

## Citizens Need to Keep Local Government Working For Us

By Melissa Lewis

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Allow me first to state that I have nothing against the men of the Caroline County Board of Supervisors on a personal level. I have never called them liars, nor have I accused them of committing illegal acts as representatives of our County. In fact I respect them for serving our community with the intent to better our county. I believe that more citizens should step up and take part in our local government's democratic process. It is our civic duty. This is precisely why I chose to exercise my right to speak at public comment during BOS meetings, where everything I say is on public record.

I understand that public speaking is a great fear for most people and I am always hesitant to do so myself. But not everyone has to stand at the podium and speak to carry out their civic duties; emails, phone calls, and just showing up to meetings go a long way in holding BOS members accountable for what they say and do, which sometimes has to be done.

At last Tuesday's meeting the Board elected in a 4-2 vote (opposed only by Mr. Sili and Mr. Black) to raise our personal property assessments from 50% of their actual value to 65% of actual value. These values are determined by NADA (National Automobile Dealers Association), and are used nationwide by local governments as well as car dealerships in appraisals. Mr. Sili and Mr. Black voted against this because there was no public hearing held for citizens to voice their concerns over an action that will potentially raise our taxes!

This can be confusing to your average taxpayer, but numbers make sense to me, so please allow me to attempt to explain what this means: A vehicle that is determined by NADA to be worth \$10,000 would, at 50% assessment, be taxed on the amount of \$5,000. That \$5,000 would then be taxed at a rate of .0625 (or \$6.25 for every \$100) creating a total tax bill of \$312.50. In contrast, a \$10,000 vehicle assessed at 65% would be taxed on \$6,500 at a rate of .0625 bringing your total bill to \$406.25, an annual increase of \$93.75. All of this being done without raising our tax rate. The tax rate would have to be lowered to approximately .0481 (or \$4.81 for every \$100) to keep it in line with last year's taxes. All of this is extremely confusing, especially for those who were not at the Board of Supervisors meeting.

I am not suggesting that I do not support a tax increase, it is sometimes necessary when doing things such as funding much needed capital improvement projects, ensuring proper equipment for emergency services, and in making sure our schools are able to provide a top notch

education for our children. I believe to get our county's debt under control it must be run like a business, constantly fine tuning its balance of revenue and expenditures. I also believe, however, that any actions taken by the BOS should be transparent and in no way fly under the citizen's radar.

My point? We need Caroline County taxpayers to show up to the meetings, voice their own opinions and hold these men accountable for their actions.

I applaud Mr. Underwood for sticking by his constituents and saying he will not vote in favor of raising taxes. But the truth is that our taxes will be raised under the guise of lowered rates and raised assessments, and most of us will have no idea what happened and just accept that we have to pay. We must keep our local government working FOR US and not forget that it is the citizens who hold the fate of this County in our hands. We are blessed to live in a Democracy, but most of us take it for granted. Board members are elected by the PEOPLE to carry out the actions that the PEOPLE decide are best for the PEOPLE of this County.

If you do not speak out you will inadvertently continue to allow these six men to do as they please. I am begging the citizens of Caroline to step up and take action by making phone calls, sending emails, and most importantly attending Board of Supervisors meetings.