

Dallas County Commissioners Meeting Overview

Contributed by Tom McGregor
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The Dallas County Commissioners held their weekly public hearing this morning. They tackled three important issues on the agenda: a proposed property tax rate increase, tax freeze for senior citizens over 65 years old, and added expenses for the County Budget.

Overall, the county Commissioners agreed that a tax hike is necessary to pay for costly improvements of county jails, because they have failed state inspections four years in a row. They voted for a proposed County budget of \$474 million for the 2008 fiscal year beginning on October 1. The county tax rate would increase by 1.42 cents per \$100 in assessed value of property to 22.81 cents.

Commissioner Maurine Dickey of District 1 called for a vote on her proposal to enact a tax freeze for senior citizens. She claimed that many seniors are house rich but cash poor. She wants the elderly to be given a "break";

Commissioner John Wiew Price of District 3 opposed the tax freeze saying, "It doesn't work for my constituents. The vote was cast 3 to 1 in favor of the tax freeze.

However, the Homestead exemption would be eliminated. This is a measure that discounts \$69,000 off the assessed value of a home before the tax rate is applied for those over 65-years old. Those who currently have the exemption will not lose it. Nonetheless, individuals approaching the age of 65 will not be able to take advantage of the tax break in the future.

The Commissioners voted 3 to 1 in favor of a budget proposal to give a 4% pay raise for county employees; hiring five new positions for the District Attorney's Office, a public defender for DNA evidence review, and constables for truancy work and traffic enforcement. Commissioner Dickey said she supported the pay raise because she wants to make the salaries of county employees "competitive" with the rest of the nation.

Compared to their tumultuous meeting two weeks earlier, all four Commissioners appeared noticeably-relaxed and a few were even cracking jokes. Property owners, however, won't be laughing at their tax hikes on their county taxes because of a tax rate increase and higher appraisal values for properties in Dallas County.