

CUMBERLAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
COMMUNITY MEETING – GRAYS CREEK MIDDLE SCHOOL
5151 CELEBRATION DRIVE, HOPE MILLS, NC
OCTOBER 5, 2009 – 7:00 PM
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Jeannette Council
Commissioner Breeden Blackwell
Commissioner Kenneth Edge
Commissioner Billy King
Commissioner Jimmy Keefe
Commissioner Ed Melvin
Commissioner Marshall Faircloth
James Martin, County Manager
Juanita Pilgrim, Deputy County Manager
Harvey Raynor, Interim County Attorney
Phyllis Jones, Assistant County Attorney
Tom Cooney, Public Utilities Director
Sally Shutt, Communications Manager
Marie Colgan, Clerk to the Board
Candice H. White, Deputy Clerk to the Board

1. Welcome - Chairman Council thanked attendees for coming and asked the Commissioners and staff to give introductions. Chairman Council advised that an earlier situation prevented residents from attending the public hearing held earlier on this matter and a decision was made to have another public hearing to ensure that residents had input into the proposed District.

2. Purpose of the Meeting - County Manager Martin advised that the purpose of this meeting was for the Board of Commissioners to hear all comments from the residents regarding the proposed Grays Creek Water & Sewer District. The proposal is a result of an engineering Rural Water Feasibility Study that was completed in August, 2009. The report indicates that in order to support the Board of Commissioners' interest in providing safe water into rural areas, a southwest district (to be known as the Grays Creek Water & Sewer District) is proposed. Mr. Martin added that in order to apply for state and federal funds to help reduce the cost, a legal entity (a district) must first be created. The public hearing on this proposed district will be held on Monday, October 19th at 6:45 pm in Room 118 of the Courthouse. If the Board of Commissioners establish the district, then information on securing funds will be obtained and a bond referendum be presented to the Grays Creek district. A vote in favor, which requires 50% +1 vote, would be needed in order to secure the financing. The Board of Commissioners will be the governing body for the proposed district. Mr. Martin advised that the meeting is not a public hearing but is for the purpose of receiving public comment and that speakers who have signed up will be given up to three minutes to speak.

Mr. Tom Cooney referred to the map on display stating that copies can be obtained through his office if an attendee did not receive one or that it can be obtained through the County website. Mr. Cooney explained that the water district will run from the Cape Fear River to the Bladen County line and the Robeson County line and along the PWC water and sewer service area and that a district must be established in order to seek Federal funding. At this time, only water will be looked at and those lines have not been established. Fifteen to twenty years down the road, adding sewer may be considered. Once a district is approved, an engineer will be hired to establish the lines and financing will be explored. If it is found to be a feasible project and the cost can be kept low, then it will still be up to the residents to pass the bond referendum before anything is done.

3. SPEAKERS

George P. Moffett – questioned if residents not located within the district lines as shown on the map would they still be able to get water. Mr. Cooney advised that it would depend on PWC’s plans to extend water, but the district could consider projects in that area if the lines run adjacent to a property. The main focus is to supply water to those areas that do not already have water available.

Dale Nunnery – voiced concern over increase in housing developments, effects on taxes, safety concerns with increased traffic and concerns of rezoning. Questioned whether he will be required to hook on to the water, whether he can keep his well and whether he will be charged for sewer if it is not available. Mr. Cooney answered that blanket rezoning is not done by the Board of Commissioners and that a request would have to be made by a property owner for rezoning. Mr. Cooney further advised that he could continue to use his own well, but could not connect well water with public water. If a line runs down his street and money has to be borrowed to run the line, there will be a monthly debt service fee which typically runs between \$12 to \$16 a month. With projects such as this, individuals are offered an opportunity to sign up before a line is run with an incentive of an early sign up fee of \$250.00 which only obligates individuals to a debt service fee. This allows individuals to get set up for future usage without having to pay the regular fees of between \$1,500 and \$3,000 per lot when being hooked on at a later date. Mr. Cooney closed by advising that when grant monies are used for projects such as this, the County cannot design for future development.

Charles Packer – questioned where the water would come from and voiced concern over being annexed by the city. Mr. Cooney replied that there is no agreement or interest in Robeson County and that negotiations are taking place with Bladen County for the Southpoint area, but mainly PWC will supply the water. The County will own and operate the lines, but would be a bulk water purchaser from PWC until the system grows large enough to require a full time operations and maintenance crew. Mr. Cooney advised that the bond referendum that was referred to earlier would be specifically for the Grays Creek area, not the entire county.

Chris Brock – questioned whether water would be coming to Southpoint and Mr. Cooney confirmed that it would.

Debra Stewart – voiced concern with the overdevelopment and population growth of Grays Creek and is concerned with the water from Bladen County as she had heard it was bad. Mr. Cooney advised that Bladen County is installing a filter treatment system to take

care of an iron problem. The water line going to Southpoint will come up Chicken Foot Road and there will be a short extension down County Line Road where there are some contamination problems. Only those side streets off Chicken Foot Road that have contamination will be considered part of the project.

William Parnell – referred to the Feasibility Study and questioned whether maps showing lines were available and voiced concern over large water bills. Mr. Cooney advised that lines are still to be determined and that the Feasibility Study only showed possible routes. Mr. Cooney stated that with the grant programs that are available, the County expects a monthly fee of around \$30 per month for Grays Creek, not \$78.00 as estimated in the report, and reaffirmed that a bond referendum would take place after a design has been completed.

Jeanna Maynard – voiced concern over new developments and would like for developers and contractors to provide community infrastructure prior to selling homes. He stated that farmland should remain farmland and cited problems with placing housing developments in the middle of farmland. Voiced concern over increase in property taxes and problems associated with droughts when the area is overdeveloped. Stated cheaper alternatives are available to making water good than to creating a water district.

Julius Maynard – voiced concern over the loss of agriculture land and the increase in housing developments, which increases taxes. Concerned with the cost if State or Federal funding is not available. Believes that if residents do not hook onto the water line that the Health Department will find a way to condemn their property.

Denise McAuley – thanked Commissioners for coming to listen to their concerns and just wants honesty and the truth. Stated that even though she does not have good water, she wants things done right for the whole community, whatever that turns out to be.

Jim MacRae – agreed with all comments given, would like for those who need good water to have it, but is concerned that development will explode if water lines are brought in.

Joe Martin – deferred his time stating just to leave them alone.

J.D. Pone – stated most of his questions had already been answered, but would like to have the answer to whether he would be required to pay if a line is run in front of his property. Mr. Cooney stated that if enough individuals on his street sign up for service ahead of time, he would not have to. Voiced concern of what will happen if funding source is not secured and Mr. Cooney advised that there are two current water districts that are not up and running because of an adequate funding source was not found. Mr. Pone stated that he is not opposed to the district if adequate funding is found, but questioned how the Commissioners would vote. Commissioner Council advised that she would vote to go forward with establishing the water district in order to apply for funding and reminded attendees that they would have the final vote if funding was available. Commissioner Blackwell clarified that the public hearing on October 19th is strictly for a decision on whether to establish a water district in order to move forward with applying for funding and reiterated that if the district is established and funding is found, then the residents will have the final vote on the project. Mr. Pone asked that the funding be explained and Mr. Cooney advised that it would be a combination of first applying for low interest USDA loans and grants. Mr. Cooney stated that if the average monthly bill ends

up being \$50 or \$60 just using loans, USDA grants may be available to supplement the additional funding needed to bring the cost down. Once the cost is substantiated, a bond referendum will take place for the public to approve the bond amount from the USDA. Only residents of the water and sewer district of Grays Creek will vote on the bond referendum.

Paula Lewis – stated she did not think that the County does much for their community. Questioned whether she would have to hook on if lines are run. Mr. Cooney stated no.

Billie Atkins – voiced concern of overdevelopment and feels that the developers of housing areas should have to test the water. Stated she has bad water, but has a filter and would have to pay to have a line run to her property since she lives off Chicken Foot Road. Requested that the Commissioners quit letting people build in the area and stop spending. Concerned that this will lead to annexation.

Rodney McMillan – stated he has three children and he has bad water which is like poison to his children and is a problem for all youth that have to drink bad water.

Daryl Cobranchi – supports water and sewer district and strongly supports taking the first step to explore the possibility of securing state and federal funding.

Quentin Smith – a lifetime resident of Grays Creek supports getting good clean drinking water stating no builder can build developments unless the people sell the land to them.

Chairman Council stated that the Commissioners felt that it was important to hear from the residents as there was a great deal of misinformation in the community. The Commissioners have a responsibility to all citizens. Chairman Council reminded attendees that they will have another chance to be heard at the upcoming public hearing on October 19th and she will vote for the opportunity to form the water and sewer district, but will not vote for water at a big price tag. Chairman Council concluded by reminding attendees that the final vote rests with them and that a 50% +1 vote is needed in order to pass it.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 8:08 PM

Clerk to the Board