

A property tax chat with Radke

Tax administrator discusses process

From Staff Reports

Chowan County Tax Administrator Melissa Radke recently provided a primer on property taxes that may be helpful for folks getting letters in the mail and making plans.

Question: When are taxes due?

Answer: Taxes become due (on or around January 5th each year). Second Notices are sent out right after bills become delinquent (early January), Enforced collections begins; Intent to garnish wages letters are sent out in February, Wage garnishments are sent in March, Intent to Advertise letters are sent out in March, Advertisement occurs first

Wednesday in April, Intent to garnish Bank Account letters go out in March/April, Bank Garnishments are sent out April/May. We try to find any heirs to property as well as locating current employers or banks all year long; Debt Set-Off submitted to the state clearinghouse each December, letters of notification for this go out in November each year.

Q: Tell me a little bit about delinquent properties?

A: County's agreement with the Town of Edenton stipulates that any town properties must be at least one year delinquent prior to submittal to foreclosure attorney. We try to collect from these delinquent accounts up until they are submitted to our foreclosure attorney utilizing our

Delinquent Tax Collector, Ashley Eure. On top of these enforced collection measures we offer to put delinquent accounts on payment plans to help ease the tax burden and get delinquent accounts paid in full before submitting to foreclosure.

Q: How many parcels are affected?

A: Since October of 2016, Zacchaeus Legal Services of Trenton is our foreclosure attorney. Our first set of 75 parcels were sent to them in February 2017. We have sent a total of 6 assignments so far for a total of 308 parcels since we first began. One-hundred-forty of those 308 have been paid in full; one was pulled out due to bankruptcy filing. More than \$540,000 in delinquent tax revenue has

been collected on these previously uncollectible properties since this program began.

Q: How much is past due?

A: We currently still have 167 parcels in the foreclosure program with \$989,796.60 (currently) remaining delinquent from tax years 2008-2018. From that total, there is \$53,045.14 that is Town of Edenton tax revenue and \$936,751.46 that is Chowan County tax revenue. One-hundred-twenty-three of these 167 parcels are vacant land while 44 are improved parcels (meaning they have a house or building of some kind on them).

Eighty-nine parcels remain unfiled with the Clerk's office as of yet, meaning they haven't been started



RADKE

by our foreclosure attorney. 50 are currently in the personal service stage (stage 1 of foreclosure), 22 are in the final demand/pre-judgment stage (stage 3 of foreclosure), 6 are in the publica-

tion/judgment stage (stage 3 just before sale). Generally, the inhabited parcels end up paid prior to judgment. These account for the majority of the current 140 that are paid in full so far.

Q: What's the goal?

A: The end goal here is to get these properties that have been simply sitting uncollected back on the tax revenue books in the hands of county residents who will pay and do something with the properties. This will help ease the tax burden for the rest of the county taxpayers. Many of these properties are owned by heirs who do not live in Chowan County and many of which may not even realize the property exists. This can create many properties being left vacant to simply sit and deteriorate.

TEA

Continued from 1A

months recovering from her injury.

"But I cheered on my team, supporting them at every competition I could go to," she said.

Wood noted that during her sophomore year in college, she became an N.C. State cheerleader.

Afterward, she focused

on beauty pageants and competed in the Miss North Carolina pageant several times.

She said that during her time on the pageant scene, she learned a lot and trained in order to prepare herself.

She also made some friends, including the guest speaker of last year's "Tea for Two," Miss North Carolina Victoria Huggins.

While having a crown

is nice, it really doesn't mean a lot, Wood said. She told the girls to be true to themselves and work hard to achieve their dreams. Wood also encouraged them to help others by supporting them.

"Be a cheerleader for others when they are down," she said.

The purpose of "Tea for Two" is to empower all of White Oaks girls to be the best they can be.



NICOLE BOWMAN-LAYTON/CHOWAN HERALD

Meredith Wood, an assistant extension agent of 4-H Youth Development in Perquimans County, speaks about going after your dreams during "Tea for Two" on Monday at White Oak Elementary School.

CRIMEWATCH

Chowan County Sheriff's Office

Arrests

Jonathan Simmons, Sandy Terrace Drive, Edenton, was arrested March 8 and charged with driving while license revoked (non-impaired) and a warrant served for Watauga County.

Grettel Valdes, Happy Home Road, Tyner, was arrested March 10 and charged with driving while license revoked (non-impaired).

Incidents

Deputies responded to a call of a theft from a motor vehicle on March 5 on White Oak Drive.

Deputies responded to a call of first-degree trespass and possession of marijuana on March 9 on Okisco Trail.

Recycle this newspaper.

FUTURE

Continued from 1A

going to be what drives and motivates a timeline that is aggressive."

Burroughs asked the administration to take that all-important first step toward making a decision by seeking a demographic study.

Such reports can light the way by forecasting future population trends — you don't want to build a new school to house 800 students if demographics indicate a downward trend in population growth in rural North Carolina.

Browder said the BOE could do some things to take the initiative, such as pay for demographic and facility studies.

"Let's take it upon ourselves and handle it so that is done," he said. "I think we need to do that, because I believe that gives us skin in the game. It shows we have the initiative to make this thing take place."

BOE gave its blessing to seeking out a contractor within the next two months to begin the work needed to conduct a demographic study.

A new high school is estimated to cost in excess of \$44 million — an amount that may come from various combinations of funding sources if the policymakers pursue that path. Because current estimated costs are more than a few years old, experts who have spoken to the joint committee contend that future construction costs will most certainly be

higher.

To add into policymakers' stress of making the right decision, the emergence of charter schools in the region may take its toll on an already declining student population — numbers that directly affect the bottom line. And there is talk of perhaps the county building a new jail — a move that will affect the county's future financial decision-making.

The bulk of financing for any project will need the voters' approval of a local bond initiative, but as yet there doesn't seem to be any movement toward sooner rather than later.

"There didn't seem to be a lot of push to get this thing ready to put on the ballot in 2020," Browder said. "It's just my opinion, but it seemed like that we must be ready to reconceive the fact that we just couldn't do it, too much to get ready. We'd have to do it 2022."

Policymakers are waiting on a blueprint of bond regulations and financing from the North Carolina Local Government Commission.

Browder said recent meetings for the joint committee have reverted to discussing the same information that has been around for many years about new school building projects. He said rather than a 2020 time frame for action regarding a local bond initiative, the calendar dates for any such initiative appeared to be several years down the road unless the BOE took the lead.

"Honestly, when we left the meeting, we were at a place I believe where we

were not doing much of anything until 2022, with the possibility of starting school construction in 2024 or 2025," he said. "We as school board members spoke up and expressed our dissatisfaction with that. Obviously in order to fund a project of this size, there is probably going to need to be a bond referendum that is put on the ballot for the community possibly, unless funding comes from the state."

Burroughs added, "We can't wait a month here and there. You're right. I got the impression that 2020 is out of the picture — I don't think so. I think there is absolutely no reason why we can't have a referendum on the issue in 2020. You might as well just have to face that fact that we are going to have to have a referendum if we are going to do anything."

Jordan said his hope is that it will be possible to get the bond initiative on the ballot in 2020 and not have to wait until 2024.

"As Mr. Browder said, if we have to wait until 2024, how long will be before we actually start doing anything?" he asked. "We are going to continue to work. I'm still hopeful and that by working with commission-

ers who seem to really want to do this. We can make this happen."

Though school board members support a state bond initiative, they are in a see-it-to-believe frame of mind when it comes to funding from Raleigh.

"The governor talked about \$2 billion for new school construction, but we all know that's not going to happen because we know it will be less than that — a compromise somewhere between the powers that be. And even then, it has to be approved," Browder said.

Though \$10 million in state grant money is available, the school district is not in position to collect such funds until the shiny shovels come out to inaugurate any such project.

"We're not able to take advantage of some grant money out there now because we are not shovel ready," Browder said. "The truth of the matter is, we are leaving about \$10 million on the table that we could have access to if we had been more aggressive in our preparations to build a new school or renovating the school we have, whatever the decision is."

Browder said many things

can be done before any debt service is incurred.

"You don't start paying on the debt service until after the building is complete," he said. "If we hired an architect today, it would be year and a half before we ever put a shovel in the ground. And it would be another two years before it was ever completed. At best, if we go with the renovation model, it could be three years before it is ever finished. So we're talking four and a half years if we were to start today. And that's well within the debt payoff aspect of it before any payment would become due in the process."

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