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Ponder: Don't Give Up On Trust Highway

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Former state highway commissioner Zeno Ponder asked the Madison County Board of Education not to give up hope on the construction of a proposed highway between Marshall and Trust.

But Ponder, addressing the school board at a special called meeting last Thursday night, fell short of saying how that road could affect the proposed closing of Spring Creek Elementary School.

School board members have approved a plan calling for the closing of Spring Creek School and the busing of students from that community to Hot Springs. A group of Spring Creek parents and residents is opposed to that plan and is trying to find funding to keep the school open.

Although Ponder did not address the proposed closing of the school, he did remind the school board that Spring Creek residents had agreed to a consolidated high school 15 years ago

after then-Gov. Bob Scott promised a modern road between the Spring Creek-Trust area and Marshall.

"Bob Scott made an appeal that if the people of Spring Creek voted for a consolidated high school, he would see to it as governor that an adequate road would be built to reach a central high school," Ponder said.

Construction began on that highway, but the road currently ends in the Little Pine section of the county.

And, according to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction's Division of School Planning, there are no plans to complete that road. The Division of School Planning had recommended that the Madison school board continue to operate Spring Creek School because students there could not be transported to centrally located facilities, which would have also included students from Hot Springs.

(The school board decided, instead, to keep a kindergarten through eighth-grade school at Hot Springs

and to bus Spring Creek students to Hot Springs).

"The Division of School Planning contacted the N.C. Department of Transportation regarding plans for constructing the Marshall-Trust highway and was informed that there are no plans to complete this project," according to the division's report on Madison County schools.

But Ponder, a former member of the N.C. Board of Transportation, says that the proposed highway is not dead.

"I would ask you to carefully look and see if an east-west road is not in the county's best interest, while we've still got horses in the ballgame and while we've still got the speaker of the House (Liston B. Ramsey, D-Madison)," Ponder said.

"Madison County has one-third of one percent of the population of North Carolina, but we've got the second-most powerful man in the state in the speaker," he said.

Ponder suggested that Ramsey's

influence could be tapped to provide funding to complete the Marshall-Trust road.

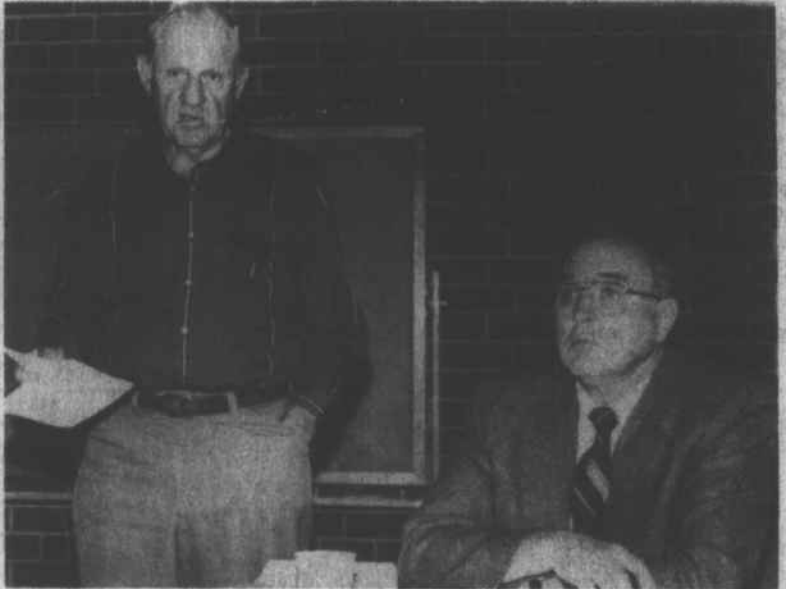
"This county will never realize its full potential until we have an east-west road across Madison County," he said.

Ponder said that transportation board member John Sutton told him that he had "never been a party to abandoning that road."

Ponder had been charged with using inside information available as a member of the transportation board when he purchased land along the route of the proposed road. A federal judge dismissed charges against him, and a state court jury found Ponder not guilty of those charges.

Ponder, a Democrat, blamed those charges on politics.

Jim Baker, Madison school board chairman, said he agreed with Ponder's comments on the need for the road.



BILL STUDENC PHOTO

Zeno Ponder, left, addresses the Madison County school board about a proposed road to Spring Creek while Superintendent Bobby Edwards, right, listens.

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County Studies Industrial Recruiting

By HASSIE PONDER
Staff Writer

The Madison County Board of Commissioners sponsored a forum on economic development and industrial recruitment Thursday night at the Marshall Senior Citizens Center.

Three experts in the field of industrial recruitment spoke at the forum: Rebecca Williams, manager of economic development for the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce; Micheal Gouge, regional development representative for the N.C. Department of Commerce; and Bob Watson, industrial development representative for Tennessee Valley Authority.

Each speaker gave some suggestions on how Madison County can speed up its economic development and increase the chances of new industry locating here.

Williams gave a list of things that industries look for when deciding where to locate:

- Financial incentives package - Does the county offer tax breaks or lower water or sewer rates?
- Labor - Is there an available workforce?
- Quality of life - Does the county offer the type of environment the company is interested in?

Watson gave a list of trends affecting new industries that are locating in Western North Carolina:

- Industries are going from larger to smaller.
- Labor is more skilled; more computer knowledge and automation is being used.
- Labor costs are higher.
- The United States will remain the safe haven for primary industries.
- More international development is occurring at the regional level.
- 60-70 percent of jobs come from existing industries.

Gouge spoke about the overall success of North Carolina in the recruiting of new industries. In 1987 North Carolina was rated as the number one state in recruiting new industries, he said. Also, in "Manufacturing Weekly," North Carolina was rated as the top state in new plant location in 1987.

Although none of these plants were located in Madison County, county officials hope that this will soon change.

With the help of Watson and TVA, county commissioners are hoping to find a site for an industrial park in Madison County. Commissioners are interested in moving rapidly to have a site ready for potential industry, said Commissioner Bowen Stein.

"It is true that with the industrial upflow from Buncombe County that Madison County need be prepared and ready to help pull industry into the county," Stein said.



BILL STUDENC PHOTO

Weaverville Town Manager Charles Horne looks at the town's crumbling pool. An inspector last week revealed major cracks in

the bottom of the facility, and town officials may be forced to build a new pool.

Weaverville Pool In Poor Condition

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Workers uncovered some disturbing news at the Weaverville swimming pool last week when they discovered that water is leaking at an alarming rate from the bottom of the crumbling facility.

The leak is worse than Weaverville officials initially thought, and will apparently force the town to close the pool and build a new facility.

Crews inspected the pool last Thursday to determine exactly how water is leaking from the pool. Last year, nearly 425,000 gallons of water went through the pool during the summer before town officials closed the pool in late July. Normally the pool, which holds an estimated 20,000 gallons of water, remains open through Labor Day.

But the town closed the pool after officials discovered the leak during a summerlong drought that forced Weaverville residents to take steps to conserve water.

Weaverville officials had suspected that water was leaking through the

pool's walls. But after last week's inspection, they learned that water is also leaking through the bottom of the pool, said Charles Horne, Weaverville town manager.

"We filled it up enough to determine where the problem is, and the water level dropped about an inch in 30 minutes," Horne said. "About 8 inches drained overnight. That's a significant amount of water."

The pool is in such poor condition that it would make little sense to try to patch up the cracks, he said.

"My recommendation will more than likely be to construct a new pool rather than try to put more money into this thing," said Horne. "Spending more money on the pool is not going to be worth the effort."

Weaverville officials had hoped to work with Buncombe County's recreation department to build a larger, Olympic-size pool for the entire northern section of the county.

But the Buncombe County Recreation Advisory last week announced its list of future projects. A pool for the

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DSS Is Target Of Proposed Organization

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Several Madison County families are trying to organize a county chapter of Citizens Against Social Abuse to serve as a "go-between" in child abuse cases.

Edward Hall of Mars Hill, one of the leaders of the CASA movement in Madison County, says it is just too easy for the Department of Social Services to remove a child from its family on the basis of suspected child abuse.

A CASA chapter recently organized in Buncombe County, and CASA members in Henderson County have

been involved in a running battle with DSS officials there for several months.

Hall, 55, and his wife were accused five years ago of abusing their two granddaughters. He says those charges were false and were brought by a family member due to other family disputes.

But Hall says his story illustrates a common problem with local DSS agencies - that the DSS has too much power.

"They (DSS workers) have too much power and we want to cut them down to size before they can destroy any more children and families,"

said Hall.

"DSS has got people so scared here in Madison County that they won't crawl out of their hole," Hall said.

DSS workers, without conducting a full investigation, can ask a judge for a warrant to remove a child from a home where child abuse is suspected, he said.

"We would like to be a go-between between the court system and the DSS," Hall said.

Hall said he would like for CASA volunteers to sit in when DSS workers interview families in which child abuse is suspected.

"The only training that DSS worker

has got is to get that child to say what they want it to when they get it in front of that judge," he said.

Having someone who is not paid by the county to participate in child abuse investigations would give an unbiased viewpoint, he said.

Another idea being investigated by CASA organizers is an arbitration committee that would review child custody cases before children are removed from a family.

The committee would be composed of DSS representatives and of people with no ties to DSS.

Hall said he is also working with the American Civil Liberties Union to

keep tabs on cases in which children are improperly removed from their parents or guardians.

The Halls, along with "four or five other families," are now working to contact other families in Madison County that may be interested in forming a local CASA chapter.

"We just want to get a meeting planned," Hall said. "We need to get enough people to have a meeting so we can elect officers here in Madison County. I feel like we're dragging our feet. We need to get this out in the open and get the ball rolling."

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Hot Springs Woman Recovering After Collision On U.S. 25-70

By HASSIE PONDER
Staff Writer

Patricia E. Cutshall, 48, of Hot Springs was hospitalized Tuesday after receiving serious injuries in an automobile accident that occurred last week on the U.S. 25-70 Bypass in Marshall.

Cutshall's Nissan Sentra collided head-on with a Ford Taurus driven by Wayne Bruce Wilson Jr. from Elk. The accident occurred on Tuesday, April 26, according to a N.C.

Highway Patrol report.

According to the investigating officer's report, Cutshall was returning home from work when she apparently fell asleep behind the wheel. She apparently woke up just before she collided with Wilson's vehicle, according to the report.

However, a Highway Patrol spokesman reported that because of conflicting stories from the drivers and from witnesses who saw the accident, the accident remains under investigation. No charges have yet

been filed.

Cutshall's car was so badly damaged that it had to be cut with saws and pulled from both ends before she could be removed from the vehicle.

Madison Air Medical Ambulance, the medical helicopter better known as MAMA, transported Cutshall to Memorial Mission Hospital in Asheville where she underwent surgery for two broken legs.

Wilson was reported as having no apparent injuries.