

Haywood County "Toeprints"

March 4, 2010

Vol. #1 Issue #1 (Subject: Haywood County Commission Meetings)

What's Happening?

The purpose of this newsletter is to inform Haywood County Taxpayers of what transpires at the bi-monthly County Commission Meetings. This newsletter will be written from the perspective of a casual observer, myself. Any opinions expressed will be mine.

I have attended nearly every County Commission meeting since last August. I am becoming aware of the workings of county government, and the people that are responsible for running our county government and spending our county tax dollars.

There are County Commission meetings (generally) twice a month, at 9:00am on the first Monday of the month, and 5:30pm on the third Monday of the month. Special meetings require a 48 hour notice. The meetings follow a prepared agenda, usually available in advance, and are video recorded. After minutes are approved, they, along with the agenda and video, are posted on the county web site, haywoodnc.net.

Meetings are open to the public, and held in the second floor courtroom of the old courthouse. Every taxpayer is invited to attend, and I encourage you to do that.

There are rules that govern the meetings. I have not reviewed any document thus far that describes the parliamentary procedures. The most important rule is that no one attending a meeting can speak until recognized by the chairman of the meeting.

There is a Public Comment Session at the beginning of each meeting. The public is invited to speak before the commissioners on any topic that is of concern. The time for each person is generally limited to 3 minutes or so. If you have a concern, I encourage you to speak.

The Commissioners

J. W. "Kirk" Kirkpatrick, III, Chairman [D]
Bill L. Upton, Vice Chairman [D]
Charles "Skeeter" Curtis [D]
Kevin Ensley [R]
Mark Swanger [D]

Three commissioners terms are about to expire. Commissioner Curtis is retiring, Kirkpatrick and Upton are running again.

New Candidates

New candidates that have filed for the three (3) open commission seats are [re: Mountaineer. *Election filing closes, May ballot to be full*, by Vicki Hyatt, 3/1/2010]:

Democrat

Kirk Kirkpatrick
Bill Upton
Raymond Brooks
John McCracken
Michael Sorrells
Danny James
Rhonda Schandavel

Republican

Jeanne Holbrook
Denny King
Michael "Hub" Scott
Tom Freeman
David Bradley

County Debt

The following data was calculated from the CAFR - Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the years 2005 - 2009.

Year	Debt
2005	\$ 33.8M
2006	\$ 50.4M
2007	\$ 56.1M
2008	\$ 63.6M
2009	\$ 60.3M

As you can see, the debt has almost doubled over the last 5 years. This does **not** include the \$12.5M for the purchase and renovation of the old Walmart building, the \$12M for a new building for HCC, nor the \$700K for the bailout of the Haywood County Fairgrounds.

Wish List.

The following is a **wish list** presented by David Cotton, the County Manager, as the last agenda item at the February 15th County Commission meeting for the coming year:

Public Safety Radio Network Upgrade	\$ 2.1M
Mobile CAD/AVL System (Computer Aided Dispatch)	\$ 1.0M
Sustainable Computer Initiative (Reduce Environmental Footprint)	\$ 0.5M
Fiber Expansion	\$ 0.5M
Senior Enrichment Center	\$ 0.6M
HHS Renovation	\$ 6.0M
Fines Creek Comm. Outdoor Facility	\$ 0.2M
Glance Street Park	\$ 0.2M
Landfill Scale House	\$ 0.9M
Municipal Solid Waste Transfer [not shown - methane project]	\$ 1.5M \$ -----
Total	\$ 13.5M

David Cotton was to send this wish list to Heath Shuler to request [pork earmarks] funding from the state. Commissioner Swanger asked at the meeting how much we received from the previous year - we received \$0.00. Since the state does not have any money, I expect money granted for this years wish list will be ... Zero.

These items are new items that were not in the previous year's budget.

Proposed Budget Preparation

The county's fiscal year ends in June. A new budget is in the process of being prepared and will be submitted to the commissioners before June. There will be one (1) public hearing which the commissioners will entertain public input on Monday, June 7th. The budget will be adopted on June 28th. This, of course, does not leave much time to factor in public input. You can always express a concern in the public comment session at each meeting. **One important result of the proposed budget will be if you have an increase in the property tax rate, which last year was 1.7 cents per \$100 valuation, to cover the excess budget expenses.**

This year's budget will be more difficult to balance than last year's. As you can see, there are plenty of new expenses the board has to consider, along with the purchase of the old Walmart building [more on this in later issues], the Wish List, etc., etc., etc... In addition, revenues may decrease in this recessionary period. As far as I am concerned, the board can spend all it wants to on these new expenditures, as long as they take it away from an existing expenditure, so the net result will be **no increase in the property tax rate for 2010!**

Commission Meeting, March 1st, 2010

[Editors Note: Since each meeting is recorded (video and audio) and placed on the county website and government tv channel, there is no need to detail every aspect of these meetings. I will focus on those aspects of the meeting that are interesting to me and may not appear in the minutes nor the local newspapers.]

The Taliban

Rev. Roy Kilby, who leads the Bethel Baptist Church in Canton, asked Commissioner Swanger point blank during the Public Comment Session if he referred to the people in Haywood County who were asking that Jesus be included in the County Commission prayer as: **"That is what the Taliban does."** Rev. Kilby was quoting Commissioner Swanger's comments from an article in the Asheville Citizen Times [re: *Haywood leaders wrestle with prayer*, by Jon Ostendorff, February 18, 2010].

Commissioners are expected to refrain from speaking during public comments and not interrupt the speakers, yet Commissioner Swanger became immediately defensive and interrupted the meeting with a response "No, ..(inaudible)." [re: my own recorder - official video to be released soon]. Of course, Commissioner Swanger had to be careful here, as he was being video recorded and by saying "No,..." he may be contradicting Jon Ostendorff and impugning his integrity.

Commissioner Swanger continued in the article by saying of those that request commissioners pray to Jesus as a group as: "That is arrogant...". I don't believe that under any circumstances, Commissioner Swanger should have referred to any citizen of Haywood County as "... the Taliban..." To me, the only person demonstrating arrogance here is Commissioner Swanger.

The Haywood County Fairground Bailout

[re: VIII. Old Business, 2. Agricultural and Activities Board, ATTACHMENT 8].

This is kind of an example of how things are done at commission meetings. Off line meetings are held, and a letter laden with conditions is sent to the board from Skipper Russell (Pres.) and Glenn White (Treasurer) of the Haywood County Agricultural and Activities Center Association, Inc. (2/18/2010) to sell all structures at the Haywood County Fairgrounds to the county to bail them out since they are about to be foreclosed. The board then pencil whips the decision and all vote yes, with no input from the taxpayers.

It seems that the county has been floating about \$150K per year to float the Haywood County Fairgrounds over the past several years because it can't make money. The year before last, as times became worse, the amount dropped to \$50K, and last year, there was no money. The Fairground Association owes approximately \$337K in loans for the buildings and the loans are ballooning. Unless there is an infusion of cash from the county, foreclosure looms.

So now the county will apply for a \$700K USDA loan (40 year) with a yearly service debt of about \$40K + \$15K insurance. If they don't get the USDA loan, they will need to get a conventional 30 year loan with about double the yearly service debt. [This is the same type of arrangement being made with the old Walmart building purchase]. The county is bailing out something that does not make money. Can anyone think of any parallels to what the Federal Government is doing? My view is that it should simply go out of business or have private enterprise take it over. There would be more motivation to make a profit. If this Agricultural Association runs short of money again, the county will be so entangled, they will have to pour more into it to keep it afloat.

Did you know?

Marc Pruett is the Director of the Haywood County Erosion and Sediment Control Department. The department expends \$186K of the annual budget, yet brings in only \$80K. The county lost approximately \$360K in a lawsuit against the Erosion and Sediment Control Department last year.

Voting.

There are ten (10) new candidates for consideration for the county commission, notwithstanding Kirkpatrick and Upton. I suggest everyone learn as much as you can about these candidates, so that you can make an informed vote in the upcoming primary election. I will certainly be looking for candidates that demonstrate fiscal responsibility.

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