

County does not need council's approval to seek occupancy tax

By **PHYLISS BOATWRIGHT**
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may not need the city's approval to introduce the bill in Raleigh.

Following a special meeting yesterday on Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding the city has received, Mayor Samuel Spencer told council members that he would like for them to hear from Councilman Ralph Clark regarding a conversation Clark had with Wilkins last weekend.

Clark told council members he was

disappointed that they couldn't "sit down together with the county and make things work" for the benefit of both bodies.

"We're the only city in the county," Clark said, "and we must be partners" with the county commissioners. "... it's time we sit down as a group, face to face, and try to mend relationships," Clark said before telling council members about his conversation with Wilkins.

Last week, Wilkins told *The Courier-Times* that he would have great difficulty getting the state House of Representatives to approve a bill that would allow the county to raise the hotel occupancy rate here by one percent if both city council and county commissioners were not in agreement on the matter.

At their last regular meeting, on

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Sam Spencer

SPRING HAS SPRUNG!



Carol Garrett / C-T

WORKING HARD — C-T employee Carol Garrett spotted this bee busy at work this weekend preparing to land on a grape hyacinth and do the task that bees do this time of year.

Solar energy expansion gains 3-2 nod from county commissioners

By **TIM CHANDLER**
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The Person Board of County Commissioners, by a 3-2 vote Monday morning, approved a special use permit request for a solar energy generator submitted by Carolina Solar Energy, LLC.

Two years ago, commissioners unanimously approved a similar request from Carolina Solar Energy to place a solar energy generator in the Person Indus-

trial Park near the intersection of U.S. 501 and Crown Craft Boulevard.

Commission Chairman Jimmy B. Clayton, along with Vice Chair Kyle Puryear and Commissioner Ray Jeffers voted in favor of the request, while Commissioners Sam Kennington and Frances Blalock voted against Puryear's substitute motion.

Kennington had earlier offered a motion to approve the request from Carolina Solar Energy with the addition of screening of the project "along the 501 corridor." Kennington said he would like the screening to be evergreens to the height of the fence.

"I feel like it is a minimum request to ask," Kennington said. He later referred to the deal proposed between the county and Carolina Solar Energy as a "sweetheart of a deal."

Stovall told *The Courier-Times* Tuesday that he took exception to that comment.

"If you look up the definition of 'sweetheart of a deal,' it reads that there is a presence of corruption," Stovall said. "This is a great deal for Person County."

Stovall said that, not only is Person County adding an additional \$5 million to its tax base by approving the request from Carolina Solar Energy, it is also saving between \$6,000 and \$7,200 annually on maintenance at the site, which was being done at a charge of "between \$500 and \$600."

The \$27,500 lease equates to an annual payment of \$1,100 and a monthly payment at close to \$92.

"It also opens the door for other economic opportunities," Stovall said.

In 2009, the estimated property tax that the county would receive annually for the initial investment by Carolina Solar Energy was \$4,500.

Puryear noted that the special use permit had gained unanimous approval from the Person County Planning Board.

Jeffers also pointed out that he was "not in favor of imposing any more" restraints to the request from Carolina Solar Energy. Jeffers said he did not view the current site as "unsightly."

With Monday's approval, Carolina Solar Energy will lease seven acres of a 50-plus acre parcel at the site off U.S. 501.

In March of 2009, commissioners granted a special use permit to Carolina Solar Energy for a four-acre site adjacent to the current proposed site.

Stovall said Monday that the terms of the deal with Carolina Solar Energy call for a 25-year property lease at a cost of \$27,500, which is the same as the

Roxboro's police, fire departments post impressive numbers

By **PHYLISS BOATWRIGHT**
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The Roxboro Fire Department's response time is lower than that of most departments in the area and the Roxboro Police Department saw fewer violent and property crimes last year.

During Monday's regular March meeting of city council, Fire Chief Kenneth Torain said his staff of 21 paid and 25 auxiliary/volunteer firefighters had a response time of 3.68 minutes to calls within the city and 9.74 minutes to county calls.

The Carrboro and Burlington Fire Departments' response time was 4.5 minutes; Cary firefighters averaged a time of 4.1 minutes; the Durham Fire Department had a time of 4.9 minutes, and Greensboro Fire Department's response time was 3.4 minutes.

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Person County's jobless rate rises to 11.3% in January

By **TIM CHANDLER**
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Unemployment rates increased in 99 of North Carolina's 100 counties in January and Person County was included in the majority.

According to numbers released Friday by the Employment Security Commission (ESC) of North Carolina, the jobless rate in Person County rose 1.4 percent in January to 11.3 percent.

The lone county not to see an unemployment increase in January was Washington County. That county's jobless rate remained the same at 11.6 percent.

"The January 2011 data reflected a decrease in 86 counties over the year," ESC Chairman Lynn R. Holmes said. "We continue to recognize that there are still challenges ahead of us as we continue to rebuild our local economies."

"North Carolina's workforce development partners continue to provide services focused on helping people get

back to work," Holmes added.

North Carolina had 37 counties that were at or below the state's unadjusted jobless rate of 10.5 percent in January.

In December, the state had 40 counties at or below the state's unadjusted unemployment rate of 9.7 percent.

Jobless rates increased in all 14 of the state's Metropolitan Statistical Areas in January.

The unemployment rate increase in Person County in January marked the third consecutive increase. The county had a jobless rate increase of 0.5 percent in December and an increase of 0.8 percent in November.

Total employment in Person County in January decreased from 17,129 in December to 16,543.

Person County's total labor force — the number of people available for work — decreased in January from 19,019 in December to 18,649.

The number of unemployed Personians increased by 216 persons in January to 2,106. The county had 1,890 unemployed persons in December.

For the third straight month, Orange County had the state's lowest jobless rate in January at 6.5 percent, which was up from 5.8 percent in December.

Also for the third month in a row, Graham County had the state's highest unemployment rate in January at 19.4 percent, which was up considerably from its jobless mark of 15.8 percent in December.

Twenty-three counties in the state had unemployment rates between 5.0 and 9.9 percent in January, which was down from 43 in that category in December.

Seventy-seven counties in the state had jobless marks higher than 10 percent in January, which was up from 57 in that category in December.

January unemployment rates for area counties follow, with their December rates shown in parentheses: Alamance, 10.8 percent (10.1); Caswell 11.3 (10.5); Durham 7.7 (7.1); Forsyth 9.8 (9.1); Franklin 10.3 (9.4); Granville 10.2 (9.6); Guilford 10.3 (10.1); Orange 6.5 (5.8); Vance 13.0 (12.5); Wake 8.0 (7.5); Warren 13.2 (11.7).



Steve Joyner

Steve Joyner named to NCVPS Advisory Board

By **GREY PENTECOST**
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Roxboro Community School Technology Guru Steve Joyner was recently appointed by the North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) to a two-year term on the North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) Advisory Board.

Joyner told *The Courier-Times* that the SBE was looking to diversify the advisory board by including people with different backgrounds, including

business. He said RCS teacher Melissa Bartlett, who is also a State Board member, sent in his resume.

Joyner believes his previous experience in the private sector and as mayor of Roxboro helped him get the appointment, along with the fact that he works at a charter school, and is the only charter school representative on the board.

The board governs and advises the NCVPS, a program that allows students to take courses online.

On Feb. 22 Joyner participated in his first meeting with the board. The board

met virtually and discussed matters such as the budget and revision of the by-laws.

"For the first meeting as far as I was concerned," said Joyner, "it was just an opportunity to meet the folks and understand what my role is, which we're working on."

He said the new members are also being asked to consider what subcommittees they may be interested in.

Joyner said he would probably be most useful on the technology committee.

Through his involvement Joyner said he hopes to be able to bring requests from RCS and Person County Schools before the board.

Since NCVPS offers courses to students that schools may not be able to afford to offer in house, Joyner said it helps in tailoring a student's education to meet his or her specific needs, which is preferred over a "one size fits all" approach.

"It's an efficient way of educating," he said, "and that's what [RCS is] about."