

**CITY OF METTER
PUBLIC HEARING
MONDAY, JUNE 3, 2024
5:30 P.M.**

A public hearing was held on Monday, June 3, 2024, at 5:30 p.m. in the council chambers at city hall.

Attending the hearing were the following officials:

Mayor Edwin O. Boyd
Councilwoman Victoria Gaitten
Councilwoman Chyrileen Kilcrease
Councilwoman Rashida Taylor
Councilman Gregg Stewart
Councilman James McKie
City Manager Carter Crawford
City Clerk Angie Conner
Public Works Director Cliff Hendrix
Police Chief Robert Shore
Economic Development Director Heidi Jeffers
Planning Director Teresa Concannon
HR/Purchasing Manager Missy Edenfield
Fire Chief Jason Douglas

GUESTS ATTENDING

Juan Taylor – Metter Fire Department

CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME

Mayor Boyd called the hearing to order and welcomed everyone.

PURPOSE

To hear public input on the proposed Fiscal Year 2025 City of Metter budgets.

COMMENTS

Councilwoman Taylor asked is the \$19.00 per hour for fire and police included in this budget? Mr. Crawford said that \$19.23 per hour is included. Does this budget include the three new firefighters? Mr. Crawford said that we had to cut that from the budget.

Mr. Crawford said that we had to cut the budget some because the county would not pay for their share of animal control. They used a 5% increase as a total cap. They would have to approve anything over 5%. Councilwoman Gaitten asked if anyone had gone over there and talked with them? Mr. Crawford said no, it does not do any good. Councilwoman Gaitten said well you do not know if you do not try. Mr. Crawford said that he got a nasty email back from the county administrator when he emailed the county that city taxpayers have been footing the bill for the past three years because of the failure for them to pay the full amount. Councilman Stewart said that usually when you send a nasty email you might get one back.

Mr. Crawford said that the county takes the position that stems from the animosity from when they did the shared services agreement. In the agreement we cannot increase animal control no more than 5% per year and they are not obligated to pay but it says by resolution the county can agree to pay more. The first year I showed them the justification why everything went up but they still would not pay more than the 5% increase. That is the position that they have taken every year. Mr. Hendrix said that the county takes that same position with the Airport Authority. Councilman Stewart asked if they did agree by resolution would it take a year to do it? Mr. Hendrix said that it should be effective with the new budget year.

Mr. Crawford said that this year the animal control budget only includes a 5% increase. That is what the total budget increase was. They did increase what they paid us last year by 5%. Mr. Crawford said that in his position, unless he is told otherwise, is to stand by what the city agreed to do, which is to provide animal control to the city and county. We plan to do that per that agreement.

Mayor Boyd said that the 5% was intended to allow the governmental entities to review any larger increases. If there is a legitimate expense, they are supposedly obligated to handle it. It was not intended to be an automatic out to decline payment of an expense that was necessary for delivery of service. The county pays 60% of animal control and the city pays 40%. If the county were providing animal control and they were taxing the citizens for that county wide the city tax base represents 40% of the tax base so the city tax base would be paying 40%. The unincorporated area would be paying 60%. There is no difference really since the city was running animal control before the county elected to participate. It makes it equitable for them to pay 60%. As this data indicates, over 60% of the calls and animals come from the county. They really do not have a legitimate reason for not paying their share of the bill but there are some underlying factors that play in here based on other things that really should not matter. Evidently, they do matter and that is I don't think the county wants to show a different tax rate for the incorporated verses the unincorporated areas. That was made clear in an IDA meeting where they indicated that they only had \$40,000 left in that unincorporated account, and they would have to raise taxes in the unincorporated area in order to fund the RISE money which is what we were talking about at the time.

Mr. Crawford said that in the animal control agreement it spells out the county will use unincorporated taxes and also their LOST proceeds for the county towards funding of that. So, it spells out that they are not using city funds but the unincorporated tax base.

Councilman Stewart asked what is their contribution? Mr. Crawford said that their contribution is about \$90,000. Mayor Boyd said it is not a material breach worth. Mayor Boyd said that he really thinks it is a misunderstanding of the relationship between the two entities. There is still a mind set about the city and the county. There is a misunderstanding that the city is in the county and that the city taxpayers are also paying in county taxes. It is easy to get confused on these issues.

Councilwoman Gaitten asked how much more are we having to pay since they don't want to go more than 5%? Mr. Crawford said a little less than \$15,000. Mayor Boyd said it gets a little more egregious when you get to talking about the IDA. Councilwoman Gaitten asked what are we in agreement with that we have to pay the county for? She said she knows the Sheriff and jail but are there any other services? Mayor Boyd said that we pay for non-emergency dispatch and for yard waste at the landfill. Mr. Hendrix said that the yard waste is based on tonnage. We do not pay for household garbage. Councilwoman Gaitten said that she was curious if we ever paid over a 5% increase to them.

Mr. Crawford said that we have a shared service agreement for police, fire, IDA, and airport. Like Cliff said we pay for yard waste and junk at the landfill. There again we allow them to dump the leachate from the landfill into our disposal pond and of course we charge them a fee for that. So, we work together on different things. Of course, the jail and dispatch, that is not part of the SDS agreement. It is a separate agreement between the city and Sheriff because he did not want to be part of the SDS. Councilwoman Taylor asked if there are any updates on that agreement? Mr. Crawford said probably we won't have an update until after the election. Councilwoman Taylor and Councilwoman Gaitten said that the election is over. Mr. Crawford said it will probably be closer to the first of the year before we hear from him. Chief Shore said he is probably ready to talk about it now. Councilwoman Taylor said that was her understanding that after the election he would be ready to talk because there is no need for November, and it is budget time. Mr. Crawford said what my position would be is to advise the council that we don't need to rattle the cage, just let him decide. Councilwoman Taylor said we are not pursuing him, but we are anticipating his announcement. Councilwoman Gaitten asked if anybody else goes into those discussions besides Mr. Crawford? How does that work? Who goes into the discussion on that, or does he just bring us what he wants us to have? Chief Shore said that if history is any indication, then he probably won't do it until December. Then he will say you have 30 days to do what you are going to do. He suggested that somebody needed to reach out and talk to him. Councilwoman Taylor said so we need to be proactive not reactive. Chief Shore said that he probably does not need to be a part of the conversation. Councilwoman Gaitten said so who does need to be a part of that conversation?

Mayor Boyd said that council will ultimately be deciding what to do so we will first have to get the information on what he is thinking. There is not a whole lot we can do until we know what he is thinking. I just think we are all prepared for it not to be very favorable to us. Councilwoman Taylor said it has kind of been said. Mayor Boyd said one of the things as far as the cost of inmates, we can kind of control that to a certain degree. Is that correct or not correct if the judge puts them in there we have to pay?

Councilwoman Kilcrease said she doesn't understand why because the city is in the county so how can they differentiate a city prisoner from a county prisoner? That is what does not make sense to me. The City of Metter sits in Candler County. Councilwoman Taylor said that when she came on council in January and we had that mediation at the school, that is the same thing that our attorney advised us to get a definition before we signed the SDS. That is the same argument as always. Councilwoman Kilcrease said it just makes no sense to me. I live here in the city, but I am still a Candler County citizen. So, if you lock me up as a city prisoner then no, I am both a city and county prisoner.

Councilman McKie said it is determined by which court it goes through. If it goes through city court, then it is a city inmate. The reason being is because of all the fines and fees that fall to the city verses if they are a county inmate going through state court then everything is sent to the state then back down. If they are a county inmate the revenue generated from whatever the fines and fees go back for the care and housing of the inmate for whatever time period they were there. If they are under the city court, however, the fines and fees go to the city and the county does not get that part of it. Mayor Boyd said there is another way of looking at that but right now I am going to call a close to the public hearing on the budget.

ADJOURNMENT

After no further comments, Mayor Boyd closed the hearing at 5:45 p.m.

Angie Conner, City Clerk