

JANUARY 9, 2003 – TOWN HALL MEETING

The Board of County Commissioners, Walton County, Florida, held a Town Hall Meeting on Thursday, January 9, 2003, at 6:00 p.m. at the Mossy Head Community Center.

The following Board members were present: Larry Jones, Chair, Commissioner Lane Rees, Commissioner Tim Pauls, Commissioner Ro Cuchens, and Commissioner Kenneth Pridgen. Mr. Michael Underwood, County Administrator and Attorney Gary Vorbeck, Director of Legal Services were also present.

Mr. Underwood welcomed the public for and stated that the purpose of the meeting is to give the Commissioners the opportunity to express some of their ideas, as well as listen to the concerns of the citizens.

Mr. Underwood turned the meeting over to Chairman Jones. Commissioner Jones again thanked everyone for attending the meeting. Commissioner Jones gave a brief summary of completed and future projects in Mossy Head. Mr. Jones commented that the water system has just went through a major expansion and Mossy Head now has a total of 1,100 customers on their water system.

Commissioner Jones presented a map showing a large number of acres the County has acquired between Hwy 90 and I-10, and additional property on each side of State Hwy 285. This property is designated for an Industrial Park. Commissioner Jones went on to say the County will begin working with the Consultants the County has obtained by contract to generate a master plan of the park. Mr. Jones stated the park has a lot of potential and hopes the park will bring good jobs to this part of the County.

Commissioner Jones stated the County was able to bring a full-time EMS service to Mossy Head last year. Commissioner Jones further advised that in the next few months, the County is looking to start work on a permanent structure to house EMS staff and equipment.

Commissioner Jones informed the public of a new development that will be located between Hinote Road and State Road 285. This project will provide a golf course along with a large number of home sites for the area.

Mr. Underwood introduced the other County Commissioners and himself. Mr. Underwood explained that the Commissioners are responsible for County Government Services and are not responsible for other public entities such as the community's water supply.

The following appeared before the Board to discuss the Industrial Park, future golf course, road and paving issues: Mr. Thomas Jennings, Bob Benezi, Tom Terrell, Gill Stanton, Wilber Stanton, William Lockner, Russ Mylonbush, James Robbins and Bob Robbins.

Mr. Russ Barry, Public Works Director informed the public that Walton County has approximately 450 miles of unpaved roads the County maintains. He also gave a brief report on the paving progress, the criteria for paving roads and the priority of roads to be paved. Mr. Barry offered his office telephone number where he could be reached for further in depth discussion of roads and paving issues.

Commissioner Tim Pauls commented on Walton County's infrastructure and expressed some of the needs of a growing County. He further commented on the importance of having resources available in order to build a good community and have

the ability to foster business developments that communities want to achieve. Commissioner Pauls also said the Board needs to start discussing, as well as looking at options and ideas for the most efficient funding method that will increase the amount of money being spent on infrastructure.

Commissioner Jones stated the special assessment areas that the County is looking into, are for roads that are not County owned or maintained.

Mr. Wilber Stanton appeared before the Board to discuss developers bringing junk trailers in the area and leaving them behind when a project is completed. Commissioner Jones informed the public that the Code Enforcement Department is responsible for this area of concern. Mr. Jones further stated that if the public will make this department aware of problems, Code Enforcement will go out and review the situation to determine if there is a violation.

Mr. Underwood introduced Mr. Phillip Green, Code Enforcement Supervisor. Mr. Green stated his office and cell phone number where citizens can reach him to discuss code enforcement issues.

Mr. David Jones appeared before the Board to discuss fire protection and MSBU problems in the Mossy Head area. Mr. Jones stated that billing for the MSBU is not done in a consistent manner. Mr. Jones also asked if the County could look into this issue to ensure billing is applied equally, and that each individual pay the fire protection dues. In addition, Mr. Jones thanked the Commissioners for their interest and support of the fire departments located in Walton County.

Commissioner Jones stated that fire protection is very important to Walton County and that we need to look into the reasons as to why assessment fees are not being collected consistently.

Mr. J. B. Hillard appeared before the Board to address renovation issues regarding the County Jail, Courthouse and old hospital in DeFuniak Springs.

Mr. Underwood stated that most of these issues would be addressed at the Board Meeting, which will be held January 14, 2003, at the Courthouse in DeFuniak Springs. Mr. Underwood also mentioned that the County was in the process of completing an assessment of the costs and what the value of each of these projects will be.

Commissioner Pauls stated the comments made in regards to the construction projects and the old hospital facility was very valid concerns. Commissioner Pauls also stated that the work that has been accomplished so far was necessary, irrespective to how the County will or has used the old hospital building. Commissioner Pauls mentioned that the County has a 1.7 million dollar bond against the building that we are paying on and that it made sense for the County to be able to use the building in some way. However, he would be in agreement for the County to utilize the facility to better fit the needs of the community.

Commissioner Rees encouraged the public to feel free to communicate with the Commissioners prior to meetings if they have issues or concerns that are happening in the community.

Mr. Chuck Rees appeared before the Board to address why the fire department in Mossy Head has not been completed. Mr. Rees stated that the lot has been cleared and has been sitting vacant for five years. Mr. Rees also said that there was money collected

through fundraisers towards this project and wanted to know where the money went and what happened with this project.

Commissioner Jones stated the funds did not come to the County, as the fire department is an entity of its own. In addition, any money collected from fundraising towards the fire department should have been deposited into an account separate from the County.

Mr. Ronnie Bell, Emergency Response Director, appeared before the Board. Mr. Bell stated the lot presently designated for the Mossy Head fire station is not large enough. However, the County recently obtained a 160-acre tract of land from the Department of Interior, which lies north of Hwy 90. In addition, Mr. Bell stated that the County is looking at the west side of the property for a location large enough to handle future growth and that will be able to service the area.

The following individuals appeared before the Board to address Animal Control issues such as: dog ordinance, dog complaints, leash law and other related animal control concerns: Mr. Dan Ammons, Don Elledge, Jim Criddel and John Brown.

Mr. Bell informed the public that the County has a brochure on the leash law he will hand out to anyone who is interested. Mr. Bell offered his office telephone number where he can be contacted personally regarding animal control issues.

Commissioner Jones commented that the Dog Ordinance reads that anyone owning a dog, that it is the owner's responsibility to maintain the dog on their property.

Mr. Bell stated the County has a system and a contract in place with Animal Control Services of West Florida. Mr. Bell also mentioned when animals are picked up they are taken to Chipley, Florida until the animal is returned or adopted out. Mr. Bell

also informed the public that, per County Ordinance, there is a log and a picture of all animals picked up that is posted on the first floor of the Courthouse. Mr. Bell also stated the Animal Control Contract is up for review in February.

There was a request made from the audience seeking the Board's assistance in getting community recognition for Mossy Head. Commissioner Jones stated that Ken Little, Citizen Services Director, is working with the Postal Service on this project and asked him to address this issue. Mr. Little stated that the Postal Service and himself have identified 23 communities that they are working together on to hopefully establish community identities for these areas.

Commissioner Pauls commented that the community needed to get in touch with DOT and try to get signage on the Interstate so the area can be notated on the highway maps.

Mr. Tom Terrell appeared before the Board and encouraged the community to contact our State Representatives regarding this issue.

Mr. Mike Lang, Planning & Zoning Director, appeared before the Board to address a question from the audience regarding Subdivisions and the minimum number of lots allowed for a development. Mr. Lang stated the minimum number of lots for a development is typically three or more. In addition, Mr. Lang stated the developer has to put up a Letter of Credit for potential road improvements for the development.

Ms. Teresa Owen appeared before the Board to address the need for a park and a school in Mossy Head.

Commissioner Jones commented that the Board could not address the issue of a school or the funding of a school due to this being a School Board matter. However, the

County has some property that could be made available if and when the School Board is ready to proceed with this issue.

Mr. Underwood introduced Mr. Pat Markey, Parks & Recreation Director, to address park issues. Mr. Markey commented that in the past, recreation activities have not gone over well in this area. Mr. Markey also encouraged the community to compose a recreation panel and have them attend the recreational meetings being held at the City Hall in DeFuniak Springs every third Monday. Mr. Underwood stated the Commissioners had appointed a 10 member Board made up of members within the community who are responsible for making recreation decisions. Mr. Underwood encouraged the public to contact the recreation board and express their concerns for recreation in their community.

A question was asked regarding beach renourishment funding and beach access. Commissioner Pauls commented that beach renourishment is being funded through the TDC bed tax. Commissioner Pauls stated that this is a tax collected south of the Bay from vendors including hotels and short-term rentals. In regards to beach access, Commissioner Pauls commented that there is a plan being worked on to improve parking, showers and clearly identifiable beach access.

Several questions were asked regarding County preparedness in the event of a potential military attack on Walton County. It was also asked if County personnel are trained on how to deal with such attacks; and if the County had enough money in reserves to operate and take care of the residents should there be an attack on Walton County.

Commissioner Jones stated that he didn't know if the County could ever be prepared financially for the type of attacks that could happen in the County.

Mr. Ed Baltzey, Emergency Management, appeared before the Board commented that presently, the County does not train the EMS and fire staff in chemical attacks. However, Mr. Baltzey stated the fire departments have their own self-contained breathing apparatuses. Mr. Baltzey further mentioned that EOC is trained for HAZMAT occurrences.

Mr. Tom Powell appeared before the Board and inquired if the County is prepared for train derailments that could pose a threat to Walton County. Mr. Baltzey commented that the County does have procedures in place for these types of situations.

Mr. Terrell commented that there has been an increase in security requirements, especially with the water systems. Mr. Terrell further stated that Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued instructions for all of the local water systems in Walton County to take various steps against attacks.

Mr. Gordon Porter appeared before the Board to give recognition to Tom Terrell for the outstanding job he has done in the Mossy Head community.

Commissioner Rees commented that he was excited about the Town Hall meetings and feels they will be beneficial to the communities.

Commissioner Jones commented that the Commissioners may not have an answer or a solution to every problem, but they are a Board willing to listen and work together to serve the citizens of Walton County.

Commissioner Cuchens commented the town meetings were beneficial in letting the Commissioners know what the communities needs are.

Commissioner Pridgen stated it was a privilege to see the participation in the community and the audience. Commissioner Pridgen also encouraged the public to get to know their Commissioner and discuss issues before they get too big and out of control.

Commissioner Pauls stated that there were a lot of problems in the County and that people wanted to see the County be responsive to their needs in order for them to have a better community. Mr. Pauls also mentioned one thing that is true and common throughout the County are road paving and infrastructure issues. Mr. Pauls also stated that most of the citizens want the County to focus on the infrastructure and to plan well so that the County is ready for growth when it comes.

Mr. Don Crim encouraged the citizens to come and participate in the regular Board meetings so they will be kept informed of what is happening throughout the County.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

APPROVED: _____
Larry D. Jones, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Martha Ingle, Clerk of Court