

Viewpoints

County commissioners allowing Hoke to slide

After last week's hatchet job on the recommended budget by the county commissioners, one has to wonder where Hoke County is heading and who is leading us there.

There is a movement afoot to make this county a better place to live. The Hoke County Commissioners need to get on board.

The narrow minded views expressed by the commissioners are clear indications of an unwillingness to move this county toward a fiscally sound future that could ultimately lower ad valorem taxes, create jobs and improve the quality of life.

If allowed to run its full course, the program supported by the commissioners can only lead Hoke County into the mire of financial chaos and eventual oblivion.

As long as this county continues to progress by improving its educational facilities, providing solid services and business opportunities for residents, then the ad valorem taxes should decrease as the tax base grows.

However, if the commissioners continue to maintain the status quo, then Hoke County residents can look forward to exorbitant ad valorem taxes, fewer jobs for unskilled residents, poorer services and welfare rolls which lead to bankruptcy. Hoke County will no longer exist and will be absorbed into those surrounding counties that will agree to take us.

To paraphrase Lewis Carroll from *Alice in Wonderland* the more we stay the same, the farther behind we will get.

Here are some facts:

•Neighboring Moore County is ranked seventh in the state in tourism. Last year travelers spent \$171.6 million there. Cumberland County is ranked ninth with \$131 million. The commissioners need to do more to coax some of the nearby dollars 20 miles further into Hoke County. The North Carolina Turkey Festival is a first step, which needs the enthusiastic support of the elected leaders. Attracting tourism needs to be a priority.

•This year Hoke County experienced over a \$4 million drop in the tax base, primarily because of industry inventory re-evaluations. Taxes have to be raised just to match last year's budget, not to meet inflation or to support needed programs, which would help attract new increases in the tax base.

•Moore County's \$17.5 million budget increased by 6.2%, but the tax rate stayed more than 20 cents below that of Hoke County, where the budget is \$6.47 million. Property taxes on a \$50,000 house in Moore County are about \$280 per year, while in Hoke County the charges on the same value of property would run over \$400. In addition to lower taxes Moore County has better school facilities, better services and a higher quality of life. Last year Moore County's tax base increased by \$106 million. In the game to get new residents, Hoke County is getting beat badly by Moore County in the late innings.

•Cumberland County passed an \$83 million budget this year, which included a 13% increase in funds for the newly merged school system, without raising taxes. Property tax rates in Cumberland at 85 cents are slightly higher than Hoke's, but that county has a reputation for better schools and better services.

•The population of Cumberland is predicted to double in the next 10 years. More demand from more people means higher land prices in Cumberland, higher rents and a higher cost of living. If Hoke County stays the same, we could become a magnet for those unable to pay their own way in Cumberland.

•Land prices are dramatically less in Hoke County than they are in Cumberland or Moore counties. With improved school facilities, a widened US Highway 401, direct telephone service with Fayetteville and a community college to train a labor force, Hoke County could attract new residents, businesses and industries. The tax base could increase. Taxes would not need to be raised to meet the demand for services.

•Because of our proximity to Cumberland and Moore counties, we are attractive to those who want to live in a comfortable and safe rural setting and who do not mind a short drive to work. The growth of this county is now occurring in the Rockfish area. However, judging from the bars covering doors and windows on new homes in that area, it is easy to see that we are gaining a reputation for our increasing daily rate of break-ins. County police protection is stretched to the limit. More effort and money needs to be put into the sheriff's department to increase protection so that new and old residents feel safe from the threat of a break-in.

Hoke County residents are paying higher taxes and getting less for their money than those living in the surrounding area. We are in a downhill slide, and the commissioners still have their feet on the accelerator.

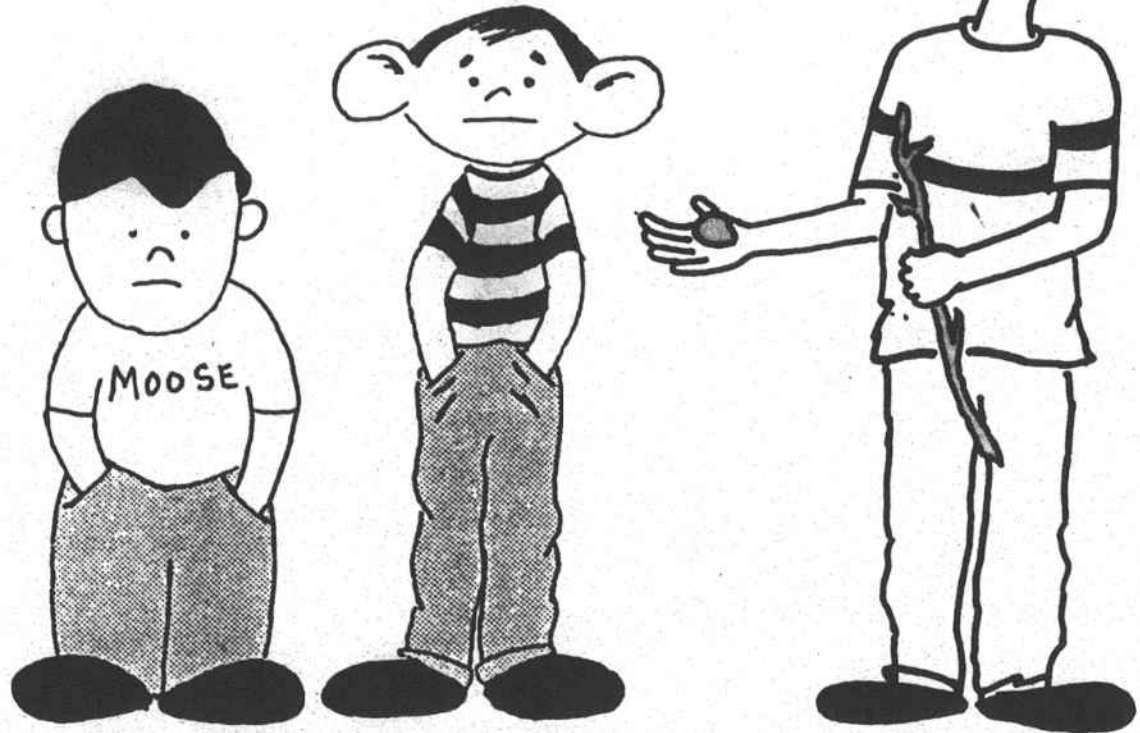
Hoke County is raising taxes to only pay bills. The county commissioners are not thinking about investing the tax dollars in the future, and we are falling dangerously behind.

The commissioners need to think about the future or to get out of office and make room for leaders who will.

On Thursday the commissioners may give final approval to the budget for the next fiscal year. We urge them to reconsider and to pass a financial plan that will move Hoke County forward. We urge the passage of the recommended seven-cent tax rate increase.

Hoke County is in a struggle for existence, whether the commissioners want to believe it or not.

I went over to Parks and Recreation to pick up the equipment for our ball-game, they gave me this rock and stick and told me to use my imagination...



CUTTING THE BUDGET

Tiny 'tike' becomes special person

Once upon a time there was a small tike named Maxine. She later became a Colston. A master teacher, quality Christian, loving mother and my tormentor.

I first became acquainted with this small energized bombshell when I took my first principalship in the town of Gaston in Northampton County.

Watching her grow into womanhood over the years has been one of the pleasures I enjoyed. Marrying Billy was a foregone conclusion. He courted her with a passion from the fifth grade until their wedding. He bought a new Ford when he worked with me in Montgomery County.

It lasted throughout his entire courtship and one child. So well trained was that Ford, it headed to E.C.U. each weekend. Billy slept half way and the Ford drove the rest and never missed a turn. One hundred and fifty miles later it

served as best vehicle at his wedding.

Maxine loved Billy through his high school years when he was struggling to play quarterback on the high school football team. I often told him he was the most unskilled quarterback I had ever known. He answered, that I was the poorest judge of talent that he had encountered.

This couple has been a consistency of compliments to each other's careers. She has mixed well with the world of athletics, computers and math. He in turn has stood behind her decision to stay home with their children when they were small, much to my dismay. I naturally wanted her in the classroom.

Their married life has been a model for young or older couples to emulate. She usually can get her way with Billy by using her built in sense of humor or just plain goodness. This holds true today



Looking On
Raz Autry

nearing forty (even though she want admit it) just as it did in their earlier married years.

Her enthusiasm was inherited from a gifted mother. Not many school principals are lucky enough to have two generations of master teachers from the same family. Age and time caught up with me, therefore, I will miss the third generation. Those who follow will see the best of Maxine and her mother in her two children. Billy did have a small part in this blessing.

Maxine brings to teaching what all administrators strive to instill in those with whom they work.

Knowledge, skill, enthusiasm and a burning desire for each child to excel, Maxine has them all. I have been a witness to this master teaching by observation and a guest speaker in her classroom. The expression in her students' eyes tell the story of one who places their academic well being and personal worth above all the rhetoric in education.

She brings to a community the qualities those who govern seek, love, concern, involvement and a belief in all people.

True Christianity shines through her eyes in church and in everyday life. Ministers delight in watching her message of devotion, dedication, commitment and a willingness to take on anything.

I have many adopted daughters I truly love. None stand taller than my eldest. To know her makes a bad day become good, unpleasant moments forgotten and the urge to do better a must.

One-car status sparks ride in comfort

Someone pulled me aside by the collar the other day and clued me in on acceptable car ownership behavior.

"It just is not done these days. If you don't do something about it, people will talk. You know how small towns are," someone whispered in my ear.

We had recently become a one-car family, and someone said the word was getting out.

For months we had driven only one car. I had been walking to work. I said it was for my health.

We told everyone our second car was being repaired in a far off city. Everyone believed us, because the story was true.

Last week it happened. A buyer came along. We sold our second car to him very quickly.

The word of the quick sale leaked out and came home to roost. Someone said people were beginning to notice.

"I don't want to get into your business, but people are beginning to say something about that roosting word near your house," someone whispered. "You need another car."

I told my wife, and we were off in a frantic search for additional transportation.

She found a "bargain" on financing at a dealership between Durham and Chapel Hill. They had the car she wanted and would finance it at 5.9%, my wife said.

We got up early on Saturday, ate a big breakfast and drove to the dealership.

During the hour-and-a-half trip we sang motoring songs, argued about paying for the new car and about who would get to drive it home from the dealership.

"We can sell rides around town to everyone we know for \$5. We'll pay for the car in no time," my wife said, pointing out that in the circles we travel, few had ridden in a new car in sometime.

"We have just the car for you and cheap, too," the friendly salesman said when we arrived at the dealership.



Warren Johnston
The Puppy Papers

"We haven't purchased a new car since 1969, and everyone in town is beginning to talk," we told the salesman.

The salesman was very sympathetic and told us he was used to dealing with families who had recently become one-carred.

"We see it everyday. It's nothing new to us," he said.

Before long we were driving all around Durham and Chapel Hill in air conditioned luxury. It was pretty nice. Everything we drove, I wanted to buy.

"Money is no object. We'll buy the top of the line," I said, remembering that in 1969 the best only cost \$5,000.

To my shock, the top of the line cost slightly more than our house where the word of our one carness had been roosting.

When we asked about financing at 5.9%, the dealer added several more thousand dollars to the price.

"We could buy two houses and an extra lot back home for that price," I told the salesman, and we stomped out of the dealership in a huff.

As we chugged along home in our 16-year-old non air conditioned car, we decided the trip was not a total loss.

Unlike a lot of people, we had gotten to drive around through a big city in a cool, comfortable car that cost more than our house.

"We'll be the envy of somebody back home," I said.

My wife agreed, and we decided that the next time somebody said something about our one-vehicle status, we would go looking for cars again.

There is a Rolls Royce dealership in Raleigh we have been eyeing for the next trip.

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