

Gum Elected As President of County Commission

During their first action of the New Year, the Monroe County Commission elected Commissioner Clyde Gum, Jr. as the Commission's President for the upcoming year. Commissioner Bill Miller was elected as Vice-President. Commissioners then recited the Pledge of Allegiance followed by the invocation.

After some discussion, Commissioners agreed it was necessary to hold a second monthly meeting. It was agreed the Commission will meet on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:30 pm in addition to their meeting now being held the first Wednesday of the month. Commissioners agreed that a second meeting would allow them to finish any business that they might not get finished at the first meeting and it would also allow them more time to talk to those that need to meet with them. Commissioners agreed to start holding this second meeting on February 18th.

Tim Wilson, 911 Director, appeared before the County Commission. Wilson provided the center's Monthly Call Report. He said there were 151 law enforcement calls, 176 EMS calls and there were 25 fire calls. Wilson then provided the monthly Wrecker Response Report. He said Galford's received nine calls, Neel's four, Clarkson's had three and Wilson and Dunbar's each received one call. Wilson reported the US Postal Service has started converting county addresses to physical addresses. He said the Postal Service is mailing a notice to those individuals whose addresses have been changed. Wilson said there are a few road names in the county that are too large to fit into an address box. Commissioners authorized Wilson to change these particular road names and make sure every affected resident is notified of any road name change. Wilson also shared some of the drawings for the 911 expansion project. He said the design of the expansion project is firm as they are still working to a final plan.

Jeff Jones, Director for the Office of Emergency Management, appeared before Commissioners. Jones said he has submitted all the necessary paperwork necessary for the county to be designated as "Storm Ready" by the National Weather Service. Jones said the Weather Service will review all documentation and requirements and then will notify the county if all requirements have been met. Jones said all schools are now participating in the Code Red Program and he was planning to issue a press release encouraging those individuals who haven't signed up to do so.

Joe Roles, a graduate of Union High School and author of the book, "Mary Jane's War" appeared before the County Commission along with several Union area residents. Mr. Roles advised Commissioners that he plans to do a Docudrama of his book followed by a full movie. The book is about the Arnott Family traveling in a covered wagon to settle in Monroe County. They made their home in Lillydale, near Salt Sulphur Springs. Mary Jane was their daughter and this book follows her thru her life. Mary Jane's husband died during the Civil War and she took a pair of mules and a wagon 120 miles during the winter of 1865 through enemy lines and over mountains to pick up her husband's remains to bring him back to Monroe County for burial. Mr. Roles said the Docudrama and the movie will be filmed in part, right here in Monroe County. Mr. Roles said he

wasn't attending the meeting today to solicit funding but rather tell the Commission about his plans and garner their support. Commissioners unanimously agreed to prepare a letter confirming their support of Mr. Roles in his efforts.

The County Commission scheduled the annual Board of Equalization meetings. They are as follows; January 30th beginning at 9:00 am, February 5th beginning at 9:00 am and February 11th beginning at 6:00 pm. The purpose of the Board of Equalization hearings is to allow a taxpayer who feels their tax assessment, as assessed by the Assessor, is unfair or incorrect to appeal such assessment to the board. Those wishing to appeal their assessment should call 772-3096 for an appointment.

Commissioner Gum reported that Larry Dunbar, Chief of the Union Volunteer Fire Department advised him that the fire department plans to make about \$14,000.00 in renovations to the Magistrate's Office. The county rents space from the department for the Magistrate's Office. Dunbar said they would be replacing ceiling tile, lights, installing carpet, and some other renovations.

The County Commission reviewed a letter from Joetta Basile, Superintendent of Schools, that she had written to EQT/Nextra, the company that is proposing to construct a natural gas pipeline from Wetzel County to Spotsylvania County, VA. The line will pass through Monroe County. In her letter, Ms. Basile expressed concern that the proposed route of the pipeline is coming within a mile of James Monroe High School. Ms. Basile asked EQT, as they continue to finalize this route that they give consideration to ensuring the pipeline is not close proximity to any of the county's schools.

Allison Tomlinson, the county's Tourism Director, appeared before the County Commission. Ms. Tomlinson spoke about some of the things she has done since being hired as Director and also shared some of her future goals as they relate to increasing tourism in the county.

Commissioners agreed to send a letter to the Pendleton Community Bank inquiring what their plans are for the former Sweet Springs Resort. The bank foreclosed on this property after the owner of the former resort passed away. Commissioners discussed how the structures were continuing to deteriorate on this historic property and would like to know what the bank's plans are for the property.

Commissioner Gum reported he, Judge Irons and other judicial staff recently toured the former Broyles-McGuire Funeral Home building. The county recently purchased this building due to the need for additional space. The Commission has discussed housing the newly created Drug Court in this facility as well as the Day Report Program and possibly relocating the Magistrates.

Commissioners reviewed the monthly financial report and the County Clerk provided Commissioners with bi-annual budget reports for each office.

The County Clerk advised Commissioners that the Legislature will convene on January 14th and he has been told by some of the Delegates in the Republican leadership that they were going to reinstate the Governor's Community Participation Grant Program. The Clerk told the Commission they needed to submit a request to their Legislators if they had any need for funding.

The Clerk also said he will try and get the word out to the civic organizations or other qualifying entities in the county of the reinstatement of this grant program in the event they wish to apply for funding.

Assessor Norbert Netzel appeared before the County Commission. Mr. Netzel said his office was still in the process of comparing personal property records to the Department of Motor Vehicle database. Netzel said any tax ticket of any individual who has a vehicle listed on it that they no longer own will be purged. He said this will be a good cleanup of the personal property records and anyone needing to renew their license will have to visit his office if the vehicle is not listed on the tax ticket. Netzel said this was another avenue his office can use to clean up the personal property books. Netzel projected county real estate assessments will increase approximately 3 million this upcoming tax year.

Several individuals appeared before the County Commission expressing the opposition to the proposed Mountain Valley Pipeline. This pipeline will run from Wetzel County, WV to Spotsylvania County, VA with 22 miles of the pipeline running through Monroe County. Some of the concerns these individuals raised were the current route of the pipeline comes within close proximity to the springs used by the Red Sulphur Public Service District. The PSD provides water to over 4,000 customers daily from this spring. Other concerns mentioned was the fact that the county's emergency services and law enforcement would need additional funding because of the increase of traffic on the county's roadways. The number of big trucks on the road at the same time school buses are on the road is also a concern. A gentleman in attendance said that EQT, the company constructing the pipeline, would not run their trucks on the back roads when the school buses were running their routes. Another individual in this group mentioned that this pipeline is no benefit whatsoever to Monroe County as this project is a typical case of corporate greed.

Cara Rose, Director of the Pocahontas County Convention and Visitor's Bureau appeared before the County Commission along with Gibbs Kinderman from Willow Bend and Allison Tomlinson, the county's Tourism Director. Ms. Rose spoke of the Mountain Music Trail, which is made up of a group of individuals who are dedicated to promoting and presenting the traditional music, dance and folkways of the Allegheny Mountain Region. In addition, this organization promotes tourism and sustainable economical development near the US Rt. 219 corridor in Monroe, Greenbrier, Pocahontas, Randolph and Tucker Counties. Ms. Rose said the organization needs funding to keep a VISTA worker who provides a valuable service to this organization and she was visiting the counties in the region to see if they could possibly make a donation to the Mountain Music Trail. Ms. Rose went on to say that she has spoken to Ms. Tomlinson about trying to get this organization to participate in Farmer's Day. The Commission authorized a \$500.00 donation to help keep the VISTA worker on staff.

Planning Commission members Garry Taylor, Rocky Parsons and Rod Graves, appeared before the County Commission. Mr. Taylor presented Commissioners with a draft of an Improvement Location Ordinance.

Commissioners agreed they needed time to review the document before comment on it or take any action on it.

There was also a discussion on the county entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with EQT/Nextra, the company that is proposing to install the Mountain Valley Pipeline through Monroe County if the proposed pipeline cannot be stopped. If an MOU was adopted between both the county and EQT, it was the unanimous decision of all in attendance that the number one item to be included in such MOU would be a contact name and phone number of a representative from EQT/Nextra that could be contacted by the county seven days a week and 24 hours a day.

There were eight final estate settlements approved, as were two exonerations.

The County Commission will meet again in regular session on March 4, 2015 at 9:00 am and will meet again on March 18, 2015 at 5:30 pm. If you need to get on the Commission's agenda, please contact 772-3096.

I. This is the only time during the year a tax assessment can be appealed.