

Walton Tax Watch

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*The eyes and ears of Walton
County for taxpayers*

Property Valuations and Tax Levies

Florida Statute requires that each year the governing body of each taxing authority adopt a budget, recompute its millage rate and publicly announce the percent by which the proposed millage rate exceeds, if any, the roll-back rate (the rate which would yield the same revenue as the previous year). If the proposed millage rate exceeds the roll back rate, this is the percentage *increase in property taxes* tentatively adopted by the governing body. Annual tax statements mailed to each property owner shows the comparisons between proposed and roll-back millage rate.

Taxing authorities control the amount of taxation (tax levy/millage rate) they charge property owners. Taxing authorities have the power to increase, decrease or maintain the ad valorem tax levy.

WALTON COUNTY PROPERTY VALUE TOTALS (In Billions)

<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006 (Uncertified)</u>
\$6.4	\$8.1	\$12.8	\$16.5

VALUATION OF COMPLETED NEW CONSTRUCTION (In Millions)

<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006 (Incomplete Year)</u>
\$441,687,458	\$493,564,151	\$626,708,935	

MILLAGE RATES SET BY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007 (Proposed)</u>
5.3150	5.3150	5.0650	4.3099	4.2600

Candidate Fair—Details Page 5



President's Message

Bonnie McQuiston

The Sunshine/Public Records Law seminar we organized for the First Amendment Foundation at the coastal library in south Walton was a significant event. Results have reverberated throughout the Panhandle. Channel 13 TV reported on possible Sunshine Law violations in Bay County; local newspapers reported on possible meeting violations of the Navarre Beach Fire Department; Walton County's compliance with access to public records was reviewed, and the City of DeFuniak Springs improved some of their public access policies.

"Results have reverberated throughout the Panhandle"

Our energies currently are centered on FY2007 county budgets. We participated in the county budget workshop on July 13th. In preparing for this workshop, it was evident that the past four years of work by our Citizens Budget Committee had a noticeable impact on the process.

"In contrast, the South Walton Fire District has not lowered their tax levy in the ten years since their inception."

Walton County leaders are to be commended for working to streamline their operations while meeting the challenges of a growing county. There was positive dialogue between the county and WCTA which gave us better insight into the thought processes that go into compiling the county budget. We appreciate the willingness and overall cooperation by our government leaders to work with our board and the public.



The phenomenal increases in Walton County property values in the past two years have resulted in record revenues from ad valorem taxes for

all county taxing authorities. In recognition of these significantly higher revenues, the Board of County Commission, Walton County School District and South Walton Mosquito Control District have each proposed lowered tax levies this year.

This will be the third year in a row that the Board of County Commission and South Walton Mosquito Control District have lowered millage rates.

In contrast, the South Walton Fire District has not lowered their tax levy in the ten years since their inception. Their FY2007 budget numbers will be complete around mid-August. WCTA has requested the SW Fire District to consider a millage decrease in the same spirit as the other taxing authorities in the county.

It is always a pleasure to announce board member resignations for the right reasons. Although we will miss them, two of our directors have qualified to run for public office in the 2006 elections. Gene Ryan qualified to run for county commissioner and Ray Padgett qualified to run for supervisor of elections. Additionally, Glenda Wood resigned to have more time for family and work.

Due to our non-partisan status, Robert Nelson has taken a temporary leave of absence because of his involvement in major campaigns in this year's elections. Robert will re-join our board following the November elections. We appreciate these board members, their service and contributions to WCTA.

Walton County is fortunate to have so many citizens willing to go into public service to make our county the best it can be. We wish them each a good race.



Porker Update.. Pedestrian Safety Lights



\$270,000

As of publication the test lights and signage were not installed.

In our last newsletter, we identified a porker project for crosswalk lights on Scenic Gulf Drive, at a cost of \$270,000. The actual cost for the lights was approximately \$9500 per crosswalk with a total of 19 lighted cross walks for a total of approximately \$182,000. This included the pedestrian pedestals at each side of the crossing and voice / lighted warning to pedestrians when activated. We termed this “pork” because the same lighting system was installed on Hwy 30A about two years ago and has not worked properly. We presented the WCTA

position on this issue to county commissioners and asked for consideration of alternative lighting systems.

WCTA had a follow-up meeting on June 14th with District 5 Commissioner Cindy Meadows and Preble-Rish engineering consultant Cliff Knauer. Knauer had tested the existing safety system at six crosswalks on Hwy 30A and found four light bulbs burned out and two push buttons inoperative. The push button design for this particular system is subject to failure due to sand blowing across the beach in these two areas. Knauer said the operation and safety of the proposed system has been greatly improved in the last couple of years with brighter lights and non-corrosive push buttons.

Since the objective is to protect pedestrians and bikers and to warn motorists of a crosswalk, Commissioner Meadows was concerned about an unreliable system and high maintenance. She requested that Preble-Rish do a trial run with an alternative

safety system, a blinking yellow light which pedestrians and bikers can activate by pushing a button when crossing the highway.

Knauer said costs are minimal to test the yellow light system since electricity is already hooked up. The test sites selected for the trial are Dune Allen and Gulf Place crosswalks on Hwy 30A. The lights to be used in the comparison include yellow flashing pedestrian activated light vs. constantly flashing yellow light.

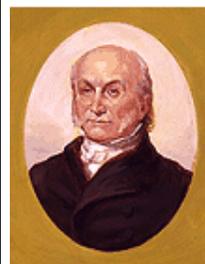
Commissioner Meadows also asked Knauer to expedite signage for pedestrian crossings on Scenic Gulf Drive (Miramar Beach) and not to wait until August for a safety lighting system to be installed.

First Online Tax Certificate Sale

Walton County Tax Collector Rhonda Skipper announced that the first Internet tax certificate cyber auction generated more than 900,000 bids from as far away as California, Arizona, New Jersey and Maine. The online sale generated \$3,387,316 compared to last year’s sale which generated \$1,900,600.

There were 3,228 tax certificates offered on parcels owned by people who owe delinquent property taxes. 1,293 people submitted computerized bids. This is compared to 47 bidders last year in the live auction on the courthouse steps.

Manpower expenses associated with the online sale were significantly reduced with the auction completed in four hours. The live auction last year required the work of six employees for two weeks.



**“Always stand on principle,
even if you stand alone”**

John Quincy Adams—6th President

Capping Government Expenditures and Taxation

The WCTA board approached this year's FY 2007 county budgeting process with a three step plan.

Set a reasonable target for growth in county budget expenditures.

The combination of annual county population growth, averaging about 4%, and inflation or Cost of Living at 3 – 4%, sets a reasonable target (7 – 8%) or benchmark for local government officials to use in county budget spending.

Meet with constitutional officers and department heads to discuss their proposed budgets and personnel, with an emphasis on limited growth and expenditures.

Encourage elected officials to “buy in” to the concept of measurable budget growth. Ask candidates in 2006 elections to publicly support this concept.

We believe it is a reasonable expectation for the county to place a meaningful cap on government expenditures and taxation. Government budgets can grow along with changing needs but government should not keep large windfall profits. County spending should mirror taxpayer spending and our tax money should be spent wisely.

Our focus this year is on fiscal discipline in county expenditures and putting excess revenues back in the pockets of taxpayers.

Proposed County FY2007 Budgets

As we reviewed the various budgets this year, it was apparent that most county leaders were already taking the initiative to limit new personnel and spending in their FY2007 proposed budgets. Many of them were at or below an 8% increase.

After County Finance Director Bill Imfeld finished his “budget scrubs” eliminating \$20 million, the final proposed operating budget of the Board of County Commission reflects a 10.7% increase. The new north Walton fire program which combines independent volunteer fire departments comprises 3.5% of the budget. Without this new program, the Board of County Commission proposed operating budget growth is 7.2%.

District 5 Commissioner Cindy Meadows observed all three days of budget scrubs.

When budget hearings are completed and budgets approved in September, we will print all county taxing authority budgets in our 3rd Quarter newsletter.

Walton County Full Time Employees:

Board of County Commissioners

FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007 (Proposed)
454	515	539

Constitutional Officers

FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007 (Proposed)
334	383	415

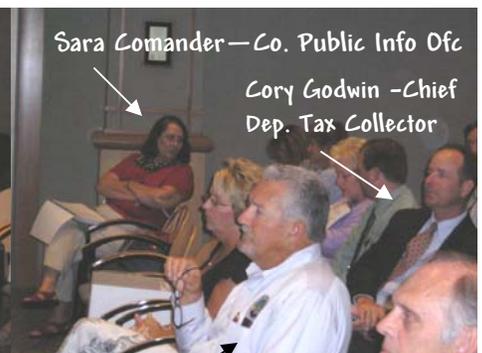
Snaps from the budget workshop -South Walton Annex



Front—
Bob Hudson, WCTA Treasurer
Bonnie McQuiston, WCTA Pres.



Bill Imfeld—County Finance Director
Ronnie Bell—County Administrator



Gary Mattison
Hondo Bob
Director -Human Resources

ELECTIONS 2006

**CANDIDATE FAIRS FOR LOCAL CANDIDATES
IN SEPTEMBER 5th PRIMARY ELECTIONS**

**DeFuniak Springs Civic Center
SATURDAY AUGUST 5th 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

**South Walton High School Cafeteria
WEDNESDAY AUGUST 9th 5:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.**

**Meet the candidates face to face, discuss issues and ask questions
one-on-one.**

PRIMARY ELECTIONS - Tuesday September 5, 2006

EARLY VOTING - Monday August 21 - Saturday September 2

*Early Voting Sites: Supervisor of Elections Office
DeFuniak Springs or South Government Annex*

EARLY VOTING HOURS 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Florida Statutes state that any person unable to go to the polls on Election Day may vote early or vote an absentee ballot. Call the Elections Office at 850-892-8112 or 850-622-0744 to have an absentee ballot mailed to you.

There is a 29-day deadline prior to each election for new voter registrations. Monday August 7 is the last day for voter registrations and party affiliation changes for September 5 Primary Elections.

Planning and Funding County Infrastructure

David Hallman
Walton County Attorney

In 2005, the Florida Legislature enacted Senate Bill 360, and in doing so, made some of the most far reaching changes to growth management regulation since the original 1985 law. This writing seeks only to point out the strengthened tie between development approvals, land use designation changes, and infrastructure planning. The website of the Florida Department of Community Affairs does an excellent job of covering the full scope and detail of those changes. That website address is www.dca.state.fl.us.

The new law tightens the requirement that local governments figure out how to pay for growth-driven infrastructure needs at the time that new development is approved. In simple terms, when new development is approved, the local government must decide how it will fund the construction of required new infrastructure. That construction plan, with identified sources of funding must be transmitted annually to Tallahassee.

Senate Bill 360 instituted a requirement that a local government's comprehensive plan must be financially feasible, and the capital improvements element ("CIE") in a local comprehensive plan must include a schedule of improvements that ensures that the adopted level-of-service standards

are achieved and maintained. The term "financially feasible" is a complicated way of saying that the source of funding must be identified.

The new law requires an annual review of the CIE to maintain a financially feasible five-year schedule of capital improvements. Importantly, the legislation provides for sanctions for failure to transmit and update these schedules. One of these sanctions is that a local government may not amend its future land use map (with a few limited exceptions) if it fails to comply. This could abruptly stop development in a fast growing county.



Importantly, the legislation provided a mechanism for developers to pay their fair share contribution to the infrastructure needs of local government, and in that way, keep their projects moving forward. Walton County was one of the first Florida counties to adopt an ordinance implementing this proportionate fair share contribution procedure.

In February 2006, the county adopted an ordinance to provide for clear guidelines for development, to evaluate traffic concurrency on roadways within the management system, and to provide a method for impacts of development on transportation facilities to be mitigated with cooperation of the public and private sectors.

Each local government must---and Walton County has---adopt a methodology for assessing proportionate fair share mitigation options by December 1, 2006.



Taxpayer Association Membership

Thank you for supporting the Walton County Taxpayers Association. Your membership allows us to continue our newsletters, candidate fairs and other public service functions. We are not supported by any political group or special interest; only by you, our members. If you have not sent your membership check for this year, please consider doing so now. We operate on a tight budget and can maintain our low annual \$10 fee only if members renew their memberships. Many of you support us much more generously with extra contributions which are ALWAYS appreciated.

In summary, the roads we plan for will need to include those that are impacted by growth and development, and --- most significantly --- we will have to identify the way we plan to pay for these improvements

An important component of new infrastructure funding will come from payments by developers in the form of their proportionate fair share contribution to our infrastructure needs. Local government will be policed by the Department of Community Affairs, which has the ability to halt any future changes in land use designations if we slip.

Walton County is far ahead of most counties in these preparations. Our Walton County Planning Department staff is forward thinking, organized and aggressive in its efforts to understand and implement the important changes coming out of 2005 Senate Bill 360. The director of planning and director of public works will be required to work closely on transportation construction projects in the future.

Observations on Senate Bill 360

The county must provide upfront funding by December 2006 to comply with Senate Bill 360. The FY2007 Board of County Commission budget includes \$2 million for this purpose.

County Planning Division Director Pat Blackshear said the program is a serious burden on her division and Public Works. This program does shift road improvement costs to the developer and off of the taxpayer.

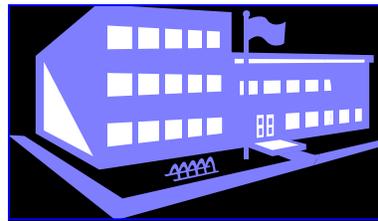
Growth Management Law Impact on Schools

Wayne Miller
School Administration and Operations

As a result of Senate Bill 360, the Walton County School District has apprised developers of the impact their development will have on the district. The district is reviewing each proposal and calculating the number of students generated and the cost to the district to provide facilities.

For example: a 100 unit development in Freeport will generate 38 students. Each student station costs the district between \$18,000 and \$25,000, so 38 times \$25,000 = \$950,000 in fair share mitigation if they have to build new facilities.

The school district is writing a pilot concurrency plan along with seven other counties. This plan



will be implemented in 2008. It will require developers to pay as they go with fair share mitigation and impact fees. They can provide land and/or dollars

to offset the impact on school capacities in the communities or zones in which they propose to build.

Multipliers have been adopted for the three zones that Walton County is divided into. These multipliers are used to calculate the cost that a development will have on the district. Developers are now being apprised of these costs in the review process by the district but cannot be required to actually pay until 2008, if the law remains as is.

Cooperation from the Experts

Alex Alford, Chief of Information Technology and William Pennington, Chief Financial Officer for the Clerk of Court sat down with WCTA representatives recently and discussed ways and means to provide understandable public financial record information.

L to R: William Pennington, Bob Hudson, Bonnie McQuiston, Dan Scupin, Alex Alford.



