

Monroe County Commission Holds November Meeting

The Monroe County Commission met in regular session on November 4, 2010 at the Courthouse. The meeting date for this meeting was changed from November 3rd due to the General Election.

Commission President Joyce Pritt called the meeting to order followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and invocation.

The County Commission opened the meeting by remembering Deputy Sheriff Joe Galuszek, who recently passed away after a courageous battle with cancer. Deputy Galuszek served as a Monroe County Deputy Sheriff for over 34 years. He served as a road deputy, bailiff for Magistrate, Circuit and Family Courts, Process Server and Chief Deputy. His contributions to law enforcement and to this county were great and he will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

The County Commission approved grant contracts for the Peterstown Ruritan Club and the Monroe County Historical Society. These two organizations were recently approved for grants from the Governor's Community Participation Grant Program. The Ruritan Club plans to use their grant funds to make improvements to the Ruritan Club's Soccer Complex and the Historical Society plans to purchase a case to display a Confederate soldier's uniform at the Ames Clair Hall in Union.

Commissioners reviewed a copy of a letter from Howdy Henritz that he recently sent to the Department of Environmental Protection. In his letter to the DEP, Mr. Henritz advised that Gordy Oil Company from Houston, TX is planning to drill for gas in the Wayside area of the county. He stated that the area in which they plan to drill is in close proximity to the Salt Peter caves, which is home to the Indiana bat, an endangered species. Henritz asked the DEP to contact the US Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct an Incidental Take Study before any drilling begins.

At the request of the WV Supreme Court of Appeals, the County Commission appointed Shane Ashley as Safety Officer for the Courthouse and Bruce Power, 911 Director, as secondary Safety Officer. Ashley and Power will be responsible for coordinating the development, maintenance and implementation of emergency plans for the Courthouse.

The County Commission reviewed a letter from The Friends of Second Creek expressing concern over the current water level of Second Creek. Dennis White, President of FOSC said he has lived in the community for 63 years and he has never seen the water level this low. The letter stated that several factors have contributed to the decrease in the water level, including commercial water sales, development and water use by the Town of Union and the community of Gap Mills. The Friends of Second Creek asked the County Commission to enact some sort of controls on the use of water in the county before it's too late. A picture noting the present water level of Second Creek was also provided.

Commissioners agreed to prepare a grant application to the WV Courthouse Facilities Improvement Authority in the amount of \$57,000.00 for the purpose of installing air conditioning in the Circuit Courtroom. County Clerk Donald J. Evans will prepare the grant application.

The County Clerk advised Commissioners that he was applying for a grant from the WV Records and Management Board in the amount of \$6,500.00. These funds will be used toward the cost of purchasing a scanner to scan all documents that are presented for recordation in the Clerk's Office. The Clerk also plans to purchase four computer monitors for the record room. Visitors will be able to access records from via the computer monitor, instead of having to look the records up in a book. By viewing the documents on a monitor, this will save on the wear and tear of the pages and the record books themselves, some dating back to 1799.

Another benefit of the project will be the fact that the scanning of the documents will provide a digital back up of the documents, which the Clerk's Office presently doesn't have. Evans said he has received a preliminary estimate from Complete Systems and Support, Inc., the same company his office, as well as other Courthouse offices presently uses for their software needs, in the amount of \$30,000.00. The estimate includes the necessary software, hardware and training. Evans said he has the remaining funds needed to complete the project secured through other grants.

Rex Thornton, representing Mountain CAD, provided Commissioners with a presentation on the services offered by his company. Thornton said Mountain CAD can provide the county with a County Information Portal which is a web based application that will allow users to search for Real Estate and Personal Property information presently contained in the West Virginia Assessor's Integrated Assessment System. Once the Assessor is able to digitize the county's tax maps, such maps would also be available for public access via computer with this program.

Bruce Power, 911 Director, met with the County Commission and provided them with an update of the activities of the 911 Center. Power reported that the Towns of Union and Peterstown have agreed to participate in the county's Floodplain Program. Commissioner Ashley plans to meet with the Town of Alderson to inquire if they want to participate as well.

Mr. Power also reported that the county's Emergency Operation Plan has been re-written. He also reported that he was making arrangements for the county's volunteer fire departments to receive specialized training for fighting fires at the site of a gas well. He said the training would be conducted by International Fire Fighting Academy. Power said he wanted the county's departments to be prepared in the event gas drilling commences in the county. On a final note, Power said he was continuing the 911 Education Program in the schools to teach the younger children how and when to use 911.

Jill Fischer, Laurie Addison and Mary Humphreys met with the County Commission to express their opposition to gas drilling in the county. They also presented Commissioners with a petition containing several signatures of individuals who live on the Knobs who are also opposed to drilling.

Travis Cullen, a WVU Extension Agent In-Training, met with the County Commission to introduce himself. Cullen said he was presently training here in the county and then will continue his training in Greenbrier County. He told Commissioners that he has developed a Master Gardner Program in the county. Those interested in participating in this program can contact Travis at the Extension Office in Union.

Rod Graves and Rocky Parsons, members of the county's Planning Commission, provided the County Commission with a power point presentation of their recent trip to Upshur and Wetzel counties for the purpose of obtaining more information on gas drilling. Ba Rea, who also went on the trip, assisted with the presentation. The trip was authorized by the County Commission in an effort to help them learn more about the process. Graves said the Planning Commission will also present their findings at a public meeting to be held at James Monroe High School on November 22nd at 6:30 pm. Those interested in obtaining additional information on gas drilling are urged to attend.

On the subject of gas drilling, the Planning Commission made the following recommendations to the County Commission; establish and maintain a dialogue with those gas companies proposing to drill in the county, train emergency service responders in responding to gas drilling site emergencies, establish and maintain dialogue with the regulatory agencies such as the Department of Environmental Protection, the Division of Highways, and the Bureau of Public Health, and other agencies involved when drilling takes places, establish a committee within the Planning Commission for understanding and interpreting rules and regulations and continue to work with the WVU Extension Office for continuing education on this process.

Graves also reported to the County Commission that Gordy Oil Company, the company that is proposing to drill for gas near Wayside, is holding an Open House at the Union Senior Center on November 29th from 5:00 – 8:00 pm.

The County Commission set the Courthouse holiday schedule. The Courthouse will be closed on November 25th and November 26th for the Thanksgiving holiday and closed December 24th and December 27th for the Christmas holiday.

The Commission approved seven final estate settlements and four exonerations. The Commission will meet again in regular session on December 1st at the Courthouse.