City of Jasper

200 Burnt Mountain Road
Jasper, GA 30143

MINUTES |Public Hearing #3 Tax Millage /
Special Called Council MEETING
Thursday, October 15, 2026, 5:30 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT
Mayor Kirk Raffield
Jim Looney
John Foust
Brandon Hannah
Steve Lawrence
Tony Davis

STAFF
Brandon Douglas
Kim Goldener
Lorrie Waters
Lindsey Williams
Matt Dawkins
John Sherrer
Mary Elizabeth Burgess
Josh Davis
Carly Glaze

GUESTS IN ATTENDANCE
See Attachment "A"

MEMBERS ABSENT

LEGAL COUNSEL

PRESS
Mari Livsey – Know Pickens

Dan Pool

I. Call Meeting to Order — Mayor Raffield

Mayor Raffield called the meeting to order @ 5:30pm

II. Adopt Agenda — Mayor Raffield

Mayor Raffield called for a motion to adopt the agenda. Council Member Steve Lawrence made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Council Member Brandon Hannah seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Staff Presentation – 2026 Property Tax Millage Rate — City Management

- **Finance Director Lindsey Williams** delivered the staff briefing detailing municipal property taxes and general fund operations:
  - Property taxes exclusively fund general government services (police, fire, streets, parks, stormwater, planning/zoning, municipal court, administration, elections). Property taxes do not fund water and sewer services, which operate as enterprise/business funds supported by user rates.
  - City operations encompass 65 full-time personnel (excluding water/sewer), maintaining 55 miles of roads, four parks, five municipal facilities, and public street lighting ($200,000 annually). In 2025, Jasper Fire responded to 2,441 calls and Jasper Police responded to 9,271 calls. Staff also support five annual parades and over 25 community events.
  - Property tax calculations: Assessed value equals 40% of fair market value (established by the Pickens County Tax Assessor). Under the proposed 7.636 millage rate, a $200,000 home ($80,000 assessed value) would pay $610.88 annually. Eligible homesteads benefit from the state-funded Homeowners Tax Relief Grant, reducing assessed values by up to $18,000.
  - Fixed 2027 cost drivers include approximately $130,000 in mandatory insurance/benefits cost increases and earlier competitive wage adjustments across public safety. General fund spending is 80% personnel/benefits and 20% operational, with zero capital equipment purchases budgeted.
- **City Manager Brandon Douglas** reviewed statutory notice requirements:
  - Property taxes comprise roughly 27% (approx. one-third) of general fund revenues.
  - State law requires advertising the tentative rate against the rollback rate (6.092 mills), producing an advertised 25.34% property tax increase over rollback.
  - Douglas noted that on a $200,000 home, the 1.5 mill increase represents $120 per year (approximately $10 per month). He outlined the upcoming budget timeline, including the November 19 budget public hearing and December 7 final adoption.

IV. Public Comments for Public Hearing

Mayor Raffield opened the floor to public comments:

- David Shouse [Shopping Center / Commercial Property Owner]: Expressed frustration over low attendance, stating citizens have disengaged out of hopelessness rather than apathy. Criticized council for

using modest $200,000 residential examples when commercial property reassessments are jumping hundreds of thousands of dollars without homestead relief. Stated landlords cannot absorb the tax hike and must pass costs directly to struggling small business tenants. Criticized downtown event performance, spending on Perrow Park, and noted that while taxes are increasing, property owners face utility moratoriums preventing them from developing parcels annexed under promises of city water and sewer.

- Joey Roland (Jasper, GA): Asked to know total municipal expenditures over the past four years; Mayor Raffield directed staff to provide the historical records.
- Larry Holbrook (Jasper, GA): Shared that he returned to Pickens County for a lower cost of living, but his property taxes have increased by $2,000, noting that he pays higher municipal property taxes in Jasper than he did for a comparable home in Marietta. Questioned why taxes continue escalating while services and population scale remain modest.
- Scott Pope [Commercial Property Owner]: Reported selling commercial property at a financial loss after encountering municipal restrictions and inflated county tax assessments on property that could not be utilized. Emphasized that it is unfair for governments to assess and raise taxes on land while utility restrictions prevent owners from building, renting, or generating revenue to pay those taxes.
- Steve Brock (Jasper, GA): Noted that while the proposed millage rate is lower than in 1996, actual tax bills are more than double due to soaring county assessments. Urged council to consider citizens on fixed incomes struggling to afford food and water bills, asking if city employee pay increases could be capped on higher salaries rather than issued as across-the-board percentage raises.
- Roy Dobbs: Spoke on behalf of property owners along Highway 53 and Highway 108 who annexed into the city decades ago under formal promises of city water and sewer service, paying city taxes ever since, yet continue to be denied utility connections while new developments have been approved.

V. **Adjourn Public Hearing** @ 5:53pm — Mayor Raffield

Council Member Jim Looney made the motion to adjourn the public hearing and Council Member Brandon Hannah provided the second. The motion passed unanimously.

Special Called Council Meeting
Thursday, October 15, 2026 @ 6:00pm
or Immediately Following the Close of the Public Hearing

I. **Call Meeting to Order** — Mayor Raffield

Mayor Raffield called the Special Called Meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

II. **Adopt Agenda** — Mayor Raffield

Mayor Raffield called for a motion to adopt the agenda. Council Member Steve Lawrence made the motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Council Member Brandon Hannah seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

III. **Consideration and Approval of Millage Rate** — Mayor Raffield

Mayor Raffield called for a motion on Ordinance No. 2026-10 – 2026 Tax Millage Rate

Motion: Councilmember Steve Lawrence made a motion to approve Ordinance No. 2026-10 setting the 2026 property tax millage rate at **7.636 mills** (a 1.5 mill increase over the current rate). Councilmember Jim Looney seconded the motion.

- **Discussion – Tax Digest Inquiry:** Councilmember Brandon Hannah inquired about digest reassessments. Finance Director Lindsey Williams reported that based on data received from the Pickens County Tax Assessor, 68 city parcels underwent inflationary reassessments (representing approximately 2.7% digest growth).
- **Discussion – Councilmember Tony Davis Dissent:** Councilmember Tony Davis delivered an extended floor statement announcing his opposition to the tax increase:
  - Acknowledged deep respect for fellow council members and staff, stating his decision was made after weeks of prayer and personal reflection.
  - Pointed out that families across the city are facing severe inflation in food, gasoline, and utilities without corresponding pay raises, forcing households to cut back and adjust spending.
  - Argued that an advertised 25.44% tax increase falls disproportionately on commercial property owners—such as downtown properties valued over $1.5 million that do not qualify for homestead exemptions—and warned that landlords will pass these taxes directly to struggling local tenants.
  - Reflected on his 2025 campaign platform, questioning past municipal spending priorities including the Main Street America designation, the $2.4 million Perrow Park development, downtown restrooms, and adding administrative overhead ("a third city manager").

- Emphasized the unfairness of demanding higher property taxes from residents and families who own land or inherited parcels with inactive water meters that the city refuses to connect due to utility moratoriums.
- Asserted that local government must trim municipal spending rather than taxing citizens out of budget shortfalls, calling for council to hold the millage rate steady at 6.136 mills.

Mayor Raffield called for a show-of-hands vote for Ordinance No. 2026-10 – 2026 Property Tax Millage Rate.

- **Approval by a show of hands:** Councilmember John Foust, Councilmember Brandon Hannah, Councilmember Jim Looney, Councilmember Steve Lawrence.
- **Opposed by a show of hands:** Councilmember Tony Davis.

Conclusion: The motion to adopt Ordinance No. 2026-10 establishing the 2026 millage rate at 7.636 mills passed 4–1. Council Member Tony Davis opposed the motion.

IV. Discussion of Remaining 2026 Events — Kim Goldener

- **Upcoming Schedule:** Downtown Live at Perrow Park (Saturday, Oct 17); Pickens High School Homecoming Parade along the new route (Monday, Oct 19 at 6:00 PM); Georgia Premier Wrestling in Perrow Park (Oct 24 and Nov 21); Burnt Mountain Days / Soup Bean Festival (Nov 7); Veterans Day Parade (Wednesday, Nov 11 at 10:00 AM); Christmas Parade (Sunday, Dec 7); and *Elf* movie night at Perrow Park (Dec 12).
- **Halloween Event Hours:** Because Halloween falls on a Saturday, Goldener presented options for Main Street trick-or-treating hours. Council unanimously agreed to set hours from **4:00 PM to 6:00 PM** on Saturday, October 31, allowing families to transition into *Halloween on Stegall* and the *Hocus Pocus* movie screening in Perrow Park.

V. 2027 Budget Presentation — City Manager and Department Directors

- **General Fund Overview:** City Manager Douglas presented the draft 2027 general fund budget summary ($9,149,000 proposed expenditures vs. $9,681,746 amended 2026). Fixed personnel-related expenses (salaries, overtime, insurance, benefits, judicial/boards) total **$7,528,000 (82.3%)**. Operating expenses total **$1,490,000 (16.3%)**. Capital outlay is budgeted at **$0**. General fund debt service is exceptionally low at $53,000 annually ($349,000 principal remaining on a 2018 fire engine). Finance Director Williams noted her goal is to maintain a minimum reserve fund balance of $3 million (well above the 20% / $1.8M policy floor).
- **Fire Department Needs (Chief John Sherrer):**
  - *Facilities & Equipment:* Requested a 3-bay equipment storage addition at Station 1 ($36,186), a 1-bay training facility/burn building with water line ($67,700 total), an SCBA fill station at Station 14 ($76,000), replacement of six SCBA packs ($80,000), six sets of turnout gear ($24,000), vehicle extrication struts ($60,000), command unit radio upgrades ($30,000), and mobile radios ($125,000).
  - *Apparatus & Staffing:* Urged council to plan for replacing frontline 2018 Engine 1 ($1.1 million; two-year delivery lead time) to maintain ISO ratings and avoid overlapping replacement of the aerial ladder truck due around 2030. Requested three additional full-time firefighter/AEMT positions (one per shift) to reduce heavy overtime and reliance on part-time staff. Call volume is projected to hit 2,700 calls in 2026.
- **Police Department Needs (Chief Matt Dawkins):**
  - *Technology & Facilities:* Requested radar/laser units, rear parking lot paving, an insulated radio repeater shelter at Bent Tree, a backup repeater on the Lilly water tank, LeadsOnline investigative software ($8,000/yr), CAD mobile computer integration ($11,000), and state-mandated HB 296 digital driver's license scanners ($16,513 equipment; $3,000/yr).
  - *Vehicles & Staffing:* Requested two patrol vehicles ($82,000–$87,000 each) to rotate out high-mileage patrol units exceeding 100,000 miles, and two additional patrol officers to implement split-shift coverage during shift changes. Department responded to 9,271 calls in 2025.
- **Public Works Needs (Josh Davis, Director):**
  - Requested a pole barn and paint for the Amicalola Electric building, a long-reach excavator for ditch and stormwater mowing, six commercial mowers (repair expenses surged this year), a sewer jetter trailer for line cleanouts, and a dedicated mechanic service truck.
- **Enterprise Fund (Water & Sewer):**
  - City Manager Douglas presented the draft water/sewer enterprise budget, proposing a **10% adjustment in water and sewer rates** to offset sharp increases in electricity, chemicals, pipe materials, and the professional plant operations contract with Inframark.

- Announced that the city will publish a Request for Proposals (RFP) in the *Pickens County Progress* next week seeking contract operations for **water distribution and sewer collection (line maintenance and leak repairs)**, mirroring the operational model currently utilized at the water and wastewater treatment plants.

VI. **Adjournment** Mayor Raffield

Mayor Raffield with no further business, called for a motion to adjourn @ 7:29pm. Council Member Jim Looney made a motion to adjourn, and Council Member John Foust seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

CITY OF JASPER CORPORATE SEAL GEORGIA

Mayor, Kirk D. Raffield

City Clerk, Lorrie Waters

Attachment " A"

PLEASE SIGN IN

City of Jasper
Public Hearing #3 & Special Called Council Meeting
SIGN IN ROSTER
October 15, 2026

PRINT NAME	ADDRESS/OR BUSINESS AFFILIATION
Kim Goldmer	COJ
Frances Hollomon	Jasper
Janice Yarber	Jasper
Joey Roland	Property Owner
Lisa Roland	" "
Tracy Jones	Jasper
Don Peel	Dorsmsc
John Phares	Jasper, GA News
David Shaw	Jasper
M E Burgess	COJ
Elise Allen	COJ
Samuel Sly	JPC