

TAXLINE

Official Newsletter of Fulton County Tax Commissioner Arthur E. Ferdinand



www.fultoncountytaxes.org

August/September/October 2006

New tax service center opens at Greenbriar Mall



ABOVE: Along with a host of staff members from his office, Tax Commissioner Ferdinand gets helping hands cutting the ceremonial ribbon at the new Tax Service Center at Greenbriar Mall. Pictured directly in front of the blue ribbon, from left to right: Atlanta Mayoral Chief of Staff Greg Pridgeon; Atlanta District 11 Councilman Jim Maddox; Fulton County District 7 Commissioner William "Bill" Edwards; Youth Commissioner Omari Bradley; Fulton County Board of Commissioners Vice Chair Emma I. Darnell; Tax Commissioner Ferdinand; Betty Ferdinand; Chief Deputy Tax Commissioner Angie Lewis; Greenbriar Mall General Manager Mike Weinberger; the Rev. Timothy Flemming Sr.; Georgia Department of Revenue Local Services Division Director Sha Hester; and Mistress of Ceremonies *WAOK-AM 1380* News Anchor Jean Ross.

Citizens, taxpayers and dignitaries from across metro Atlanta converged on Greenbriar Mall Thursday, August 3 for the formal opening of the **Tax Service Center at Greenbriar Mall**.

"This office is twice the size of previous facilities," says Tax Commissioner Arthur Ferdinand. "It will be a full-service office, where people can pay ad valorem (auto) taxes, purchase auto tags, renew their tags, and pay their property taxes—all under one roof."

Day after day, you hear about long lines and long wait times just to get a new tag or to renew your license plate. The new office at Greenbriar will relieve thousands of citizens of those headaches. With unlimited parking at the mall, a "kiddy room" for children while their parents take care of their tax and auto issues, the new center is

considered a "state-of-the-art" facility designed for premium customer service.

Joining Tax Commissioner Ferdinand for the formal ribbon-cutting ceremony were Fulton County Commissioners Emma I. Darnell, William "Bill" Edwards, Atlanta City Councilman Jim Maddox, Local Services Director Sha Hester of the Georgia Department of Revenue, Chief of Staff Greg Pridgeon of the Atlanta Mayor's Office, and General Manager Mike Weinberger of Greenbriar Mall. The Reverend Timothy Flemming Sr., pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist Church, delivered the invocation, and Omari Bradley, a senior at Booker T. Washington High School, led the pledge of allegiance.

"This will bring thousands of *new* customers to our

See Greenbriar on page 3



Frankly Ferdinand

The Commissioner's Comments

We are in the midst of the tax-billing and collecting cycle for 2006. The statutory time for appealing property values ended April 1. The 45-day appeal period has also ended for most of you who received assessment notices from the Board of Assessors. Now remember, you cannot appeal a tax bill, but you can appeal the assessment used to calculate your taxes.

Tax bills were mailed August 1 this year instead of July 1. This is a result of the City of Atlanta and the Fulton County School Board being unable to set their millage rates in time to calculate, print and mail bills for the normal July 1 mailing date. So, this year the due date for City of Atlanta residents is October 1 instead of August 15, and the Fulton County due date remains October 15. If you did not receive your property-tax bill, call or visit one of our full-service offices to get a new bill, or visit our Web site at www.fultoncountytaxes.org to determine how much tax is due on your property.

For the first time, residents of the City of Sandy Springs will pay a Sandy Springs tax *instead* of the Special Service District Levy they formerly paid. Fulton County's tax office will provide billing and collecting services for the City of Sandy Springs. The due date for City of Sandy Springs residents is the same as for Fulton County residents—October 15. The proposed cities of Johns Creek, Milton, Chatahoochee Hill Country, and South Fulton will continue to pay the Special Services District levy until they also become independent cities, at which time those cities, too, will be able to levy their own taxes.

When taxes become delinquent after the due date passes, by State law, interest accrues at the rate of 1 percent per month on the unpaid balance, and a one-time 10 percent penalty is added after 90 days.

Delinquent taxpayers will be sent a '**30 day notice of intent to issue a *fifa***' on delinquent real-property taxes. A *fifa*, or lien, is attached to property when taxes remain unpaid after the *intent to fifa notice* matures. Liens are recorded in the office of the Clerk of Superior Court. Delinquent personal-property taxes do not require notice before liens are attached. A lien is recorded so the world at large knows there is a defect on the title of a property. Title Companies search the Clerk's records when checking property titles. The Clerk's office is also where credit-rating companies pick up lien information that negatively impact credit worthiness.

In the 2006 General Assembly, State lawmakers enacted

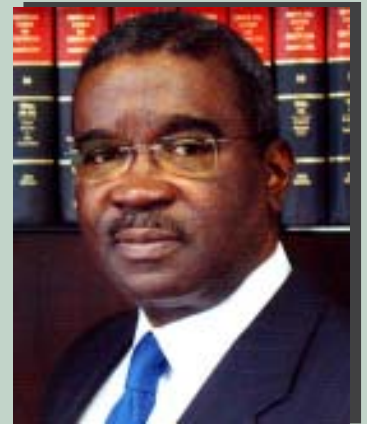
Senate Bill 585 (S.B. 585), signed into law by the governor, which gives Georgia tax commissioners the authority to sell tax liens. S.B.585 places stricter controls on lien-purchasers, and it provides more protection and notification for taxpayers—especially if the property has to be foreclosed for back taxes. The law went into effect July 1. You can expect the bulk of the 2006 liens to be purchased in December.

A lienholder cannot charge any more than the interest and late fees the Tax Commissioner would have assessed. In addition, a lienholder can charge for certain expenses related to administering the lien. Lienholders have no right to your property: they cannot trespass, cannot collect rent, should not pay the taxes on the property—and if they do, the property-owner can consider it a gift; and above all, lienholders cannot gain ownership of property by simply holding liens to the property.

Ignoring a lienholder can necessitate the tax lien being taken to the sheriff for a tax sale or foreclosure. If a tax lien is transferred to a third party, I would suggest working with the lienholder to establish a payment plan to satisfy the debt. Never ignore a lienholder, in much the same way you don't ignore a mortgage-holder.

The purchaser of a property tax deed from a Sheriff-foreclosure sale has no right to the property—except to pay taxes to protect his or her investment. The successful purchaser of a tax deed cannot trespass, cannot collect rent, cannot make improvements to the property, and must allow the property-owner to redeem the property. When the lien is satisfied from the successful bid amount, what is left is called "excess funds," and it is held in the Sheriff's office or interpleaded into the Superior Court for the person entitled to receive, usually the property owner.

QUITE FRANKLY, my best advice to you, as your tax commissioner and fellow taxpayer: Pay taxes on time; it is cheaper, and you avoid unnecessary complications. Because when it comes to your money and credit worthiness, *tax matters!*



Fulton County Tax Commissioner
Arthur E. Ferdinand, Ph.D.

Arthur E. Ferdinand



County heeds Ferdinand recommendation, cuts taxes, returns millions of new-growth revenue to South Fulton taxpayers

Earlier in the summer, Tax Commissioner Ferdinand was approached by Mrs. Gail Dean, president of the Fulton County School Board. She wanted to affirm the significant new growth in the school district before committing to spending the tax revenue implied by such extraordinary growth. As it turned out, there was substantial growth in Fulton County—most of it in Unincorporated South Fulton.

After his review of the data, Tax Commissioner Ferdinand sent a memo and an attachment to the Board of Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners has the sole authority to set property tax rates. Ferdinand's note showed a summary of the data the School Board received from the Board of Tax Assessors for 2006, and a comparison with prior-years digest figures. As one can see (on the charts on page 4), tax year 2006 is uncharacteristic of the growth pattern of prior years.

As a result of the confirmation of the data and the recommendations of the Tax Commissioner, the Board of Commissioners voted to cut the taxing rate of South Fulton property owners—returning millions of dollars of their money back to them!

Below is an excerpt of the memo to the Board of Commissioners from Tax Commissioner Arthur Ferdinand, sent June 6.

Tax Commissioner Office Locations

Full-Service Locations
Monday - Friday
8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Government Center, 141 Pryor St., Downtown Atlanta
North Service Center, 7741 Roswell Rd., Sandy Springs
South Service Center, 5600 Stonewall Tell Rd., College Park
Alpharetta Square Office, 289 South Main St., Alpharetta
Greenbriar Mall, 2841 Greenbriar Pkwy., SW, Atlanta

Motor Vehicle Service Locations
Haynes Bridge Shopping Center - Kroger
3000 Old Alabama Rd., Alpharetta
Monday - Friday
11 a.m. - 6:15 p.m.

Motor Vehicle Service Locations
Seniors Age 55 or older (Only!)
Harriett G. Darnell Senior Multipurpose Facility
677 Fairburn Rd., Atlanta
Tuesday and Thursday
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Dorothy Benson Senior Multipurpose Facility
6500 Vernon Woods Dr., Sandy Springs
Monday and Friday
10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

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Greenbriar Mall home of new service center

mall," says Weinberger. "We are excited and see this as a catalyst for new economic opportunities for all of our merchants."

The new service center hours are Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information, call the Tax Commissioner's Office at (404) 730-6100. For a complete list of locations see directory above of office locations.

To the Board of Commissioners:

Last week I was approached by the president of the Fulton County School Board, Mrs. Dean, who wanted to affirm the significant new growth in the School District before committing to spending the taxes implied by such extraordinary growth—only to find out afterward that it was in error.

The attachment shows a summary of the data the School Board received from the tax assessors for 2006, and a comparison with prior-years digest figures. As one can see, tax year 2006 is uncharacteristic of the growth pattern of prior years.

With such extraordinary growth for 2006, I thought it prudent to ask the appraisers to verify their values, but at the same time check the tax commissioner's billing file for 2006. As a consequence of this inquiry the Board of Tax Assessors lowered the 2006 growth from \$1,831,128,000 to \$1,658,632,243 and recertified this lower value to the School Board. Though lower, 2006 still shows extraordinary growth. The tax commissioner's billing file confirms this massive growth for 2006. The School Board's Digest includes all Fulton County minus the City of Atlanta data. This means the School Board values includes Unincorporated Fulton County growth as well.

Knowing that the City of Atlanta is enjoying significant new development, and having not seen the same activity in other municipalities, it suggested this growth must be in the unincorporated part of Fulton County. We analyzed our billing file to affirm this observation. Indeed our observation was correct; the growth was in Unincorporated Fulton County. A more detailed analysis of our billing file showed the predominance of the growth was in Unincorporated South Fulton, a total of almost a billion dollars (\$962,985,016) of real estate growth, second only to the City of Atlanta. The result of the Tax Commissioner's analysis is shown in the attached table.

In February 2006 the Board of Commissioners took action to raise the millage of South Fulton by three mills, in compliance with the Schafer Amendment, and at the same time created a new tax district for South Fulton. In view of the 2006 billing data,

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is the official publication of the Fulton County Tax Commissioner. For more information, or inquiries, please, contact:

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Ferndinand memo to Board of Commissioners

that action might have been premature, since there was no prior indication of extraordinary growth based on normal mathematical extrapolation. In fact, this growth should have been captured for the 2005 billing season if the Board of Assessors had been more diligent with its work in 2004. The deficit in South Fulton in 2005 was not due to South Fulton's not being able to support itself, but more so because the Board of Assessors failed to discover the growth there in 2005. The surge in building permits and housing starts in the region should have been an indication of massive growth.

As a result of the combination of increased millage and significantly more growth than anticipated, Fulton County now stands to have far more revenue available to South Fulton than the cost of the services it plans to provide, based on the 2006 budget that was set. This would lead to significant excess fund balances for South Fulton.

One implication of this huge growth in South Fulton is that the revenue available would be of a magnitude to make South Fulton self-sufficient as a city without loss of service or having to boost millage rate to create operating revenue. One advantage South Fulton has over the City of Atlanta is that no South Fulton-tax revenue is committed to Tax Allocation Districts.

The Board of Commissioners' action in February, in creating a new Tax District for South Fulton, also took away the Governor's homestead tax credit available to all other homesteaded property owners in Unincorporated Fulton County. This tax credit is worth \$8,000 in assessed value.

Fulton County School Board's Digest Values 2003-2006 (Assessed Values in Thousands)

Year	Reassessment	New Growth
2003	\$837,588	\$668,999
2004	\$572,465	\$514,748
2005	\$737,176	\$407,352
2006	\$357,259	\$1,831,128

There are several actions the Board of Commissioners might consider for 2006:

- Reassess the need for a millage increase for South Fulton.
- Set a lower millage rate than the one advertised for South Fulton.
- Reassess the need for a new Tax district, which deprived South Fulton residents of the Governor's homestead tax credit.
- Reassess the need to cut services in South Fulton, reinstating some services as the District Commissioner deems necessary for quality of life and safety in the region.
- Direct the Board of Assessors to rework individualized rollback sheets for Sandy Springs, Johns Creek, Milton, and South Fulton for 2006.
- Direct the Board of Assessors to create individualized consolidation sheets for Sandy Springs, Johns Creek, Milton, and South Fulton for the 2006 digest.

2006 Fulton County Revaluation and Growth

CITY	REVALUATION		GROWTH	
	Incorporated	Unincorporated	Incorporated	Unincorporated
Atlanta	\$ 1,221,459,785		\$ 3,249,841,719	
Alpharetta	\$ 194,178,121		\$ 361,357,061	
College Park	\$ 39,866,300		\$ 39,329,381	
East Point	\$ 39,483,184		\$ 185,979,472	
Fairburn	\$ 16,079,748		\$ 95,283,680	
Hapeville	\$ 36,735,100		\$ 10,357,900	
Mountain Park	\$ 252,100		\$ 1,519,380	
Palmetto	\$ 2,180,797		\$ 19,339,676	
Roswell	\$ 199,173,073		\$ 303,738,333	
Union City	\$ 24,995,278		\$ 114,931,071	
South Fulton		\$ 176,328,152		\$ 962,985,016
Milton		\$ 63,788,839		\$ 407,240,663
Johns Creek		\$ 242,313,285		\$ 277,675,071
Sandy Springs		\$ 259,433,371		\$ 573,970,617
<i>Fair Market Values Totals</i>	\$ 1,774,403,486	\$ 741,863,647	\$ 4,381,677,673	\$ 2,221,871,367