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Board Readies For New Budget

Budget Woes Aired At School Board Meeting

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK
Editor

With just 10 weeks of school remaining in this year, school superintendent R.L. Edwards still has school budget woes, as evidenced at the board of education meeting last week.

Edwards read a notice from the State Board of Education which contained predictions of much higher operating costs to local school units for the next fiscal year. For example, Raleigh school officials are predicting the price per gallon gasoline for school buses to be as high as \$1.50 or more by 1982.

Edwards shifted the blame of some of the budget problems to the county commissioners by pointing out the commissioners fell short of giving the school board what it requested for 1980-81 by \$152,969. "If we hadn't had the carry-over money (some \$154,000) to do what we felt the children of Madison County should have..." Edwards said, indicating the

school system barely made it through this year.

"Now who's going to have to set the education pattern, the board of education, or are the county commissioners going to say 'Now here's an amount of money, you educate on that amount of money?'" Edwards asked the board members.

"This is the problem I have," Edwards added. "Now if the board of education wants to get involved item by item (with the budget), we'll have a workshop. If you suggest I go ahead and work up a budget and we go through it item by item, then we'll do that."

Board members commented and nodded in agreement that they preferred Edwards to prepare the budget for fiscal year 1981-82 and present it to them for their approval or disapproval.

North Carolina law requires that local school budgets, together with a budget message, be submitted to the board of education not later than May 1. "The budget and budget message should, but

need not, be submitted at a formal meeting of the board. The budget message should contain a concise explanation of the educational goals fixed by the budget for the budget year, should set forth the reasons for stated changes from the previous year in program goals, programs, and appropriation levels, and should explain any major changes in educational or fiscal policy," the law states.

In an additional effort to point out the school system's financial needs, Edwards said that Madison High School is worth \$4 million on today's market, and he emphasized the county commissioners only granted the board \$25,000 in capital outlay funds to maintain capital improvements at all seven of the county's schools. Board member Ed Gentry stated it costs 10 percent of the current value of any building in order to maintain it, if that building is used on a daily basis as are the schools.

In other matters at the

school board's March meeting, the board:

- Heard from architect J. Bertram King that an Energy Technical Assistance report had been sent to Raleigh on Feb. 20, and another report is to be sent on April 15. The reports are a preliminary step in seeking a federal grant to formulate energy conservation measures for the county's schools. According to King, the grant would require 50 percent matching funds provided by the board of education.

- Adopted a new school bus driver salary schedule which allows bus drivers to be paid \$3.50 per hour. The new pay scale became effective March 1.

- Approved the school calendar for 1981-82 as submitted by the school principals. The calendar reflects the same dates as the 1979-80 calendar. Edwards commented that the "principals said this calendar is what the teachers want."

- Received an invitation to attend a School Board

Association meeting in Asheville on Tuesday, March 17. All members of the board indicated their intentions of attending with Mr. Edwards, along with Dr. Bobby Jean Rice, supervisor of county schools, and Owen Fish, director of the Title I program.

- Passed a motion to purchase a new car for R.L. Edwards. The superintendent's present vehicle has logged 90,000 miles, and it will be transferred to David Wyatt, principal of Madison High.

- Retired to executive session to hear recommendations from the school system's seven principals on the rehiring of tenured teachers for 1981-82. The board approved the rehiring of 24 regular, tenured teachers at Madison High; 33 at Mars Hill Elementary, 15 at Marshall, 9 at Laurel, 3 at Walnut, 5 at Hot Springs, and 4 at Spring Creek. The board also approved the rehiring of 15 vocational teachers at Madison High.

- Approved the rehiring of all seven principals for the 1981-82 year. They are: David



Commissioner Virginia Anderson, Supt. R.L. Edwards

Wyatt, Madison High School; Jerry Plemmons, Spring Creek; J.C. Wallin, Hot Springs; Sidney Harrison, Walnut; Frederick Anderson,

Mars Hill; and Vernon matter involving a teacher at Hot Springs School. The board took no action on the matter when it returned to regular session.

Commissioners Praise New Fire Department

In the shortest meeting this year — one hour — the Madison County Board of Commissioners whizzed through routine business last night in what seemed like an effort to join other county residents in watching the ACC basketball tournament.

Stan McElroy, newly elected chief of the West Madison Volunteer Fire Department, presented a petition to the board requesting their support of the recently formed department under N.C. General Statute 55-A.

Commission chairman James Ledford praised McElroy and the people involved in establishing the fire unit, and commissioner Virginia Anderson read a resolution commending the citizens for their efforts. The three member board unanimously passed the resolution.

McElroy also asked the commissioners if the department could use the services of county attorney Larry Leake to help the unit draw up bylaws and state and federal tax exemptions charters. Leake agreed to help, and the commissioners approved his services.

In another matter, the commissioners heard a proposal from Hank Holmes of Hot Springs to provide cable television to the outlying areas of Madison County through the services of Univamp of Johnson City, Tenn. Holmes asked if a county franchise would be necessary for Univamp to begin operations here, and Leake said that it is the custom in most counties. The board took no action on the matter, but indicated an interest in the proposal. Univamp uses satellite and airwaves communications, and could possibly offer Home Box Office service, according to Holmes.

In other action, the board of commissioners:

- Signed an agreement with the towns of Marshall and Mars Hill to implement a feasibility study for expansion of the Mars Hill watershed to include a water system that would serve both towns and parts of the county.

- Heard a report from school superintendent R.L. Edwards clarifying the sources of the school board's \$147,234 carry-over for fiscal year 1979-80. Edwards explained the sub funds reported in the school board audit and

pointed out that CETA employees given to the school system by the commissioners had enabled him to save some \$40,000 to \$60,000.

"So I want the commissioners to understand that there is nothing wrong concerning the audit. It is the problem in communication in the question which is being asked," Edwards said, referring to recent reports in The News-Record.

"There has been a certain paper giving out information, which I have documents for our attorney to review, that are false and inaccurate," Edwards stated.

Edwards told the commissioners that he will be presenting a budget to the board of education at its next meeting, and said, "I hope that this will help you in seeing that we are being as conservative and yet trying to meet the needs of our students as best we can."

- After a five minute executive session, recommended the employment of Richard Miller for the 4-D Child Support Enforcement program in Yancey County, and authorized Leake to prepare a release for the county's recreation property to the town of Marshall.



Photo by N. Hancock

CIRCLES are formed by the 9 foot diameter steel casings that will be used to construct the supporting piers of the new Southern Railway bridge over the French Broad

River south of Marshall at the Ivy River. The casings were spotted at along the bank of the French Broad near the construction site of the new bridge.

Council Gets Stonewalled

By SCOTT FITZGERALD

The Mars Hill Town Council received some disheartening news at its last session. The council was hoping to hear that the approval for government grants had been given to their sewer and water project planned for the Mars Hill Community, but their hopes were not fulfilled because the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) did not pass approval.

The \$3.5 million project which will provide water and sewer service through an intricate system and treatment facility, will be funded through grants amounting to over \$2 million. The project, which had already received state approval in December, was stonewalled by the EPA. The EPA stated they had approved the system's design and technical aspects, but they said they were displeased with the financial goals and figures involved in its construction.

Mayor Bill Powell said the council wanted to build the system in phases so it would be financially safe for the town. "...But the EPA wants to have a guarantee that the town will complete its end of the bargain if the EPA gives grant monies."

The council and members of the community present were very upset at the EPA's stalling of the project. Mars Hill College President, Dr. Fred Bentley was displeased because he had received word from the state that the council was "dragging their feet." "I didn't know what to think when a government agency asks for a push through of a project when that same agency will not pass approval on the very same project," said Dr. Bentley.

Consequently, the council has found itself between a rock and hard place. The EPA's delay causes the council to react with patience but the project is costing more and more everyday due to rising inflation and an unstable economy.

The EPA's delays were not the only problems the council had to face at the March meeting. Police Chief Willard Ammons, who was recovering from a heart attack, suffered a relapse and will not be back for several weeks. The aldermen interviewed several applicants for part-time positions to serve in the chief's absence.

They also had to deal with rising costs in the purchase of a new fire truck. The purchase cost of a new truck will be over \$80,000, and the biggest shocker of all, a truck that will be able to fight fires in the college dormitories will cost over \$250,000. The council will have to bear more discussion on the purchasing of town utility vehicles.

Commission Could Be Eliminated By Summer

Madison Officials Await ARC Budget Decision

FROM STAFF AND AP REPORTS

Marshall Mayor Lawrence Ponder is holding his breath waiting to see what happens, and other town and county officials in Madison County are apprehensive over the fate of the Appalachian Regional Commission, a 16-year-old agency that has been praised by the Reagan administration, but may totally fall under the budget as early as this spring or summer.

Sara Yount is the ARC state coordinator in North Carolina, and for six years she had millions of federal dollars to help hundreds of mountain families in 29 western North Carolina counties.

But all federal ARC money

is frozen now, and the proposed cancellation of the fiscal year 1981 monies would eliminate \$7 million of ARC funds for some 47 projects in the 29 N.C. Appalachian counties.

The federal Office of Management and Budget director, David Stockman, proposes an immediate termination of the ARC and all of its programs except highway expenditures. The highway programs would be transferred to the federal Department of Transportation.

An OMB official in Washington, who studied ARC for Reagan's proposed \$41.4 billion federal budget cut, said, "The specific programs have been beneficial to the

states. But there is a good chance ARC could be terminated just given everything else that's going on here."

If Congress approves the cut, programs in North Carolina and 12 other Eastern states will lose money for 706 planned projects, ranging from creation of 65 day care centers to installation of miles of water and sewer pipes. Nearly \$214 million in ARC highway money would be shifted to the Department of Transportation.

Specifically, Madison County stands to lose \$200,000 for the rehabilitation of the Capstone Dam in Marshall, a project which would serve the electrical power needs of 15 percent of the county's popula-

tion. Another \$223,000 for a sewer extension to the county's industrial park would be lost. And, another \$200,000 for the construction of the Hot Springs Community Health Center will be gone if the 1981 funds do not remain available.

Mayor Ponder, county commission chairman James Ledford and Mars Hill mayor Bill Powell attended a meeting in February with 11th District Congressman Bill Hendon in Asheville to show their support for ARC and other federal programs. Hendon had called the meeting with elected officials from Region B (Madison, Buncombe, Henderson and Transylvania counties) in order to determine what programs were

worthy of his support, according to Ponder.

Ponder said the conversation centered around the ARC, and Rep. Hendon indicated to his Asheville audience that he would be in support of continuing ARC funding. However, contacted later in his Washington office, Hendon said he would have to consider what is best for the country.

Ponder said he considers the ARC "one of the most efficient" federal programs going, pointing out that "an investment of \$223,000 to produce a \$10 million annual payroll" is not a bad deal. Mayor Ponder referred to the sewer extension to the county's industrial park helping to obtain industry such as the

proposed American Greeting Corporation plant.

The ARC was created to help Appalachian communities take advantage of matching grants from other federal agencies. Incapable of floating bond issues to pay their share of the development projects, mountain communities relied on ARC to pay the local matching money for them.

Whatever the tenuous fate of the ARC, one can rest assured that ARC officials attending their annual conference in Washington this week will be speaking nervously and trying to settle uneasy stomachs as they wait to see how hard the Reagan administration's budget will fall.