

Gwinnett County Government NEWS RELEASE

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Board of Commissioners

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OFFICIALS OUTLINE PROPOSAL TO RESTORE KEY SERVICES

(Lawrenceville, Ga., Oct. 23, 2009) – Gwinnett County officials today outlined a proposal that would restore some of the spending reductions made earlier this year to the county’s public safety, parks and recreation and social services programs. The new proposal would be funded by a 2.28-mill increase in county property taxes.

The proposal was developed by county staff in response to a request from District 4 Commissioner Kevin Kenerly and was unveiled at a press briefing by Board Chairman Charles Bannister, Commissioner Kenerly, County Administrator Glenn Stephens and Chief Financial Officer Aaron Bovos. The details of the proposal were also posted to the county’s Web site.

Stephens said the county would hold three public hearings on the proposed property tax increase on Monday, Nov. 23, at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m., and then on Dec. 1 at 7 p.m. at the Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center located at 75 Langley Drive in Lawrenceville. He said he expected the county commission would formally consider the proposal at a special called meeting following the 7 p.m. hearing on Dec. 1.

“Based on discussions with commission members, they will consider the proposal at the Dec. 1 meeting, and we have been asked to take the necessary steps to make Gwinnett County’s citizens and taxpayers aware of the proposal well ahead of that decision,” said Stephens.

The proposal outlined by the officials would add \$31.3 million in service-related additions to the 2009 budget and provide, among other items, funding for the district attorney, courts and constitutional officers, the addition of 58 new police officers, the opening and staffing of three new fire stations and the continued operation of all county libraries – including the new Hamilton Mill branch opening next year – at equal service levels. It would also add \$4.8 million to the recreation fund to, among other things, set youth athletic association fees at a more affordable

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level for families, restore grounds maintenance personnel and restore seven-day operations at all aquatic centers. The proposal also will address a deficit in 2010 and compensate for a reduction in the commercial and residential property tax digest.

Funding the proposed \$59.2 million increase would require a 2.28-mill increase in the county's property tax rate. For 63 percent of county homeowners, whose homes are assessed at \$200,000 or less, the resulting tax increase would be less than \$13.36 a month; for the additional 30 percent of Gwinnett homeowners whose homes are assessed at between \$200,001 and \$350,000, the monthly tax increase would be between \$13.36 and \$24.76. Combining the two groups, 93 percent of homeowners would see a tax increase of less than \$25 per month.

"I appreciate the county staff's response to my request," said Commissioner Kenerly, "and I look forward to hearing from my constituents and to studying this proposal with my colleagues on the Board. Especially in retrospect, I have been troubled by the drastic service cuts that were necessitated by our earlier budget decisions – and I am not convinced that they reflected the will of a majority of citizens and taxpayers. I am growing concerned that many of the cuts we already made or are planning to make will severely diminish our community long term.

"I think it is important to revisit this issue with an eye toward focusing on truly critical services and on giving our citizens, voters and taxpayers an opportunity to understand the current and future stakes for our county," Kenerly added. "I'm hopeful that when we call this question it will be with the benefit of a great deal of thought and an understanding of the views and desires of all our citizens."

Commission Chairman Charles Bannister said he supported revisiting the millage rate question. "I backed the millage rate that was originally proposed and have been concerned that our failure to fund needed public service improvements would do real damage to our county now and in the years ahead," he said. "I look forward to studying this proposal and hearing from the public between now and December."

Bannister stressed this move does not lessen the value of the Engage Gwinnett citizens committee. "Their work is still very important to us, but this millage adjustment will temporarily allow us to stop dismantling great improvements made in the community since 2005, including investments in public safety, while we await their service level and funding recommendations," said Bannister.

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The proposed restoration of services does not include many of the cuts made within the County's internal support functions and also does not fund the Unified Plan, which was designed to better manage growth, public safety, quality of life and economic development over the next several decades. The Engage Gwinnett Committee will continue to study service levels and funding options in order to make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners in the first quarter of 2010.

If the proposed increase were to be approved, a second set of 2009 tax bills would be mailed to property owners on March 15, 2010. This billing will reconcile the final millage rate with the temporary rate used in billing taxes earlier this year. Tax bills were issued to property owners last August under a temporary collection order, which allowed the Board of Commissioners to set a temporary millage rate while the County continued negotiations with cities over matters of service delivery. Once commissioners set a final millage rate, the State Department of Revenue will certify Gwinnett's tax digest resulting in a new round of property tax bills.

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Note: A complete list of services funded by the proposal announced today is attached.