

COUNTY CLIPS

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 7 JULY, 2008

COMMISSIONERS CUT TAXES BY 12 CENTS

Property owners will see relief in the form of a tax rate decrease to take effect July 1.

During their June 17 Mid-Month Meeting, the Richmond County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved a tax rate of 81 cents per \$100 worth of property. In determining the rate for the next fiscal year, the Board and County Manager Jim Haynes gave careful consideration to the costs of services and the effect of the tax rate on citizens.

Because of thoughtful planning and decision-making on the part of the Board and County staff, Richmond County was able to cut taxes by 12 cents to a revenue neutral tax rate.

This year, the task of balancing the

budget brought its own challenges. First, Richmond County, like many other areas in the nation, has experienced its own economic downturn, which can be seen in the lack of growth in sales tax. While the County was able to see some relief due to Medicaid reform, the positive effects have been somewhat muted by the lack of growth in sales tax.

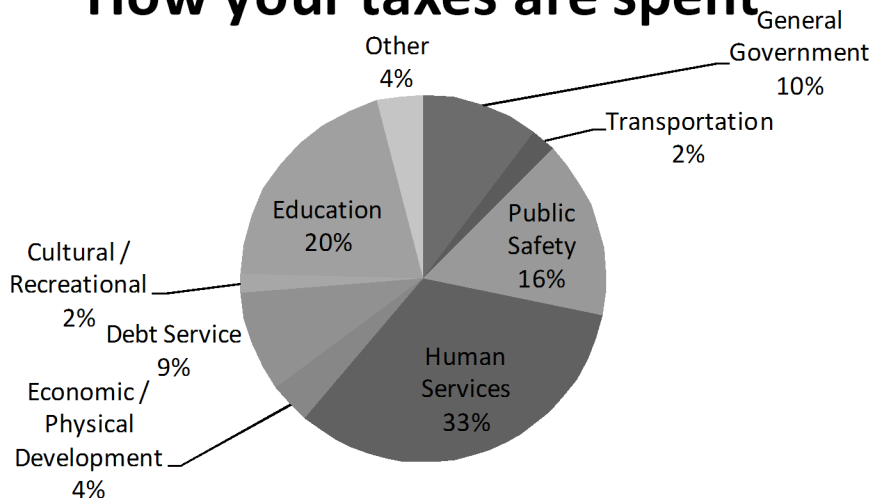
The County also recently completed a property revaluation cycle. During the past two years, Richmond County Government certified tax appraisers have looked at some 31,000 parcels of land. While surveying each plat, appraisers must value each property as close as possible to its true market value in light of changing real estate market conditions. Some citizens saw a moderate increase in their property tax

values, while others faced a larger increase. The Board knows that this is tough on working families.

The County does not seek to profit from taxes, only to collect what is needed to provide all the proper and state-mandated services. The most important job of the Board is to continue to provide services to the citizens of Richmond County. The Commissioners have worked diligently to meet the needs of citizens, as illustrated by this year's budget. Every funding decision made by the Board and County Manager is conscious and measured.

It is the Board's goal to maintain the mandated and expected levels of services to citizens, while also listening to its constituents.

How your taxes are spent



RICHMOND COUNTY

EXPENDITURES 2008-2009

- GENERAL GOVERNMENT—\$4,979,621
- TRANSPORTATION—\$1,002,746
- PUBLIC SAFETY—\$7,536,191
- HUMAN SERVICES—\$15,750,356
- ECONOMIC/PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT—\$1,760,271
- DEBT SERVICE—\$4,279,366
- CULTURAL/RECREATIONAL—\$749,018
- EDUCATION—\$9,852,656
- OTHER—\$1,926,665
- TOTAL—\$47,836,890

HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONTINUES TO FOCUS ON PREVENTING FOOD-BORNE ILLNESSES

The Richmond County Health Department will begin using a new food service inspection form July 1, following a 2007 statewide mandate to focus inspections on those establishments with the highest potential risk and violations more likely to contribute to food-borne illness.

Dr. Tommy Jarrell, Health Department director, said that the new form completes the risk-based inspection approach to food service establishment inspections.

He added that this form, like the risk-based inspection approach, focuses on critical violation risk factors. This means that more emphasis will be placed on identifying and immediately correcting contributing factors that increase the chance of developing food-borne illnesses.

The new form will contain requirements separated into critical violation risk factors and good retail practices.

“It is a matter of public health,” Jarrell said. “The fact is that items that fall under the ‘good retail practices’ category do not have the same level of concern related to controlling food-borne illness as compared to the critical violation factors.”

Emphasis is again focused on the importance of the critical risk factors by dividing the inspection items into categories of critical violation risk factors and good retail practices, which are preventative measures to control the introduction of pathogens, chemicals and physical objects into foods.

Such critical risk factors include improper cooking or holding temperatures

of potentially hazardous food, food handlers not washing hands properly and ill workers preparing food. The form had 18 critical violations and 30 good retail practices.

Under the existing inspection protocol, each food service establishment will be evaluated and assigned a risk category based on the type of food and amount of food preparation conducted in the facility.

Previously, environmental health specialists were required to conduct a minimum of four inspections per year in each retail food service establishment. Points were deducted for violations and reflected in the final score and grade, but there was no requirement to correct items on-site.

WATER RATES TO INCREASE

Richmond County Water rates will increase on July 1. The minimum charge for residential rates for usage up to 2,000 gallons will increase from \$16 to \$17.50 per month.

Residential and commercial consumption rates will also increase 7.5 percent for usage over the minimum of 2,000 gallons per billing cycle. This increase will apply to the bills that will become due on Aug. 15. For the average customer using 5,000 gallons of water a month, their bill will increase by approximately \$2.27—from \$30.25 to \$32.52.

Due to a new state tax that must be collected on each ton of garbage, Solid Waste fees will increase on July 1. Fees for county residents living outside municipalities will increase from \$125 to \$145 per household. Fees for city residents will increase from \$90 to \$105 per household. The tipping fee paid at the transfer station on Walter Kelly Road will also increase from \$46 to \$53.50.

**Pay by
Credit Card**

**Tax Payments by Credit
Cards & Electronic
Check**

Pay your County taxes online at

www.officialpayments.com.

**Pay by electronic check online at
www.officialpayments.com/echeck, or Pay by**

Phone at 1-800-272-9829



A nominal convenience fee is charged by Official Payments for this service. The fee is not charged by or paid to Richmond County Government. The convenience fee is assessed to cover operating costs and the costs associated with serving thousands of card transactions. For more information, call the Tax Office at 997-8270.