Ungaro reminded everyone that property taxes can be appealed through the Tax Assessors office.

Sherly Fleming – 1053 85 Connector – Want to know what is all the money going to be spent on? What are you going to do with this large increase? Is there any money in the budget to do anything with the water? Is there a town limit to where the property tax is going to go?

Mayor Langford replied it is an increase in the property taxes; last fiscal year, property tax was \$40k, and some change. This increase would take it to \$68,560; the increase is \$28K. Most of that is proposed for raises for permanent staff of the Town, Mayor and Council excluded, the Mayor and Council are not getting raises. Currently, the Mayor makes \$200.00 per month, and each Council Member makes \$100.00 per month. The raise proposed is for a COLA; the raise is 8.5%. M. Ungaro added that the increase in the property tax is also due to the cost of inflation. Mayor Langford replied that the water system is not in the current budget and is on a future projects list. M. Ungaro stated that the County is trying to get a grant from the state for the water system and will work with the County to ensure the Town of Brooks is included. M. Ungaro shared the boundaries of the actual Town of Brooks and stated that all of the residents within the boundaries will have their property taxes affected by the millage rate. The Town only can charge those residents within its boundaries.

Melvin Brown – 900 85 Connector – stated his taxes have doubled, they’ve gone from \$21.00 to \$45.00, and it’s going to affect those on a fixed income.

Mayor Langford replied that it shouldn’t be doubling but close to it and reviewed what his taxes are on his property within the Town.

Francis Cavender – 249 W. McIntosh Rd. - Basically everyone now wants to live in Brooks; with Brooks growing and all the housing going up, you can expect more taxes, and the Town will have to provide more services. This town will continue to grow and grow and will cost more.

Stephanie Griffin – 118 E. Kelly Lake Rd – I would like to know the plan and what is the purpose of the property tax going up. Will this increase the Fund Balance? What are the hours of the Town?

Mayor Langford replied that the property tax last year in Brooks was about \$40K, and the total revenue was \$529K, so the property tax was only 7.6% of the total budget; there are four categories that are larger; sales tax, grant income, insurance premium tax, and franchise fees. The purpose of the millage rate going up is it is rather dangerous to plan on increases in all the other revenue sources in a time that is looking recessionary. The increase in the millage rate will produce about \$28K in property taxes in total. The raise was not allocated to specific projects; it was principally designed to cover the 8.5% COLA for the permanent staff and cover general expenses. M. Ungaro replied that the Town is open Monday – Thursday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and is on 24/7 call as needed.

Brian Diner – 269 Woods Rd. – Are we going to have this conversation regarding the millage rate again next year? Keeping it stable is part of the shock.

Mayor Langford replied, I hope not; M. Ungaro replied that is not our intent; we would like to keep it stable, Mayor Langford stated that it was kept stable for many, many years.

Rick McElveen – 1063 85 Connector – Do you think it would behoove this Council to have maybe foreseen this earlier? What I’ve heard so far is sticker shock! Maybe ease the effect and take smaller bites.

Council Member Scott Israel replied, that is a good question, and in hindsight; we should have been increasing taxes a little bit year by year; the Town was trying to take the easiest route for the citizens by not increasing the millage all these years; it's come to a point where the Town does not have a choice. Mayor Langford reiterated that the Town is not planning to do it again but won't have an idea until next Spring, when we can pull the actual revenue numbers and see where they are.

Mayor Langford commented that the Town has a first-class staff.

Mayor Langford asked if there were any further public comments, and with no additional public comments, the Public Hearing is now closed at 7:12 p.m.

Mayor Langford called for a motion regarding the millage rate.

Mayor Langford also stated that, in his opinion, there are several options on the table, but there are three that might want to consider seriously:

- 1) Pass the 1.64 milage rate as proposed.
- 2) Go back to the originally proposed increase that the staff proposed with the FY23 budget for a total of 1.50 mills (the increase was 0.50 mills) and take back the 8.5% raise and replace it with the original 5.2% raise.
- 3) Neither of the above and table it to revisit it. Maybe even taking it lower would require a special called council meeting to go over the budget and come up with items to cut, revenues to increase, and/ or adjust.

Mayor Langford asked if there was a motion regarding this millage rate:

Council Member Scott Israel asked if we have enough time for another meeting.

Mayor Langford replied, yes, if we have a Special Session on Wednesday, August 24th, and another Public Hearing to adopt the rate on Monday, August 29, 2022

Council Member B. Davis – shared the math for 1.5 mills for a \$315k home, the portion the Town would receive would be \$195 a year; at 1.64 mills, the taxes would be \$213 a year, or another \$18, and wanted to remind everyone that this millage rate affects everyone, Mayor, and Council Members.

Council Member B. Davis made a Motion to approve the millage rate 1.64 millage rate as presented; Council Member K. Brumbelow seconded the motion.

Mayor Langford asked for those who are all in favor and those opposed.

Council Member Scott Israel and Council Member Ted Britt opposed.

Mayor Langford said there was a tie, and he would break the tie and will vote opposed and feels it should be tabled and revisited it.

Mayor Langford recommended that it be tabled and revisited with a Council Meeting on Wednesday, August 24, 2022, and another Public Hearing on Monday, August 29, 2022.

Adjourn: There being no further business to discuss this evening, Council Member Brian Davis offered a Motion to adjourn; Ted Britt seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lorey Spohr
Town Clerk