

County Commission Holds First Meeting of New Year

The Monroe County Commission met in regular session on January 5th at the Courthouse. The first item of business for the New Year was to elect a President and Vice-President of the Commission for this upcoming year. Shane Ashley was named as President of the County Commission and Bill Miller as Vice-President.

President Ashley called the meeting to order followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and prayer.

Newly elected Commissioner Clyde Gum, Jr. provided Commissioners with an update on the training session he recently attended in Bridgeport for new Commissioners. Gum told the other Commissioners that he planned to work to bring more jobs to the county and get cellular phone service established in the Gap Mills / Sweet Springs area. On the subject of gas drilling, Gum said he has been contacted by 78 individuals, either by phone, email or letter, who are opposed to gas drilling in the county. Commissioner Gum stated that he was also opposed to gas drilling.

Commissioners welcomed newly elected Circuit Clerk Letta Gullette Comer. Ms. Comer was elected in the November 2010 General Election. She replaces Julia Light, who retired after 24 years of service to the county.

The County Commission unanimously agreed to file a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission against AT&T. The county has received numerous complaints from individuals concerning their AT&T cell service. These complaints include an increase in the number of dropped calls and no or poor cellular service. Those who are experiencing similar problems can also file compliant by visiting the F.C.C.'s website at <http://esupport.fcc.gov/complaints.htm> and follow the instructions.

Steve Rawlings, representing the West Virginia Counties Risk Pool (WVCORP) met with Commissioners and provided them with an update on WVCORP. Mr. Rawlings said there were presently 34 County Commissions in the state who are members of the insurance pool along with 41 other entities, such as solid waste authorities, health centers and public service districts.

The County Commission unanimously agreed to write a letter to the WV Division of Highways relaying their opposition to the closure of County Route 4. Commissioners agreed that this road could be used for current recreation use and a site to possibly designate a recreational trail.

Commissioners denied a request for funding from an organization called Reaching the Summit 2013. Bill Baker, who chairs this organization, said a committee was formed to clean up southern West Virginia prior to the Boys Scouts of America holding their annual Jamboree at their new base camp in Fayette County in 2013. Baker said they are focusing on nine southern counties who will see an economic benefit from this summit. He said 40,000 boy scouts would be attending the Jamboree with 7,000 adult volunteers. He said there will be in excess of 300,000 visitors to the New River Gorge are during the jamboree. The plans are to have VISTA workers in each of the counties performing whatever cleanup is necessary. The funds would pay for the VISTA workers.

Baker asked the County Commission to contribute \$5,400.00 toward this project for the next two years. The County Commissioners unanimously agreed that they certainly support the Boy Scouts and their project but if the county had an extra \$10,800.00, it should be used to fund worthwhile projects right here in Monroe County.

Commissioners reviewed letters from the Mayors from the Towns of Peterstown, Union and Alderson. All three letters were in reference to the proposed Dilapidated Building Ordinance being considered by the county. The county previously asked the three towns if they wanted to be included in the ordinance. The Town of Peterstown replied that they do want to be covered under the ordinance. The towns of Union and Alderson had some additional question concerning the ordinance. Rod Graves, Chairman of the Planning Commission, agreed to meet with these two Mayors and their councils and try to answer any questions they have.

The County Commission reappointed the following individuals to the County's Building Commission; Wayne Dent, Kevin Fullen, Melvin Chinault and William J. Haynes. There is a vacancy on this board. Anyone interested in filling this vacancy should contact the County Commission.

Commissioners reviewed the monthly meeting minutes of the Gap Mills and Red Sulphur Public Service Districts and reviewed public comments on the proposed Dilapidated Building Ordinance.

The County Clerk advised Commissioners that the renovations to the women's employees' restroom, located on the main floor of the Courthouse, have been completed. Duane Miller Construction Services performed the renovations and the project was funded by a grant from the Governor's Community Participation Grant Program.

At the request of Donald J. Evans, the County Commission unanimously agreed to send Governor Earl Ray Tomblin a letter asking him to provide the Commission with a status report on the replacement of the bridge located in Peterstown on the West Virginia / Virginia border.

Commissioners reviewed a copy of a letter that the Monroe County Historical Society recently sent to Governor Earl Ray Tomblin, James Martin, Chief, WV Department of Environmental Protection and Randy Huffman, D.E.P. Secretary. In their letter, the Historical Society requested that state government enact a moratorium against gas drilling in the county until the County's Planning Commission has created and passed ordinances protecting the citizens from the potential hazards of fracking, including water contamination, road deterioration, excessive traffic, disturbance of endangered species and their habitats, economic depreciation of property, and most importantly, the disruption of our rural and cultural settings.

The County Clerk advised Commissioners that the county's grant application to the WV Courthouse Facilities Improvement Authority seeking funds to install air conditioning in the Circuit Courtroom has been denied. In a letter to the County Commission, the Courthouse Facilities Improvement Authority said the county's grant application was complete and the project met the criteria for funding but the request for grant funds exceeded the amount available.

Commissioners represent the County Commission on various boards and agencies. The following appointments were made; Commissioner Gum was appointed to the County's Farmland Protection Board, Commissioner Ashley was reappointed to the Greenbrier Valley Economic Development Corporation Board of Directors, former County Commissioner Joyce Pritt was reappointed to the Council on Aging Board and to C.A.S.E., Commissioner Miller was reappointed to represent the County Commission on the board of directors for Region 1 Planning & Development Council, Commissioner Ashley was reappointed to the 911 Advisory Board and Jill Young was reappointed to represent the County Commission on the Mountain RC&D board.

Planning Commission members Rod Graves, Rocky Parsons and Jim Menard met with the County Commission for the purpose of providing an update of the Planning Commission's activities. Mr. Parsons inquired if the County Commission was interested in the Planning Commissioners preparing a Gas Drilling Ordinance. A discussion was held over the length of time it would take to get an actual ordinance in place. The discussion then shifted to the county entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with gas companies who plan to drill in the county. This M.O.U. would address issues such as requiring the gas company to file a copy of their permit application with the County Commission (which Gordy Oil Company has already done), requiring that the drill cuttings be hauled to a landfill rather than buried, require the company to coordinate traffic control with law enforcement officials and possibly use a pilot car in front of the big trucks, posting an adequate road bond with the Division of Highways in the event the company would damage a county road, and provide the mode of transportation of water and the source of the water they will need. It was also mentioned that if the county can get this agreement in place, it will provide time for the preparation of an actual ordinance. Commissioners unanimously authorized Rod Graves, Chairman of the Planning Commission and Parsons to meet with the Prosecuting Attorney on Friday to discuss this Memorandum of Understanding further and inquire as to the enforceability of the agreement.

Bruce Power, 911 Director, met with the County Commission to provide them with an update on the activities of the 911 Center. Mr. Power advised Commissioners that he and several county volunteer firefighters recently attended specialized training in Beaver, WV to learn how to deal with gas well fires. He also advised Commissioners that he has applied for a grant to the Governor's Community Participation Grant Program seeking funds to make renovations to the Ballard Fire Department. These renovations will allow the department to use their facility as an emergency shelter in the event of a countywide emergency or disaster. The County Commission authorized Power to solicit proposals to install a Reverse 911 System for the county. This system is able to call several thousand-phone numbers in a matter of minutes in the event the county would need to relay emergency information to its residents. It's also designed so that a particular section of the county can be notified in the event the emergency is just affecting that particular area of the county. Commissioners unanimously approved a draft of an Improvement Location Permit for the county

and agreed to forward such permit to the Planning Commission for their approval.

The County Commission entered into an agreement with the Greenbrier Valley Economic Development Corporation for the purpose of evaluating and assessing any and all proposed wind energy projects of any nature to be developed in the county. The GVEDC will act as the initial contact point for any proposed wind energy projects for the County Commission and will accept any contacts referred to the GVEDC by the County Commission in regard to wind energy projects. The GVEDC will assess any proposal and apprise the County Commission as to such proposal and assist the Commission in its evaluation and determination of any action taken.

Commissioners scheduled Board of Equalization and Review meetings for January 28th at 10:00 am, February 3rd at 6:00 pm and February 9th at 6:00 pm. All meetings will be held in the Commission's meeting room at the Courthouse.

The County Commission addressed two estate matters, approved 13 final estate settlements and one exoneration.

The Commission will meet again in regular session on February 2nd.