

The News-Journal

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12% tax hike proposed for Hoke County budget

By Warren Johnston

Hoke County taxpayers may be facing a 12.8% increase in ad valorem taxes if approval is given to a budget recommended for the upcoming fiscal year.

If the proposed budget, which was given to members of the Hoke County Commission on Friday, is OK'd, the tax rate would be increased from 70 cents to 79 cents in order to raise \$283,000 in additional revenue.

The ad valorem tax increase would be coupled with additional funds provided by the statewide one-half cent sales tax, to raise revenue and expenses by about \$540,000, or 12%, over last year's \$4.5 million county budget.

Included in the recommended budget are:

•Funds for improving the physical condition of the county schools according to a plan proposed earlier by a 21-member citizen's committee.

•An allowance for a 7.5% pay increase for most county employees.

•A school operating fund increase of 10%, or about \$87,000 less than was requested by the Board of Education.

•Funding for airport improvements and an airport commission.

•Increased funding for the Hoke County Ambulance Service, excluding pay raises for emergency personnel.

The increases would cost owners of a \$30,000 home \$27 more and \$50,000 homeowners \$45 in additional county taxes.

If the budget is approved, four of the county's main industries will carry about 23% of the burden of the tax hike by paying more than \$65,000.

Based on current evaluations, Faberge's taxes would be increased by \$27,540, Burlington's by \$26,640, House of Raeford's by \$7,900 and JRA Industries' by \$2,900.

School plan funded

According to the budget proposal, 60% of the county share of one-half cent sales tax, or \$270,120, would be given to the schools for capital improvements.

Under state law the county is allowed to keep 60% of the sales tax in general operating funds and must give the schools 40% for capital repairs. The shift of the 20% means about \$90,000 more for the schools.

If those funds are allowed to remain in the budget and continued for 10 years, the money would

cover the cost of a \$10.2 million school improvement program and would repay the debt on a proposed \$2.5 million bond issue.

Also included in the proposed budget is \$200,000 to replace roofs on schools and \$79,500 for annual school maintenance.

All of the additional school allocations were recommended by the 21-member school facilities committee.

If funded, the plan would build 78 new classrooms in the county and would upgrade the condition of existing facilities.

As of last July, Hoke County owed \$720,000 on existing school bonds.

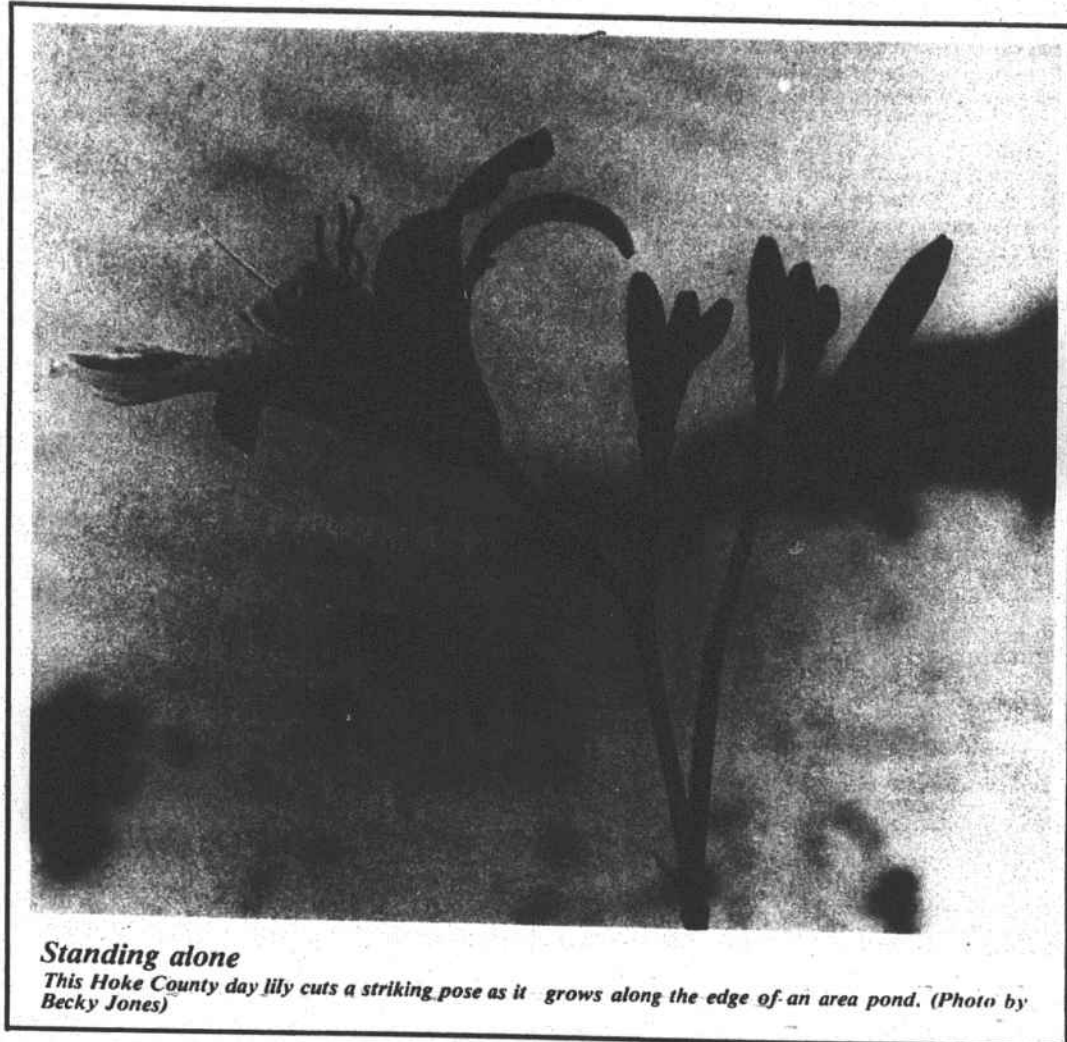
Funds for the school's operating budget are also recommended to be increased from approximately \$940,000 to about \$1.1 million.

The recommendation cuts \$87,000 out of the Board of Education request. The reduction was made after meetings between County Manager James Martin and school administrators.

Pay raises eyed

Besides the increases in school funds, additional money has also been recommended which would

(See TAX, page 14A)



Standing alone

This Hoke County day lily cuts a striking pose as it grows along the edge of an area pond. (Photo by Becky Jones)

Federal funds available for four lane 401 project

Federal funds may be available to cover the cost of constructing two additional lanes on U.S. Highway 401 between Raeford and the Cumberland County line, the director of the federal Highway Administration said Friday.

However, in order for Hoke County to obtain the funds, local officials must lobby with the state Department of Transportation (DOT), the governor and Congress, Highway Administration Director Eric Bolton said.

"It's got to come through them," Bolton said.

The question of widening the road came up when a delegation from Hoke County formally requested the work during a DOT hearing last Tuesday.

County Commission Chairman John Balfour, Commissioner James Albert Hunt, County Manager James Martin and Chamber of Commerce President Steve Parker appeared at the hearing in Carthage to re-emphasize the county's desire to have the road widened.

Local officials see the road improvements, which were funded during the 1960's and promised to be completed before 1972 by then North Carolina Governor Bob Scott, as vital to the county's continued growth.

"I think we got their attention again," Balfour said after the meeting.

The latest funds, which could be available for the widening of

Highway 401, are part of the 1982 federal Surface Transportation Assistance Act, that are designated for primary and secondary roads.

Requests for those funds would have to come from the DOT or from Congress, Highway Administration Divisional Administration for North Carolina Kenneth Bellamy said Friday.

The funds are part of the recent federal gasoline tax charged to repair and maintain interstate highways, bridges and roads.

In most states about 85% of the funds collected in the state are returned to the state. North Carolina is one of the 12 states in the nation which have not gotten a full allocation, Bellamy said.

The funds which have not been

returned would be available for projects like widening U.S. Highway 401, Bellamy said.

Although Hoke County has been attempting to get the improvements made to the road for more than 20 years and has made recent requests for the work, Bellamy said he had not been contacted about providing funds for the project.

As of Friday, no inquiries about widening Highway 401 had been made to the North Carolina Divisional office of the federal Highway Administration by either the DOT or by the office of Eighth District Rep. William G. Hefner, Bellamy said.

"I can't be absolutely sure about the highway department, but I

would remember an inquiry from a Congressman," the highway administrator said.

Most of the effort to obtain the funds must come from the DOT, but Hefner would help with obtaining funds for the widening of Highway 401, a spokesman for the Congressman's office said Monday.

"We're very supportive," spokesman Bill McEwen said.

Hefner will write North Carolina Secretary of Transportation William R. Roberson Jr. and to DOT District Board Member Martha Hollers suggesting the use of the federal funds for U.S. Highway 401, McEwen said.

Federal funds for Highway 401 could be available, but Hoke County must work through

Hollers to obtain them. State Highway Administrator Billy Rose said Friday.

"Keep in touch with your board member. She can be important in changing the process," Rose said, noting that Highway 401 could be moved up the priority list.

Even though members of the board might change after the election of a new governor, Rose said new board members traditionally respect projects on the priority list.

"If the board approves it, funding would be available," he said.

Hollers said she was not sure how much she could do for the project before she left office in November.

"There is not much I can do," she said.

Around Town

By Sam Morris

Sunday and Monday seemed to me like summer arrived a few weeks in advance. When the temperature gets above 90 degrees the first of June, you can say we are in for a hot summer.

Anyway after the cold days last week, most of us are ready for the weather to stay warm for awhile.

The Heart Association Golf Tournament that will be played at the Arabia Golf Course should be of interest to most golfers that like to play in tournaments. The play is open to both men and women and is a team of four best ball tournaments. Southern National Bank is co-sponsor of this event.

The format is an 18-hole best net 2-of-4 balls. The event will allow handicaps up to 18. The tournament will be played at Arabia on Wednesday, June 13 and the winning foursome will advance to the Pro-Am Golf Championship in Pinehurst where the winners will receive a \$5,000 purse.

More details are published elsewhere in this issue of *The News-Journal*. For further details, call Rebecca Smith, 875-3717; Steve Parker, 875-3738 or Arabia Golf Course, 875-3524.

Be sure to look at the Graduation section in this week's issue. (See AROUND, page 14A)



Quiet moment

This Hoke County pooch takes a few moments to snooze and perhaps dream about September when school will begin and the hectic kid-filled days of summer will be over. The dog probably couldn't care less that we have taken a look at the school graduates for 1984 in Section B of today's *News-Journal* or that we have the names of the seniors who captured awards and scholarships on page 8 of Section A, but that's OK. (Photo by Becky Jones)

Man dies in Antioch wreck

A 34-year-old Red Springs man was killed after the car in which he was riding left the road and crashed in the Antioch community on Saturday.

James Sherman Knight, of Rt. 1, Red Springs was killed in the wreck, according to the investigating State Trooper John Gildewell.

Also in the car were two other Red Springs residents.

Grady Vaughn Locklear was the driver of the vehicle and was charged with driving while impaired (DWI), driving while his license was revoked and manslaughter.

Jimmy Jacobs was a passenger and was not charged, Gildewell said.

Burlington Park given nod

By Ed Miller

Construction of a new park on the land adjoining Burlington Industries was given a green light Monday after members of the Hoke County Commission voted to accept a matching \$20,000 state grant for the project.

The local funds to match the park grant are in the budget recommended for the coming fiscal year, County Manager James Martin said.

The total cost of constructing the new Burlington Park will be \$40,074, county Parks and Recreation Director Denise Melton said.

The park is expected to include ballfields, a concession stand and a parking lot.

The largest expense for the project will be the construction of the concession stand at a cost of \$15,000.

Cost estimates do not include labor, and Melton said she hoped that county labor could be used for building the concession stand.

However, Martin said county crews were committed to other projects and would not be available to work on the park.

An effort would be made to get help from the Army Corps of Engineers, Melton said.

County Commission Chairman John Balfour also questioned the approximate \$31 per square foot cost of the stand.

Other major costs of the park are \$12,020 for ballfield construction, \$1,280 for drainage improvements, \$6,860 for parking

and \$3,914 for ball field fencing, a budget estimate said.

First Responder held

In other business, the commissioners tabled action for the third time on the First Responder Program.

Insurance costs are still the stumbling block.

After a recent meeting with county fire chiefs and Fireman Association representative Bobby Strother, it was determined that more county departments would like to participate in the program than was originally anticipated, Commission Vice Chairman James Albert Hunt said.

Strother, who has been representing the program in commission meetings, said that he had been talking with a representative of Pioneer Insurance, of Fayetteville, and that Pioneer would insure all of the 180 firemen in the county against malpractice and liability for \$1,701 per year.

Strother also said that the company told him that, since the first responder volunteers will not be doctors, there should be no need for malpractice insurance.

This policy will cover the county's firemen including first responders for \$350 more per year than is now being paid, Strother said.

Under the present insurance policy, such coverage would cost \$100 per person.

North Raeford Fire Chief Johnny Baker said Burke County,



John Balfour

the first county in the state to implement a first responder program, found that the system is "working well."

Burke also has a county Rescue Squad and an ambulance service much like Hoke County.

Hoke County Rescue Squad member Jim Wade told commissioners that he is concerned about the costs of replacing supplies in the trauma kits as they are used by first responders.

These supplies would be replaced by the hospital that accepted the patient much in the same way that ambulance supplies are now replaced, Strother said.

There would be no additional (See FIRST, page 14A)