

JULY 8, 2004-TOWN HALL MEETING

The Board of County Commissioners, Walton County, Florida, held a Town Hall Meeting on Thursday, July 8, 2004, at 6:00 p.m. at the DeFuniak Springs Community Center.

The following Board members were present: Larry Jones, Chair, Tim Pauls, Vice-Chair, Commissioner Lane Rees, Commissioner Ro Cuchens and Commissioner Kenneth Pridgen. Mr. Ronnie Bell, Interim County Administrator, and each department head were also present.

Commissioner Rees led with prayer followed by the pledge of allegiance to the American Flag. Chairman Jones called the meeting to order and presented a power point presentation that introduced each commissioner and spoke briefly about past and current projects in Walton County.

After the presentation each department head introduced themselves and each commissioner made an opening statement. They welcomed the public and thanked them for attending the meeting.

The floor was opened to the public for comments and questions. Ms. Sue Rushing commended the commissioners for all that they do. She questioned the increase in ad valorem taxes and the Board's recommendation to leave the millage rate as is. Chairman Jones explained that what had been proposed at the budget workshop was a preliminary number. He said that the rate could be reduced but could not be increased when the budget hearings are held in September. Ms. Rushing encouraged the Board to lower the rate. She felt that the increase in assessed values could accommodate a reduction in the millage rate. Commissioner Rees agreed and said that he would also like

to see a reduction in the millage rate. Chairman Jones spoke about the ad valorem tax rate in Walton County compared to those of other counties in Florida. He pointed out that there are only 13 counties in Florida that have a lower rate than Walton County. Commissioner Pauls also commented on the issue. He said that he supported leaving the millage rate as it is because of the number of capital projects that the county has not budgeted for.

Mr. Roy McCloud asked if the county planned to implement any type of impact fee as part of the development process. Commissioner Pauls spoke about the meetings that had been held with the Impact Fee Committee and their recommendation to not implement an impact fee at this time.

Mr. Ron Kelley questioned the possibility of an industrial park being built in the Mossy Head area. Chairman Jones spoke about different steps that the county has taken to ensure that the project would be successful. He gave a brief history of how the land was acquired and spoke about the master plan that was prepared. He also talked about the process to acquire federal grant money.

Commissioner Pauls asked Mr. Bell to give an update on Animal Control. Mr. Bell stated that an Animal Advisory Committee had been appointed and were scheduled to come before the Board with recommendations to build an animal control center in Walton County.

Mrs. Mena West asked about the building on the lot next to Sonic that has been proposed as an animal clinic. She felt that that building was an inappropriate location for an animal clinic.

Mr. Kevin Chilcutt asked for an update on the old hospital building. Mr. Marvin Collier, Construction Manager, said that the county had advertised for contractors and had received several proposals. He stated that demolition of the building should begin in August.

Ms. West read a portion of a letter that had been submitted to the DeFuniak Herald by a citizen who was concerned about the paving of Long Road. He/she didn't understand why the road hadn't been paved when there had been equipment on the road. Mr. Russ Barry, Public Works Director, stated that the paving of Long Road was on hold due to right-of-way issues that Public Works had encountered while obtaining right-of-way agreements from the property owners. The letter also expressed concern about more roads being paved in the southern portion of the county than in the northern portion. Mr. Barry stated that there were several large road paving projects that were currently in process for the central and northern parts of the county. He further stated that there is a road paving list and he would be happy to provide the list on a website for the citizens to review. Further discussion was held regarding road paving issues.

Commissioner Cuchens announced that an Amnesty Day was being held in the Choctaw Beach area on Saturday, July 10th.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

APPROVED: _____
Larry D. Jones, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Martha Ingle, Clerk of Court