
OLLIE B. CLEMONS, JR. MAYOR

City of Austell
Office of the Mayor
7/3/2025

Dear Austell Neighbors,

I want to speak to you not just as your mayor, but as your neighbor - someone who shops at the same stores, fills up at the same gas stations, and faces the same rising costs you do. We all feel it. Groceries cost more. Gas is higher than it's been in years. Essentials that once felt affordable are now out of reach for too many. Just over twenty years ago, a gallon of gas was \$1.49. Today, it's nearly three times that. Inflation has touched every corner of our lives – including city government.

For over 20 years, Austell has had the lowest millage rate in Cobb County and one of the lowest in the region - about 3 mills. That's something we've taken pride in, but it's come at a cost. Year after year, we've struggled to make ends meet, relying on inconsistent revenue from our city's gas system - a system tied to unpredictable market forces. For too long, we've crossed our fingers and said, *"Let's hope for a cold winter,"* because that meant more gas usage - and more funds. That's no way to run a city. The truth is, we've been running at a deficit for years. Last year, we took a long look at the budget shortfall of \$1.6 million. Since then, we've had to dig into our reserves. That's not sustainable. We can't build a better Austell on hope and patchwork solutions.

I know any talk of raising taxes is hard to hear. It's hard to say. But it's time we face our challenges head-on. To stabilize our finances, Mayor and Council have agreed to a 3 mill increase in the millage rate and a 2% Fire tax. This wasn't a decision made lightly. We've weighed every option, looked at every number, and considered the impact on every household.

The lack of resources is holding us back from completing the LCI (Livable Centers Initiative) plan that so many of us have looked forward to and attracting the kind of talent we need to make our city thrive. If we want a stronger Austell with better services, safer streets, and a city government that doesn't live in crisis mode we have to make this change.

I want to reassure our seniors and those on fixed incomes: help is available. Just like we've done with Leaf & Limb services, this increase will have a lighter touch on many residents 65 and older. Our Finance Department is standing by to help anyone who needs assistance completing the necessary forms.

I know this isn't easy, but we will get through this - together. And when we do, it will be because we made the hard but necessary choices to secure a better future for our city.

With respect, gratitude, and a deep commitment to our city,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ollie B. Clemons, Jr.".

Mayor Ollie B. Clemons, Jr.