

Johnson Describes Concerns with School Facilities Funding Proposal

Kim McKinney
IREDELL CITIZEN

STEVE JOHNSON BEGAN THE MAY 4 Iredell County Commissioners' meeting by veering from the agenda and reading a prepared statement setting out concerns with the \$125-million school facilities funding proposal presented by Superintendent Terry Holliday and the Iredell County School Board.

"During the past 12 years \$202,949,718 has been spent renovating and constructing school buildings in the Iredell-Statesville School system," Johnson read. "Remember that figure when someone tells you that the commissioners have done nothing for the schools or when people complain about the condition of the school buildings."

Johnson then listed reasons why he and other commissioners feel the school board plan to be unworkable, first citing the use of faulty financial projections on the part of the school system. Johnson said the school system had hired an outside consultant unfamiliar with the county budget to help them in making projections instead of working with commissioners and county staff to generate figures.

The use of maintenance money to make payments for the planned changes also concerned Johnson. He said he feels existing facilities will deteriorate while dollars go toward bond repayment.

Johnson added that the plan takes the county's debt service to around 18.03%, higher than the 15% maximum recommended by the Local Government Commission (LGC).

"The county has other capital needs and a high debt ratio will hurt the county when we return to the bond market," Johnson said.

The biggest problem, according to Johnson, is that the LGC requires level "principal" payment rather than level payment. The school system's plan, he said, calls for an

amortization schedule based on level payment. Under the level principal payment required by the LGC, Johnson said, there is no surplus and there would, in fact, be a \$5.6 million deficit.

"This will result in a substantial tax increase," Johnson said, "This increase would come on top of last year's re-evaluation which more than doubled the property taxes of many working or retired folks."

In summary, Johnson called the plan "well intentioned, but unworkable." He pointed to the \$24 million worth of school projects underway today and said these were accomplished by cooperation between the commissioners and the school board. He added that the strategy for future projects would be based on "sound financial planning and realistic projections."

Back on the regular agenda, the commissioners considered a request from Mooresville resident Jackie Power to change the Residential Agricultural (RA) ordinance about permits for non-governmental sewage treatment plans.

The current ordinance requires that such facilities go through a public approval process, with mandatory notifications of neighbors, prior to locating in an area. However, the RA residential zoning district is exempt from the public approval process. Citizens living in RA zoned neighborhoods opposed to sewage treatment plants being located near them have little recourse except going to court.

Power and Michael Lindsay, a resident of Spring Acres, described their experiences of having such plants located near their neighborhoods without their prior knowledge. Power said that quick action on the part of commissioners was important since 17 applications for such water treatment facilities in Iredell County are pending at the state level.

Commissioners unanimously

approved the ordinance change to require a public approval process and mandatory notification of residents in RA zoned areas.

In other action, commissioners:

- Approved rezoning property at 1190 Brawley School Rd., Mooresville, to Neighborhood Business-Conditional Use (NB-CU). Conditions include putting a vegetative buffer around the property. Commissioners also approved rezoning property at 1352 Jennings Rd. to Community Business, Conditional Use (CBCU.) The property will be used for a gas station (existing), retail sales and auto sales.
- Approved amendments to the Airport Hazard Ordinance and Overlay Zone necessary for the new instrument landing system.
- Approved changing the upper roof of the new library from metal to TPO, saving \$11,000.
- Approved the 2004-05 county employee health plan with overall increased expenses of about eight percent. Coverage will continue with Blue Cross Blue Shield of NC and contributions will remain the same for dependent coverage. The county will pick up all employee coverage.
- Renewed Iredell Arts Council's lease for the old jail.
- Granted an easement at Scott's School to Public Service of NC for a gasoline pressure regulator.
- Transferred \$50,000 for the sewer line project at the new Department of Social Services Building.
- Approved purchasing transportation

billing and scheduling software locally.

- Approved Emergency Services Director Tracy Jackson's applying for an Urban Areas Security Initiative Sub-Grant and a Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness Grant.
- Denied the Sheriff's Department's request to reconsider granting Joe Moody credit for prior service with the Kannapolis Police Department for vacation accrual. Commissioners decided the current policy was not in effect when Moody was hired and similar requests had been denied in the past.
- Appointed Janet Hall to the Adult Care Community Advisory Committee, Don Kelly and Tom Moore to the Troutman Planning Board and Dottie Wilson and Bill Newell, Jr. to the Mooresville Library Board of Trustees. Vacancies remain on the Region F Aging Advisory Committee and the Adult Care Community Advisory Committee.

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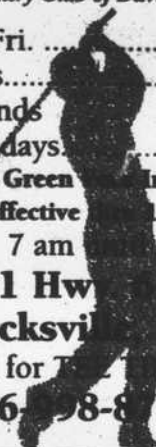


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