

Landscaping for birds

Page 3

Sports physicals set

Page 8

A "Democratic" Republican

Page 4

June 23, 2004

Vol. 72, No. 25 Hertford, North Carolina 27944

T P11/C5
PERQUIMANS COUNTY LIBRARY RECEIVED
110 W ACADEMY ST
HERTFORD, NC 27944-1306 JUN 23 2004
6/22/2004

PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

35 cents

Nelson speaks out against county budget

Former chair has concerns about unfunded items

SUSAN R. HARRIS

Former County Commissioners Chairman Wallace Nelson said he has concerns about the 2004-05 budget proposal that came out of the commissioners' budget sessions.

Nelson spoke at the June commissioners' meeting from prepared comments that he asked be included in the minutes.

Nelson first said that the budget contains about \$77,000 for repair and maintenance of county buildings, but there is no way to know if that amount is adequate. Nelson cited lack of cost estimates and a prioritized list of needed repairs as his concerns.

"When the concept of obtaining cost estimates and prioritizing the work and establishing a plan for the upkeep for the taxpayers' property, that idea was criticized implying that incurring the cost to prepare such a plan was wasteful and unnecessary," Nelson's statement reads. "...Without cost estimates and critical priorities, we cannot determine if the \$77,000 in 04-05 is adequate or not. I feel it is irresponsible for me to not advocate for a plan to take care of the taxpayers' property."

After property concerns, Nelson moved on to employee salary and benefits. He said the board procrastinated for three years before approving a plan to bring county employee salaries to a competitive level with other local governments. While he said he commends that step, the county has not gone far enough. The county did not fully implement the recommendations of the employee salary study it commissioned. Nelson had recommended last year a three-year plan to fully implement Option III of the plan.

In addition, other items, he said, were never discussed adequately such as health insurance for retirees. Nelson said County Manager Paul Gregory said Perquimans is one of only three counties in the state that does not provide some type of health insurance to retirees.

Next Nelson said the board showed disregard for the school superintendent and board of education and that group's expertise in school matters by arbitrarily cutting the schools' operating budget request for a 6 percent increase to 3 percent. Nelson is a former school board member.

The repairs and renovations needed in the schools are not being moved forward "in an expeditious

way," Nelson said. He the county manager presented a plan in April that proposed a way for the county to accomplish needed capital projects.

Nelson said that if the county continues to use a "pay as you go" philosophy for capital needs, the school projects will end up costing taxpayers more money over the coming years.

He added that the county also needs to move ahead with the wellness center planned as Phase II of the recreation project at the commerce centre.

"If we continue to wait for interest rates to increase and building costs to continue to rise, one can easily see how much more we will cost the taxpayer to accomplish these projects," Nelson stated.

"As to the idea I hear of being criticized for placing a debt burden on a future Board of Commissioners, I can only think if past Boards had adequately funded the renovation projects at the middle school and Hertford Grammar School, the roof-top units would not have been the chosen option for HVAC at both schools," Nelson said. "If the Central School project had also been funded as designed, we would have a 4-pipe HVAC system in that building today. ... I would rather be a part of a Board that made the tough choices today which saves the taxpayer money in the future. That is a much more positive legacy to leave for a future Board."

The HVAC systems at both the middle and grammar schools must be replaced, along with roofs, damaged in part by leaking HVAC units. In addition, the board of education has spent significant sums of money on mold removal at Central School, which may be a result of not installing the HVAC system in the initial plans, Nelson said.

At the recreation center, Nelson said the budget contains no funding for stabilization of the waterfront, even though considerable property was lost during Isabelle. Losing that much more property could make the plans for waterfront accessibility impossible.

Nelson said he disagreed with the board's refusal to fund \$7,500 to match the school board's \$7,500 for Communities in Schools. He said it is a relatively small amount of money to fund what he considers one of the most vital and productive organizations in the community.

Nelson closed by saying his comments were not an attack on any individual commissioner. He said he was a part of some past decisions and takes full responsibility for them.

However, Nelson said he could not vote for the budget in good conscience.

Nelson is not running for another term. His term expires in December.

PERIAUGER CELEBRATION



Perquimans County Restoration Association President Chris Lane christens the periauger at the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort Saturday. About 200 people attended the celebration of the boat's completion after years of planning and construction. The periauger will now undergo sea trials in preparation for its voyage to Hertford, where it will make its arrival during the Indian Summer Festival.

A HOME OF THEIR OWN



Work is in full swing at the Habitat for Humanity house being built in Snug Harbor. On Monday, volunteers were installing siding while heavy equipment operators were in the back yard putting in the septic system.

Habitat house in progress

A four-bedroom, two bath Coastal cottage is rising from a vacant lot on Holly Street in Snug Harbor.

Volunteers have been on site for weeks constructing the home being built by the Chowan-Perquimans Habitat for Humanity. The dwelling will be home for a single mother and her teenage children upon its completion.

Organizers hope to have the home finished by the end of this month to offer safe, affordable shelter for the family.

While the outside is nearing completion, finish carpentry, carpet and appli-

ance installation must still be accomplished inside.

On Monday, volunteers were installing vinyl siding while contractors put in the septic tank.

Volunteers are welcome

to offer their help. Call John Sams at 221-8555 or e-mail samsjl@earthlink.net for information on how you can become involved in helping others through Habitat for Humanity.

Yates challenges Hunter to debate

Winfall Mayor Fred Yates has challenged House Representative Howard Hunter Jr. to a debate on campaign issues.

Yates is running against Hunter for the District 5 seat in the North Carolina House of Representatives.

The debate is set for July 7 at 7 p.m. at the Roanoke-Chowan College Auditorium in Ahoskie. Yates said that the debate will be held if the state legislature closes its session before that time.

Yates wants to ask Hunter what he is doing for northeastern North Carolina, including issues such as education, jobs, economic development, community college funding and tax incentives for small businesses. The small counties and municipalities in the region must have state help in order to grow and prosper, he said.

WEEKEND WEATHER

THURSDAY
HIGH: 86
LOW: 70
SCATTERED T'STORMS

FRIDAY
HIGH: 91
LOW: 73
ISOLATED T'STORMS

SATURDAY
HIGH: 89
LOW: 73
SCATTERED T'STORMS