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MINUTES
**WAYCROSS CITY COMMISSION
BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING**

**WAYCROSS CITY COMMISSION CHAMBER
(FIRST FLOOR OF CITY HALL)**

**TUESDAY, JULY 23, 2024
3:00 P.M.**

I. CALL TO ORDER:

The Public Hearing on the proposed budget for the FY2025 General Fund, Enterprise Funds and Special Revenue Funds of the Commission of the City of Waycross was held on Tuesday, July 23, 2024, in the Commission Chambers of City Hall. Mayor James called the meeting to order at 3:00 pm. Those in attendance were, City Manager, Ulysses Rayford, Commissioners Katrena Felder, Sheinita Bennett and Diane Hopkins.

A. Invocation Commissioner Katrena Felder

Invocation was led by Chief Eddins, WFD

B. Pledge of Allegiance

II. READING OF NOTICE: City Clerk

Read by Assistant City Clerk, Marquis Nixon

III. CALLED MEETING:

A. BUDGET PRESENTATION

1. Mayor and Commissioners ****SEE ATTACHED DISCUSSION NOTES****
2. Public Response

Roger Collins, Tax Commissioner, ****see attached notes****

IV. LAST CALL and/or ADJOURN TO EXECUTIVE SESSION

V. PUBLIC REMARKS ON OFFICAL ACTION

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor James adjourned the meeting at 3:40pm.

CITY OF WAYCROSS

BY: *Michael Angelo James*
MICHAEL-ANGELO JAMES, Mayor

ATTEST:

Jacqueline Powell
JACQUALINE POWELL, City Clerk



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Mayor: At this time, we will stand for our invocation and our pledge. Commissioner Katrina Felder.

James Smart:

Lord, thank you for this day. And, Lord, we thank you for your grace and your mercy. Lord, we thank you for the opportunity we have to serve this city. Lord, we ask you to be with this meeting. We're about to take in order the things and the decisions are pleasing to you. Lord, that your son, Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.

All: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands. One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Mayor: Ladies and gentlemen, the format of the public hearing will be the following manner. The City Clerk will read the notice that was published in the Journal Herald. Following the reading of the public notice, the appropriate department personnel will summarize a Report. Regarding the petition. The petitioner shall have ten minutes to present reasons for the approval of the petition. Opponents of the petition shall have ten minutes to present reasons why the petition should not be approved. Anyone who wishes to speak in opposition to the position or the petition should have registered with the City Clerk prior to the commencement of this hearing. The speaker should give his or her name and address. If more than one person registers in opposition to the petition, the one who registers first shall be entitled to use the ten minutes to present the reasons why the petition should not be approved. Following the ten minutes, presentations and others will be permitted to speak, and each person so desiring to speak will have three minutes to make the presentations. I'll determine the order in which these presentations are made following the opportunity to speak. The City Commission will deliberate the issue and make its decision where decisions will be deferred to a later date. At this time, I will designate our city clerk as the hearing's timekeeper. At this time, we will hear the reading of the notice from our City Clerk.

Assistant City Clerk:

Public notice City of Waycross, Georgia. Proposed budget hearings of the City Commissioners for Fiscal Year 2025. July 23rd, 3 p.m. 417 Pendleton Street, City Hall. The purpose of these Commission hearings is the discussion and consideration of the commission of the proposed budget. All citizens of Waycross are invited to attend. Handicapped citizens requiring assistance to attend the meeting should make their request to the City Manager's office by calling (912) 287-2912. Back to you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor:

Thank you, Mr. Clerk. At this time, we are moving forward in our budget presentation, and we are calling now for our personnel who will be speaking.

City Manager:

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. The finance director will present the budget with a few updates that we have, and then we'll turn to the public for their response.

Greg:

Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners. I've got a PowerPoint this time, and I've given out a paper copy at your desk if you want to follow along. As you see, it's not very lengthy and a lot of it's reviewed, but I do have one piece of information related to the real estate tax and the tax commissioners here. And he can tell you about it somewhat to.

We're all concerned about the budget. One thing I learned in a hurry when I started working here was that the department heads and the supervisors knew what the budget was. They followed the file of the budget. And, you know, when I first got here, too, we had Arpa money and that's, you know,

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going to come to an end during our fiscal year. We're in right now. So, you know, that is that is a concern not having the Arpa money. And also, the next line that, you know, supplies, fuel, insurance.

They've always they've all increased substantially, um, since the virus especially. And of course, recruitment, recruitment and retention remain a challenge for our division directors and for our supervisors. So, the action we're proposing is to continue the monthly, you know, monitor our financial statements, determine if we need to make any actions Financially. We will review the financial data to determine affordability of any increases and experience and expenses, including any changes to the recruitment and retention policies. And as we've talked about before, we need to continue to purchase equipment through capital leases as we have in prior years. And like I said, the city manager, I mean the city tax, sorry, the tax commissioner is going to speak on this too. But I want to tell you how it affects our budget. Uh, you know, he's told me that the due date for city taxes may be extended. Normally we get most of our cash from taxes on property in November and say if it's December or January or even February this year, uh, it'll still get into our budget year. It won't affect our expenses or revenue as such because like I say, most of it, instead of getting in November, we may get a little bit later in our fiscal year, but we've got reserves too, uh, for we can handle that. And as the second Senate says, a later due date will not materially change the revenue of the budget, and the commissioners will again have the opportunity, like they do every year, to roll back the millage rate. I did not anticipate any other factor when I did when I did the budget, uh, one thing the tax commissioner needed was the lost revenue. And as you can see on the screen, it's 3.8 over 3.8 million for on for 23. And as citizens of the city of Waycross, that own property. That's a line item on our tax bill where our taxes are Reduced by the lost revenue that we get through sales tax. Some positive factors are, you know, we'll continue to monitor the financial statements that we get monthly to determine if we need to take any further action. Our worker's comp expense should decrease as we pay off the old claims. I mean, as you as I have in the budget, a substantially high and but this will be it should be reduced when we pay off these old claims. And you know, inflation is really hurting us on the expense side. But it's a positive on the tax revenue side. On sales tax revenue I mean, it's terrible how grocery store prices have hurt our personal pocketbook. But a positive side of that is that the grocery stores, for example, have to pay us in sales tax revenue. So that does help our budget somewhat. And also, you know, the new businesses that are coming to town. That will increase our sales tax revenue also. And then the last point, the opportunity to keep our financial position strong is to monitor our expenses and keep them in line with the growth of the city. In other words, I mean, like any business, you know, if the revenue goes up, we need to keep the expenses in line with that. We especially need to do it here to keep our budget balanced. That's really all I, all I have with any questions or comments from the commissioners or anyone.

Mayor: Commissioner, do you have any questions of the director?

Comm/Bennett:

I have one question, Commissioner. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. When you say pay off old claims, how far back? Speaking of old claims.

Greg:

It's back for workers comp. Yeah. If a worker's comp insurance, uh, I mean, we the city was self-insured and because we, you know, didn't have insurance for, for some of those claims, we still got a lot on, or we did have a lot. I know H.R. is really working those down and we get reports, I get report, and the city manager gets a report from her showing where we paid. We settled a lot of them. And so, they're expensive to settle sometimes. But then we're done with those particular claims. And I know she's doing everything she can to try to pay for them.

Comm/Bennett: How far back?

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Marissa-HR Director:

some of them can range to 2001. Mhm. They're really old claims.

Comm/Bennett:

And that should have been taken care of way before now.

Marissa-HR Director:

Yeah. When I came on board roughly three years ago, we had close to 20 open claims right now we're working with five, so if we can close those, then we can go with the fully insured and be done with all of the self-insured.

Mayor: Commissioner Hopkins.

Comm/Hopkins:

Um, have we negotiated the attorney one? Have we negotiated with workman's comp on them? Give them a cap of what we'd pay to try to get these claims settled.

Marrisa-HR Director:

We've got one that we could potentially settle now. Um, I can get with Mr. Spearman and set up discussion where we could talk about that in executive. That would leave us with four.

Comm/Hopkins:

Okay. So, we have one with seven now? Yes. Is the quicker we can get those settled, the better our insurance will be.

Marissa-HR Director:

The cheaper the less will pay. Right.

Comm/Hopkins:

Okay. Well, I'd like to I'd like to look into that and let her report to Mr. Huey. And see That he had thought of the workman's comp, but to see why he could settle with them, we'd have to give him a cap on what we Would settle for. Thank you.

Mayor:

Any other questions for? Thank you so much. Did you want to bring up our other presenter?

City Manager:

I was going to ask that, Mr. Mayor, because technically he would be a public response to the budget. But if you want to bring him up now, you can't wait until the public response. Yes. Okay. And, Mr. Mayor, that kind of completes this presentation. We presented the budget a few times now. So, like I said, I tried to answer as many questions as possible that I was asked to. So, I don't know any other questions or concerns of the commission at this time that we can answer, but I'll pause if we have any questions.

Mayor:

Commissioner, did you have any questions?

Comm/Felder:

Yes, I have a question. So, and this relates to the positive factors from the presentation. You said continue to use financial statements to determine the financial action plans. Um, does this include all

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financial statements for the commissioners? The mayor? Um, staff? Yes. Regarding all expenses, contingency reports, and what day of the month will we receive this statement?

City Manager:

Yes. So soon? So, you will soon get the budget approved and passed. I still need to make the version of the statement that is, I guess appreciative of everybody. So, we'll give you a few copies here next week just to see if that's what you're looking for. It'll be at the end of the month to reflect the beginning of the month, so you'll get it at the end of each month, but it will reflect like, you know, March 1st through April 1st, and you'll get it at the end of the month. So, if you have any suggestions now, from the current financial reports that you receive, you can send those up at this time Commission. That way we can start making these adjustments. Like I said before, the problem we were having, because we had not done a lot of time, we didn't have the proper financial picture that we have now. Now, that being said, and when we go into this other discussion about the, uh, the taxes, that might be something that we might need some budget amendments. I've also mentioned briefly a few times too, about his overtime situation. I know everybody is aware of that. We can't talk about it now, but there might be some amendments to the budget pending based off of those, whatever happens behind those situations. If we're able to kind of, uh, figure out his Manning, his Manning situation, that might not be an issue. Then once we get to the true picture of the tax session, we might have to come back again and kind of kind of paint that picture for you to understand what's going on with the housing market.

Comm/Felder:

Thank you.

Mayor:

Do you have a follow up question for City Manager?

Comm/Hopkins:

I have a question, Commissioner Hopkins. Are you talking about the Public Works Department or overtime? Both.

City Manager:

Chief Eddin has been briefed a few times about his concerns about his workforce. So, he mentioned that might be an overtime situation where it would be increased to, to mitigate the Manning right now, because we do have some many issues. I can't go into detail all that right now. We have done that a few times in session. But, uh, so I just let the commission know that might need to be amended in the budget if we don't figure that out. Here in the next 90 days but the team is working on it. Chief Eddins with the H.R. Director on some courses of action. So, once I get those courses of action, I'll follow back up with the commission. But I just want everybody to know potentially, if we don't rectify those, we might have to amend the budget to reflect those, um, those changes over time. That just has to happen because of the shortage of people to be seen.

Comm/Hopkins:

Hopefully within six months or so. Will those positions.

City Manager:

Oh, we have a plan. We're trying to work as best we can. And I think at one time before we started going back and looking at other options across the board, I didn't want to just change the fire department. If we're going to make some changes on personnel to be out through the whole city. Like I said, HR is working through some things. We're looking at the past decisions that were made to

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gather in a certain place and try to avoid those potholes again. but once we come up with a better plan, um, and we kind of put that to the side until we got this budget passed. And once the budget is passed, we're going full steam and working on that plan and bringing it back to the commission for consideration.

Comm/Hopkins:

Mr. mayor I'd like to ask City manager some, um, but I want to clarify something in my mind. Um, the employees did get that cola. Am I correct?

City Manager:

They got the initial 2.5. It is another 1% in the budget right now that.

Comm/Hopkins:

Will include that in the budget. They will get the cola right? Yes. So that would be 3.5. Correct. So, they do get a little raise this year. Yes. Yeah. Okay. And then I hadn't really counted. But how many people did we promote. Was it 6 or 7. They had five didn't they.

City Manager:

Yeah. They're ongoing.

City Manager:

Right. Yeah. They're ongoing. And there could be some, like I said, some promotions involved. Like this goes again to the situation. And when we get those replacements in might be some other folks. Like I said though, that won't affect the budget as much as you know other things. The main thing will be the overtime because it will be massive if we keep going in the direction we're going with the fire department. So hopefully we get those new recruits in to kind of fill some of those slots and we'll have to keep on doing this, this, uh, this workload that the fire department is carrying right now.

Comm/Hopkins:

So, you know, one other thing that. Concerns me, and I don't know if we've looked at it in the budget or not, but I know we're not having the prison crews because of different situations they have going on in the prison. So, the canals, you know, mainly clean them. And so, we can't get behind on them because they have a lot of growth in them and the flow of the water. So, what do we intend to do about that? Do we if the prison crew is not going to show up or don't have men to put out there, or we're going to try to hire some?

City Manager:

So, the prison crew has been showing up. they have been showing up. It depends how many they can release at that point in time. I know it's like five to 7 To 10 like we used to know. About 14. But whoever was able to come out, they came out. but with that and this is probably outside this budget discussion for this briefing, but James has got with me, we're looking at as you all know, we only have one tractor that goes all the way down. So that's something, you know, once we get behind, we get behind on that stuff. But we are looking at some other options. I can present those at the next meeting. Of course, we got three right now that we're looking at, and I'll do that then when Mr. Smart is here. He's not here today and wasn't feeling well, but I do want him to provide some of his insight. And he's been here longer than I have, and he's been dealing with that for many years. So, I do think we have got a plan. It will be some financial cost, different ways. Like many things, it could be long-term. It could be a rental cost or a one-time purchase. But we'll present that at the next meeting. Um, and hopefully also some, some courses with not courses, but some courses of action with the fire department. At the same time, I don't want to overload them the regular meetings until we get the budget passed.

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Comm/Hopkins:

The other thing is, have we budgeted for that? And some of us have overtime, but some of them have a little extra in their budget. Have we budgeted for that already or is see something we have to mend.

City Manager:

We probably have to mend the fire department's budget because they did budget for overtime. But because of the situation he's in that we're in is probably going to exceed that until we get the money straight. So, like I said, we've kind of discussed this a few times already. So um, but yeah, so they are we are working the plan. I'm not sure it's going to mitigate everything. So, he probably still will be a little bit over, but at least it won't be that that large cost that we're looking at right now.

Comm/Hopkins:

Most of the departments have to have some overtime because you never know what catastrophes. Yeah. Correct. The city. So, most of them already have some built in. Yes. Correct. Yes. Okay.

Mayor:

Any further questions of our city manager?

Comm/Bennett:

Mr. Mayor, that 1 percent Cola, we did promise the city workers that they could have that yes, that 1% cola. And also, I feel like we need to go ahead and try to move forward so the city can function properly. And if it's possible, can we go ahead and vote on the budget or do we have to wait until August.

City Manager:

And you can correct me if I'm wrong on here, but I think now that we kind of reset, we got to do all three meetings. And so, August will be the vote for next week, not next week. Two weeks from now will be the vote. I know that some of the workforce is questioning you. We will retro it back to the date as far as their raises and stuff like that. So, they won't miss their pay raises and or advancements or anything like that. It'll reset. So that's not a factor. I did speak to the workforce. Some of them this morning. So, I know they had a lot of questions about what's going on and concerns. So, we're trying to, and the director has been talking to him too about the process. And everybody fully understands, you know, the importance of getting the budget right. Um, this, this extra time did allow us to look at some things that we do need to address. And I've addressed that a few times before about inflation and travel and certain things that we got to change just because they've not been changed before. So, it's always a silver lining to everything. But I understand, Commissioner, we fully agree with you about getting it done as fast as possible. But like I said to the charter, now we have got to do the three full meetings and then we'll put the vote on. I think it's August 6th, maybe the next voting meeting on August 6th.

And miss, can I bring the tax commission up. Because this is important that the commission get this information now. So kind of can, um, paint the picture because sometime probably around next we'll be doing the audit by that time when this it comes back up, I'm assuming. So, there might be some you know, it shouldn't delay things, but this will be something to add to that time frame depending on when we collect the money. But Roger, you come up and

Speak, sir. And he put a copy right there on your desk. Um, you should have a copy of this form of, um, documents on your desk right there. He'll be briefing on you. Don't have the slides up for the public, but we'll put them out later on if need be.

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Roger Collins:

Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor. Commissioners. Good afternoon, City manager. Um, first of all, I need to apologize because I fat fingered a number on the five-year history. And I'll get that. So, there's four sheets. You have four sheets in front of you. One is a TT 32. It's a rollback. That's a rollback. As you can see, in the second column is the reassessment of the existing property. So that is what's really affecting your military. Currently, if \$152,163,695 increase and that's a 40% value. That's what your taxes are figured on. 40% value of your houses and the property. That's 40% value. Um, and then a little further down on that same column, you got \$30,000,677.01. Well, 677 and \$1. That's the exemption that got added on because of the rollbacks, because of reassessments for homesteads. Um, just let you guys know Um, the assessments are going out tomorrow. These are the. These are preliminary numbers. These are the best. We can do numbers without appeals. And we know a complete revival of the county is going to have a bunch of appeals. And, um, as Mr. Smith stated earlier that it may be later, it's going to be later because of the 45 day you got a 45-day appeal period. And that's not going to end until the first round, the first or second week of September. So, we can't do anything. I won't even have the actual full final numbers until sometime after that. Um, with the appeals there are there is a law that's this 8% appeals. So, if we're over 8% appeals or we're over 80% in the value of the reassessed values that are under appeal. We can't. I cannot get an approved digest. We can't get any final numbers until we get down below that 8% number. But anyway, uh, on the rollback, the millage rate had rolled back to 8.244, and currently you're at 11.03013. I included inflationary growth where uh, the assessors, they have to give that to me to put on this form. And you'll see everything from the, the second line, the city 40% down because as Downtown Development Authority, all those numbers affect the city and the exemption. Reassess exemptions on the last column, the second one for the city.

So that's what drives your millage rate rollback for that rollback. It's The rollback numbers they reassess values. All the new all the new um industries company's new sales, all that stuff. That's not part of the assessed value that's going to be in addition to um, so on the if you can look at the numbers, you got real in the personal, you got 2 million, you got a little over \$2 million. That's in addition to that. That's new personal property you got on the on the reel. There are hits and misses because of certain ones that are sold. And then there's the, there's value that is nontaxable. The mobile homes, the motor vehicles, uh, your, your mobile homes and motor vehicles, they decrease, the motor vehicles decrease because they this is under the ad valorem taxes. These are the under the old system so that those dollars get included in this when you buy a car or truck or whatever you pay tax that's not included. That's those taxes are not included in this. So that's the reason why every year they're going down because the cars are being traded in appreciate and paying less taxes.

So, the five-year history. I've just done that. And like I said that the real and personal property. I fat fingered that down there because I was, I was in the I got these the actual numbers from the assessors at 22 three and they were solid numbers. But I was in a hurry. But that number is and it's on your roll on your rollback form is \$534,416,411. That's that is the value currently prior to appeals and to roll back, you'll see a less rollback the local option sales tax, that local option sales tax that rolled it back 5.999. So that doesn't it doesn't roll back the eighth. It's in addition to the eighth because that comes off the taxes. So, your overall millage rate is 14.243 minus 5.99. That equals 8.244. And that's how it gets taxed. The overall taxes levy will be \$3,983,827, which is an increase of \$86,884. And that doesn't seem a lot when you compare it to the net gain of what we have. But that goes with the millage rate, with the rollback rate. That's to make you whole as last year. Then it says 2023 What that is, is five-year history figuring on using with last year's notice rate and like I said, that very first number is \$534,416,411. It turns out to be the collection would be \$5,321,917. That's an increase of \$1,424,974. So, what you see the difference in the two millage rates and in between. But like I said these are all pre-appeals. These are all pre appealed. And I'll get the final numbers which will be in September at the earliest. Um, I foresee with these appeals I foresee us going over 8%. You're all aware of what happened in Pierce County last year. We are. We're in the same, same deal. The county. The assessors are working under a consent rule where they had to have to. The county

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completely rebounds by this year. We're not the only ones, we're like one of 78 counties that has to have this done by this year. So, appeals, I foresee the appeals going over 8% just for the increase. And it was then, the, the appraisers that were hired to help the board of assessors The had commercial property out of whack when they got it, the chief appraiser he stopped. He looked at it and he said, this is crazy because they had a minimum of every single commercial property going up \$2.5 million every commercial property. So, they had to. That's the reason why this is still running a little bit late. Because they had to correct that. But I foresee a bunch of appeals. I don't see, I see the due date being in December at best. With using the rollbacks, everybody who has homesteaded their values are frozen that their values in on their on their taxes where their tax is frozen. It doesn't matter if they were 100,000 last year and they went up to 280,000 this year, as long as they was homesteaded, they're frozen. They're being taxed on that lowest value that they had when they when they were homesteaded. That being said, the new houses that were purchased this year or last year, um, during the year, because, you know, these values are considered as of January 1st of every year and the owners of every year. So, if somebody sells their house on January 3rd or January 2nd, they get that homestead for that year for that previous person. But when somebody buys it now, they're going to be appraised at the actual market value instead of that frozen low value. So that's going to that's a part of that increase as you see. And you'll get more taxes from the owner. That's the reason why the exemptions really didn't jump up compared to how much that you got.
Do y'all have any questions for me?

Mayor:

I do. One of the questions I have is that you mentioned that only 78 counties are dealing with this out of 159.

Roger Collins:
this year.

Mayor:
And what generated.

Roger Collins:

What generated what generated that was in the past. The sales ratio was not under 36%. And it's got to be between 36 and 42%. I see. And um, it was it was below that for so many years. And they had, they had some years. They had three years when they when they notice, they notice that the Department of Revenue checks and the audit company checks and checks it. And they have it's been below that. They were given three years to get it up. And if they don't Then the county gets a fine. A \$5 per parcel. Fine. And that's what happened in 2022. So, they've been under this consent order. They were supposed to be done last year, but there were some mitigating factors. And the Department of Revenue gave them a, a really a waiver to get it done this year. So, I'll tell you the market value is what drives this. So, a board of assessors, the appraisers have to appraise values. Theirs go as of January 1st; a house they can have at \$110,000 sold for \$240,000 that year. The audit department of audits. They pick up the sales from December and work back. So that's how there's always. There's always a difference in numbers. The assessors would have had their ratio right. But the audit department audits when they do it, they do it from the sales from the from the sales instead of January 1st. And they work backwards. And that's the reason why they're always out. That's the reason why there were 78. There was that was half of them that's due this year. Half of the county's some was some was due last year, some is due next year. We just happened to fall into that pot. I was just wondering about was it a geographical or how did they know it was. It was all through the department audits and doing the sales ratio, the way they the way they do it. And they have a formula which they will not give, they will not give it to the Department of Revenue. They will not give it to assessors or appraisers or anybody like that, but they keep it themselves. And that's the reason why everybody, these counties all keep falling under it.

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Mayor:
Commissioner, do you have any questions of Mr. Collins

Comm/Felder: Yes, sir.

Mayor:
District three.

Comm/Felder:
Yes. You mentioned that the assessments are going out again on July the 24th.

Roger Collins:
The assessment is going on tomorrow. They're going out tomorrow and they have 40. You have 45 days to appeal.

Comm/Felder:
Thank you. Okay.

Mayor:
All right. Thank you.

City Manager:
Thank you, sir. That concludes the budget, the presentation, and the update. I don't think we have anybody else on the public response.

Mayor:
Any questions regarding the budget?

Comm/Felder:
Have had questions and the city manager has addressed my questions, but I think I have maybe a couple more follow up questions that I will send to you. Thank you.

Mayor:
Any questions?.

Comm/Hopkins:
Yes, sir If I, if I, if I look through and find something that made some adjustments.

Mayor:
Did you have any more comments?

Comm/Bennett
I don't Mr. Mayor

Mayor:
Okay, this meeting is adjourned.