



Minutes

City Council Work Session

January 7th, 2025

6:30pm

Baldwin Courtroom, 155 Willingham Avenue, Baldwin, GA 30511

Mayor Stephanie Almagno, Councilmember Erik Keith, Councilmember Nancy Lehman, Councilmember Kerri Davis, Councilmember Maarten Venter, and Councilmember Alice Venter were all in attendance.

Call Meeting to Order

Mayor Stephanie Almagno called the meeting to order at 6:31 pm.

Public Hearing

Aguilar Zoning Change Ordinance [#2024-12156Z](#)

Legal Counsel Jack Samuels opened the public hearing at 6:32 pm. No one came forward in favor or in opposition of the zoning change. The public hearing was left open for the remainder of the work session.

Old Business

New Business

1. Habersham County Jail Agreement

CAO Emily Woodmaster presented an agreement with Habersham County Jail to house Baldwin arrests through 2028. Currently per the agreement, the cost is 10% of the citation total, paid to the Habersham County Jail Fund to cover the cost of inmate housing and jail maintenance and operations. If the City chose not to sign the agreement, the cost would have to be paid out of the City's coffers as opposed to being paid for by the violator.

Council was in consensus to bring this forward Monday night.

2. GIRMA Georgia First Responder PTSD Program Resolution [#2025-01158R](#)

Woodmaster presented information for House Bill 451, also known as the Ashley Wilson Act. This House Bill requires municipalities to adopt a first responder PTSD program insurance. It provides a one-time lump sum benefit to first responders who experience PTSD from an event on the date of the House Bill adoption going forward. Woodmaster has already submitted a list of first responders on staff to Georgia Municipal Association. In the case of second-tier first responders (those who work part-time for Baldwin and full-time at another location), the cost will be split between the two departments.

The minimum requirement for the lump sum and the long-term PTSD disability, which covers 60% of their income for a set number of months. Woodmaster stated that this mandate was already worked into this current fiscal year's budget to allow for up to \$15,000 and the premiums under the Employee Insurance budget line. GIRMA had to

create another fund (FUND C), and the City must agree by resolution to enter Fund C, where these funds will go.

The City of Baldwin must adopt both components in order to be compliant with HB 451. For the first responder lifetime benefit, a \$3,000 lump sum payment goes to the employee. There is an option to increase the amount up to \$15,000 (with a higher premium), but that amount must be chosen and adopted by the Council.

Council was in consensus to bring this forward Monday night.

3. Fire Department Training Facility Agreements

Woodmaster presented four separate agreements for the City of Baldwin with Banks County, City of Clarkesville, City of Demorest, and Banks County to allow these entities' fire departments to utilize the Baldwin training facility for an annual fee. It is clearly stated in each agreement that waivers of liability will be signed by all personnel prior to each use of the training facility.

Council was in consensus to bring this forward Monday night.

4. House Bill 581 - Statewide Floating Homestead Exemption

Woodmaster explained how House Bill 581 introduces a floating homestead exemption and establishes a Floating Local Option Sales Tax (FLOST) to offset the exemption. All cities state-wide must decide whether to opt in or out by March 1st. If opting out, the City must host three public hearings, with similar requirements to the hearings for a millage rate increase. This leaves only the January end of month meeting and February.

County-wide, however, the cities face an "all or nothing" decision. With seven cities in Habersham and six in Banks County, if one city chooses to opt out, the result will be the floating exemption without the benefit of the local option sales tax for all the cities. There is no option to opt in at a future point in time. After a meeting with representatives from all seven cities and Habersham County, there is a consensus of being in favor of FLOST. Woodmaster expressed an idea for Baldwin Council to have a joint-called meeting with the cities and county board to review all the HB 581 information, work out any concerns, and create an IGA to move forward, should that be the final decision.

The floating exemption would apply to all properties that have obtained a homestead exemption by April 1st, 2025. If a property's Fair Market Value (FMV) goes up by any amount from this year to next year, the exemption will take the difference and only increase it based on an inflationary method of the state's choosing. The Consumer Price Index is the most logical choice, but it's not guaranteed. This floating exemption is not a replacement for whatever homestead exemptions are already in place, nor does it guarantee a frozen FMV. If improvements or additions are made to a property, the FMV will increase due to a change to the property, not the assessment. The House Bill also codifies that assessments must happen at least every three years.

FLOST opens how many LOST pennies an entity is allowed to have. Previously, there was a two-penny limit for a county (not including TSPLOST and ESPLOST). This FLOST is an exemption, so it would increase the Habersham County tax rate from 7% to 8%. In order to get the LOST penny, this decision will have to go to a referendum in November, so ultimately the voters will decide. If the voters do not pass FLOST, it will result in either an increase in the millage rate or a reduction in services to accommodate the budget. If passed, the pennies will be distributed amongst the cities and county, typically based on population through an IGA. The entities, however, cannot publicly advocate for FLOST, but instead must educate the public.

While a joint meeting with all entities has not been scheduled, as there are two cities who have not responded to the proposed meeting, Woodmaster said she expected to have an answer in the next few days about whether the joint meeting was being scheduled.

This will not appear on Monday's agenda, as any actual vote or consensus will be at the joint-called meeting with the other cities.


Jack Samuels closed the public hearing for the Aguilar zoning change at 7:15 pm.

Announcements

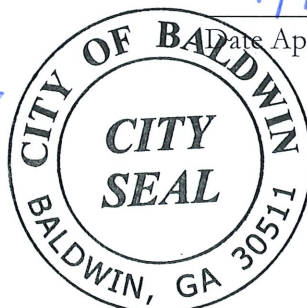
- a. Due to unforeseen delays, 2024 property tax information was released later than typically expected, and the bills have now been sent via postal mail. As it is the City's practice to extend the due date in the event of billing delays, the new due date for 2024 property taxes is February 28th, 2025. For any questions, please call City Hall or email cityclerk@cityofbaldwin.org.
- b. City Offices will be closed Monday, January 20th in observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
- c. Mayor Almagno invited citizens to contact her via City Hall or email if they were interested in participating in a committee to review and update the Noise Ordinance.

Adjournment

Action: A motion was made by Maarten Venter to adjourn the meeting with a second by Kerri Davis. Motion Carried 5-0 at 7:17 pm.


Stephanie Almagno, Mayor


Erin Gathercoal, City Clerk



1/13/2025
Date Approved by Council