

CITY OF PINE LAKE
CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
June 29, 2021
7:00 PM
VIA ZOOM

Call to Order at 7:01 PM by Mayor Melanie Hammet. Present – Mayor Melanie Hammet, Mayor pro tem Jean Bordeaux, and Council members Tracey Brantley, Brandy Hall, Brandy Beavers and Augusta Woods. Also, present were Acting City Administrator Peggy Merriss, Administrative Coordinator Missye Varner and Chief Sarai Y’Hudah-Green. City Attorney Susan Moore was not in attendance.

Announcements/Communication

Mayor Hammet announced that on Wednesday, June 30th at 7:00PM there will be an important community meeting. This Public Information Meeting will be held via Zoom by a development group seeking re-zoning for a parcel on the north side of Memorial Drive. This development is proposing to build in an environmentally fragile area that contains several natural springs and streams that feed into Snapfinger Creek. This is especially important for Pine Lake, as this existing green space is vital to runoff mitigation for our lake and wetlands.

For Zoom meeting ID information visit www.pinelakega.net ; Quick Links/What’s New.

Adoption of Agenda

Mayor Hammet amended the agenda by moving the Public Hearing before the Consent Agenda. On a motion by Mayor pro tem Jean Bordeaux, second by Council member Hall and all council members present voting “aye,” the agenda as amended was adopted.

PUBLIC HEARING

The City Council of the City of Pine Lake, GA has tentatively adopted a millage rate of 19.909 mills for maintenance and operations and debt service which will require an increase in property taxes of 13.29% for fiscal year 2021. This millage rate generates revenue necessary to fund the City of Pine Lake’s general operations, capital improvements and debt service budget for fiscal 2021. This is the same millage rate adopted for the previous fiscal year 2020.

Mayor Melanie Hammet opened the public hearing by announcing that Acting City Administrator Merriss would make a presentation regarding the proposed 2021 Millage Rate.

Ms. Merriss stated that the presentation would be an overview introduction for the public hearing and that the process of setting the millage rate begins when the city obtains the tax digest information from the DeKalb County Board of Tax Assessors in May of each year. She also pointed out how the formula for the millage rollback rate is calculated and that it is dictated by state law. Ms. Merriss stated that at the June 8th City Council Meeting the adoption of a tentative millage rate of 19.909 was approved to begin the process of establishing the final millage rate for 2021.

Acting Administrator Merriss explained the outcome of the 2021 real property tax digest reassessment and stated that the City's real estate tax base generated the most revenue for the City. Ms. Merriss also discussed changes in the digest and growth. The millage rollback rate and the calculation of the rollback rate were also topics of the presentation and Ms. Merriss explained in depth how the rate is determined.

The next topic of discussion was the Five-Year History advertisement. Ms. Merriss explained how the information presented in the advertisement is calculated and that it must be published with The Champion along with separate advertisement for three public hearings. Ms. Merriss concluded the presentation by presenting a list of considerations for Council, including using fund balance this year to balance the budget; unbudgeted costs for the opening of the beach; increased costs for property and liability insurance cost; reimbursable unemployment unbudgeted costs; the increased cost of gasoline; funding for repairs and maintenance to the dam and the wetlands; unbudgeted capital cost for stabilizing and renovating the gazabo and for maintenance and repair of the tennis court and also the consideration of potential staff compensation increases.

Mayor Hammet opened the hearing to the public and Council for comments and questions.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Resident Calvin Burgamy commented on the proposed multi-unit development proposed for Memorial Drive and North Hairston Drive. Mr. Burgamy also asked about the proposed millage rate and how the city would fair budget wise and asked if there was a 14% increase for the millage rate for this year.

Acting City Administrator Merriss responded to Mr. Burgamy and explained the difference between setting the millage rate and the roll back rate. Ms. Merriss also added that there could be approximately an additional \$80,000 for the City

budget if the 19.909 millage rate was adopted.

Mayor Pro tem Bordeaux provided additional information to Mr. Burgamy on rollback rates and assessment rates relating to setting the millage rate and commented that for the past two years the millage rate had been the rollback rate. Mr. Burgamy asked if the millage rate was arbitrary with Ms. Merriss replying to the City Council had discretion in setting the rate but that it was not arbitrary.

Resident Stephanie Urriola, comment was how will the city account for the additional 80k be spent and what is the consideration for lowering the millage rate.

Mayor Hammet replied that revenues would be spent according to City needs and priorities and referred her to the considerations list from the presentation. She also stated that spending will be considered for budgeted line items. Acting City Administrator said that the city could also utilize reserve funding as well.

Resident Holley Mitchell provided comments to clarify the questions that Mr. Burgamy proposed about the millage rate, and she also inquired if the decision could be made tonight for setting the millage rate. Mayor Hammet clarified that the city was not a profit-making enterprise. Mayor Hammet confirmed that the millage rate would be set later in the meeting as part of the regular agenda.

Resident Amy Colburn asked for consideration to set the millage rate somewhere between 17.05 and 19.909 and not to make a large increase. Ms. Colburn also asked if the city was still getting funding from the Federal government for COVID-19. Acting City Administrator replied that the city was scheduled to receive funding from the American Rescue Plan Act in the amount of \$140,000 for this year and next year and that one of the allowable uses was to cover lost revenues during the COVID pandemic. Ms. Merriss noted that the City Council would make the decision as how the funding was used.

Resident Matthew Collins commented that 2020 was a terrible year and requested City Council honor taxpayer protection by adopting the rollback rate. Mr. Collins also stated that that this would be a way to help neighbors financially.

Resident Jeff Goldberg commented that he wanted to clarify that when the millage rate stays the same it does not mean that taxes do not increase because in the past his taxes had increased even with a millage rate rollback.

Resident Stephanie Urriola stated that she seconded the comment that Matthew Collins made.

Resident Calvin Burgamy commented that he agreed with Mr. Collins and asked

about an infrastructure bill that was about to be passed and could that help the budget when that time comes.

Mayor Hammet opened the Public Hearing session to City Council for discussion.

Councilmember Brantley commented that she wanted to clarify that the City Council discussion does not affect or control the millage rate for DeKalb County or the DeKalb County Board of Education and that they do a similar process of setting their millage rates.

Mayor Pro tem Bordeaux stated that the City needs to give the residents some relief because the City is getting funding from the Federal government. Ms.

Bordeaux suggested that instead of a 14% increase in the millage rate that the Council consider lowering the millage rate to an overall increase of 11%. She also stated that the residents need to understand that the City budget is limited and that specific maintenance projects will need to be put off until a later time.

Mayor Pro tem recommended setting the millage rate at 19.324 which would result in an estimated \$61,000 increase instead of an \$80,000 increase.

Mayor Hammet closed the Public Hearing section of the agenda and re-opened the regular meeting agenda.

On a motion by Council member Hall, second by Council member Brantley and all Council members present voting "aye," the Public Hearing was closed, and the regularly scheduled meeting convened.

CONSENT AGENDA

Adoption of the Minutes of the regular meeting of June 8, 2021, and the Special Called Meeting of June 22, 2021.

On a motion by Mayor pro tem Jean Bordeaux, second by Council member Woods and all council members voting "aye," the consent agenda was adopted.

OLD BUSINESS

Adoption of 2021 Millage Rate

Mayor pro tem Jean Bordeaux suggested setting the millage rate at 19.324 instead of the 19.909 millage rate which would be an 11% increase.

Council member Hall inquired if they could trim the considerations list more and suggested prioritizing the list and funding. Ms. Merriss stated that would be at the

discretion of City Council. Mayor Hammet recommended that City Council give a thorough look for best usage of funds for the list of considerations and to present them at a future meeting.

Council member Beavers inquired if the city has funding from the stormwater fund for the dam and wetlands repairs and suggested utilizing the capital improvement fund for the repairs for the gazebo and the tennis court.

Mayor pro tem Jean Bordeaux talked about the stormwater fund balance and that there is not a large amount in the fund. She also said that the City will need funding for various stormwater projects needing repairs.

Council member Woods indicated support for adopting the 19.324 millage rate with an 11% increase for the millage rate which would help the citizens.

Council member Brantley commented that she has concerns as it relates to tapping into the reserve accounts and that this could go on for years and that it is a reality that property taxes and millage rates have to increase at some time.

Mayor pro tem Bordeaux commented that she agrees with Council member Brantley and that a 11.18% increase seems reasonable because there will be some funding from the Federal government and that the City cannot afford to go with the rollback rate for 2021.

Council member Beavers commented that she agrees with some of the Council discussion, but this has been a tough year for a lot of residents so in order to help out she support adopting the roll-back rate OR the rate in between the rollback rate and the proposed rate of 19.909. She also stated hat consideration should be given for looking at adopting a millage rate that would be in the middle between the current rate and the roll-back rate. She indicated support for adopting a millage rate of 18.72 in an effort to help the residents.

Mayor Hammet stated that this was her 14th millage rate hearing and that it is not pleasant when discussing increasing taxes. She added that the City has expensive amenities and that 2020 was a hard year. The Mayor asked City Council to keep the City financially stable and not to put it in fiscal jeopardy.

On a motion by Mayor pro tem Bordeaux, second by Council member Hall and Mayor pro tem Bordeaux and Council members Hall and Woods voting "aye," and Council members Brantley and Beavers voting "no," the final 2021 millage rate was set at 19.324 mills.

NEW BUSINESS

Approval of Quote to Remove Three Trees

Recommend approval of the proposal from AKA Tree Removal Service LLC to remove three trees.

On a motion by Council member Woods, seconded by Mayor pro tem Bordeaux, and all council members voting "aye," the quote from AKA Tree Removal Service LLC not to exceed \$5,500 to remove three trees was approved.

Council member Hall inquired if 25 to 30 feet of the tree trunks could remain as a bird habitat. Acting City Administrator Merriss will research the request.

Returning to In-person Council Meetings.

Discussion regarding returning to in-person council meetings.

Acting City Administrator Merriss shared that Governor Brian Kemp did not extend the COVID-19 Public Health State of Emergency past July 1, 2021. Part of the provisions of the state of emergency order allowed state, county and local governments to meet virtually via electronic platforms such as Zoom. The effect is that the Council meetings will need to return to in-person beginning with the first meeting in July scheduled for July 13, 2021. The City Council Meetings resume being held at 459 Pine Drive at 7:00PM in the Council Chamber/Court House. The in-person meetings are on the second and last Tuesday of each month.

Ms. Merriss will consult with the City Attorney regarding mask requirements and the number of persons allowed to attend the in-person meeting.

Reopening Club House and Beach House

Discussion regarding reopening the Club House and Beach House.

Council member Woods inquired about when the City would return to renting facilities. Mayor Pro tem Bordeaux stated that there needs to be an application process and a review of revenue and expenses so that rental rates can be established. Council member Hall recommended only opening the facilities for

community meetings because there is still a pandemic going on as it relates to crowds and that in the past rentals did not break even with revenues.

Acting City Administrator Merriss stated that rentals need to be in the positive for generating revenue and that the City would need to charge a cost that covered expenses plus provide some revenue. Ms. Merriss also said that the City should not be at renting the facilities at a loss and should be above a financial break-even point. She will have rental rate information available for a future meeting in August.

Council member Woods commented that the City facilities are special because of the views such as the lake and the beach and that this should be a positive financial venture.

Council member Brantley stated that prices were raised and adopted in 2019. Mayor Hammet commented that more work needs to be done on this agenda item.

Mayor Pro tem Bordeaux advised that prices were raised and adopted in 2018 and that she could provide a revision to the existing rental facilities policy.

On a motion by Council member Woods, second by Council member Hall, and all council members voting "aye," permission for P.L.A.I.N. to utilize the Beach House for their monthly meeting was approved but other uses and rentals of the Club House and Beach House was deferred to a later date.

REPORTS AND OTHER BUSINESS

Public Comments

Resident Stephanie Urriola thanked the Mayor, City Council and Acting City Administrator and for their work and commented that the process was very interesting. Ms. Urriola also said that she has lived in Pine Lake for a while and that this was her first meeting.

Resident Holley Mitchell inquired how to contact the DeKalb County Chief Tax Assessor and Mayor Hammet requested her to email her request to Acting City Administrator Merriss for assistance.

Staff

There were not any staff reports.

Mayor and City Council

Mayor Hammet thanked the residents for working through the millage rate process with the governing body. She also thanked them for attending the Zoom Meeting and for their comments.

Council member Beavers thanked Mayor and City Council, the staff and residents for participating in the meeting.

Mayor Pro tem Bordeaux thanked the residents for attending the meeting and encouraged all to attend the upcoming face to face City Council Meetings.

Information for "The Pine Lake News" eblast:

Wednesday June 30 Important Community Meeting

A Public Information Meeting will be held via Zoom by a development group seeking re-zoning for a parcel on the north side of Memorial Drive. This development is proposing to build in an environmentally fragile area that contains several natural springs and streams that feed into Snapfinger Creek. This is especially important for Pine Lake, as this existing green space is vital to runoff mitigation for our lake and wetlands.

Council sets millage rate for 2021

Pine Lake City Council has set the 2021 millage rate at 19.324 compared to the 2020 rate of 19.909. This rate, applied to the 2021 property digest results in an 11% increase in revenue for the City.

City Hall will be closed July 5th.

City Offices will be closed on Monday July 5th in observance of Independence Day. Have a safe and enjoyable 4th of July weekend.

City Council Meetings move back to the Council Chamber.

The COVID State of Emergency declared by Governor Kemp will expire at midnight on July 1, 2021. Part of the emergency order was the waiver that allowed municipalities to meet virtually rather than in-person. Therefore, starting with the July 13th meeting we will be back in the Council Chambers/Courthouse located at the corner of Clubhouse and Pine. (See additional Info at the end of this Brief.) We encourage everyone to follow CDC guidelines for masks in indoor spaces.

Lake and Beach will open July 8, 2021.

Just a reminder that the Lake and Beach will open for the 2021 season on Thursday, July 8, 2021. The beach will be open from Thursday to Monday each week. There will be two sessions each day: Morning from 7:00 AM to 11:00 AM and Afternoon from 4:00 PM – 8:00 PM, with a limit on capacity of 75. The season will close on August 30th.

Comprehensive Plan -A small number of follow-up questions are now on the Comp Plan website.

A short follow-up survey has been posted on the Comp Plan Website and will be available through mid-July. Thanks to everyone for the strong participation on the original survey, a total of 85 people participated making 902 responses and giving 222 comments. No one ever said that Pine Lakers had nothing to say.

Pine Lake City Council Meetings

Are the second and last Tuesday of each month at 7:00 PM in the Council Chamber/Courthouse at 459 Pine Drive.

Adjournment: On a motion by Mayor Pro tem Bordeaux, second by Council member Woods and all Council members voting “aye,” the meeting was adjourned at 8:55pm.

Note:

The 2021 Millage Rate presentation is available on the City’s website at www.pinelakega.net. Scroll to the Home Page/Front Page News/Tax Hearings and click on the link.