

**MAYOR**  
Lamar Scroggs

**CITY COUNCIL**  
Martha Collins  
Sam Evans  
Ron McFarland  
Montie Robinson, Sr.  
Todd Wilson



**CITY MANAGER**  
Stan Brown

**CITY CLERK**  
Tangee Puckett

**NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on September 22, 2014**

## **Property owners complain about proposed tax hike in Oakwood**

Oakwood property owners, including three from the same neighborhood, criticized a proposed 50 percent hike in the city's property tax rate Monday, saying they believe officials should have eased in increases rather than hit residents all at once.

"I think we're coming at this (tax hike) a little late in the game, and a lot of people are a little upset about it," Delores Pearson told Oakwood City Council, which held the first of three public hearings on the increase.

"I'm not arguing at all that we don't need the money, but I think we just waited a little too long to step into the field to do something."

Business owner Rick Jackson said he would suggest that in the future the city consider "more incremental increases that people can absorb."

Officials are proposing a new rate of 4 mills, with 1 mill equal to \$1 for each \$1,000 in assessed property value. Property is assessed at 40 percent in the city. The current rate is 2.658.

Taxes on a home with a \$100,000 value would increase by \$53.36.

The new rate would help support the South Hall city's tentative 2015 budget, which takes effect Jan. 1.

Oakwood City Manager Stan Brown has said the city needs additional money to cover "maintaining the infrastructure and equipment we have."

"I ask you to consider the people of Crawford Oaks (subdivision) as well as the rest of Oakwood, in that we are just now coming out of a recession," Carole Moores told the council.

"Many of us are still struggling and we have seniors on fixed incomes. I hope you take all of this into consideration when you decide on your millage rate."

Jackson recommended the city consider "a less aggressive agenda" with Oakwood 2030, a plan for how the city's downtown area might look by that year.

In a presentation before the public hearing, Brown spoke about some of the city's debts, including for property acquired as part of that effort.

"It's a nice concept, but I think agendas like that in times like these may need to be shelved until revenues allow for those acquisitions," Jackson said.

The city also has a \$3.5 million debt on its portion of Thurmon Tanner Parkway, a four-lane road between Flowery Branch and Oakwood. The segment between Plainview and Mundy Mill roads in Oakwood was completed a couple of years ago.

Oakwood used the money to pay for right of way along the stretch.

Also, the city plans to cover a loan from the city's sewer fund that was used to pay for a new culvert on McEver Road. Flooding on May 19, 2013, washed out the old structure.

Overall, Brown talked about tight financial times in the South Hall city, mainly related to the timing of property tax money as it flows into the city. The city had to take out a short-term loan earlier this year to cover expenses.

"We've been living month to month, payday to payday," he said.

Even with the tax increase, next year's budget is projected to result in a \$393,000 deficit, but it could be covered by carryover money from fiscal 2014, which ends Dec. 31. Plus, officials are looking at cutting expenses in 2015.

Still, Brown said city taxes cover several services, including trash pickup. He said he checked with one trash company that offers comparable services and the cost was about \$200 per year.

Property owners also criticized the city for holding the meeting at 4 p.m., or before the end of the workday for many residents.

The meeting time "is real insensitive to a lot of people who can't be here, especially business owners, who pay a huge amount of taxes to the city," Jackson told the council. "I'm really sad to see so few people here. I think they ought to be more involved."

Officials said the public hearing is considered a called meeting, which the city customarily holds at 4 p.m.

Because the proposed rate is higher than the city's rollback rate, or the rate that would keep the property revenue amount the same, state law requires that Oakwood hold three public hearings on the proposed increase.

The other meetings are set for 4 p.m. Oct. 6 and 6 p.m. Oct. 13. All the meetings will take place at City Hall, 4035 Walnut Circle.