

County Commission holds October Meeting

The Monroe County Commission met in regular session on October 6, 2010 at the Courthouse. Commission President Joyce Pritt called the meeting to order followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and invocation.

The County Commission agreed to forward a letter, sent to them from the Monroe County Health Department, to Gordy Oil Company of Houston, TX. In their letter, members of the Board of Health asked the County Commission to negotiate with companies that are planning to drill for gas in the county to increase the distance at which the owner or occupant of land has the right to have their water tested for contaminants from, 1,000 to 5,000 feet and to test the know water recharges (springs) from the underground karst aquifers and implement a continuing monitoring program for those discharges. The letter further requested that the gas company bear the cost of the water testing at this increased distance and the cost of the continuing monitoring program. At the present time, Gordy Oil Company is the only company that plans to drill here in the county.

David and Theresa Smith met with the County Commission concerning the assessed value of their business located in the Pickaway area. The Smith's stated that the Assessor has assessed their property too high and their business is not being assessed comparable to similar properties throughout the county. The County Commission reminded the Smith's that, in accordance with WV Code, the only time they could hear tax assessment appeals was during the month of February. They said they have spoke with the Assessor numerous times and the Assessor feels the assessed value placed on their business is fair. On this day, the Assessor agreed to go visit the Smith's property herself and review the assessment her office has placed on such property.

The County Commission reappointed Robert (Bob) Allen, Melvin Chinault and Joe Galuszek to the County's Deputy Sheriff's Civil Service Commission and made technical changes to the County's Floodplain Ordinance.

Shirley Hall, Executive Director of the Coalition for Children and Families, met with the County Commission. Ms. Hall said she was meeting with the Commission again to make them aware that there are families right here in Monroe County who have no cash income and simply rely on food stamps to purchase their groceries. Ms. Hall said this wasn't just a problem in Monroe County and West Virginia but is a nationwide problem and she was going to continue making the public aware of this problem.

Jerry Campbell, a VISTA employee, met with the County Commission concerning the Civil War Marker's Program. The program, which is administered by a company in Richmond, VA, has placed 1,600 Civil War Markers in five states. The County's Historical Society agreed to participate in the program and five of these markers have been place in the town of Union. They are located are located on the Courthouse lawn, the Chapman House, the Confederate Monument, the former Union Academy property (now owned by the Higginbotham and Burns' families), and Dr. James Banks' home.

Jill Fischer and Laurie Addison appeared before the County Commission concerning a proposal for a company to drill for gas here in the county. Ms. Fischer

asked the County Commission to write a letter to James Martin with the Department of Environmental Protection and request a moratorium be placed on gas drilling through the karst topography in the county until more can be learned about this process. The County Commission took no action on Ms. Fischer's request. Ms. Addison also expressed her concern over drilling through the karst topography.

The County Commission awarded a bid to Duane Miller Construction Services to perform renovations to the employee's restroom on the main floor of the Courthouse. The bid amount was \$9,792.00. Renovations will include; replacing the wall covering, ceiling, and installing new tile and new fixtures. Duane Miller Construction Service was the only contractor to submit a bid for this project. The project is being funded through Governor Joe Manchin's Community Participation Grant Program. Duane Miller Construction Services was the only contractor to submit a bid for this project.

Commissioners reviewed the monthly meeting minutes of the Red Sulphur Public Service and Gap Mills Public Service Districts and the Monroe Board of Health.

Commissioner Pritt advised that she recently visited the Wayside Community Center property. She reported that the new entrance road to the community center was complete. The County Commission owns this property and lets the community of Wayside use it for a community center.

The County Commission agreed to send a letter to a property owner who has subdivided a piece of property to remind them that WV Code requires them to file a plat of such subdivision with the Assessor and County Clerk.

Earl Long, representing the JOBS PROJECT, appeared before the County Commission to advise them that the JOBS PROJECT was working with a company called Alpha Energy to construct a wind farm on Little Mountain near Peterstown. According to their website, THE JOBS PROJECT is an organization that acts as a catalyst for sustainable economic diversification in Central Appalachia, creating replicable, locally owned institutions that capitalize on renewable energy resources. THE JOBS PROJECT is based in Williamson, WV. Eric Mathis, also representing the JOBS PROJECT, and Chris Burgess, representing Alpha Energy, also participated in the meeting by conference call. Long said Alpha Energy has been involved in eight other wind projects but this is the first one in West Virginia. He went on to say that they have secured "Options to Lease" from two individuals who own property on Little Mountain. Chris Burgess estimated that the county could receive tax revenue in the amount of \$15,000.00 annually per wind tower and the property owner on whose property a tower is constructed, could receive around the same amount. Burgess went on to say that they want to construct eight to ten towers, contingent upon the results from the wind test. Companies normally measure the wind speed in a location for 12 to 18 months to see if the wind speed is adequate to proceed with the project. Alpha Energy officials said an anemometer, a device used to measure wind speed, was installed last week.

Bruce Power, 911 Director, reported that the 911 Center has been awarded a grant from the Department of Homeland Security to purchase a generator to be used in the event that 911 operations had to be moved from its present location to another location. He said this generator was adequate to operate the system in the

event of a catastrophic event. Grant funds will also be used to purchase emergency radios that are IRP compliant. The Interoperable Radio Project (IRP) is an emergency radio network developed so that public safety officials throughout the state can communicate with each other in the event of a county, state or national emergency.

Power also discussed the issue of Emergency Medical Dispatching. Emergency Medical Dispatching (EMD) is a type of dispatching that allows 911 dispatchers to provide pre-authorized medical advice and instructions to a caller in need of assistance. A licensed physician must serve as the program's Medical Director. The physician will prepare specific instructions for specific emergencies and the dispatcher is only authorized to provide advice and instructions exactly as the physician has prepared them. For example, if someone would call 911 to report that someone is choking, the dispatcher would have pre-prepared information to give the caller to help dislodge the object. Power said he had asked every doctor in the county to serve as the county's medical director for the EMD Program and no physician is interested in serving. He said he talked to Dr. Marshall Long of Princeton and he has agreed to serve as Monroe County's Medical Director. Dr. Long also serves as Mercer County's director. The County Commission authorized Power to proceed with the implementation of this program. Power said he hoped to have the new system operational by the end of the year.

The County Commission also approved a funding request from Power in the amount of \$3,500,00 to purchase the necessary equipment to enable him to perform updates to the County's Mapping and Addressing program. Power said he could purchase the equipment and perform the updates himself versus having to continue paying a company to perform such updates.

Sheriff Mike Gravely met with the Commission and advised that the Sheriff's Department has also been approved for a grant from the Department of Homeland Security. Sheriff Gravely reported that he plans to use the grant funds to purchase necessary equipment for his department.

Rod Graves, Jim Menard and Garry Taylor, members of the County's Planning Commission, met with the County Commission to provide them an update of the activities of the Planning Commission. Mr. Graves, Chairman of the Commission, told the County Commission that the Planning Commission needed additional members. The County Commission gave Graves three names of individuals who may be interested in serving. Graves also reported that the Planning Commission has tentatively scheduled a public meeting for November 9th so the individuals who went on the gas drilling fact-finding trip to Upshur and Wetzel counties can share what they learned from the trip. Garry Taylor advised Commissioners that the Planning Commission continues to work on the Improvement Location Ordinance and a draft should be ready soon.

Mark Betler of Union appeared before the County Commission suggesting that the county file legal action against the owners of property in the Walnut Springs development in an effort to try and recover the legal fees the county incurred while defending a tax assessment appeal from Mountain America, the company that developed Walnut Springs. At the County Commission's September meeting, Betler

told Commissioners that the taxpayers of Monroe County shouldn't have to pay the legal fees, totaling almost \$200,000.00.

The County Commission approved seven final estate settlements and five exonerations. The meeting adjourned at 5:10 pm.