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Consolidation Plan Gets Tentative OK

By BILL STUDENC
Editor
The Madison County Board of Education has reluctantly adopted a controversial state recommendation calling for the consolidation of most of the county's elementary schools. But Madison school officials are quick to say that does not mean they

support the phasing out of schools at Hot Springs, Laurel, Marshall and Walnut and the construction of consolidated middle and elementary schools, as recommended by the N.C. Division of School Planning. School board members say they accepted the state recommendation last Wednesday because of a fast-

approaching deadline. "We are making a five-year plan, quite simply, because we have to do that," James Baker, school board chairman, said during last week's special meeting. "We are required to do that by law." Legislation approved last year requires all public boards of education to submit by Jan. 1 a five-year plan on future construction and renovation of facilities. Madison officials had hoped to base their plan on recommendations made by state planners following a survey of county school facilities. But the N.C. Division of School Planning did not deliver its report to the Madison County School Board until last Tuesday -- just three days before the school board's five year plan was due in Raleigh. Because of the lack of time to come up with an alternative plan, the Madison school board agreed the following day by a 3-1 vote to adopt the state planners' recommendations as the five-year plan for Madison County schools. Board member Jewell Church of Hot Springs cast the lone "no" vote. Member Mike Jenkins was absent. Church said she could not vote for a plan that would result in only one school in the entire lower end of the county. "I hate to be the one to disagree, but I feel in no way can I compromise the lower end of the county and not have a school down there," she said, eliciting applause from a crowd of about 75 people, most of them from Hot Springs and Spring Creek. "I do

feel that even in the very first presentation we give, there should be something for the lower end of the county." Under the state's recommendation, schools in Hot Springs, Walnut and Laurel would be totally phased out and students transferred to a middle school serving all Madison students attending grades 6-8. Students in grades 6-8 at Spring Creek would also be transferred to the countywide middle school, but students in kindergarten through fifth grade would remain at a renovated Spring Creek facility. Church said she is concerned that many Spring Creek and Hot Springs students will drop out rather than endure a lengthy bus trip to a centrally located consolidated school. "I know a small school cannot offer the advantages that can be offered in a larger school," she said. "But I also think that traditional education has a place. I just don't feel that it's fair to let the lower end of the county lose its identity." Baker said he agreed with Church, but also said the time factor made it impossible to come up with an alternative plan in time to meet the Jan. 1 deadline. "If we make a decision that the people don't necessarily agree with, I don't want you to feel like this is something that is written in stone somewhere and can't be changed," he said. "Our problem in making this plan right now is time. It has to be submitted day after tomorrow. "Fortunately, we can change what ever plan we submit," Baker said.



BILL STUDENC PHOTOS

School board members Mike Jenkins and Jewell Church listen to comments Monday.

School board members Gerald Young and Franklin Anderson voted in favor of the plan, but also prefaced their approval with the disclaimer that the plan can be amended. "I think we definitely will have to go with what's been recommended, with the understanding that it can be changed later," Anderson said. "This plan would not be my first choice," Young said. "I am for middle schools, but I would be for two middle schools." Young made the motion to approve the plan submitted by the state planners, and Baker seconded it. During last Wednesday's meeting,

about a dozen residents spoke out against the plan -- all of them from Spring Creek or Hot Springs. Among their concerns were the length of time students would be on the road enroute to and from a consolidated school, loss of community identity and reduction in the potential for attracting industry. The school board agreed to leave a copy of the state-recommended plan in the libraries at each county school, and Baker urged interested parents to obtain a copy of the report and read it.

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Garland Woody of Spring Creek outlines his community's objections to a proposed consolidation plan.

Hot Springs, Spring Creek Want West Madison School

By BILL STUDENC
Editor
Hot Springs and Spring Creek residents flocked to Madison High School Monday night to let county school officials know they do not want their children bused to a consolidated school in the Marshall area. The residents also gave the school board a new recommendation: if some consolidation must occur, that a school be built in the

Hot Springs area to serve children in Hot Springs and Spring Creek. The school could also include students from Laurel, if parents there are supportive, speakers at Monday's meeting said. The Madison County Board of Education has scheduled a special meeting for 7 p.m. Jan. 18 to continue discussion of massive changes recommended by state school planners. About 125 parents and residents

attended the regular meeting of the county school board to show their opposition to the potential closing of schools in Spring Creek and Hot Springs. Among those 125 people were members of the Hot Springs Board of Aldermen. "We figured this was far more important than anything we had to discuss," said Hot Springs Mayor Kenny Ramsey. Residents of the two western Madison County communities had

met Saturday night to map out a strategy for opposing recommendations made last week by the N.C. Division of School Planning (see related story). Among those recommendations was that all Madison County students in grades 6-8 be transferred to a new consolidated middle school in Marshall, and that students in grades kindergarten-5 at Laurel, Hot Springs, Walnut and Marshall be transferred to a new

consolidated elementary school north of Marshall. Students in grades K-5 at Spring Creek and Mars Hill would remain at renovated schools in those communities, under the state recommendation. During Saturday's community meeting, Hot Springs and Spring Creek residents agreed that the state's recommendation is "completely unacceptable," said Garland Woody of Spring Creek. It was during Saturday's community meeting that opponents came up with an alternative plan. "We propose that a K-8 facility be built on a site mutually acceptable to people of Spring Creek and Hot Springs and the Board of Education, with adequate facilities for these grades, and that this be made a permanent facility with no plans shortly

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Pharmacy Board Revokes Powell's License To Practice

By BILL STUDENC
Editor
The N.C. Board of Pharmacy has suspended for one year the license of Mars Hill pharmacist William Paul Powell, chairman of the Madison County Board of Elections and former Mars Hill mayor, for improper distribution of prescription medication. According to state pharmacy board officials and documents filed in Madison County Superior Court, Powell distributed prescription drugs on several occasions in 1986 to a Marshall woman allegedly representing herself as a nurse caring for a patient. That woman, Karen Ledford Sheppard, faces 15 criminal charges of obtaining a controlled substance by fraud. The Board of Pharmacy has also permanently revoked the operating license held by Powell's pharmacy, Community Medical Center Pharmacy.

The two penalties are the result of an administrative hearing held by the board in Carrboro on Nov. 17, David Work, executive director of the N.C. Board of Pharmacy, told The News Record from Chapel Hill in a telephone interview Tuesday. "The net result of that hearing was a consent order to Mr. Powell to surrender his license to practice pharmacy for one year and the revocation of the permit to operate Community Medical Center Pharmacy," Work said. "He is to surrender those to this office within 60 days of Nov. 17." A "closed" sign was on the door of



William P. Powell
...pharmacy license revoked

Powell's pharmacy this week. He could not be reached at home this week and did not return a telephone message. The suspension of Powell's license and the revocation of his pharmacy's

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Auditor: No Wrong-Doing In 1986 County Finances

By BILL STUDENC
Editor
Madison County financial transactions questioned by auditors one year ago were the result of poor accounting practices -- not intentional wrong-doing. That was the verdict Monday from Roger Gregg of Gregg & Lasher, P.A., the accounting firm that questioned several checks written on county government accounts during the final months of administration of the former Madison County Board of Commissioners. "We again assiduously researched all expenditures made during that period of time," Gregg told the current commissioners during Monday's meeting. "We have found no evidence whatsoever of any criminal or civil misconduct or improprieties in the types of expenditures that were made." Gregg, on Jan. 12, 1987, told the then-newly elected commissioners that he had questions about several county payments to former commissioners and employees. Among those payments were several \$500 checks to former commissioners for "travel expenses" and a check to a former county employee for more than \$5,000 in holiday, vacation and sick pay. "I am not stating for the record that these are illegal," Gregg said last year. "We are saying that the documentation isn't there in all instances to make a determination. There are things here that look like we could have a problem with." Gregg said Monday that his questions of a year ago arose because of improper documentation of transactions. "These were the result of inadequate accounting procedures," he said. "They (the accounting problems) have been cured. Frankly, Mr. Chairman, we consider this a past problem." Commissioner Reese Steen, however, said he is not satisfied with the answers given Monday to questions originally raised one week shy of a year ago. "If the accounting procedures and things that went on in the last audit were so hunky-dory in this audit, why were they so questionable in the first audit?" Steen asked Tuesday. "If everything is fine, I think the accounting firm not only owes some people an apology, I think they also owe the county \$3,000." The partial audit conducted in January 1987 cost about \$3,000, he said.

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Mars Hill Gets Audit Report

By R.T. KOENIG
Special To The News Record
Mars Hill Mayor Joseph Godwin warned the town's aldermen that they were in for a long night Monday as the board met for the first time this year. Despite Godwin's warning, the Board of Aldermen managed to wrap up several matters during a 90-minute session. On a night when temperatures dropped into the teens, the town officials outnumbered the audience. The board received the town's annual audit report from Carl Shaw of the Hendersonville accounting firm of Hansen, Johnson and Associates, P.A. Shaw detailed the town's operating budget for the 1988-87 fiscal year for the aldermen. According to Shaw's audit, the town continues to receive

the majority (41 percent) of its operating funds from property taxes. An additional 22 percent of revenues are obtained from sales taxes, franchise tax and state tax refunds. State funds account for 31 percent of the town's operating budget. Shaw warned that a large portion of funds in the past year came from federal revenue sharing funds that are no longer available. He told the aldermen that additional revenues will have to be found to replace the lost revenue sharing funds. Property tax receipts have shown little growth in the past three years, according to Shaw's report. Shaw also said town expenses have remained unchanged in many departments. Government operations accounted for 29 percent of the town's operating budget, as did public safety

(police and fire) expenditures. Maintenance of public vehicles was also a major expense during 1986-87, claiming 23 percent of the town budget. Only 3 percent of the budget was spent on culture and recreation while 8.5 percent went to debt service. Shaw recommended that the town upgrade its accounting system by adapting a computer the town already owns for use in recording business transactions. The IBM computer is presently being used to prepare water and sewer bills. The aldermen also heard from real estate developer Bob Phillips, who informed them that he has a client interested in locating a nursing home in Mars Hill on property owned by C.N. Willis.



RAYMOND STINES PHOTO

Marshall Post Office patrons try to calm an unexpected visitor.

Deer Visits Marshall

From Staff Reports
Oh, deer. That's what someone who happened to be in the Marshall Post Office at about noon last Thursday might have said. Postal clerks and patrons were surprised to see a young deer walk through the door of the Marshall Post Office as a wild goose chase -- make that a wild deer chase -- through downtown Marshall came to an end. State wildlife officials spotted the deer on Bannercrest Island in Marshall late last Thursday morning. They tried to apprehend the animal, which ran from the island to the bridge crossing the French Broad River.

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