

OCTOBER 2, 2003 – TOWN HALL MEETING

The Board of County Commissioners, Walton County, Florida, held a Town Hall Meeting on Thursday, October 2, 2003 at 6:00 p.m. at the DeFuniak Springs Civic 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 Attorney Gary Vorbeck, Director of Legal Services, were also present.

Mr. Underwood opened the meeting and explained that the Board, along with staff, has worked to develop a strategic plan for Walton County. As part of the plan they adopted a mission statement as follows: “To provided efficient and effective government services through responsive leadership, ensuring pride, preservation and conservation for Walton County”. He stated that roads were the number one priority. Presently, Public Works has 21 miles of roads that are being paved using in-house paving and contract paving. There are \$9.3 million of on going paving at the present time.

Mr. Underwood commented that Mr. Barry has worked hard to stress safety and has gone 256 days without any loss time injuries. This has saved the county a substantial amount in worker’s compensation premiums.

An overview of the current budget was given, which was adopted in the amount of \$91,029,806.00 to provide the necessary services for Walton County. Mr. Underwood advised that \$8 million has been set aside for the renovation and expansion of the courthouse in DeFuniak Springs. Advertisements have been submitted for RFQ’s and will be presented to the Board in November.

Mr. Underwood also gave an overview of other capital projects currently being worked on and some that are needed. He continued by giving an overview of each of the county divisions and their progress or accomplishments.

Chairman Jones thanked the public for attending and opened the floor for public comments. One member of the audience asked if the county was going to hold a free spay and neuter clinic. Commissioner Pauls stated that he is working on this issue and feels that it is one of the most important issues regarding animal control. He stated that there would be a proposal presented to the board and would like the Board to consider this issue. She agreed that this would be more economical than a large facility to house the stray animals.

Mr. Sonny Heath thanked the commissioners for their accomplishments and asked about the Standard Operating Procedures. Mr. Barry stated that he has given many operating procedures to his employees. He also commented that he has further scrutinized the use of county vehicles by employees. He stated that previously there were 32 individuals who were authorized to drive the county vehicles home. That has now been reduced to nine (9).

Commissioner Pauls spoke about issues that are significantly important to him. One issue he has worked to accomplish is to hold joint meetings between the commissioners and the School Board. This will open communications to discuss the usage of all facilities, thereby using the taxpayer's dollars more wisely.

The second issue Commissioner Pauls spoke about was impact fees and whether or not developments are paying their fair share. And, what revenues could be collected

that are not currently being collected. He spoke about the importance of collecting the fees due to the county's rapid expansion.

Commissioner Pauls also spoke about the Comprehensive Plan and LDC process that is being done to bring them into consistency with each other. He also commented on the Mac Bayou Study, which is being used to help with planning for that area.

Commissioner Pauls advised the members of the audience that Walton County now has three representatives on the Transportation Planning Organization. He commented on the need to get funding for the 4-laning of Highway 331.

Lastly, Commissioner Pauls commented on the budget. He felt that this Board is concerned with being efficient with spending so the tax millage rate can be reduced when possible, but still maintain the revenues necessary to build infrastructure.

Mr. Roy McLeod asked about the progress on the Mossy Head Industrial Park. Chairman Jones stated that the master plan for the park is complete and they are awaiting the report. He further commented that revenues were previously set-aside from the one-cent sales tax to be used for infrastructure, marketing and promoting the park.

Ms. Jane Wright asked about the Sr. Center that is being planned at the old hospital and questioned if the office spaces could be placed downstairs away from the recreation center. Mr. Collier stated that the offices will be downstairs. Chairman Jones commented that all available options will be considered to make it the best possible center for the citizens. Commissioner Rees also stated that he too wants to make sure that it is a center to be proud of. He also wants assurance that there is long-term funding for the facility.

Mr. Kevin Chilcut asked for an update on the Wee Care Park. Mr. Underwood explained that the improvements are dependent upon funding from the FRDP Grant. He explained that no funding was received this year for that park, but another grant will be submitted in early spring. Mr. Underwood also explained that negotiations are in progress for the 10-acre YMCA parcel and which agency will oversee it.

Mr. Chilcut thanked the Board for the swimming pool in Freeport and encouraged them to work on getting a pool in the north end of the county, DeFuniak Springs, as well.

Chairman Jones commented on the Wee Care Park and how successful it has been. He stated that it is being well used.

Commissioner Rees stated that one of the most important issues is knowing where to lead the county. He spoke about the work done by Vision 20/20 and the Chamber. Commissioner Rees also commented on the two new hospitals and the new jobs it has brought into the county.

Mr. Tom Terrell encouraged the commissioners to continue holding the Town Hall Meetings. Ms. Wright agreed. Mr. Nobles suggested that the commissioners provide a phone for call in questions.

The commissioners thanked the members of the audience for attending the meeting.

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

APPROVED: _____
Larry D. Jones, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Martha Ingle, Clerk of Court