

A Public "Town Hall" Meeting was held by the Oconee County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday, October 20, 2009, at 7:00 p.m. at the Oconee County Civic Center.

Members Present: Chairman Melvin Davis
Commissioner Jim Luke
Commissioner John Daniell
Commissioner Margaret Hale
Commissioner Chuck Horton

Staff Present: County Clerk Gina M. Lindsey
Administrative Officer Alan Theriault
County Attorney Daniel Haygood

Media Present: Blake Giles, The Oconee Enterprise
Joe Vanhoose, Athens Banner Herald

Chairman Davis called the meeting to order and welcomed the public. Administrative Officer Alan Theriault served as moderator of the meeting and explained the procedures for asking questions of the Board of Commissioners.

Russ Page asked if it was still possible for Oconee County's new water customers to pay the county's portion for the Hard Labor Creek Reservoir. Commissioner Luke said although the anticipated growth is not there, the county is going to do its best to fund the cost from water revenues. Chairman Davis noted the projected need for water was 2014 and due to slow growth this date will probably be pushed out. He also expected there may be other purchasers of the water from the reservoir. Commissioner Horton said the Hard Labor Creek Management Board is looking at other funding sources.

Kate McDaniel remarked the State is projecting another five years of poor economic conditions.

Jeff Hood asked when the Mars Hill Road widening project will begin. Commissioner Horton remarked the GA DOT has not yet set a date for construction. Chairman Davis reported GA DOT has approved right-of-way acquisition for Phase I.

Mitch Bell requested an update on the widening of Daniell's Bridge Road. Chairman Davis said the project is in the design phase. He noted \$400,000 has been set aside in SPLOST funds. Commissioner Luke said the County will move forward as the timeline allows.

Chairman Davis remarked on economic conditions and noted Oconee County has not been impacted as strongly as the State. He expressed concern that agencies will look to the County to supplement funding cut by the State. Commissioner Hale said County Department Directors have done a good job by keeping their budgets lean. Commissioner Horton stated the economic downturn has forced our local government to look closely at what they do and the services they provide. Commissioner Daniell said the Board is willing to prioritize and make hard decisions.

James Morris encouraged the Board to make the Solicitation Ordinance as restrictive as possible.

Kate McDaniel asked if the Board was keeping up with the number of foreclosed homes in Oconee County. Commissioner Daniell said the Board is watching the trends and staying informed.

John Caudill asked what the County is doing to attract new businesses. Commissioner Daniel explained the Board held an economic development work session last week. Commissioner Horton remarked there are many fine details to be worked out in determining how to proceed. He noted the County does not have industrial zoned land or the needed infrastructure. Commissioner Luke said he is somewhat supportive of a regional effort. Commissioner Hale said the Board needs to know what the community wants. Chairman Davis said the County does not have a product to offer, no infrastructure and no site buildings.

Jason Corbin asked how the County is going to sustain its quality of life as growth continues. Commissioner Hale explained the Land Use Map sets what the citizens want Oconee County to look like in the next 10 to 20 years. Commissioner Horton agreed the Land Use Map is a good guide to show what is intended. Commissioner Luke said the County's growth is well controlled because of strong development regulations. Commissioner Daniell noted economic development is important to the tax base. Chairman Davis expressed appreciation for the community's involvement in developing the Community Agenda and Land Use Map.

Andrew Malcom spoke on the covered bridge in Northwest Woods Subdivision and asked if it would be replaced. Chairman Davis said the Board is favorable to replacing the covered bridge when funding is available. Commissioner Luke said the funds would be committed when the County is no longer fighting the economy.

Kate McDaniel requested an update on the proposed shopping center on Jennings Mill Parkway. Commissioner Luke said the shopping center is still on the table. He said he expects it will offer a good deal of jobs, but is not sure these are the kind of jobs Oconee County wants. Commissioner Horton explained the rezone was conditioned on the letting of the contract for the Jennings Mill Parkway extension. Chairman Davis remarked the Jennings Mill Parkway extension is projected for completion in late 2011. He also noted the road will be renamed "The Oconee Connector".

Jeff Hood complained the lighting of public schools at night was a waste of tax dollars. Chairman Davis explained Mr. Hood's complaint should be addressed to the school system and pointed out 72% of property tax dollars goes to support the school system.

Kay Shepard asked about plans for the Daniells Bridge Road overpass. Commissioner Hale said the long range plan is to create an overpass over Loop 10 to the Epps Bridge Parkway area. Chairman Davis said the project is only in a concept stage and is in the long range plan for 2025-2035.

Russ Page stated this is an ideal time for the County to purchase land. Commissioner Horton explained the County does not have surplus funds to purchase property. He noted many projects are on hold right now and the only properties that can benefit from SPLOST funds are the Courts, Library and Government Annex. Commissioner Hale stated the Board would not cut employees in order to have the funds for extra projects.

Kate McDaniel questioned why the County is spending \$150,000 on infrastructure for Gateway Park. Commissioner Daniell stated this was not true and Ms. McDaniel had received incorrect information.

Jeff Hood asked how concerned the Board was over the loss of tax revenue. Commissioner Daniell explained the Board is prioritizing projects in order to save money. Commissioner Luke noted the ad valorem tax is less than one-half of the county's budgeted revenue. He said the bigger concern is the loss of sales tax dollars. Chairman Davis reported the collection of tax revenue is down 2 percent while other Georgia counties are down 5 to 6 percent.

Jeff Hood remarked that uncompleted subdivisions are eyesores in the County. Chairman Davis stated the Code Enforcement Department is making sure the subdivisions are up to code. He pointed out the issuance for single family home building permits are significantly down. Commissioner Horton expects growth in the County will continue and the inventory of unsold homes will start going down.

Franklin Shumake asked the Board to be cautious and plan for quality growth. Commissioner Daniell noted this was the point of economic development discussions. Commissioner Horton said we all want good things for the County.

Chairman Davis reported the Board will hold a public hearing on a proposed Solicitation Ordinance at the October 27th Commission meeting. Commissioner Hale said she welcomes phone calls and emails from citizens on any subject. Commissioner Daniell said he would like the Board to look at Commissioners' salaries and how they are legislated.

Commissioner Luke remarked he was surprised space issues relating to the County did not come up. Commissioner Horton said the citizens should have their opinions because any expenditure would have to be justified to the taxpayers.

Lee Becker suggested the Board have a meeting to discuss the County's enabling legislation and governance.

Jerry Price expressed appreciation to the Board for listening to the citizens and suggested the Board meet quarterly in a similar informal session.

Chairman Davis noted Board members would be available 30 minutes following the meeting for individual discussions with citizens.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

County Clerk

Chairman

Date

DRAFT