STATE OF GEORGIA
COUNTY OF HENRY

The Henry County Board of Commissioners held a Called Public Meeting ***in-person*** on Tuesday, August 19, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. at the Henry County Administration Building (Community Room), 140 Henry Parkway, McDonough GA. HenryTV also streamed this live online at its website, as well as Charter/Spectrum Channel 180 and Facebook Live.

Carlotta Harrell, Chair
Johnny Wilson, District 1 Commissioner
Neat Robinson, Vice Chair/District 2 Commissioner
Dee Anglyn, III, District 3 Commissioner
Michael T. Price, District 4 Commissioner
Kevin J. Lewis, District 5 Commissioner (Not Present)

Staff Present: Cheri Hobson-Matthews, County Manager; Kevin Johnson, Deputy County Manager; Ashley Larrow, CM COS; Chalonda Smith, Chair COS; Rachel Mack, County Attorney; Candace Brown, Staff Attorney; Stephanie Braun, County Clerk and Jasmin Head, Deputy County Clerk.

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Harrell called the meeting to order.

PRESENTATION – 2025-2026 Millage Rate Presentation

Bernita Harris, Budget Director, presented the second mill rate discussion for 2025 and highlighted key points of the FY26 budget. She explained that property taxes are the primary source of revenue for the general fund and special service districts, and therefore it is important to outline how these funds will be allocated. She noted that the FY26 general fund and special service district budgets were officially adopted on May 28, 2025. Leading up to adoption, staff engaged with commissioners through multiple Commissioner 101 sessions, worked closely with county leadership to establish board priorities, and gathered input through two budget workshops and two public hearings. The adopted FY26 budget totals $287,797,000, reflecting a $28.1 million increase compared to FY25, which amounts to a 10.8% year-over-year rise. Importantly, the budget is based on maintaining the current mill rate of 15.733 mills.

The FY26 budget incorporates the Board of Commissioners' priorities, including road improvements, judicial system expansion to address county growth, continued funding for public safety personnel and equipment, and competitive compensation and benefits for county employees. It also provides for department essentials to maintain current service levels. Notably, the budget was balanced without reliance on fund balance reserves only available revenues are being used to cover projected expenditures. A graphical breakdown of the budget shows that over 50% is dedicated to public safety, approximately 16% supports government operations, 11% funds the judicial system, and 6% is allocated to public works.

Mr. Michael Harris, Tax Commissioner, explained that the millage rate is the tax rate used to calculate local property taxes, and it represents the amount a homeowner must pay for every $1,000 of their property's assessed value. The assessed value, determined by the tax assessor's office, equals 40% of the property's fair market value, which includes both the house and the land. Assessment notices are typically mailed in April or May, and taxpayers have 45 days to appeal. Mr. Harris emphasized the difference between fair market value and assessed value, underscoring that only the assessed value forms the basis for taxation. He also gave a simple example using the current 15.733 millage rate: take the fair market value, multiply it by 40% to find the assessed value, subtract exemptions, and then multiply the result by the millage rate to determine the property tax owed.

Mr. Harris explained the "frozen exemption" provision, enacted in 2004, which was designed to benefit homeowners—especially seniors—by freezing the taxable value of their homes. Once a homeowner applies for and is approved for a homestead exemption, the fair market value of their primary residence (and up to five acres) is locked in based on that year's valuation. This frozen base remains in effect, meaning residents continue paying taxes on the base year value regardless of market increases. If property values ever fall below the frozen base value, homeowners are billed at the lower rate. Mr. Harris stressed that this exemption is renewed automatically each year and provides significant long-term tax relief.

In addition to the frozen exemption, Henry County offers the L1 exemption, which reduces the assessed value by $15,000 for all homeowners with a homestead exemption. There are also age-based school tax exemptions: at age 62, residents receive a $20,000 reduction; at 65, the reduction increases to $80,000; at 68, it rises to $120,000; and by age 70, homeowners no longer pay any school taxes. Other targeted exemptions exist for individuals with disabilities, veterans, surviving spouses, conservation use properties, and Freeport inventory, each designed to provide relief for specific groups.

Mr. Harris also addressed House Bill 581, a new law establishing a statewide floating exemption, which caps annual increases in property value based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), typically between 3% and 5%. However, he stressed that Henry County's frozen exemption is far more beneficial since it effectively caps increases at 0%. The county opted into the floating exemption but must run an analysis for each parcel to ensure residents receive the most favorable outcome. In almost every case about 99.5% of the time the frozen exemption proves more advantageous than the new floating exemption.

He also explained the digest process, describing it as a collaborative effort involving the tax assessor's office, the tax commissioner's office, the Board of Education, the Board of Commissioners, the cities, and the Georgia Department of Revenue. The tax digest is essentially a listing of all property assessments and exemptions, covering real and personal property such as homes, land, timber, mobile homes, motor vehicles, heavy-duty equipment, and public utilities. Before property tax bills can be mailed, the digest must be reviewed and approved by the Georgia Department of Revenue. By law, bills must be mailed at least 60 days before the due date. Henry County typically sends bills by September 1, giving the office a two- to three-week cushion. Historically, tax bills have been due on November 16 each year.

Mr. Harris explained that this year is different due to the impacts of House Bill 581, which significantly altered the assessment process. During the assessment period, many residents saw unexpected changes to their assessment notices, which led to a sharp increase in calls to the office. These challenges, he said, have not been unique to Henry County but have affected taxpayers and officials across the state. He acknowledged that 2025 has been an extremely difficult year for digest preparation and billing, and his office continues to work closely with vendors and state representatives to address the new complexities introduced by the legislation. Even so, he affirmed that the county is still striving to meet the traditional November 16 due date for tax bills, and that remains the goal moving forward.

Turning to millage rates, Mr. Harris explained that the figures are still considered "proposed" because the county is the last entity to set its rate. The cities and school board have already finalized theirs: Stockbridge has maintained its millage rate at 3.77, McDonough has kept its rate at 3.033, Hampton has reduced its rate to 4.995, and Locust Grove has introduced a city tax for the first time at 4.087. However, Locust Grove is also offering a full exemption, meaning residents there will not feel the impact of the new city millage. On the county level, the proposed millage rate stands at 15.733, which would result in a slight decrease compared to last year. Mr. Harris attributed this reduction in part to the school board's lowered rate, calling it one of the few positive outcomes emerging from an otherwise challenging year.

Finally, Mr. Harris informed attendees that the final hearing and adoption of the county's millage rate is scheduled for this evening at 6:30. With that, he concluded his remarks and invited any questions or comments from the audience.

Public Hearing:

Chair Harrell called the Public Hearing to order and invited anyone wishing to speak to come forward and stated they would each have 3 minutes to speak. No one came forward and the Public Hearing was closed.

Upcoming Meetings and Events

A. August 19, 2025 at 6:30 p.m. is a regularly-scheduled BOC Meeting (which includes the 3rd Public Hearing and Adoption of the Millage Rate).

Adjournment (9:22 am)

Carlotta Harrell, Chair
Henry County Board of Commissioners

Stephanie Braun
County Clerk