

MAY 1, 2003- TOWN HALL MEETING

The Board of County Commissioners, Walton County, Florida, held a Town Hall Meeting on Thursday, May 1, 2003 at 6:00 p.m. at the Choctaw Beach Community Center.

The following Board members were present: Tim Pauls, Vice-Chairman, Commissioner Lane Rees, Commissioner Kenneth Pridgen, and Commissioner Ro Cuchens. Mr. Michael Underwood, County Administrator, and Ms. Kira Honse, Staff Attorney, were also present. Chairman Larry Jones was unable to attend the meeting due to other county business.

Mr. Underwood called the meeting to order and introduced each commissioner. He also introduced each department head that was present to answer questions. Commissioner Cuchens hosted the meeting and welcomed everyone in the audience. Mr. Cuchens thanked the staff of the Choctaw Beach Community Center.

Mr. Emil Vacasavick stated that he would like to see a process where the Choctaw Beach area could obtain funds for improvements to the Community Center. Mr. Underwood explained the importance of the timing when applying for a grant. Mr. Underwood suggested that Mr. Vacasavick contact Ms. Angie Biddle, Grants Coordinator, for assistance. Mr. Vacasavick stated that he had previously spoken with Ms. Biddle and commended her for being extremely helpful.

Mr. Eugene O'Neil commended the staff and commissioners for attempting to resolve the traffic hazards on Highway 98 and for the low cost of garbage pickup. Mr. O'Neil voiced concern pertaining to the disposal of used tires. Mr. O'Neil asked if

Walton County has a clean-up day, and if so, he requested that it be advertised in the Bay Beacon. Mr. Barry stated that the ad would be posted immediately.

Ms. Camilia Clapp questioned if there would be an Amnesty Day for picking up insecticides and other hazardous waste. One member of the audience clarified that the date of the Waste Tire Amnesty Week is May 5-10. He explained that on Saturday, May 10th, the public is permitted to take waste tires, as well as other hazardous materials, to the Walton County Fairgrounds or to South Walton Mosquito Control Office.

Ms. Birdie Mitchell commended those responsible for the repairs made to the Choctaw boat launch area. Ms. Mitchell voiced concerns regarding traffic accidents on Highway 20. Ms. Mitchell questioned if an additional lane could be added throughout the Choctaw Beach area for safety reasons. Mr. Russ Barry, Public Works Director, stated that he would address the issue with the Florida Department of Transportation.

Mrs. Sharon Decker agreed with Ms. Mitchell regarding the need for an additional lane and stated that she also had a few concerns. Mrs. Decker's first concern was in regards to the drainage problem on Cedar Avenue, which causes sand to wash onto her property. Mrs. Decker stated that her second concern was in relation to vehicles speeding around the curve in front of her home on Cedar Avenue. Mrs. Decker expressed the need for additional signs, or perhaps, placing some speed bumps in the road. Mrs. Decker commended Amanda Lee, at Public Works, for her assistance and Mr. Ronnie Bell, Emergency Response Director, and his staff for animal control in her area. Mrs. Decker also expressed concerns regarding two scrap vehicles parked in the yard of the fire department for the purpose of training exercises. She requested that the vehicles be removed from the yard once they have been used.

Mr. Underwood stated that Public Works would conduct an assessment of the road and examine the signage. Commissioner Cuchens suggested erecting a guardrail around the curve in front of Mrs. Decker's house to prevent people from entering into her yard. Mr. Vernon Thowe, Chairman of the Tri-Village Fire Department, stated that the scrap vehicles would be removed from the yard.

Ms. Clapp questioned the status of the creation of an additional road, between Live Oak and Hickory Street, to serve as an evacuation route in the event of another severe storm. Mr. Underwood stated that the commissioners and staff would look into the situation.

Mr. Sharon Maxwell inquired about the status of the noise ordinance. Ms. Maxwell stated that her problem was noise due to barking dogs. Mr. Ed Baltsley, EOC Manager, stated that the issue of dogs barking is in the animal ordinance. Mr. Baltsley explained that the public could call with their complaints and an Animal Control Officer would investigate the complaint.

Mr. Vacasavick spoke about three existing methods, which were submitted in 1988, to bypass Highway 20 for the evacuation route that Ms. Clapp had inquired about.

Mr. O'Neil questioned the possibility of widening Highway 20 into a four-lane highway. Commissioner Pauls stated that he had presented a request to Eglin Encroachment Committee to consider a bypass around Choctaw Beach. Mr. Pauls stated that the Transportation Planning Organization had denied the request. Commissioner Pauls spoke about the possibility of seeing an additional Bay Bridge constructed and questioned how the traffic will be handled going east. Discussion was held regarding long term planning.

Commissioner Rees commended Public Works for their efforts of overseeing the county as a whole when observing the road paving plans.

One member from the attendance stated that the Sheriff needed to be notified that there is a problem with dump trucks exceeding the speed limit on Highway 20. Mr. Underwood recommended that the residents call to report the problem.

Mr. Pat Markey, Parks & Recreation Director, spoke about improvements that are in progress for the area. Mr. Markey stated that three weeks prior to the meeting that \$20,000.00 of Recreation Plat Fee Fund had been approved to spend on the Choctaw Beach Park. Mr. Markey reviewed other improvements that were also in progress.

Mr. O'Neil questioned what the level of the local water table is since the pipeline was installed through the Freeport area. Mr. O'Neil stated that when the pipeline was installed, the water in the private wells dropped. Mr. Underwood stated that the water companies in the area handle the water.

The audience applauded the Board of County Commissioners.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

APPROVED: _____
Larry D. Jones, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Martha Ingle, Clerk of Court