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County Budget Approved

Revaluations Offset Drop In Property Tax

By STEVE FERGUSON
Interim Editor

Although the new county budget includes a drop in the tax rate, many landowners may still see increased property tax bills.

The county commissioners Monday approved the 1988-89 budget which lowers rates from 99 cents to 71 cents per \$100 worth of property. That budget includes a continuation of 24-hour ambulance service in Madison County, a 5 percent raise for all county employees and an 8 percent increase for education spending. The increase for taxpayers comes from the revaluation of land values which has tripled for some property owners. About 50 people attended the 1 p.m. meeting, an unusually large number for a daytime commissioners public hearing. Most voiced anger over the revaluations.

"(Property estimates) did jump quite a bit," said Irene Lee of Roberts Real Estate. "Our personal property value rose about two and one-half times."

"A lot of people have told me they would love to sell their property at what it's valued at," she said.

At least six landowners have appealed their revaluations to Raleigh.

This year's budget is based on the assumption that 10 percent of all property taxes will be uncollected, said finance officer Ralph Rice. The state average for uncollectible taxes is about 5 percent, he said. Several residents were vocal over the rate of uncollected taxes.

One Grape Vine property owner whose permanent home is in Virginia in a similarly sized county compared the collection rate to her home town. "My father-in-law was tax collector (in Madison County, Virginia) and his tax collection rate was 99 percent," she said. The comment brought applause from the crowd.

An earlier budget suggested that the county cut one ambulance unit. Concerned residents began circulating petitions. County finance officer Ralph Rice changed the final budget to include \$372,613 for ambulance service, an amount county Emergency Services Director Eddie Fox said would be enough to continue service on the current 24-hour level.

County employees will all see an upgrade in pay level starting January 1, 1989.

Although an increase, the commissioner's allocation still fell short of the school board's request of \$1,762,676. The commissioners gave them \$1,424,600.

Other budget items include

- \$287,500 for the sheriff's department. This is short of Sheriff Dedrick Brown's request of \$365,000 but could bring the department back up to full staff. Brown and the commissioners were at odds earlier this year when they told him to lay off three deputies in order to keep from spending more money than the county had on hand.
- Brown instead laid off four dispatcher-jailers and closed Madison County Jail. He later reopened the jail with a volunteer staff.
- \$346,287 was allocated to operating expenses for the Madison County Landfill. \$241,200 was allocated for land and equipment. During the meeting, the commissioners also voted to hire another person to work at the landfill.
- \$424,152 for day care. This includes an increase in wages for Madison day care workers.
- \$287,500 for a senior citizen center.
- \$4,359,894 for Medicaid (most of

which is provided by the federal government).

After the budget was announced, Commissioner Reese Steen suggested several revisions, including cutbacks in the \$40,000 allocated for tax mapping. He argued that since most revaluation was complete, the figure could be cut by at least \$8,000.

Steen also felt \$10,000 could be cut from the ambulance service by making the service more efficient and still maintaining full service. He suggested a \$14,000 cut in the landfill budget because he said he felt the hiring of an additional employee was unnecessary.

Steen asked that money be placed into economic development. An earlier budget had given \$40,000 for that purpose but the revised budget gave no money for it.

"Why did you take money out of economic development?" Steen asked Rice.

"Because I told him to," said Commission Chairman Bobby Capps. In the revised budget, economic development money was placed in a contingency fund, giving the commissioners a more lenient spending category.

Steen also asked Superintendent Robert Edwards to appear before the board to explain increases in budget requests.

"I want to increase the education budget by a real 10 percent over last year," Steen said.

The 'real' 10 percent, he explained, was subtracting \$86,908 in money that Madison County received this year from North Carolina that it had to fund on its own last year. Steen suggested that any difference be placed into the capital outlay fund for school construction.

Edwards disagreed with the 10 percent estimation.

"With a 4.5 percent teacher salary increase, that's only a 5.5 percent increase in total budget," he said. "Add inflation to that and you're virtually standing still."

Steen also asked Edwards about the cost of two middle schools, a figure which Edwards estimated at \$4.5 million each excluding the cost of purchasing the land, sewer and water costs.

"We've already built one school on an island," Steen said. "I don't want

anyone to say to me 'you didn't ask the right questions.'"

After Edwards was dismissed Steen submitted his proposed budget changes. "We're breaking the backs of the taxpayers and we're still using good ol' boys' ways," Steen said.

Commissioners Bobby Capps and John Hensley voted against the changes and the budget was approved 2-1.

'A lot of people have told me they'd love to sell their property at what it's valued at.'

— Irene Lee

Education Budget To Adjust For 8 Percent Increase

By STEVE FERGUSON
Interim Editor

The Madison County Board of Education will have to trim \$338,076 from its 1988-89 budget to meet what county commissioners have given them.

The \$1,424,600 is an 8 percent increase over last year's total school board budget of \$1,311,761.

"The school board will have to look back to the line-item budget and make some adjustments," said School Superintendent Robert Edwards. "We'll have to go back and revise."

Edwards said the board's original budget had planned for a computer in every classroom. "Since we have to go back and revise, that may change," he said.

Other increases built into this year's budget include a Student Information Management System that keeps tracks of all student attendance and progress reports. A SIMS system is already in place in Madison High School and Marshall Primary, and one is planned for Mars Hill Elementary. Madison and Marshall are both hoping to upgrade their current SIMS equipment.

\$90,000 is allocated in the proposed



Commissioner Reese Steen reviews the proposal with Superintendent Robert Edwards.

budget, half for equipment and half for computer hardware.

\$95,000 is proposed for the purchase of library books.

"Region 8 did a survey for us in 1986," said Edwards, "and recommended that we upgrade our school libraries by adding books and getting rid of outdated reference books. The information in encyclopedias and

other reference materials can be outdated in just a few years."

\$50,000 slated for clerical salaries is due to many part-time clerical workers being converted to full-time salaried employees, Edwards said. Other major expenses include a projected \$115,000 for electricity and \$81,068 for fuel for facilities.

In projected capital outlay needs, the board asked for \$615,056 broken

down as follows:

- \$100,000 for roofing, sidewalks and erosion
- \$20,000 for computers and typewriters
- \$230,000 for repair to buildings
- \$1,000 for repair to primary grounds
- \$284,056 for construction, additional rooms, and the primary school.

The board was granted \$500,000 of their capital outlay request.

Weaverville Group Appeals Annexation Ruling

By STEVE FERGUSON
Interim Editor

Continuing their fight against the annexation of the Reems Creek Golf Club, a group of Weaverville residents have appealed a judge's ruling that allowed the move.

Attorney Harold Bennett filed the appeal Friday on the grounds that Buncombe County Superior Court Judge Robert D. Lewis didn't follow state law when he refused to issue a restraining order to stop annexation

of 89 acres planned for the development of 189 homes. State law mandates that all of a subdivision must be annexed, not just part. Reems Creek Golf Club includes 250 acres.

Bennett is optimistic about the appeal.

"I think our chances are good," he said. "The law clearly says you can't annex part of a subdivision. You have to take it all in."

Lewis' decision was based on another portion of North Carolina law

which prohibits towns from annexing more than 10 percent of its existing municipal acreage. "There is no evidence in the record that Kenmore had some sinister motive in petitioning for annexation of only the phase one portion of the project," he said.

"To the contrary, the indication is that but for the 10 percent limitation ... Kenmore would put the whole 250 acres in the town of Weaverville."

Joe Joyner, chairman of Concerned Citizens of Weaverville, the group op-

posing annexation, said he felt the resort would be a detriment to the town.

"We never were opposed to a golf course, housing development, or anything else up there. We just don't want it to be part of the town," Joyner said.

The resort-priced lots and golf prices would be out of the price range of most residents, he said. "There would never be any reason for anyone in Weaverville to go up there."

Bill Sears Chosen As Assistant Superintendent

By STEVE FERGUSON
Interim Editor

Madison County's first assistant superintendent of schools was hired Monday.

Bill Sears, a teacher at Mars Hill College in the education department, was chosen by the school board to assist current superintendent Robert Edwards.

Sears, however, was not Edwards' first choice.

Of five applicants, Sears was number five on the list of Edwards' recommendations.

His top choice for the post was Dr. Owen Fish, Title I director for Madison County. No motion was made by the board following Edwards' recommendation, so Fish could not be considered.

Next, Edwards recommended Hot Springs principal J.C. Wallin. Again, no motion followed the recommendation and Wallin could not be considered for the post.

When Dr. Bruce Phillips, assistant principal at Madison High school, was nominated by Edwards, board member Gerald Young made a motion for the recommendation. There was no second, therefore Phillips could not be considered.

Next, Edwards suggested Tom Jones, psychologist for Madison County, for the position. Again, no motion was made and Jones could not

be considered.

After Edwards recommended Sears, board member Mike Jenkins made the motion to accept him. Board member Jewell Church seconded the motion, and Sears was approved 5-0.

In other hiring, the board chose Terry Price to fill the position of finance officer. Pam English Gregg, a former hourly employee, was chosen to be employed as a full-time salaried employee.

Mars Hill Elementary: Catherine Denton, J.D. Thomas and Buster Shelton were hired as custodians. Doris Dickerson was hired as a secretary.

Madison High School: Michael Norton, Tommy Rice and Danny Frisbee were hired as custodians.

Marshall Primary: Bob Boyd was hired as custodian.

Walnut School: Jimmy Massey was hired as custodian.

Laurel School: Terry Cook was hired as custodian.

Hot Springs School: Clyde Webb was hired as custodian for July and August.

Spring Creek School: Michael Hold was hired as custodian. Patsy Buckner was hired as bus driver for summer school.

The next scheduled board meeting is July 6.

Drought Conference Scheduled

Governor Jim Martin has announced a Drought Management Conference will be held June 30 in Asheville in response to increasingly dry conditions in western North Carolina.

Representatives of local governments, water system operators, and state water officials will meet at the Ramada Inn West in Asheville from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. June 30.

Several reservoirs in the western counties are at lower levels than during the 1986 drought and some communities are beginning to impose water use restrictions.

"If drought conditions get worse in the western counties, Governor Martin said, "it becomes imperative that state governments be prepared to step in with whatever help is needed."

Practical water conservation steps will be discussed, and cooperation between state and federal water agencies will be stressed. The conference is expected to result in contingency plans for state and federal assistance should the drought worsen.

The conference is being organized by the Division of Water Resources in the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development (NRCD). Other state agencies to be involved: the Public Water Supply Branch of the Department of Human Resources; the Division of Emergency Management; the Department of Game Control and Public Safety; the Division of Environmental Management; and the U.S. Geological Survey.

Low-Cost Mortgages Available

Low and moderate-income home buyers can apply immediately for 8.75 percent mortgage loans as a result of a \$50 billion bond sale authorized by the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency (NCHFA).

The 30-year, fixed rate loans are available to approximately 1,075 first-time home buyers on a first-come, first-served basis. Prospective borrowers with a sales contract on a new or existing house, townhouse or condominium can apply for a below-market rate loan from one of the 133 lending institutions participating in the NCHFA program. Thirty-three builders from across the state also are participating in the program.

With the high demand for these low-interest rate mortgages, borrowers should be advised to apply for

mortgage credit certificates (MCCs).

MCCs reduce the amount of federal income tax qualified home buyers pay. As a result, home buyers have more disposable income to qualify for a mortgage loan. Acquisition costs and income limits are the same as the 8.75 percent mortgage requirements.

To qualify, borrowers need a three to five percent down payment and a one percent loan origination fee. A home buyer can substitute an immediate family member if savings aren't sufficient. The buyer or seller pays closing costs, but the buyer is responsible for escrow account fees. All loans are insured by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA).



Students in Madison County's summer school class at Marshall High read and study about computers.