

# THE NEWS RECORD

SERVING THE PEOPLE OF MADISON COUNTY

On the Inside . . .

Marshall Fireman Warn  
Of Rail Accidents

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## Commissioners Face Budget Squeeze

# Road Fund, Ambulance Cuts Discussed At Board Meeting

At the regular county board meeting last Friday night, concerns were divided between how to use this year's secondary road improvement money and how to pay next year's bills.

Several groups from different areas of the county came to plead for a share of the \$533,948 in road funds that will be passed along to the county from the state in fiscal 1980-81.

And several county agencies heads warned of increased budget needs for the coming year. In all cases these increases are to pay for higher costs and an across-the-board salary increase of 10 percent — not for expanded programs.

The most immediate crisis confronting the commissioners is the loss of CETA funds that are being used to pay seven of the county's 18 ambulance drivers. Finance officer David Caldwell told the board that paying for all the salaries would cost the county about \$200,000 a year — roughly 20 percent of all the county's tax revenues.

The commissioners agreed to discuss various options immediately with Emergency Services Director Ernest Snelson. One possibility mentioned was a return to five-day-a-week service on a full-time basis and volunteer service on weekends. All agreed that it now seems impossible for the county to shoulder the entire bill for full-time county-wide emergency medical service.

Other witnesses who came before the board included citizens' groups requesting road work in their areas.

The largest group — some 30 persons — came from the Rice Cove-Sodom Laurel section, requesting that the money be used to pave Road 1334. "We've made several efforts to get this road paved," said Quentin Ramsey, speaking for the group, "and we'd like to ask again, that if there is any possible way to get it paved it would benefit all these people in the room here and a lot more who use it to get to work and school." The group left a petition with four pages of signatures.

Another request was made by Carl Ed Woody and by Zeno Ponder, who spoke on his behalf, to replace two bridges on East Fork Road they said are too narrow to accommodate a 12-foot-wide mobile home. "There are a lot of people on the upper end of the creek who can't afford anything but temporary housing," said Ponder, "but they can't get a temporary house up there. I would hope you would take whatever steps are necessary to allow these people relief." County Attorney Larry Leake sug-

gested that a fund exists in Raleigh to upgrade just such bridges and a resolution was passed to investigate such funding.

Ponder also requested improvement for the sharp curve where the road to Paw Paw turns right from Anderson Branch.

A group of four men, also supported by Ponder, asked that the money be spent to pave the Colvin Creek Road. Oscar Boles asserted that everyone on the road wanted the job done and was willing to sign a right-of-way waiver. In addition, Howard Payne, supported by Jackie Ball, requested that Anderson Branch Road be paved. The entire three miles of Anderson

Branch are now number 5 on the priority list; Payne requested paving of just one mile.

Colvin Creek is presently first on the priority list of the Department of Transportation; if this list were followed strictly the money would go

there. However, the commissioners said they had not yet decided where to spend the money. They did point out that paving costs are so high today — about \$100,000 per mile in the mountains — that the money would more likely be spent on several projects to

improve but not to pave roads in particularly bad condition.

In other business, Day Care director Teresa Zimmerman told the commissioners that the new senior citizens' facility adjacent to the day care center on Long Branch Road

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## County Has 'Green Thumb' At Winning HUD Grants

When it comes to landing large government grants to improve living conditions, Madison County has the bureaucratic equivalent of a green thumb.

There was little in last week's announcement of three community development grants to indicate how difficult they are to get, and how fortunate the county is to secure

as many as it did.

But consider this: in the entire state of North Carolina, only four single-purpose grants were awarded this year by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and Madison County got two of them.

A single-purpose grant means a grant that is used only for one purpose, such as road repair, housing rehabilitation or sewer installation.

And consider this: In North Carolina, only four comprehensive grants were awarded this year. Madison County got one.

A comprehensive grant is one that is used for a thorough upgrading of a neighborhood, including funds for all categories of needed repairs. (A second comprehensive grant went to Black Mountain, which is in the same administrative area as Madison County, Region B).

The first and largest grant goes to the town of Marshall, to the Rollins neighborhood upriver of town and adjacent areas up Hayes Run. A total of 146 persons will be affected, 93 percent of whom have low and moderate incomes. Some 88 percent of the dwellings where these people live are judged substandard, and four of them are vacant and due for demolition. HUD has put up \$804,200 to fix up the substandard buildings and tear down the rest.

Of the 46 buildings to be rehabilitated, 24 are occupied by the owners and 22 are rented from others. In order to insure that the owners of the rental units don't raise the rents or sell the houses right after they are improved, the town of Marshall will set strict rules on rental and resale policy.

"To some extent, owners will benefit from this project," says Becky Williams of Region B of the Land-of-Sky Council. "But HUD looks at the people who live in the houses as the beneficiaries. The agency thinks it isn't fair to overlook them just because they can't afford to own their own houses. And there are costs to the owners; in some

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DIVIDING UP THE SPOILS is part of an Easter morning for these children, who have just finished an energetic egg hunt at the Skemp's mountainside farm high above Anderson Branch. The

(Photo by Rob Amberg)

parents divided their time between barnyard basketball, making mountain music and keeping eggs and children from rolling down the hillside.

## County-Wide Clean-Up Is Set For Apr. 14-20

April 14-20 is Community Development Week, and county organizers are intensifying their month-long campaign to clean up litter from the roadsides and stream banks. The Department of Transportation has been spearheading the clean-up effort for the past week, using highway crews and trucks to clean the highways.

Others to be involved in the effort include the county landfill operation, the Agricultural Extension Office, the county health department, the highway department, law enforcement personnel, churches and schools.

The county landfill office phone number is 649-2311. Any community needing extra trash removal during this special month can call and receive instructions for extra service.

Students are also a vital part of this community effort. The Department of Public Instruction has sent suggestions to each school principal, encouraging them to involve their students in local clean-up campaigns and educational programs.

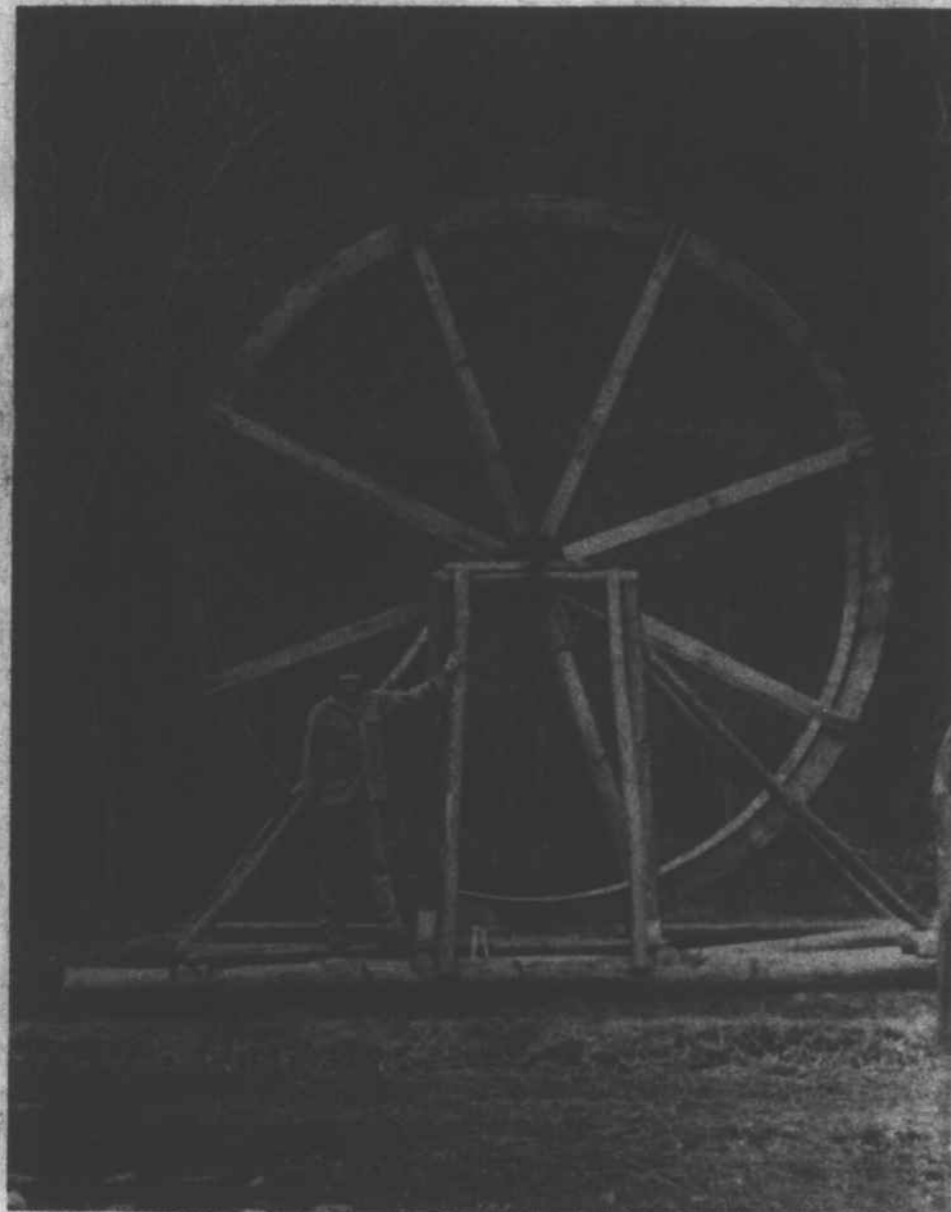
When the snows of winter melted, we saw just how much litter each of us has created during the past few months. "Ugly" was everywhere. Now is the time to retrieve our trash and heave it into the green boxes and landfill.

County Community

Development organizers also remind county residents that littering — at any time of year — is a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of up to \$200 and 30 days in jail.



WALNUT CREEK LITTER is typical of many of the county's roadsides and stream-banks. Citizens are urged to make April a big clean-up month — now that we can see what winter has left behind.



(Photo by Kevin Morley)

LARRY MCCALL of Lower Shut-In, near Hot Springs, stands proudly by his home-made water wheel. Larry built the wheel from 400 square feet of white pine, shaping the braces and sections by hand with adze and draw knife. Working from only a simple sketch McCall constructed the wheel around a seven-foot-long shaft that formerly turned in the Teague Mill in Marshall. The

Shut-In wheel is 14 feet in diameter and will turn on ball bearings. Larry says that building the wheel was the easy part; now he must move it some four miles to its permanent site at his farm in Upper Shut-In. For that task Larry has set the wheel on giant skids. When in place it will provide mechanical and electrical energy as well as the tranquil sight of simple efficiency.

# Federal Budget Cuts Could Strike Deep Within The County

At the county Board of Commissioners meeting Friday night, it became apparent that inflation and cutbacks in federal funding are putting a painful squeeze on Madison County during these budget-planning months.

On one hand, the current inflation rate of 18 percent guarantees that the cost of running the county will go up this year.

At the same time, the reduc-

ed spending by Washington on social programs is certain to reduce the amount of money available to meet those costs.

For example, one of the hardest decisions the commissioners must make regards the ambulance drivers working in the county — six each at Hot Springs, Marshall and Mars Hill. Seven of these workers are now paid out of CETA funds — funds that will no longer be available after June. The coun-

ty must either find some other way to pay for these positions, or modify the ambulance service.

To pay for the entire ambulance service would cost Madison County about \$100,000 more than it is spending now. This figure is about 10 percent of the county's entire tax revenues last year.

One way to fund this service would be to raise taxes by 10 cents on every dollar. But many other county services are

also becoming more expensive. The budget of the health department, for example, will probably rise by some \$20,000.

Likewise, the landfill operation, which had the benefit of CETA salaries for three months last year, will rise by about \$20,000. The day care and senior meal site budget may up \$40,000. The biggest increase of all, however, may come from the Board of Education, whose salary load could go up by as

much as \$250,000.

One of the ironies of government funding is that while the commissioners face the unpleasant prospect of raising taxes to pay for a larger share of the county's services, the county has just received approval of federal HUD grants totalling \$1.63 million — more than the entire county's share of the budget last year. While these grants have brought us a relatively large amount of

money for rehabilitating older homes in several areas, we are hurting for money to meet the regular county expenses. We are grant-rich and dollar-poor.

And it is not easy to cut regular expenses. Approximately 99 percent of the county's budget goes to pay county salaries — teachers, health workers, social workers, clerks and so on. To cut the county budget is usually the same thing as firing county workers.