

Madison and North Buncombe's high school varsity basketball teams are in the middle of their seasons.
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BILL STUDENC PHOTO

Asheville Mayor Louis Bissette, left, and Dr. Otis Duck of Mars Hill announce the formation of a regional group that will lobby for the creation of an interstate highway on the route of U.S. 23 through Madison County.

Regional Group Calls For I-26 Extension

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

ASHEVILLE - Representatives from all over Western North Carolina have joined forces in a regional effort to convince state and federal highway officials to convert U.S. 23 into an interstate highway.

The newly formed Interstate 26 Corridor Association held a press conference Tuesday to announce strategies to lobby for improvements to U.S. 23 north of Mars Hill.

"This association is being formed to expedite improvements to U.S. 23 from Mars Hill to the Tennessee line, which would significantly upgrade the route from Asheville to Johnson City (Tenn.)," said Asheville Mayor Louis Bissette, co-chairman of the association.

"We don't believe there is another project we know about in Western North Carolina that could have the economic impact on the region that the I-26/I-181 corridor would have," said Dr. H.F. Robinson, chancellor

"There will be a tremendous impact, we feel, in Madison County from tourism increase once the highway is complete."

Dr. H.F. Robinson
I-26 Association Co-chairman

emeritus of Western Carolina University and association co-chairman.

The N.C. Board of Transportation, in its Transportation Improvement Program announced last year, pushed the upgrading of U.S. 23 higher on its list of road projects planned for the next decade. But the plan only calls for the beginning of planning in 1993 and right-of-way acquisition in 1995. The state currently has no money allocated for the right-of-way acquisition.

The I-26 Corridor Association says that's not soon enough. Tennessee is proceeding with plans to widen a 15-mile two-lane section of U.S. 23 from Erwin to the North Carolina line.

When that work is completed by 1992, a four-lane, interstate-quality highway will end at Madison County, association members said.

"It is important that North Carolina get on the ball and complete a span of 11 miles from Mars Hill to the Tennessee line at approximately the same time Tennessee completes their section from Erwin to the North Carolina line," said association vice chairman Dr. Otis Duck of Mars Hill.

Duck called the new organization "the coalition to bridge the gap - Sams Gap, that is."

"The problem is we'll have a four-lane interstate ending there at the

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Efforts To Save Bridge Fail; Park Still Possible

By BILL STUDENC
and YVETTE WESSEL

Efforts to save the old Hedmon bridge near Marshall have failed, as contractors working for the N.C. Department of Transportation removed most of the bridge last week.

But Frank Roberts, a member of Madison County's Historical Structures Committee, is still working to create a county riverfront park at the site of the bridge.

Roberts, a Marshall real estate agent, attempted to beat the clock last week, seeking a judicial order that would have halted the demolition of the bridge. Roberts also filed a legal complaint seeking to prevent the demolition of the bridge.

But Superior Court Judge C. Walter Allen refused last Wednesday to

grant a temporary restraining order. Roberts had hoped that the bridge, built in 1916, could serve as the cornerstone of a proposed park at Hedmon. Although the bridge is all but gone (only two spans remain), he is still working to obtain approval of a park at the site.

Roberts spoke Monday night to the Madison County Board of Commissioners about plans for the park. His proposal calls for the creation of an observation deck/fishing pier with the remaining spans of the bridge, a park area with picnic tables and grills, and ample parking space. The park will provide access to the French Broad River for canoers and rafters.

He called the stretch of river one of the safest sections in which canoes and inner tubes can be launched.

He also said displays are planned that would highlight the historical significance of the river, the railroad and the old Asheville-Buncombe

Turnpike used to drive livestock from Tennessee to Asheville.

Roberts asked commissioners Monday for \$5,000-\$10,000 in "temporary

funds" from the county's treasury for the park project.

The funds would be paid back later from the General Assembly, Roberts

said. House Speaker Liston B. Ramsey has agreed to request during the summer "short session" the \$15,000 in initial start-up cost of the park and \$7,000 needed annually for security and other costs, he said.

But commissioners said they could not commit county funds without a written promise from the legislature.

"Appropriating money in anticipation of money puts us in a bind," said Commissioner Reese Steen.

Roberts Capps, chairman of the commissioners, told Roberts that he had not heard anyone express support for the park.

But Roberts showed commissioners petitions containing the names of 250 signatures of residents in support of the project.

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Schools Consider Policy On AIDS

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

The Madison County Board of Education is considering the adoption of a policy regulating students and school employees with communicable diseases -- including AIDS.

Joan Castellote, Madison County schools' health education coordinator, presented the school board Monday night with a proposed AIDS policy based on the policy in effect in the Asheville City School system.

A student in the Asheville system was diagnosed last year as having an

AIDS-related disease, and that student has continued to attend school without incident, Castellote said. And the reason is that Asheville school officials already had a policy in place, she said.

Although AIDS does not currently seem to be a problem in Madison County, nationwide statistics indicate that it may only be a matter of time.

"I would like for this draft to be passed as quickly as possible," Castellote said. "At the rapid rate that AIDS is spreading, it is projected that by 1991, AIDS will be the fourth-leading cause of death. It will have surpassed automobile accidents."

An estimated 2.5 million people may be infected with the AIDS virus, and some 50,000 people have been diagnosed as suffering from AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

"It's just a matter of time before we have to deal with someone who does have the AIDS virus," Castellote said.

The school board agreed Monday to table action on adoption of an AIDS policy until members could read the proposed policy presented by Castellote and until board attorney Forrest Ball could read over the policy for possible legal problems.

The proposed policy draws most of its regulations from guidelines developed by the N.C. Division of Health Services.

Under the proposed policy, a student with a communicable disease shall not be denied access to school unless the child is too ill to attend school or presents a health risk to others.

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Consolidation Not Discussed

Although the possible consolidation of Madison County schools is the educational topic foremost on the minds of most county residents, the topic did not come up once during Monday's meeting of the Madison County Board of Education.

Several residents opposed to the consolidation plan attended Monday night's meeting, apparently hoping for a chance to discuss the controversial proposal.

But James Baker, school board chairman, opened the meeting with this statement: "We are not devoting this meeting to any one particular item. We realize there are items of concern to many communities, but the business of the school board must go on."

Capps Hospitalized After Meeting

Robert Capps, chairman of the Madison County Board of Commissioners, was hospitalized early Tuesday morning after complaining of chest pains.

Capps was taken to Memorial Mission Hospital in Asheville shortly after the completion of a lengthy meeting of the commissioners Monday night.

Capps will remain in the hospital for tests for a couple of

days. He is apparently in no danger because of the pains.

"I came in last night to let them check me out to see if I had a heart attack," Capps said from his hospital room Tuesday night. "I think a little high blood pressure caused some discomfort."

Capps said he has had trouble with high blood pressure for some time.

During Monday night's board

meeting, the commissioners adjourned into executive session for nearly three hours of discussion on the firing and rehiring of four employees of the Mars Hill unit of the Madison County Emergency Medical Service.

Capps said he does not believe discussions during the meeting played a role in his causing his chest pains.



Harold Wallin
...seeking 10th term

3 Candidates File As Deadline Passes

From Staff Reports
Races for county and state office have heated up in the past week as three candidates added their names to the list of contenders seeking election in November.

C.N. Willis of Mars Hill waited until an hour before Monday's noon filing deadline to throw his name into ring as a Republican candidate for one of two state senate seats representing the 28th Senatorial District.

Madison County's incumbent tax collector, Democrat Harold Wallin, made it official last Wednesday, filing for re-election.

Angie Roberts Simpson, in her first

bid for elected office, filed Thursday as the Republican Party's candidate for Madison County register of deeds.

Simpson will run against Democratic incumbent Jena Lee Buckner, who is seeking her fourth term as register of deeds. Buckner filed for re-election on Jan. 4, the opening day of filing.

"I was raised to believe in doing all you can do to improve things. I feel one way to do that is to run for office," said Simpson, granddaughter of Dr. Jim Hutchins, who served one term in the state senate.

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Angie Roberts Simpson
...register of deeds candidate

Developer: Inspections Have Been 'Lax'

By EMMA LOU WAMBLES
News Record Correspondent

A Mars Hill real estate developer has asked town officials to take steps to ensure that new buildings in Mars Hill are being properly inspected.

Bob Phillips of Phil-Co Realty told the Mars Hill Board of Aldermen at its Monday meeting that he is aware of buildings valued at \$30,000 or more that could not meet minimum state building code standards. That, Phillips said, reflects the need for better inspection.

"The law states that every county has the authority and the responsibility to provide a building inspector," he said the Mars Hill board.

Phillips said Mars Hill, along with the towns of Marshall and Hot Springs

contract with Madison County officials for inspection of buildings inside municipal limits.

Madison County does not have an official building inspector, although county officials are now in the process of hiring one. The responsibilities of building inspector have been handled by electrical and plumbing inspectors.

"Inspection has been lax in this county for years," Phillips said after the meeting. "I want to stress that electrical inspections have been done sufficiently, but fire and insulation and other inspections have not been done properly."

Phillips said he is not trying "to raise a stink," but is only voicing his concerns. He likes to see the

minimum state building codes enforced in our county," he said. "I think the people of the county have been gypped by lax enforcement of minimum state building codes."

Mars Hill board members said they prefer to continue contracting with Madison County for building inspection services, but would work closely with the county to get a qualified inspector.

In other business, the board members discussed dismissing the town's present architect (Hessman-Johnson Associates of Hendersonville) and law firm (McGuire-Wood-Bissette of Asheville) and look for a local attorney and accountant to perform those services.

The board took no action on dismissing the current firms or selecting new ones.

Mars Hill Mayor Joseph Godwin expressed his dismay at the condition of a centrally located building downtown.

Godwin has been unsuccessful in his attempts to reach the building's owner to notify him of the town's request to make needed repairs.

Godwin vowed to follow up on the matter, and said he would seek condemnation of the building if his requests are ignored.

The board also approved the purchase of land held vacant for some months.