

Viewpoints

City can lower ad valorem taxes

Raeford City Councilmen have a rare opportunity to take advantage of an option which is not often available to elected officials.

The council members can reduce municipal taxes for the coming fiscal year and at the same time give all city employees a raise in pay.

Apparently because of the confusion over the new half-cent sales tax and the change of city administrators, revenues for the coming year's budget have been underestimated by about \$45,000.

Last week the council members approved a budget which showed revenue from the one-half cent tax at only \$35,000. Conservative state figures now peg the city's share of the tax at more than \$80,000.

Because of an apparent lack of revenue and the need to give city employees a 5% raise, the councilmen, unaware of the discrepancy in the sales tax figures, ordered that the municipal ad valorem tax rate be hiked by one cent.

The money from the tax hike will generate about \$12,000 and will provide enough for the pay hike.

However, now that the city will get the \$45,000 windfall, which is equivalent to almost four cents in the ad valorem rate, a tax increase is no longer necessary. In fact taxes could be lowered in the city.

In last week's meeting, four of five councilmen spoke against a rate hike, and said they "wished" the city did not have to have an increase.

We encourage the city councilmen to take advantage of the windfall and to cut taxes.

After all, it is not everyday that a wish comes true.

Little future help in county budget

Unless members of the Hoke County Commission find a chest of money hidden in the sub-basement of the courthouse or stumble over some other financial treasure, it appears likely that taxpayers can look forward to an increase in ad valorem taxes for the coming fiscal year and perhaps for many future years.

The commissioners have been spending long hours trying to cut a recommended budget, which included a nine-cent rate hike, but the officials are having little success with making dramatic reductions.

To make matters worse, the \$5 million budget addresses primarily current spending needs and includes few proposals which would broaden the county's tax base and help curb future rate increases.

Here is the problem:

•Despite receiving more than \$400,000 from the state one-half cent sales tax last year, the county has still had to dip into its fund balance,

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or savings account, to meet the need for services. By reducing the fund balance, not only is less revenue earned from interest on the account, but the county is also in jeopardy of having to borrow money to meet obligations during the lean months before taxes are collected.

The fund balance must be built back up to a \$1 million level, county officials say. That takes more revenue.

•The Hoke County schools are in need of repair and expansion. A citizen's blue ribbon study committee has estimated that it will take \$6 million over the next 10 years to put the schools in acceptable physical shape. That takes more revenue.

•School personnel need pay increases and instructional programs need upgrading. The needs may take about \$150,000 more than last year.

•The cost of providing ambulance service is up about \$100,000.

•Hoke County Sheriff Dave Barrington believes his department needs to add five deputies to provide adequate protection to residents. County deputies also need a pay raise. Perhaps another \$100,000 will cover it.

•Other county employees also need a pay raise.

•The county's portion of the cost of social and health programs are on the rise.

•The costs of materials, equipment and utilities are increasing.

Hoke County needs more revenue, and that means an increase in ad valorem rates.

As this county tries to keep pace with the rest of North Carolina and the rest of the nation in the future, the demand for services will increase and the tax rate will go up unless more taxpayers are added to the local rolls.

If Hoke County is going to continue to be an affordable place to live, we need industries and we need more upper to middle income residents.

In this year's budget there is little more than a token allocation for industrial recruitment and no provision for planning and zoning which could make this county a more attractive place to live.

Members of the county commission often speak about the need to recruit industry, but they do little to get an effort going.

Perhaps the commissioners feel most county residents like things the way they are. After all, if Hoke County grows, life here will change.

Most residents may feel keeping the status quo in Hoke County is worth the price of paying annually increased ad valorem taxes, of maintaining the lowest per capita income in the state and holding on to a double-digit unemployment rate.

Hoke County residents may also feel that having to drive to neighboring counties for movies, bowling, cultural events, hospitals, a variety of restaurants, night spots and shopping is preferable to having to deal with those sorts of conveniences at home.

Perhaps the commissioners are right if they think county residents are not in a hurry for growth, but we doubt it.

Letters to the editor

Teacher's fate worries student

To the Editor:

I am a student at Upchurch Jr. High, and I am concerned about a teacher at our school, Mrs. Naomi Johnson.

I understand that this teacher is losing her job.

I really like this teacher, and I know that I am not alone.

She is nice, trustworthy, disciplines fairly and is a good friend, as well as a teacher.

I hope this letter will get some kids in her classes attention so they will write a letter also.

I hope this letter will help in some way or another.

Sincerely,
Kelli Vincent

Law allows cruelty to state's animals

To the Editor:

As your readers may be aware, lost and abandoned dogs and cats in North Carolina can be sent to a laboratory for research purposes under the state pound seizure law. Rep. Peggy Stamey who opposes this practice tells me that many counties have refused to comply with this voluntary law -- decisions which I applaud.

The citizens of North Carolina should know what is happening to these animals. The University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center recently conducted a study involving both dogs and cats.

In one experiment, 21 dogs were used, 12 of which were force-fed alcohol. All 21 dogs then received non-penetrating blows to the chest powerful enough to have killed 11 of the 12 "drunk" dogs.

Out of the nine dogs who were spared the alcohol, one died, however, it is clear that all of the dogs involved in this experiment suffered a great deal of pain having received blows of such deadly force. In a separate experiment, a group of 14 cats under the influence of alcohol became the vic-

tims of spine damage; twelve of these cats remained permanently paraplegic while all of the cats in a control group not receiving alcohol regained the ability to walk.

This is what happens to dogs and cats in North Carolina. Cats' spines are crushed and dogs are beaten to death without the benefit of anesthesia.

The reader may be asking why this research was conducted. The point was to prove that intoxicated persons suffer more damage in vehicular accidents than non-drinkers. But researchers had already determined this without subjecting animals to pain and suffering. Commendably, this information was gathered by studying actual reports of automobile accidents and the results were crystal clear -- don't mix alcohol and automobiles. I don't know why the researchers then decided to torture animals to further prove their point.

Furthermore, I am not sure of what use this information will be. We know not to drink and drive, but people still do. Therefore, the animals were tortured in vain.

Is this what the people of North Carolina want to happen to their lost and abandoned pets? Don't these animals deserve a better fate? I urge your readers to work with their elected officials to end abuses such as this and to completely prohibit the use of lost and abandoned dogs and cats in experimentation. We have done this in Massachusetts with the cooperation of the medical/research community. I hope it can be done in North Carolina.

Sincerely yours,
Aaron Medlock,
Executive Director
New England Anti-Vivisection Society

Armory Park is amusement park instead of a ball park

To the Editor:

Some of the citizens of Hoke County would like to ask a few

questions about the \$40,000 grant that was approved for a new ball park.

1. Is this ball park going to be run by the same people that run Armory Park?

2. Are the bathroom facilities going to be the same as they are at Armory Park?

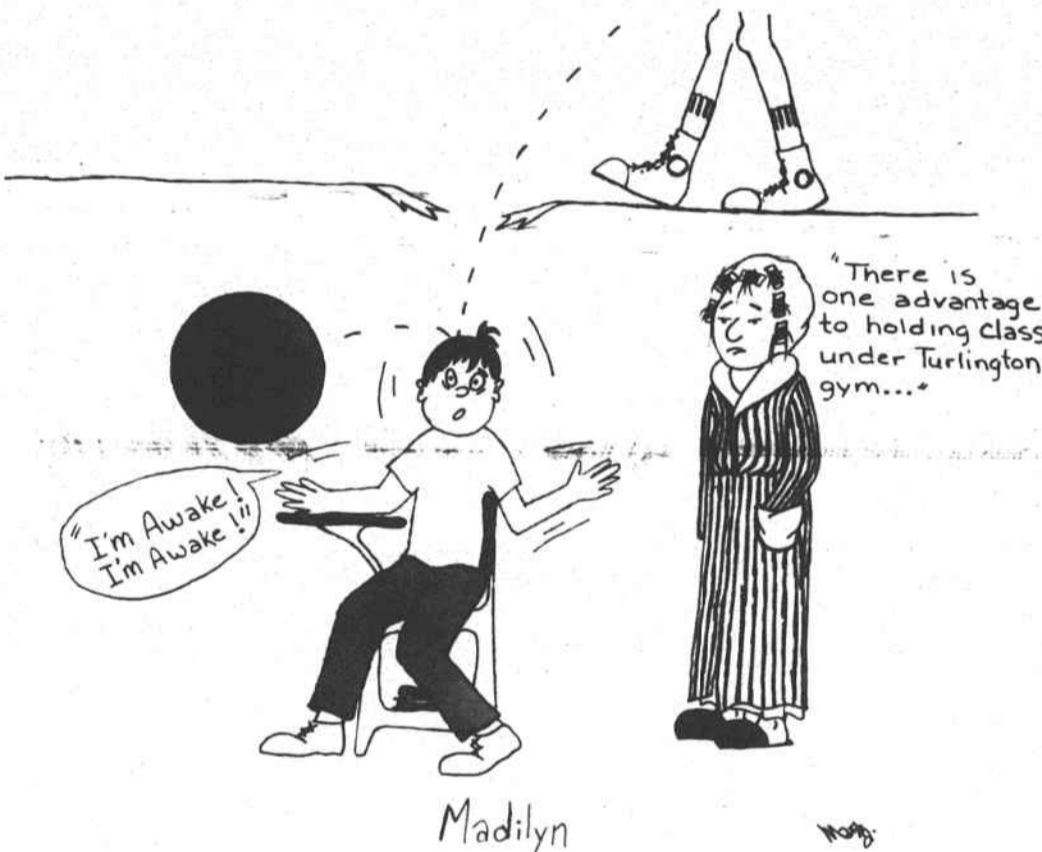
3. Are the bleachers going to be like they are at Armory Park?

4. Last but not least, are they going to allow break dancing, loud music, drinking of alcoholic beverages, fighting and all that profanity that they have at Armory Park?

If the answers to these questions are yes; then you're wasting hard earned money on an Amusement Park instead of a ball park.

I'd like to invite all the concerned citizens and their families to come out to Armory Park on Tuesday or Thursday night and see what you're missing.

Thank you,
Ronnie Taylor
(One of the many concerned citizens)



Madilyn

'Moment' can mean 'eternity'

By Lucien Coleman

In church last week, at the conclusion of the final hymn, the minister asked the congregation to be seated "for a moment."

Twenty minutes later, as we headed for the parking lot, it occurred to me that words like "moment" are handled pretty casually in our culture.

For instance, when a telephone receptionist says, "One moment please," this can preface a three-minute wait. Or when a restaurant hostess says, "Your waiter will be with you in a moment," experience tells you to multiply that estimate by 3.1416.

I work in an academic institution, where it is not uncommon for a student to interrupt a last-minute class with the inevitable

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question, "Got a moment?" I have learned that these unscheduled interviews take a moment only if my answer to the student's request is "Yes." "No" always requires more time.

But "just a moment" isn't the only language we should take with a grain of salt. Everyday communication is filled with instances in which people say what they don't really mean.

For example, you know those signs at the entrances of discount stores: "For your convenience, please leave your parcels with the security guard at the service counter."

You know, of course, that the company doesn't have your convenience in mind at all. Their real concern is to reduce the probability that you will steal something.

Airlines use the same ploy to keep you in your seat while the plane taxis to the terminal. "For your convenience and safety, please remain in your seat until we have come to a complete stop at the terminal." I can see how that might have something to do with the safety of passengers clumsy enough to lose their balance as the plane sways and lurches. But "convenience?" What would really be convenient would be getting my coat and carry-on bag out of the overhead compartment before arriving at the terminal.

Air conditioning beats summering at shopping mall

By Warren Johnston

"It's on," was all the voice on the other end of the telephone said.

The voice sounded remarkably like my wife's, but I wasn't sure. The telephone company might have gotten my called crossed with one being made by a master spy or someone about to pull off the world's biggest jewel heist.

"I'm getting the word that the CIA is about to launch a covert operation into the bowels of the Kremlin?" I rhetorically asked the voice on the other end.

"No. Don't be silly. It's the air conditioning. They just turned it on, and we're not going outside until at least January," the voice, which was now sounding much more like my wife, said.

"I was hoping that you were calling to tell me where I could pick up my cut from the great Crown Jewel Robbery," I said to the voice.

"Feel how cool this is," she said, as a sound much like the north wind whistling across the tundra roared through the receiver.

The Puppy Papers

"Come on home from the office. Calhoun and I are staying right here until cool weather starts again."

It wasn't the first time we had been exposed to air conditioning, but it was a first for our house.

Because of the high cost and my Scots heritage, we held off purchasing air conditioning last summer and tried oscillating fans to gain relief from the humid days.

There is little question that a lot of people live without air conditioning, but most of them were hanging out in the shopping mall with us during those 110° days last August.

"Hey, I suggest the shopping mall. You get to see a lot of people. It's cool, and they have nice fountains," I told a friend who was looking for a place to spend his summer vacation.

This summer, after we figured how much we spent on gasoline the previous year driving back and forth to the mall, it was clear that we would be better off with an air conditioned home.

Besides Calhoun and one of the cats were lobbying vigorously for the purchase of a summer place in the Yukon. As the recent temperatures soared into the 90's, I was beginning to see the wisdom of their argument.

"Air conditioning would be easier, and Calhoun wouldn't have to pull a sled," I told my wife.

It has been on about a week now. My wife and Calhoun are holding to their vow and have not left the house.

I'm considering additional night work to help cover the cost of operating the new cooling system.

But before I make a final decision, I plan to stay in our living room and wait for the first monthly electric bill to arrive. After all, in the heat of the summer, one should not move too quickly.

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