

Earl Nixon answers to the rural needs of Chowan County C1

Aces alumni recruited to play football for N.C. Wesleyan College B1

SBI asked to investigate Chowan County's current financial shortfall

By Bob Montgomery and Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

District Attorney Frank Parrish on Tuesday asked the State Bureau of Investigation to get to the bottom of an estimated \$4 million shortfall in Chowan County's budget.

"I have today requested the financial crimes unit of the

SBI to conduct a thorough inquiry into any possible criminal misconduct arising from the budgetary shortfall recently discovered in Chowan County," Parrish said.

"Our position will be, if there is substantial or sufficient evidence to warrant prosecution, we will then go forward."

No further details about the investigation were available

Tuesday night.

Meanwhile, several Chowan's commissioners are leaning toward an 8.5-cent realty tax hike to help make up the multi-million dollar shortfall in the current budget.

That would mean a \$170 tax increase on a \$200,000 home. Among other things, it would result in about 25 part or full-time staff cuts.

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The commissioners' remarks followed a meeting Monday attended by about 800 residents in which numerous speakers said

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TAX IMPACTS ON OWNER OF

\$200,000 HOME AND LOT

OPTION 1:

19 CENTS = \$380 INCREASE

OPTION 2:

8.5 CENTS = \$170 INCREASE

OPTION 3:

2.5 CENTS = \$50 INCREASE

OPTION 4:

0 CENTS

Firms sought for appraisals

Town manager seeks building sales to strengthen town's reserve

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

Town manager Anne-Marie Knighton is soliciting bids from appraisers on several of Edenton's landmark buildings.

If sold, the proceeds from the buildings' sale might bolster the town's reserve funds.

Last spring, Edenton's Mayor Roland Vaughn was searching for a way to bolster the town's reserves when he proposed the sales.

"He was really thinking outside of the box," Knighton said of the plan.

The idea was to put surplus property to use developing Edenton's waterfront and boost the town's financial security at the same time.

Knighton said the most unusual idea was to rent or "condominium-ize" the upper floor of Edenton's town hall, the former Bank of North Carolina building.

"The views up there are spectacular," Knighton said of the building's upper floor.

She said the property could work well as either an executive office space or as a private residence.

By making the upper floor a condominium, Knighton said the town could sell the second floor space, keep the bottom floor and bank the proceeds, boosting the reserve fund.

The idea will probably get renewed attention in light of Chowan County's financial problems after depleting its reserve fund.

The town government does have enough money in reserve to meet state mandated reserves, unlike the county. Vaughn's plan would strengthen them.

Also under consideration for sale are the Edenton Municipal building, former home of the police department and 911 Center, and the Edenton Partnership building located near Colonial Park.

Appraisals have not been in the budget so far, but Knighton said she is sending out requests for quotes from several firms this week.

RESIDENTS VOICE CONCERNS OVER LACK OF GOVERNANCE



Brett A. Clark/The Daily Advance

A near-capacity crowd showed up at Swain Auditorium Monday night to hear County Manager Peter Rascoe's four proposed options to get the county out of its current financial crisis. The public comment period continued for nearly an hour.

School board contemplates tight budget

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

A meeting Monday of the county board of education to discuss last minute budget developments turned out to be anything but routine.

As uncertainty over county finances put school budget plans in doubt, there was little for school officials to do but contemplate their options.

Annual school budgets are always a last-minute business for school boards across North Carolina as they tally the final state funding figures just as schools prepare to open.

But last week's abrupt disclosure that the county is in dire financial straits has thrown the

board's spending plans out the window.

Chowan's schools receive 19 percent of their funding from the county.

Superintendent Alan Smith said he has been in contact with county manager Peter Rascoe about what to expect.

"We understand the situation they are in," Smith said. "I'm sure the school system will be affected by the actions they will have to take."

Even now, Smith said he does not know exactly how much money is coming from the state for Edenton's schools.

Much of school funding comes in as line items in different bills passed or rejected by the legislature. He is still waiting to hear

the results on some of the spending initiatives.

For example, money for textbooks is down slightly while funds for vocational education are up. It's like that across the board as Smith tallies the results.

He said the good and bad news seems to be evening each other out, for the most part.

The state did add \$35 million for fuel expenses across North Carolina after having raised the specter of cuts in the face of rising diesel costs for school buses.

One sore point with teachers will be potential cuts in promised "ABC bonuses" for reaching goals in standardized testing results.

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Dino-Detectives search the Word at Bible school

Pastor Randy Browder says it takes faith to believe either account of world's creation

Photo and Story
By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

There's a really big, green lizard stretched out across Randy Browder's pulpit at Immanuel Baptist Church, and it won't leave.

He says it can stay there for now — his Bible school kids wouldn't have it any other way.

The papier-mache dinosaur, made from copies of the Chowan Herald, took two six-hour shifts of five workers each to build and paint.

It stretches the width of Immanuel Baptist Church's sanctuary.

The dinosaur represents the theme of this year's vacation Bi-

ble school, "Dino-Detectives." The program's slogan is "Digging for the Truth."

Kids and dinosaurs are a natural combination. The prehistoric creatures seem to hold a universal fascination for children.

But some might think dinosaurs a strange choice for Immanuel Baptist's Bible school theme.

Browder believes in a strict interpretation of the Genesis account of creation.

He does not believe in Darwin's theory of evolution.

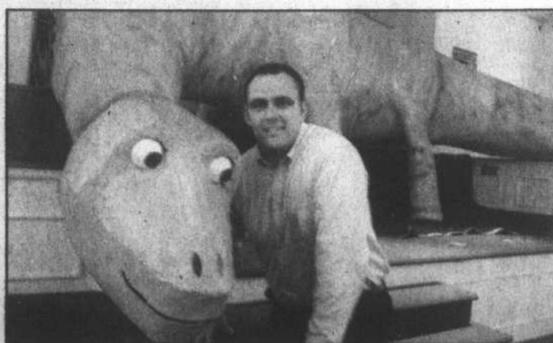
"God created the Earth in seven days," Browder said. "I believe God created dinosaurs, but I also believe the Earth is 6,000 to 10,000 years old."

Browder said he understands his beliefs might be at odds with others, but he said that it takes considerable faith to believe either account of the world's creation, biblical or Darwinian.

While he believes dinosaurs existed within the last 10 millennia, he also believes they died out shortly after the flood, being unable to survive changes in the Earth's environment.

For now, the 40-foot lizard isn't going anywhere. It's hard to argue with something that big.

The kids are duly impressed by its size, but Browder hopes his kids also learned some valuable lessons about searching for the truth.



Browder poses with Immanuel Baptist's Bible school mascot.

Edenton Commons delayed

Lowe's signing ensures project will go forward; shops expected to open 2010

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

Construction of Edenton Commons will be delayed for up to one year, until at least October 2009 due to the national economic slowdown.

Susan Pleasants, spokesperson for Wheeler Interests, said that Lowe's has signed a contract with the developer. So the project will definitely come to pass.

Wheeler Interests President, John Wheeler, said that Chowan County's financial crisis played no part in delaying the project, though it has come to his attention.

"If I were 10 feet underground, I couldn't miss it," he said.

"You guys are in a hornet's nest. This is going to be a hard one to overcome."

Developers originally hoped the shopping center would open in 2009. The first shops should open sometime in 2010, Wheeler, said.

National economy a factor

"The good news is that while Lowe's cut 100 projects (nationally), Edenton Commons is going forward," Pleasants said.

Wheeler also said the county's fiscal problems shouldn't hurt his efforts to sign other stores to the shopping center.

He said the project's delay was entirely about national economic conditions, adding that Lowe's decision to locate in Chowan County while canceling so many other projects showed considerable faith in the region's future.

Pleasants said there are no financial commitments from the cash-strapped county government that could cause any problems for the planned shopping center.

Wheeler said the project has asked for very little in the way of concessions or assistance from local government.

The delay was not a problem for the other stores already signed by Edenton Commons, Wheeler said.

He said most welcomed the delay in light of national economic conditions.

The shopping center, located on Virginia Road between Highway 17 and Albenarle Ford, is expected to create about 350 jobs once it is built and open.

In addition to Lowe's, Pleasants said, CVS, Peebles, Family Dollar, Ace Wire-less, and Subway have all made firm commitments to locate at Edenton Commons.

Pleasants acknowledged the search is still on for a grocery store anchor at the center. She said Farm Fresh is still a possibility for that slot.

Symbiotic relationship

Wheeler Interests is a firm with 30 active properties spread from New York to Florida and as far west as Texas.

Pleasants said 10 other sites are under development.

Citing her company's support of local civic activities like the Edenton Water and Music Festival and the county fair, Pleasants said she believes the shopping center will benefit the county without hurting

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