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**MINUTES**  
**DOUGLAS COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**PUBLIC HEARING FOR PROPOSED TAX MILLAGE AND**  
**SPECIAL CALLED BOARD MEETING**  
**AUGUST 2, 2010**  
**6:00 P.M.**

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The Douglas County Board of Education met in a special called public hearing in the board room of the administrative office building at 9030 Highway 5. Chairman James Bartlett (Post 2) called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Also present were board members: Mr. Larry Barnes (Post 3); Dr. Sam Haskell (Post 4) and Mr. Jeff Morris (Post 5). Mr. Michael J. Miller (Post 1) was absent.

Staff members present were Dr. Gordon Pritz, Superintendent; Mrs. Kay Turner, Chief Financial Officer; Mr. Dudley Spruill, Chief Operations Officer; Mrs. Karen Stroud, Community Relations Director and Mrs. Melanie Nicholson, Secretary to the Superintendent.

All concerned citizens who are residents of Douglas County are invited to make comments at this meeting. We ask that each person limit their comments to three minutes. We will take comments in the order in which people signed up.

#### AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Mr. Jeff Priest addressed the Board. Mr. Priest stated that he has been a resident of Douglas County for 27 years. We moved to Douglas County shortly after we married. We've seen our property tax go up, up and up. We got married at 16 years old. We've never asked anybody for any help. We've never gotten any kind of government assistance. We've worked hard for what we've got. We've got a nice house that we worked and built ourselves. But these times are tough and it's everything we can do to hold on to our house. We've cut back. You all know that our property values have decreased some 15% and some more than that. It's a struggle to make ends meet. When I hear things on the news where the county attorney is spending over \$1 million to do legal work out of the taxpayer's money when a comparable school in Paulding County was done for a fraction of the price it upsets me. I feel like we are being parlor tricked so to speak if you know what I mean where the lights are turned down low the smoke is going and the noise and nobody's looking and I've been reading on the internet because of the value going down the taxes aren't really going to go up but oh yes they are. If you look at the percentages just the school bond millage rate is increasing 37% and we put that into the hands of I guess you guys to decide if you are going to decrease that if the value of the homes goes up. It has gotten to the point that my property tax was over \$6,000 last year. I feel like I am being penalized for living in Douglas County. You want to know how I feel in my heart? I don't want to add on to my home. I don't want to extend by business. I don't want to put a garage up. Because you know why, I am going to have to pay more taxes. Even if I could afford to, I am a business owner and a local minister. I pastor a church down the street. I am fed up with every time we get in a pinch we want to tax people. We want to raise the tax rate. We are always looking to the

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people to bail us out. How many people in this room can say they have recently taken a pay cut to do their job this year? Can anybody raise their hand and tell me that? You've all taken pay cuts in your salary this year? Substantial? Well good for you. Freeze or pay cut? I wouldn't be here tonight if this didn't bother me. I think this room ought to be packed out with citizens that are concerned about their county and about their government and about where we are headed as a country. We can't sustain a tax increase. We are told there won't be an amount difference. I feel like not one person should have to pay a penny more in their property taxes. It's unsustainable now. I'm speaking for myself and those that are around me, everybody is doing everything they can to hang on to their home. If it goes up even on those that are more fortunate that have a house that their taxes didn't go up how are they going to hang on to their home if you keep raising their taxes. I don't see looking to the people. I think we should slim back our government. Trim down what we are doing. Make some cuts. Do everything that we are required to do as a homeowner right now to make ends meet. We've cut out everything that's not necessary. We've done everything that we've needed to do to hang on and pay the bills but not once did I turn to somebody else and say hey look I'm going to increase your fees so I can make my ends meet never crossed my mind. I thought about what could I do or what can I cut out to make ends meet. I just wanted to come voice my opinion to let you know how a citizen of this county, a taxpayer for the past 27 years, feels about the millage rate increase. Even though my taxes may go down \$50 and they go under \$6,000. I own less than seven acres and that is high. Everybody I tell says that is too high. I feel like I am getting penalized for getting ahead. For what it is worth I came to voice my opinion so that maybe you would rethink what you are doing. Maybe you can look inside. Maybe you would consider where can we cut back? What can we do? Maybe you can do a special interest tax. I know that it would have to be voted on. To keep coming to the well of the taxpayer of people like myself people are going to be in foreclosure.

Mr. Richard Segal addressed the board. I live in Douglas County and do have a child in school in Douglas County. I am happy to pay taxes to help our students learn and get a quality education but I am not happy paying when the money is wasted. Two things that I want to focus on tonight. One, you got the extension from the State, use it. Please don't take action on this tonight. Don't vote. Look at everything and see what can be done. The second thing is the portion of the millage rate that relates to the bond which Mr. Priest mentions is going up 37%, 18% above and beyond the rollback rate. So that means you actually think you're bond service expenses for the next fiscal year will be 18% higher than the previous year? That doesn't make sense because we refunded one of those bond issues. That should bring us lower expenses. We haven't issued new bonds so we shouldn't have increased expenses and they're not variable rates so it should be a fixed amount each year with a decreasing amount as you are paying off

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principal. If this is not fact and what I am saying is untrue, then that means the school district has not done a good job of explaining that to us. I searched the website and nothing on there. This shows me that there is definitely a problem with communication and transparency and that is what really gets me upset. If these expenses are going up and it's not explained to the taxpayers of the county then that's a problem.

Ms. Anjinette Lindsey addressed the Board. Ms. Lindsey has two children in Douglas County High School. I kinda share what the two gentlemen previous to me are saying. One is like for my family. Georgia has been hit really hard this year. Both me and my husband, both of our jobs have gone away. We are struggling to hold on. Every time you turn around there is more of a property tax. Unfortunately, we bought a house in the city limits which seems that we get hit more than people in the county. I don't quite understand that. But then additionally to that I don't mind paying because I do have two kids in the school system but it does not seem that this money is benefitting the school system. Our school system doesn't seem to be doing any better with all this money required. Then additionally, what he is saying, I don't quite understand that there has not been good communication on what the funds are for. Every time you look around there is a new school going up, a new school going up. Our scores are not doing any better. Then you find out that parts of the school are not being utilized. It just seems excessive when the people in the county are struggling. There are not a lot of jobs in this county that pay very well so we are struggling and every time you turn around taxpayers have to give up more money. At some point you have to understand we don't have any more to give. I don't see the benefit of it. I don't see why we keep building schools. Our grades are not improving. Some of us are just at the point that we can't pay more and more taxes and go into a foreclosure and then where is the tax going to come from.

Ms. Margaret Priest addressed the Board. One thing that hasn't been said is we don't mind paying our fair share. I've had three boys and my baby is in 12<sup>th</sup> grade this year at Alexander High School. We can't pay for everyone's child. Nobody likes to speak about it but there are people out there that are getting their children educated and getting free lunches and not paying into the system. So that is one thing that could be addressed. I've always taught my kids if you want something you work hard and you get it. Everyone of my boys pay for their own vehicles. They pay for their own insurance and their own cell phones. I have tried to teach them the right things and constantly there being thrown in their face give, give, give. The entitlement that I believe people are entitled to, are things that you are willing to work hard for. We are getting in our communities, in our states and in our country where that no longer stands. Now, I may not be able to make a difference, and I am really saddened not to see more people here. I have been to another meeting similar to this at Fairplay. I feel like not enough information is given out so

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that people know. I could probably ask 10 people right now and they don't even know this is happening and that the millage rate is being contemplated on going up. Like everyone has spoken here, you're going to tax yourself out of a job because sooner or later people aren't going to have the money to even pay ya'll. There has got to be a better way. We've had to strap our belt tight. A lot of people are having to do that. That is what I am asking of ya'll. Strap the belt down tight because there's funds there. How are they being used? Are they being used in a righteous manner? We've got to get back to doing right with what God has given us and that is what we are not doing. My husband mentioned when we heard about the lawyers being paid an enormous amount of money, it could have been done cheaper if we had of looked for it. Maybe we are not searching all of our avenues. And that is what I ask you to do tonight because there is only so much you can squeeze out of a turnip. Sooner or later that is going to go away. You just can't keep strapping the same people over and over and requiring more of them than you require of all people. I don't mind paying my taxes. I don't mind paying my fair share. I am getting a little tired of paying other people's fair share. Everybody that is involved in this county needs to pitch in and that is not only homeowners. There are a lot more people in this county than just homeowners. I am tired feeling like I am being squashed because we have worked hard and because we have tried to make something of ourselves. We were so young when we got married that people said we would fail and our kids would be nothing. I am very proud of my kids. All of my kids have been good students. My teenager now is in all AP classes. So it can be done and if we get back to the principal basics I think it can be done and I think we should start right here in Douglas County and show the state that it can be done.

Mr. Bartlett asked if there was anyone else that would like to address the Board.

Mr. Bartlett stated that we began the budget process last December. All budget meetings have been open to the public and advertised. As we walked through the budget during the spring time we knew already that we were going to be cut \$14 million from the state on top of \$13 million last year. Each board member had the option to lay out priorities and we agreed on those priorities. We got great guidance from our tax commissioner. The tax commissioner told us early on that the tax digest was going to be down between 15% to 20%. As it turns out with school exemptions, the overall digest is down 15.4% and the residential digest is down 19%. Except for last year, this is the fastest we have received the tax digest. We have gotten great information along the way. This has been a pretty methodical process. This is the third of our three public hearings. We have had participation at each one of them, but not much. Our budget is available on our website as well.

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Dr. Haskell stated that a number of cuts have been made in various areas of the school system. We have made all the cuts that can be made.

Mr. Bartlett said that Douglas County should be prepared for another \$3 to \$5 million cut from the state by the end of the year. We were cut another 4% in transportation, grants and nurses.

Mr. Bartlett thanked everyone for attending and for their comments.

Ms. Carol Lindstrom addressed the Board. I did attend some of the financial budget discussions. Those were not well attended. I would like to praise Mrs. Turner. She not only provided materials for ya'll but also for people that attended to see what we were up against. I'm not a CPA or financial expert by any means but it did give me an idea of what you are up against and I do not understand how you will make this decision. I do hope that you take into account everything that is possible. I know that you have been working very hard to make sure that you do what is best for Douglas County.

The public hearing adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

The Board did not meet in Executive Session.

Mr. Bartlett called the Special Called Board Meeting to order at 6:21 p.m.

SETTING OF AGENDA: On motion by Mr. Barnes, seconded by Dr. Haskell, unanimous approval was given to set the agenda as written.

**FINANCE**

**A. Adoption of FY2011 Millage Rate**

On motion by Dr. Haskell, seconded by Mr. Morris, approval was given to accept the Superintendent's recommendation to set the millage rate at 20 mills for maintenance and operations and 4.10 mills for bonded indebtedness. Mr. Barnes was opposed. The motion carried.

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There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

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Dr. Gordon Pritz, Superintendent

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James Bartlett, Chairman