

FEBRUARY 20, 2003 – TOWN HALL MEETING

The Board of County Commissioners, Walton County, Florida, held a Town Hall Meeting on Thursday, February 20, 2003 at 6:00 p.m. at the Coastal Branch Library.

The following Board members were present: Larry Jones, Chair, Tim Pauls, Vice-Chair, Commissioner Lane Rees, Commissioner Kenneth Pridgen, and Commissioner Ro Cuchens. Mr. Michael Underwood, County Administrator, and Attorney Gary Vorbeck, Director of Legal Services, were also present. Each department head was also present to answer questions.

Mr. Underwood called the meeting to order and voiced his, along with the commissioner's, appreciation to Ms. Bonnie McQuiston and the Tax Payer's Association for spreading the word about the meeting and providing refreshments. Mr. Underwood introduced each commissioner and staff.

Mr. Arlon Smith requested assistance from the Board for maintenance of Crest Drive. He also spoke about needed improvements at Legion Park. Commissioner Pauls responded stating that the park was built on property owned by the Bureau of Land Management. He stated that the Tourist Development Council is developing a plan to restore the park.

Mr. Brian Russell addressed the commissioners regarding road problems on Palmetto. He also spoke about problems with people speeding and the need for sewer lines. He also asked for a small boat ramp at Elrod's Fish Camp. Mr. Russell also recommended installing additional fire hydrants. Commissioner Pauls stated that he is a proponent of bringing water and sewer to south Walton County and paving roads. He also

stated that he would ask the County Engineer to look at the possibility of installing speed bumps.

Mr. Barry, Public Works Director, addressed the issue relating to road paving. He stated that a two-year and a five-year road-paving list has been developed and adopted in an attempt to pave as many roads as possible. Mr. Barry explained the criteria for selecting roads for paving, stating that hurricane evacuation routes, maintenance expense, and the number of residences are all issues taken into consideration.

Mr. Lee Eyer questioned if lack of staffing is still a problem and is it hindering paving progress. Mr. Barry stated that he does pull employees from projects to help with other projects with a higher priority. He explained that road preparation is what consumes the most time.

Mr. Bill Bard, Churchill Bayou, stated that he feels the county should take the responsibility of taking on a bond issue in order to provide water and sewer in needed areas. He also stated that there is no fire protection in his area and felt that these issues should be addressed before the road paving. Commissioner Pauls agreed that utilities should be installed before paving is done.

Mr. Bonnie Brizzard, Foxglove Road, requested maintenance in his area and stated that the area needs cleaned up.

Mr. Todd Keller, Palmetto Street, also spoke about trash in his neighborhood and stated that it needs cleaned up. He also commented that the roads in the area need improved. Mr. Barry commented that there is a small crew that has been designated specifically to trash pickup.

Ms. Beverly Kraska spoke about the number of people in Walton County who pay for flood insurance and questioned what Walton County is doing to obtain a community rating for those citizens. Mr. Underwood stated that staff is working on this issue.

Captain Ed Destin questioned if the commissioners were aware of the cemetery on Mack Bayou Road. He stated that Adam's Home Builders has cut all of the trees down in that area and asked what is being done to protect the cemetery. Mr. Underwood stated that he would have someone check into the situation.

Ms. Joanne Vance questioned where Gulf Pines Road is on the road-paving list. She also spoke about the paving of bike paths and stated that road paving should take precedence over the bike paths. Mr. Barry explained that the monies used to pave bike paths are received from grants and must be dedicated to the projects they are designated to. Commissioner Cuchens also stated that the Board is looking into alternate funding mechanisms as a way to pave additional roads. Mr. Barry stated that there are 450 miles of unpaved roads in the county, of which 50 miles were paved last year. He is attempting to pave 125 miles this year.

Mr. Raymond Halbig spoke about bike paths, speeding problems and roads. He also complimented the county on completion of the bridge on CR30A. He stated that the bridge was built within the timeframe and within the budget.

Ms. Bonnie McQuiston requested clarification regarding conflicts of interest for county appointments to boards and commission. Attorney Vorbeck responded by stating that a conflict is present when a board member or their family will be rewarded if they vote. The goal of any member is to be fair and impartial.

Mr. Stephen Spencer spoke about a Regional Utilities meeting he attended. He explained about a program that would allow citizens to make payments to hook into a water tap. However, the program has ended without notice being sent to the property owners. He stated that funds were reappropriated and the program is no longer being offered. Commissioner Pauls stated that he was not aware that the program had ended.

Mr. Jeff Gates, Peach Creek, stated that the water level comes up over the septic tank of one of the property owners and the fecal levels in the water are unacceptable. He stated that he has contacted the Health Department and they have not responded. Mr. Underwood requested that Mr. Barry check into the situation. He also spoke about problems with fire trucks and emergency vehicles having the proper space to turn around to exit their subdivision. Commissioner Pauls stated many roads are considered to have a prescriptive easement by the county, but never accepted for maintenance. A determination would have to be made if this is a county road that Mr. Gates is speaking of. Mr. Barry stated that many times the property is owned by a private individual who has not granted an easement to the county and the road cannot be completed.

Mr. Thad Bird spoke about road maintenance, jail construction, and facilities. He spoke about the need for repair to the interior of the jail. Mr. Barry stated that he maintains the Administration portion of the jail and stated that the Sheriff is responsible for maintaining the interior of the jail.

Mr. Vince Pasquarello stated that he has worked with the Board for years in an attempt to get additional infrastructure in the south Walton County. He stated that south Walton is now getting more infrastructure such as the courthouse annex, schools, and

hospital. He commented that this is creating a need for parks and a community center for both the elderly and children.

Another issue addressed by Mr. Pasquarello was travel expenses taken by the commissioners. He felt that the reimbursement taken by the commissioners for in-county travel is not a legal system. He spoke about the Grand Jury Report and the Auditor General's Report and asked for review of the issue. Attorney Vorbeck stated that the Florida Statute allows the commissioners to be reimbursed for travel. They must however, provide an example once a year of their average travel. Mr. Imfeld, Finance Director, agreed with Mr. Vorbeck and stated that each commissioner's forms are reviewed each year by the county's independent auditor and have been determined to be in compliance.

Commissioner Pauls responded to Mr. Pasquarello's comments regarding infrastructure. He stated that \$150,000 has been spent on Helen McCall Park in the last two years on needed improvements. Mr. Pauls also stated that they are working to get an additional 10 acres from the State Division of Forestry for expansion of the park. He also stated that the idea of a community center needs to be discussed further.

Mr. Pasquarello requested records from the commissioners regarding how they determine their average monthly travel for county business. The commissioners advised that they do not use county vehicles for county business.

Ms. Sarah Minor spoke on behalf of Ms. Mary Brockett who was not able to be present. She questioned the status of the Noise Ordinance. She was advised that discussion will be held at the next board meeting relating to the Noise Ordinance. Ms. Minor also questioned the issue of compatibility and the proposed compatibility

ordinance that was recently presented to the Planning Commission. She said the ordinance was rejected by vote for further review. She questioned when a workable definition of compatibility might be adopted. Ms. Minor also spoke about “double dipping.” Because of the silence of the Comprehensive Plan and the Land Development Code it will allow the character of an entire community to be changed. She commented on the urgency of this issue. Mr. Underwood advised that the Planning Commission vote was to send the proposed ordinance to the commissioners for consideration, not back to staff. Commissioner Rees advised that the inconsistency issues would be addressed. The commissioners stated that the inconsistencies are very important and agreed that they need to be addressed.

Mrs. Eyer spoke to the commissioners about the inconsistencies and asked the Board to place a moratorium on development until the inconsistencies can be worked out. Commissioner Rees stated that he does not agree with issuing a moratorium. He agreed that there is a problem and that it needs to be corrected to allow development to move forward. Commissioner Pauls stated that the policy previously sent to the Board was a good start, but felt that public input needed to be given before it was adopted. He felt that the code needs to be clarified so the community, applicant, or property owner knows how the county will respond to their application for them to be able to build on their property.

Mr. J.B. Hillard, DeFuniak Springs resident, appeared before the commissioners. He complimented them on holding these meetings with staff present to answer questions. He spoke about the need for additional space in the jail. He stated that he has not yet received any answers to his questions regarding compatibility of the jail to its

surroundings. Mr. Hillard questioned if there is sufficient space to build a new jail on the current site with room for future expansion.

Mr. Bob Dobies also thanked the commissioners for the Town Hall Meetings. Mr. Dobies also questioned the issue relating to covert conflicts of interest. He further questioned the Board how they would like the public to address it or bring it to their attention. He voiced concern with losing public trust. Attorney Vorbeck commented that covert conflicts are usually a matter of perception and not fact. He recommended that it be addressed with written communications to the commissioners.

Ms. Kraska stated that Hartman and Associates published a stormwater management study and ranked over 660 sites with water quality and or water quantity problems. Ms. Kraska questioned what the county's plans are to correct these problems. Mr. Barry stated that staff is addressing the problems. They have requested three grants from DEP for stormwater issues raised in that plan. He stated that they are also looking at ways to solve the problems while getting the most for the money. Mr. Barry stated that they are also addressing the problems with the strategic plan and some will be addressed in his upcoming budget. Commissioner Pauls stated that the county is currently working on an Impact Fee Study and a method to fund the related issues. He also stated that they would be looking for ways to implement the program in a consistent method.

Mr. Dan Scupin stated that staff needs clear direction from the commissioners utilizing information from the strategic workshop recently held. Commissioner Rees stated that he would like to see how the plans relate between the county, Vision 20/20, EDC, and the TDC. Mr. Ken Little, Citizen Services Director, stated that he would be

developing a list to present back to the commissioners regarding the outcome of the workshop.

Mr. Bob Knob questioned the commissioners about the situation relating to Black Creek Borrow Pit. Mr. Vorbeck stated that Black Creek is currently in litigation and waiting for a trial date.

Mr. Don Fougley questioned the commissioners regarding wetlands. He explained that he recently applied for a clearing permit from the county. The permit was issued, but there was a notation on the edge by staff which stated “possible wetlands, check with Corps of Engineer”. He explained that this has created a lot of problems for him. He suggested that the Board check regulations of wetlands and questioned if staff has the right to put such a notation on the permit. He stated that such notations should not be placed on any permit if staff is not sure. Mr. Fougley stated that the Corps now wants to regulate his property. Commissioner Pauls stated that the county has formed a wetlands working group who has been working on these types of issues. They are researching the county’s codes for consistencies and inconsistencies. Mr. Bill Bard responded by stating that people need to be familiar with the property they are purchasing.

Mr. Thad Bird questioned if the county has qualified staff to handle a situation in the event of a terrorist attack. Mr. Ed Baltzley, EOC Manager, stated that he is qualified in this area.

Ms. Cindy Meadows stated that the University of Florida has projected Walton County’s growth at 111% over the next 30 years. She feels that additional Zoning and Planning staff is needed. Mr. Underwood stated that additional staff has been hired in

addition to a new Certified Planner who will begin this month. Commissioner Pauls commented on the Mack Bayou Study that is being done. It will look at land use classifications, which zoning may be a part of it. He commented on the challenges because of the lack of zoning. He commented on the need to become more specific regarding the vision of the county.

Ms. Pam Watkins, resident near Black Creek, questioned what one could do when problems arise like those with the Black Creek Borrow Pit. She stated that all of the property was designated Estate Residential, but the neighboring property has been dug out causing a reduction in her property values. Commissioner Rees responded that litigation is ongoing. He also spoke about the need to correct the inconsistencies in order to operate as good neighbors. Ms. Watkins stated that she, along with the neighbors, fear that the property will become a dump. Commissioner Rees voiced his sympathy, but stated that the project is in litigation.

Mr. Richard Fowlkes spoke about building heights. He felt that the spirit of the code is being violated. He stated that plans are being approved without any way to verify their actual height. He questioned how the county can continue issuing certificates of occupancy when they don't know if the height of a building is accurate. Mr. Underwood stated that staff recognizes the deficiencies, but that the plans are now required to have the elevation listed on the plans.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

APPROVED: _____
Larry D. Jones, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Martha Ingle, Clerk of Court