



**CITY OF PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA  
BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES  
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2008 5:01 P.M.**

**COUNCILMEMBERS PRESENT:** Friedman, Albers, Wallace, Goldberg, Smith-Mooney

**CITY EMPLOYEES PRESENT:** Dave Drury, Finance; Rick Keeney, Public Works; Tom Jackson, Utilities; Phil Wickstrom, Human Resources; Dennis Murphy, Growth Management; Kathy Dailey, City Manager's Office; Butch Arenal, Police; Robert Hancock, Fire; City Attorney Levin; City Manager Kunik; City Clerk Foster

**Mayor Friedman** called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m. He reported the City of Punta Gorda for fiscal year (fy) beginning October 1, 2008 and ending September 30, 2009 had a calculated rolled-back rate of 2.5689 mills, adding the proposed millage rate for this same period was 2.5689 which was the same as the rolled-back rate.

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**A Resolution adopting a final millage rate for the levying of ad valorem taxes for the City of Punta Gorda, Florida, for Fiscal Year 2008/2009.**

City Attorney Levin read the resolution by title.

Mr. Thomas Roberts voiced disappointment he would be paying more taxes rather than less, adding his neighbors felt the same.

Mr. Gerald Riseley asserted the City's spending was out of control, stating most businesses were required to make cuts when revenues were not forthcoming. He stated he did not feel the City was representing the people by their spending.

Mr. Ed Maier reported his taxes were up 12%. He stated the road condition of Bal Harbor Boulevard was poor, maintaining the residents in that area received no service. He then mentioned the poor condition of Aqui Esta, adding he had been waiting almost ten years for roadwork to be done. He inquired what happened to the money that had been budgeted previously for road repairs in that area.

**Mayor Friedman** responded Aqui Esta was not being repaved because the entire road would be reconstructed beginning this year. He reported the County had issued the contracts to do so.

Mr. Maier spoke of past actions with regard to Aqui Esta, asserting it had taken too long for repairs to be made.

**Mayor Friedman** added Federal funds were paying the costs of the repair, explaining same was a time consuming process. He pointed out those funds were more than one year of tax revenue.

Mr. Maier responded same was worse, asking what his 12% tax increase was being used for.

**Mayor Friedman** stated the City's budget would fund many other projects. He then provided a brief explanation of the Save our Homes (SOH) amendment and the results of same during poor real estate markets.

Mr. Maier reiterated his frustration with increased taxes on top of his increased cost of living.

**Mayor Friedman** advised the total revenues received during the current year were 5% less than the year prior, adding the proposed revenues for the upcoming year were also 5% less. He pointed out the costs to the City had increased as well; however, the budget had been reduced.

**Councilmember Wallace** explained the City had made substantial cuts in the past two years, including staffing. He maintained the system was not correct and the City did not control same.

**Mayor Friedman** added it was the City's job to strike a balance in the revenues and the quality of life that the citizens enjoyed. He pointed out reducing the budget further would require cuts such as reduced fire and police service.

**Councilmember Goldberg** reported the City was now at the minimum staffing level for firefighters at each station, adding to reduce it further would require closing one of the stations.

**Councilmember Albers** explained the cost to provide police and fire service in Punta Gorda exceeded the ad valorem revenues, adding the remainder was funded from other sources.

Mr. Franz Von Atzigen, Swiss Connection, reported his taxes increased 91% in one year, asking how businesses were supposed to survive with same and impact fees. He opined the system was wrong. He stated in Switzerland small businesses were tax free for the first five years.

Discussion ensued with regard to Mr. Von Atzigen's various properties and taxing rates.

**Mayor Friedman** recommended Mr. Von Atzigen speak with the Charlotte County Tax Assessor.

Discussion ensued with regard to the requirements passed down from the legislature.

Mr. Peter Chamik commented on the low turnout to the hearing, reporting that his neighbors were frustrated that nothing would change. He maintained the government was supposed to work for the people, stating the City must drastically reduce costs. He spoke of the increase to his taxes. He asserted it was irresponsible for the government not to provide tax relief when it was voted upon. He stated there were further cuts that could be made, offering his assistance as an efficiency expert.

Examples of budget cuts made this period were provided to those in attendance.

Councilmember Albers **MOVED** to close the public hearing, **SECONDED** by Councilmember Goldberg.

**MOTION UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED.**

Councilmember Smith-Mooney **MOVED** approval, **SECONDED** by Councilmember Albers.

**MOTION UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED.**

**An Emergency Ordinance of the City of Punta Gorda, Florida, adopting a budget for Fiscal Year 2008/2009 making appropriations; providing for conflict and severability and providing an effective date.**

City Attorney Levin read the ordinance by title.

**Mayor Friedman** called three times for public comment.

Councilmember Wallace **MOVED** to close the public hearing, **SECONDED** by Councilmember Albers.

**MOTION UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED.**

Councilmember Goldberg **MOVED** approval, **SECONDED** by Councilmember Albers.

**MOTION UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED.**

#### **CITIZEN COMMENTS**

Ms. Lorraine Chamik asked why Charlotte County was the highest taxed County in Florida.

**Mayor Friedman** responded same was inaccurate. He explained the only cities with lower millage rates were those such as Naples where the property values were much higher. He assured those in attendance that members would continue to work toward keeping costs down, suggesting involvement beginning in January when the budget process began.

**Councilmember Goldberg** referenced comments that City Council was out of touch with the people, countering all members encountered hundreds of people in the course of a week with their attendance at various meetings and events. He pointed out the increases in costs affected all members of the Council just as it did everyone else. He concluded they had an obligation to ensure a quality City to all residents.

Mr. Roberts inquired why a fire truck was sent out with every ambulance.

Mr. Rob Hancock, Fire Chief, responded there was one County ambulance assigned within the City limits while the City had three fire stations, thus the City firefighters could arrive prior to the ambulance and provide basic life support.

Mr. Riseley suggested City Council place public notices with regard to the hearings.

**Mayor Friedman** responded same was required by law and was done for every public hearing, adding all meeting agendas were placed on the City's web site as well.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:11 p.m.

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Mayor

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City Clerk