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NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on October 31, 2011

Oakwood budget hearing draws nobody

South Hall city's millage rate unchanged in 12 years

OAKWOOD — If there is any opposition to a proposed $6.5 million budget for Oakwood's city government, the council hasn't heard it.

No residents have submitted suggestions on the city's spending plan for 2012 at City Hall and no one showed up to a meeting council members had specially called Monday to hear opinions on the plan.

Mayor Lamar Scroggs adjourned the public hearing less than a minute and a half after it began at 6 p.m. and only moments before Councilman Gary Anderson, who told council members he'd been stuck in traffic, arrived.

"Everyone that's here gets a reduction in the millage rate; everyone that's not here pays double," Scroggs joked.

Despite the joke, the millage rate for Oakwood will stay the same as it has for the last 12 years under the budget proposal.
If the plan is adopted, property owners in the city limits will pay $2.48 in taxes for each $1,000 of their assessed property value.

For some residents, the steady tax rate could mean paying less in property taxes. Property values in Oakwood and in the rest of Hall County have declined with the current economic recession, and those lowered values are finally making an imprint on tax rolls, according to City Manager Stan Brown.

Oakwood's proposed spending plan has been built on an expectation that the city will collect $41,000 less in property taxes due to the lowered values, Brown said.

City officials expect to spend $3.5 million on day-to-day operations: trash pick-up, payroll, street maintenance, planning and public safety.

The budget includes a 2 percent cost of living raise for city employees and sets aside $12,000 for the development of a parks and recreation program with the YMCA.

The plan does not include money to replace former Assistant City Manager Patti Doss-Luna and Planning Director Larry Sparks, who both retired earlier this year.

Also under the plan, some $2.6 million in revenues from sewer fees and loan proceeds will be spent on a sewer project with Braselton and to repay loans on previous projects.

The city also plans to spend $390,000 in revenues from special purpose local option sales tax funds to repave roads and for a future downtown commercial project.

With no apparent opposition, the council is set to vote on the spending plan Nov. 14.
If approved, the budget will carry the government through the 2012 calendar year.