

MARCH 6, 2003 – TOWN HALL MEETING

The Board of County Commissioners, Walton County, Florida, held a Town Hall Meeting on Thursday, March 6, 2003 at 6:00 p.m. at the Red Bay Community Center.

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 Ms. Kira Honse, Staff Attorney, were also present.

Mr. Underwood called the meeting to order and introduced each commissioner. Mr. Underwood also thanked the staff of the Red Bay Community Center. Mr. Underwood introduced staff who was present to answer questions.

Commissioner Rees hosted the meeting and welcomed everyone in attendance. He applauded those individuals who helped with the improvements at Seven Runs. Commissioner Rees also recognized Johnnie and Angie Padgett, the first Paramedics/firefighters in Red Bay. Mr. Padgett addressed the people and welcomed them to contact the fire department any time that they may need assistance.

Mr. Thad Bird spoke about an incident relating to a dog bite case. He explained the situation and the involvement of the Sheriff's Department. Mr. Underwood advised that the commissioners do not have authority or control over the Sheriff. Mr. Bird stated that he does not feel the Sheriff handled the case properly or ethically.

Mr. Allen White, President of the Red Bay Community Center, thanked the Board for providing a Paramedic/firefighter for their community. He stated that there are many elderly people and this will be very positive for the community.

Mrs. Judy Kennington questioned the wisdom of contracting out the animal control services to another county. She feels that it should be brought back in the county. Commissioner Rees reminded the audience of the audit that was performed on the Humane Society about one year ago and the deficiencies that were found. He stated that the issue would be revisited one year from the date of the contract. Commissioner Rees did state that the issues relating to the audit have been resolved according to George Scott, Accountant, who appeared before the commissioners at their February 11th meeting. Chairman Jones stated that the Board made the best decision they could with what information they had at that time.

Mr. Art McLellan questioned if the county can look into operating the animal control services. Commissioner Rees stated that they would attempt to look at all options available at the time the contract is up for renewal. Mr. Ed Baltzley stated that they have looked at the costs of constructing a building and staffing costs, which are both expensive.

Mr. Jerry Fulaytar reminded the audience that animal control is being done by the county; however, it's the sheltering that is not. He stated that he would like to see that portion returned to Walton County also, but he wants it done with quality.

Mr. Don Crim questioned if the contract could be dropped in 45 days as stated in the contract. He also stated that the contract is for a five-year period.

Mr. Kent Kennington spoke about a joint project the county did with Northwest Florida Water Management called Tilly Landing. He stated that the county spent a lot of time and effort on that project and questioned why the gate has now been closed. Mr. Gene Ryan explained that after the road was built, there was a dispute over who owned

the property. He also stated that Northwest Florida Water Management provides a lot of service to the county and does not charge the county for it. Mr. Barry will research this issue further.

Mr. Allen White was told that the road was closed because people were going onto private property. He stated that county residents should have access even if Water Management owns it.

Mr. Bobby Ammons, previously employed by the Public Works Department, stated that an agreement was made at the time the road was constructed that the gate would never be closed. Mr. Ammons also asked if the county could ask Water Management to allow Walton County business owners to be allowed to bid on their projects. He explained that much work is performed in the county and Walton County businesses are not given that opportunity.

Commissioner Pauls stated that it is a good idea to look at the county's Purchasing Policy. He explained that there needs to be a balance in order to obtain the best price through the competitive bid process. He suggested looking at a way to give a weighted advantage to Walton County businesses and still stay within the competitive bid process.

Chairman Jones explained that local business is important. He stated that he previously discussed this issue with Mr. Infeld and they are looking at the possibility of providing information to the public regarding the items that would be considered for purchase for an upcoming year. This would allow them to be better informed in order to bid. The information is currently being compiled. Mr. Johnny Ervin stated that it needs to be considered how many times money turns over when it is spent in the county.

Mr. Bird asked if a report could be issued by the county showing the amount of roads paved and the related costs. Mr. Barry stated that he has purchased a computer system and software that will track this information. The information will be made available to the public as soon as they begin putting it in the computer.

Mr. McLellan questioned the status of the lawsuit on CR 3280. Commissioner Rees stated that it is still in litigation. Mr. McLellan questioned when White is going to pave it. Chairman Jones stated that a contract was signed today with CWR and they have 14 days to begin and 120 days to complete it. Commissioner Pauls stated that he met with Secretary Prescott in an attempt to locate the funding to repair CR 3280. Mr. Prescott stated that there is no money available. Mr. Bird suggested closing the road to commercial traffic. Commissioner Rees stated that the speed limit has been lowered in an attempt to make the current conditions safer. Chairman Jones commented that the county would make an attempt to get reimbursed from White Construction for the damages they caused.

Mr. White questioned the commissioners if they could help with funding for building improvements or an air conditioner for the Red Bay Community Center. Mr. Imfeld asked Mr. White to work with Mrs. Biddle, Grants Coordinator, in an attempt to locate grant funding.

Commissioner Pauls asked the public if they would support weight limits on county roads. Mr. Tom Terrell stated that he previously sent correspondence to the commissioners regarding weight limits on CR 1087. He stated that CR 1087 was not constructed to carry the weight of heavy trucks. Mr. Terrell advised that they use that road as a thru road to traverse back and forth from the north end of the county to I-10. He

stated that the trucks are also tearing up the sides of the road that have recently been constructed. Discussion was held regarding the possibility of putting up “No thru traffic” signs. Mr. Barry will look into this matter. Commissioner Pauls stated that the county would need to adopt an ordinance in order for enforcement to be upheld in court.

Mr. Ammons questioned what future plans the county has for the DeFuniak Springs EMS Station. Mr. Collier stated that they will be replacing the current facility. He explained that the plans have been completed, but a new contractor is being located.

Mr. David Henderson complimented the county on various improvements that have been done around the county, but asked how the vandalism can be stopped. Chairman Jones commented that it would take help from everyone in each community to reduce the vandalism.

Mr. Don Crim spoke about the amount of help the county has provided to the School Board at no cost and now they want to charge the county for recreation. Chairman Jones stated that this is the first time the county has asked for help from the school board and they will not agree to reduce the charge. Commissioner Pridgen stated that he went to the School Board Meeting where this was discussed and the School Board stated that they do not have the money and felt that the county does.

In closing, each commissioner spoke in response to the community’s needs. Commissioner Pauls stated that the needs in each of the communities seem to be alike. He stated that the Board needs to find a systematic approach for handling the issues. He felt that the county is making progress, although the public may not always see it. Commissioner Pauls stated that he attempts to be responsive to the public, but there is only a certain amount he can do without approval from the entire Board.

Chairman Jones agreed that it takes the majority of the Board to make the decisions. He feels that this is an excellent Board and asked the public to be patient. The Board is attempting to deal with as many issues as possible. Chairman Jones thanked the public for attending the meeting and stated that he is there to serve the public.

Commissioner Rees spoke about how large District One is and how diverse it is. He also spoke about the beauty of the district. Commissioner Rees stated that they are making attempts to upgrade the quality of services, such as the Paramedic/firefighter in Red Bay. He too felt that this Board is very responsive to the people's needs and are willing to communicate with the public.

Commissioner Pridgen stated that the issues presented by the public are important to him. He thanked the community for attending the meeting and voicing their concerns.

Commissioner Cuchens also thanked the public for attending the meeting. He stated that their comments are important to him and that all of the Board shares in their concerns and are willing to help. He reminded them that a commissioner is not elected only to one district, but countywide.

Mr. Terrell responded to Mr. White regarding funding for the community center. He stated that Mossy Head received legislative appropriations and suggested that Mr. White look into that also. Mr. Terrell agreed that the commissioners are elected countywide, but stated that they only have control over certain issues. Mr. Terrell also applauded Mr. Barry for the accomplishments he has made regarding the road paving plan.

Mr. Bird spoke about the need for additional staffing and equipment in the event of a chemical disaster within the county.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

APPROVED: _____
Larry D. Jones, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Martha Ingle, Clerk of Court