AGENDA
PUBLIC HEARING
Wednesday, September 3, 2025
8:00 A.M.

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1. Call to Order

2. Invocation and *Pledge of Allegiance*

3. To hear public comment about the Proposed 2025 Millage Rate Increase

4. Adjournment

Board of Commissioners of Candler County
Public Hearing
September 3, 2025
8:00 a.m.

The Board of Commissioners of Candler County met for a Public Hearing Wednesday, September 3, 2025, at 8:00 a.m., in the Commissioners' boardroom at 1075 East Hiawatha Street, Suite A, Metter, Georgia. Chairman Brad Jones presided with Vice-Chairman Blake Hendrix, Commissioners David Morales, Jonathan Williamson and Tre' Ross in attendance. County Administrator Bryan Aasheim, County and Clerk Kellie Lank. County Attorney, Kendall Gross, was unable to attend this public hearing.

The Metter Advertiser was notified of the meeting, but no representative attended this meeting.

Chris Billingsley was present for this public hearing.

1. Call to Order
Chairman Jones called the public hearing to order at 8:00 a.m. and opened the floor for comments about the proposed millage rate increase

****Commissioner Williamson entered the boardroom at 8:01 a.m.****

2. Invocation and *Pledge of Allegiance*
Vice-Chairman Hendrix delivered the invocation and led the *Pledge of Allegiance.*

3. To Hear Public Comment on the Proposed 2025 Millage Rate Increase
Chairman Brad Jones opened the floor for public comments regarding the proposed 2025 millage rate increase. Mr. Chris Billingsley, the only citizen present, initially reserved his comments.

Chairman Jones explained that, despite the board's efforts to maintain a tight budget, a small millage increase was necessary. He noted that adding one mill would result in an 8.23% increase in property tax. Administrator Aasheim emphasized that personnel costs are the primary factor driving the budget increase, particularly adjustments required for EMS services and additional staffing in the Sheriff's Office and Detention Center to split dispatch and comply with state requirements. He clarified that the fire budget increase was in a separate fund and had no impact on the millage rate.

Administrator Aasheim reported that personnel costs make up approximately 65% of the county's general fund budget, and closer to 74% when excluding budgets without personnel expenses. This means that 74 cents of every dollar is spent on payroll, insurance, taxes, and workers' compensation, leaving only 26 cents for operations. He noted that unlike private businesses, county government cannot increase revenue by selling more goods or creating new business lines. He also pointed to mandatory annual expenses, including roughly $250,000 for inmate medical care and food, as well as higher costs resulting from longer inmate stays when the court system is underfunded.

In response to Mr. Billingsley's question about personnel costs, Administrator Aasheim clarified that 74% represents the share of the budget, not the increase. He explained that the overall budget rose 8–9% this year, largely due to public safety personnel needs. To meet EMS demand, the county added personnel rather than a new $1.2 million ambulance, while the new jail required two jailers and a separate dispatcher. Together, these changes accounted for about $1 million in added costs, equal to three mills. The county is proposing a one-mill increase and covering the other two mills through budget cuts and other revenues.

Administrator Aasheim also addressed other rising expenses, such as 8–10% annual increases in health insurance and significant equipment repair costs, comparing them to general inflation. He emphasized that the Commissioners only control the millage rate, while property values are determined by the Tax Assessor's office based on market sales. Chairman Jones and Administrator Aasheim attributed rising property values to pandemic migration and regional economic growth, and defended the Tax Assessor's practices, noting the state requires assessed values to remain within a 38–42% sales ratio or the county risks losing tax revenue from utility companies.

Mr. Billingsley compared the county's 74% personnel cost to Goodwill's 79% allocation to operations, questioning the balance. Commissioners responded that high personnel costs are typical across many organizations to retain qualified staff, particularly given wage competition from employers such as Hyundai. Commissioner Williamson noted the county's costs mirror the 8% higher cost of living since 2020.

Administrator Aasheim clarified that property tax revenue is not used for capital purchases, which are funded by SPLOST, but instead supports only operations and maintenance. He stressed that the county's property tax funds are limited to mandated services (courts, Sheriff, Tax Commissioner), EMS, Fire and a few additional services such as Recreation and 4-H, leaving "nothing to cut" without reducing essential services. Chairman Jones underscored the value of Recreation ($275,000 annual budget serving 300+ children) and 4-H ($112,000 budget), stating that cutting these would save little while eliminating important youth programs. He also highlighted the dramatic increase in EMS calls, from about 100 per month seven years ago to 210 per month currently, necessitating frequent mutual aid.

Commissioner Williamson stated that a modest millage increase was a necessary step to address growth, heavier traffic demands, and public reliance on emergency services. Chairman Jones further outlined the county's cost-effective EMS strategy, which now includes a "fly car" paramedic model supported by cross-trained fire EMTs, helping to meet demand without adding full ambulance crews. He also praised the county's ability to retain paramedics despite statewide shortages.

Administrator Aasheim and the commissioners encouraged civic engagement and urged Mr. Billingsley to share accurate information with others. Mr. Billingsley thanked the board for answering his questions. Chairman Jones concluded by announcing the next public hearing on the millage rate would be held at 7:00 p.m., with zoning and recreation meetings scheduled earlier in the day.

With no further comments of discussion, Chairman Jones called for a motion to adjourn at 8:35a.m.

4. Adjournment

Vice-Chairman Hendrix made a motion to adjourn this public hearing. Commissioner Ross provided a second. The motion carried 5-0.

Kellie Lank, Clerk
Attest

Chairman, Brad Jones