



**MINUTES OF THE
MAYOR AND COUNCIL
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
CITY OF DULUTH, GA
JULY 24, 2023**

PRESENT: Mayor Harris, Council members Harkness, Thomas, Doss, Graeder, and Whitlock, City Manager, Department Directors, City Attorney

Mayor Harris called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

I. PUBLIC HEARING

Mayor Harris opened the public hearing.

1. PROPOSED TAX MILLAGE RATE - 2023

Assistant City Manager Ken Sakmar presented. Each year, the Gwinnett County Tax Assessor reviews the assessed value of taxable property in the County. When the total digest of taxable property is prepared, Georgia Law requires calculation of a "rollback" millage rate (RMR) that produces the same total revenue on the current year's new digest that last year's millage rate would have produced, had no reassessments occurred.

Georgia law requires that the City publish a "Notice of Property Tax Increase" in the legal organ when the tentative adopted millage rate exceeds the rollback millage rate. In addition, three public hearings must be scheduled to allow the public an opportunity to express their opinion on the proposed tax millage.

Mr. Sakmar said that the City of Duluth is considering maintaining the same millage rate as last year, which is 6.551 mills. For the 2023 digest, the current millage rate exceeded the rollback millage rate by 0.509 mills, or stated another way, as a percentage of the rollback millage rate, the current millage rate represents an 8.42% "increase."

Items worth noting:

- Other Changes to the Taxable Digest, mainly the growth in real and personal property of \$123,228,252 accounted for a 5.14% increase in the overall digest
- Reassessments of Existing Real Property (reassessments less projected appeal losses) are projected to result in an increase of \$186,305,848 or 7.76% in the overall digest

- Due to vehicles transitioning to TAVT, the assessed value for motor vehicles decreased by \$514,780

The average annual increase to a property valued at \$350,000 would be approximately \$70 or \$6 per month.

Mr. Sakmar referenced the available exemptions that some homeowners can qualify for. He also mentioned the state Homeowner Tax Relief Grant (HTRG) credit that those with homestead exemptions will receive for the 2023 tax bill, which amounts to approximately \$117 in savings per household on the city bill. There will be the same \$18,000 reduction in taxable amount for Gwinnett County taxes.

He concluded by announcing that this is the second public hearing; the third is scheduled for August 14, 2023, at 6:00pm in the City Hall Council Chambers, after which an ordinance will be presented for adoption.

Mayor Harris called for discussion from Council. No comments were made.

Mayor Harris called for questions/comments from the public.

Being none, Mayor Harris closed the public hearing. No motion was required.

II. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilmember Whitlock, seconded by Councilmember Doss, to adjourn from Special Called into work session at 5:40 pm.

**Voting for: Council members Harkness, Thomas, Doss, Graeder, and Whitlock
Motion carried.**

WORK SESSION NOTES MAYOR AND COUNCIL CITY OF DULUTH, GA JULY 24, 2023

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS

No comments received.

II. DISCUSSION ITEMS/PRESENTATIONS/UPDATES

1. ROAD PAVING PROJECTS UPDATE

Public Works Director Audrey Turner presented an update on the status of recently approved paving projects.

The City will begin the new paving technique High Density Mineral Bond on 18 streets. This technique, HA5, has been in use for close to two decades out west and protects over 600 million square feet of roadways across 25 states.

HA5 is arguably the fastest-growing trend in pavement preservation, now in use by over 200 public agencies. Meeting the stringent demands of a High Density Mineral Bond, HA5 is uniquely emulsified with a near neutral charge that is able to hold a unique blend of fine aggregates. Limiting oxidative damage from moisture is fundamental to HA5's preservation qualities. But just as critical to the prevention of oxidative damage from moisture is preventing oxidative damage from Ultraviolet (UV) radiation. HA5 combats oxidation from UV by including limited amounts of specific polymers to reflect damaging UV rays.

HA5 features include:

- A specialized, non-ionic emulsion specifically engineered to carry mineral types that are not compatible with anionic and cationic emulsions.
- A blend of ultra-dense, angular-shaped fine aggregates formerly unavailable in a thin surface treatment.
- A combination of specific polymers that combat oxidation by deflecting Ultra-Violet Rays.

Ms. Turner noted there will be inconveniences and disruptions and residents will be affected, but feels that once the streets are paved and striped, the residents will be pleased. This new type of paving carries a 5-year warranty on the product. The contractor will be working on the streets simultaneously and plan on finishing all of them within 3 to 4 days.

A resident of Ennfield requested that their streets be assessed as soon as possible. Ms. Turner said they are in the next phase of scheduled roadwork, within the next 3-year window.

Asst. Manager Ken Sakmar came forward and requested authorization to place a budget amendment on the next agenda. This would cover funding for professional consultants to oversee some of the upcoming Public Works projects.

Council authorized staff to place a budget amendment on the next Council agenda for approval.

2. REQUESTED AMENDMENT TO PATIO LEASE AGREEMENT - 6s BREWING

Economic Development Director Chris McGahee came forward on behalf of Robb Watson, owner of 6S Brewing, who currently leases a 534 sq. ft. brick paver patio from the City of Duluth. He is requesting an additional 21 x 17 or 357 sq. ft. of adjoining space located inside the existing gazebo. Staff recommended approving the lease request by amending the existing lease. There would be additional revenue for the space.

Mr. McGahee said that the space sits vacant most of the time. During the school year, school kids congregate there after school, and it renders the 6s back service window almost unusable, since visibility is blocked. It has also been reported that 6s staff has been subject to some unruly actions of unsupervised teens. The space would be closed off until it was utilized by the business. Any updates to the area would have to be approved by the City Manager.

Questions and concerns were raised by several councilmembers who felt that it is difficult to balance public access to public space with needs of business owners. Some felt that people were going there for shade and relaxing on the swing, and were not supportive of giving the business exclusive access. Comments were also made regarding the peak hours of use and that 6s isn't open enough hours to block off the space for the rest of the time.

Council asked staff to follow up with the owner to offer options, and to report back.

3. FUTURE BUDGET REQUEST – HVAC CAPITAL PROJECT

City Manager James Riker explained that staff anticipates the need to replace the HVAC system at the Public Safety building in 2024. It will be necessary to contract with a consultant to prepare the Request for Proposal (RFP). Funding would come from SPLOST – Admin. Facilities.

Council authorized staff to place a budget amendment for the RFP consultant on the next Council agenda.

4. INSTALLATION OF DOWNTOWN ELECTRIC CHARGING STATIONS

City Manager James Riker explained that several years ago, the City refurbished the parking area behind the Red Clay Theatre. During the refurbishment, conduit was installed to accommodate the installation of electric charging stations.

Subsequently, Council did not want to move forward with this project. Staff asked Council if there was any renewed interest in moving forward with installation of the charging stations at this time.

Economic Development Director Chris McGahee explained that the City would pay the power, but the consumer pays for the service and that revenue goes back to the City. The City can determine the charges, and there are penalties for taking the parking space up for longer than needed. It was noted that there are some charging stations installed at the District and at SoDo, and Tesla has some by the new ChicFila. However, Chargepoint and Tesla are not interchangeable for all vehicles.

Council authorized staff to investigate next steps for installation of charging stations.

5. AMEND DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT – EVERLEIGH

City Manager James Riker came forward and explained that, under the current Greystar TAD Development Agreement for the Everleigh project, the City still owes the owner \$500,193. Greystar is willing to accept a one-time lump sum payment of \$437,000 which would be due by August 31, 2023. Upon receipt of the payment, the Development Agreement would be considered extinguished.

The proposed amendment will result in a savings to the City of \$63,193. Gary Mongeon from KB Advisory reviewed the lump sum payment and recommends approval.

Council authorized staff to place the Development agreement amendment for early payment and termination on the next Council agenda for approval.

6. STORMWATER UTILITY UPDATE

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City Manager James Riker explained that there have been recent infrastructure challenges, and introduced staff to discuss some of the more urgent matters affecting the stormwater division.

Josh Arnold and Alyssa Gilhooly gave a presentation showing recent stormwater projects and pipe inspections. They explained the zones, scoring criteria, and reported that 83 projects have been completed since 2019 at a cost of approximately \$3,100,000.

Emergency repairs seem to have become more widespread and obviously move ahead on the priority listing. In this case, several structures that were identified as top priorities have been postponed for several years due to sinkholes or other failures causing flooding. Staff noted one such concern for River Green Parkway due to standing water/flooding along this busy corridor, which had to be addressed during the summer break months because there are three schools in the area.

Mr. Arnold reported that a recent closed circuit TV (CCTV) inspection for Howell Wood Trail, Howell Wood and Whitney Place now shows these areas as higher priority, and several days later a sinkhole appeared on Tinsley Place. Items such as driveway location, trees, etc. make this a costly repair.

Asst. City Manager Ken Sakmar came forward and said the annual stormwater collections and budget is \$1.7 million. There are administrative, consulting, reporting and operating costs which leave approximately \$1 million per year to spend on the projects. He referenced staff's estimates of approximately \$7 million in repairs has already been identified on the current priority list.

For this reason, staff would propose a budget amendment to roll funds forward from the FY23 budget year, however, staff would also like to request a possible reserve fund transfer of \$1.5M to tackle some of the larger projects as well.

The City has 5 on-call contractors and should have enough resources to complete many of the simpler projects.

Mr. Riker referenced other recent emergency repairs and noted that they are very unpredictable. Council was in favor but wanted to ensure staff is focusing on public education as well.

Staff was authorized to place the budget amendment and line-item transfer on the next Council agenda for approval.

7. POLICE CAMERA ROOM UPGRADE

Capt. Robert Montgomery and Sgt. William Alexander came forward to present the request.

Capt. Montgomery said that the camera systems started in 2016. In 2019, another \$35,000 was invested to add screens and laser projectors. As the camera systems have proven to be invaluable, in 2022 more employees were hired and the camera room has become more of a real time crime center.

Sgt. William Alexander has been working to develop a proposal to upgrade the police camera room to a real time crime center which will allow the police department to be more proactive in apprehending suspects and investigating incidents. The existing equipment would be replaced with an LCD screen that expands to the entire wall and could display either one picture or 75 different ones. Staff has looked at Cobb County and Gwinnett County for their setup to ensure it would work for Duluth.

The overall cost for the upgrade is approximately \$380,000. Part of this could be paid with previous council approved 2017 SPLOST funds of \$180,000 earmarked to be used towards cameras and camera room upgrades. Staff is requesting an additional \$200,000 in unallocated 2017 SPLOST Funds be allocated to complete the upgrade.

The cameras have assisted the PD in solving hit and run accidents, homicides, and identified many suspects and vehicles in criminal investigations.

Staff was authorized to place a budget amendment on the next Council agenda for approval.

III. MATTERS FROM COUNCIL

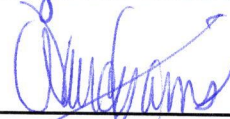
- Emergency plan/storm event: Leaving many without power for a lengthy time, consideration for the need for centralized cooling (or heating) stations to open for the public as solutions for long term extreme weather events. The text alert system could be used for public notification.

- Deadly motorcycle accident on PIB: concerns about the intersection and proper timing of yellow turn signals. This is a question for Gwinnett County, who is assisting with the ongoing investigation.
- Recent rash of Car break-ins: Will there be cameras in the Thrive parking lot? There are plans to have them on the RR observation tower once that is complete, but they can be installed on the light poles in the interim if there is access to uninterrupted power.
- Sidewalk overgrowth: On Old Peachtree to Bunten Road, evergreens are blocking the sidewalk causing residents to walk in the street. Code enforcement has been contacted and is handling the concern with appropriate residents.
- Commendation for staff: Wonderful job on cleanup after the storm.
- Update on housing numbers: Delivery drivers come all times of night and have trouble locating addresses in the dark. Staff will revisit.
- GwMA meeting next Wednesday August 2.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm.

Approved this 14 day of August, 2023.



Mayor Nancy Harris

ATTEST:



Asst. City Mgr./City Clerk, Teresa Lynn