

2015 TAX INCREASE 1ST PUBLIC HEARING
JULY 28, 2015

Chairman Clark Henderson opened the first 2015 tax increase public hearing at 4:00 p.m., with Commissioners Sam Farrow and Larry Felton in attendance. Chairman Henderson read the millage rates from the surrounding counties with Crisp County's millage rate lower even with the tax millage increase. He advised that several of these counties have a fund to assist them in getting businesses to locate in that county. He advised that ad valorem tax is about 1/3 of the county's budget of \$24 million, and our reserves are getting low. We have also decided to put ½ mill of tax into the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) to help generate jobs for the community. Administrator Patton stated that we will have another public hearing at 6:00 p.m. tonight and one at 1:30 p.m. on Friday. John Woodard stated that he doesn't have anything against raising the millage to take care of business but the Commissioners should be here unless they are sick or dead. He stated that Drayton Road is very dangerous and the grass is very high in this area. He also has had four or five break-ins in his area, and the deputies come out there and look, and that is all he ever hears; he thinks they should dig and dig until they solve the problem. Also someone is going to get killed where Marvair Drive turns into Drayton Lane as the weeds on the property across from his house are very high. He doesn't mind paying his part of taxes if he is getting the services, and he doesn't think he is getting the services. Frank Olson stated that he is here as an existing tax payer, and he wants to put a different prospective on the millage increase; he knows people are upset about tax increases, and he doesn't blame them. He stated that the commissioners have done a good job of containing taxes through the years by cutting costs and spending down reserves, however you reach a point where you can no longer cut costs. The way to provide relief to existing taxpayers is to grow the tax base because if the tax base is not growing and remains essentially the same year after year, inflation and unfunded mandates will cause you to have to raise taxes, and he thinks that is the present situation. The ½ mill of tax dedicated to the IDA will be used to strengthen the industry recruitment process resulting in more business and industry, therefore more tax base. He advised that some of our close competitors have an infusion of tax dollars into their industrial development efforts and those dollars are used to develop industrial sites, enhance infrastructure and are used as incentive packages to entice new business and industry. Cordele/Crisp County is at a huge disadvantage in this respect, our community has a lot going for it but dedicating some taxes to the IDA is necessary to keep Crisp County in a competitive position. He stated that on the 2014 ad valorem tax bills for five of the larger industries, taxes ranged from \$71,000 to \$844,000, and the estimated tax was \$11,000 for 300 acres of land without an industry. More important are the jobs and payroll a new industry brings, boosting sales tax revenues for the county and ultimately increasing the tax base to residential and business expansion. He asked commissioners to consider positively the ½ mill for the IDA for the future good of our community. We need new business industry and residency to help this commission and subsequent commissions to avoid tax increases for the existing tax payers. Lowering your tax base gives you a fighting chance to hold the line on taxes. Herbert Gladwin stated that he thinks it is atrocious that our commissioners are not here; this is the third meeting in a row he has attended that Mr. Mathis was not here. The issue of garbage on the

tax bill is a new tax that he is highly opposed to. He was on the committee that examined the garbage issue before we ever had curbside garbage, and he and John Woodard both told Mr. Mathis to please not get the county involved in the collection of the garbage fees as it will be a set of nightmares. He said they heard in the workshop today that it is a nightmare for the sheriff's department, courts, administrator, commission, and to everybody. The county should not be involved in this, if they want to sell franchises to the garbage collection company, do that so they can collect their own fees. He stated how two surrounding counties did their collections. In a previous meeting it was discussed that ditches, etc. would be littered if we did have the garbage service, and the sheriff's department can enforce the ordinance we already have in place that says you can't litter. He recommends that the county get out of the garbage business and franchise it out. Bob Evans, a member of the IDA and as a taxpayer, thinks that it is important to realize that quality of life is directly related to our tax base, and in order to create those jobs you have to have education. They do great jobs with our public schools in Crisp County and with Darton College to provide education for our young people so that they are employable. The hospital is the largest employee in the county and these employers could not exist if we don't have a tax base to support the public jobs. The IDA has been able to bring in industries like Norbord, and Stella Jones and without the incentive to be able to provide land, water, sewer, and gas; those industries are locating in communities that can provide those incentives. He encourages commissioners to pass the ½ mill tax, and he applauds the commissioners for having one of the lowest millage rates in south Georgia area; our services and our quality of life is just as good or better than those other communities that have a higher tax base than we do. Dale Willis and Fred Geeslin, signed up to speak but stated that their issues had already been addressed. Tommy Stewart stated he has lived in this county all his life and pays taxes. He had a fire in his home several years ago, he lost his home and built another one, and his taxes have risen three times since he built his house. He is elderly and living on a fixed income, there are "For sale" signs all over the river as years ago people moved to the river, they worked all their life, now taxes have gone up so high that they cannot afford to pay the taxes. He thinks the fairest and best way is to raise sales tax, that way anybody that buys something here will pay their part. Administrator Patton advised that in the state of Georgia counties are not allowed to raise sales tax except through legislation, which we already have one penny each for L.O.S.T., S.P.L.O.S.T., E.S.P.L.O.S.T., and T.S.P.L.O.S.T. Chairman Henderson advised that we have another public hearing at 6:00 p.m. today. Administrator Patton stated the overall digest was down, so that is an indicator that we are not growing. Commissioner Felton thanked all the citizens for coming out, and he would like to see the county move forward and the city and county to work together in order to grow. Chairman Henderson closed the public hearing at 4:44 p.m.

2015 TAX INCREASE 2nd PUBLIC HEARING
JULY 28, 2015

Chairman Clark Henderson opened the second 2015 tax increase public hearing at 6:00 p.m., with Commissioners Sam Farrow and Larry Felton in attendance. Chairman Henderson went over the millage rate of the surrounding counties, which were all higher than Crisp County's, even with the millage increase. He advised that ad valorem tax is about 1/3, or about \$6 million, of the county's budget of \$24 million, and we couldn't operate our budget only on ad valorem tax; the ability to grow jobs is the only thing we can do, and without jobs and industry this county is not going to grow and taxes will be higher. Frank Olson stated that he is here as an existing tax payer, and he knows people are upset about tax increases, and he doesn't blame them. He wants to offer a different prospective regarding the ½ mill for industrial development. The county commissioners have done a good job of containing taxes through the years by cutting costs and spending down reserves, however you eventually reach a point where you can no longer cut costs. Looking ahead, the way to provide relief to existing taxpayers is to grow the tax base because if the tax base does not grow and remains essentially the same year after year, inflation and unfunded mandates will cause you to have to raise taxes, and he thinks that is the present situation. The ½ mill of tax dedicated to the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) will be used to strengthen the industry recruitment process resulting in more business and industry, therefore more tax base. The recruitment competition is fierce, some of our close competitors, Tifton, Americus, and Douglas, are an example of many communities that have an infusion of tax dollars into their industrial development efforts. These dollars are used to develop industrial sites, enhance infrastructure or used as incentive packages to entice new business and industry. Cordele/Crisp County is at a huge disadvantage in this respect, our community has a lot going for it but dedicating some taxes to the IDA is necessary to keep Crisp County in a competitive position. He stated that on the 2014 ad valorem tax bills for five of the larger industries, taxes ranged from \$71,000 to \$844,000, and the estimated tax was \$11,000 for 300 acres of land without an industry. More important are the jobs and payroll a new industry brings, boosting sales tax revenues for the county and ultimately increasing the tax base to residential and business expansion. He asked commissioners to consider positively the ½ mill for the IDA for the future good of our community; we need new business industry and residency to help this commission and subsequent commissions avoid tax increases for the existing tax payers. Lowering your tax base gives you a fighting chance to hold the line on taxes. Herbert Gladin stated that for the benefit of those that are here that were not here for the last meeting, he is appalled of the absence of two commissioners at this meeting. He wants to talk about the garbage issue being placed on the tax bill. He thinks that the garbage collection service is a commercial business conducted for the purpose of making a profit and that the government should not be involved in it. He and John Woodard were on the committee that studied this before it was every contracted, and they told Mr. Mathis many times during those meetings to please don't get the county involved with the collection of fees for the garbage company as it will spawn a series of nightmares. We all heard in the work session this afternoon the series of nightmares for the courts, sheriff's department, finance department, commission, and even a nightmare for the

garbage company, a free enterprise commercial business and it should be left that way. The government should not be in it, and we can't have a community to govern ourselves without some administrating of those kinds of utilities so franchise the people, let them do their business here and if they can't manage it, get somebody that can. He stated that a couple of neighboring counties have different versions of how they collect their fees. Advanced Disposal did a good job of trying to convince all of you that just have to have help with this, they can rattle statistics off, but they knew before they ever even proposed to collect garbage in Crisp County that 10% of the people were not going to pay their bills. Advanced earlier said that they were not collecting 10% of the garbage fees, but this afternoon they said that 16% were not paying. He didn't want to criticize them and their business but he thinks the county has no business being in this, cut them loose, and if they go up a dollar or two on the garbage, so be it. If the people want the service they will pay it and if they don't, they won't pay it. All the threats they put out about throwing garbage in the ditches and woods, the sheriff's department will be free to enforce our ordinance because they won't be busy serving summons so you can collect the fees for the garbage company. Crisp County needs to get out of the garbage service. Jim Paulk stated that he is a tax payer, and the main thing he wants to find out is what are we going to get for the increase in county taxes. Chairman Henderson stated that we are required by state law to have a balanced budget but we have unfunded mandates that we have to fund. Administrator Patton stated that one reason we have to increase taxes is we have a decrease in the digest, which means property values went down, an indicator that the county is not growing. Another reason is your taxes is going to pay for another public defender and investigator, and just through mandates in the last three years the county has had to do in the judicial system is almost a mill of tax; if we didn't have mandates that our county taxpayers have to pay, we wouldn't be talking about raising taxes other than the industrial development. Those are external forces that we do not control whatsoever but we have to do them because the state says we have to do them. We were able to dodge that bullet the last couple of years but this year sales tax is not coming in as in the last few years plus other revenue is down. Charlene Thomas wanted to know what the status of the IDA is as the industrial park was booming in the 1990's and it is not now. Administrator Patton stated that we are going through what every community has gone through, we did lose some industry, but the IDA is doing a lot of things like getting Big Tex, Stella Jones, and the expansion of Norbord, we just need to expand more. If you look at towns like Tifton and Albany, they are our competition, and we want those industries to come here so we can put our people to work; you have to have money to do that. He advised that now if the IDA needs any money, they have to come to the city or county. Mrs. Thomas stated that when you say let's raise taxes so that we can help the IDA do what it is trying to do, we understand we need money but as a community we would like to see some more progress in that area. She thinks we all want to see progress in Cordele/Crisp County. Chairman Henderson stated that we lost a big project a few months ago because the city and county didn't have the money to pay for some of the things they needed. Commissioner Felton thanked all the people that came out and stated that he would like to see the city and the county work together as that is the only way we are going to grow. Chairman Henderson closed the public hearing at 6:40 p.m.