

A Called Meeting of the Oconee County Board of Commissioners was held on Tuesday, February 20, 2007, at 7:00 p.m., in the Commission Meeting Chambers at the Oconee County Courthouse.

Members Present:

Chairman Melvin Davis
Commissioner Jim Luke
Commissioner Don Norris
Commissioner Margaret S. Hale
Commissioner Chuck Horton

Staff Present:

Administrative Officer Alan Theriault
County Attorney Daniel Haygood
County Clerk Gina M. Lindsey

Gary Dodd, Utility Director
Chris Thomas, Assistant Utility Director
Jeff Benko, Finance Director
Wayne Provost, Strategic Planning

Media Present:

Vinnie Williams, The Oconee Enterprise
Merritt Melancon, The Oconee Enterprise
Lee Shearer, Athens Banner Herald
Ingunn Mercer, The Oconee Leader

Chairman Davis began the meeting with a Moment of Silence. Commissioner Norris led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Davis opened the meeting to allow citizens the opportunity to comment on future water sources for Oconee County. Two handouts were available to the attendees, a Synopsis of the Bear Creek Project and Questions and Answers that were previously submitted and posted on the county's web site.

Hoyt Watson said he would prefer Oconee County construct its own reservoir and water treatment plant and commented too much water is better than not enough water.

Ken McMichael, a member of the Jasper County Water and Sewer Authority, urged the Commissioners to look into the potential Snapping Shoals Water Treatment Facility Project as an optional source of water. He stated Jasper County has agreed to partner in the project and a regional water authority would be the best way to develop the "South River Option". Mr. McMichael said the estimated cost of producing water, including debt service, is \$1.06/1000. He asked the Board to delay their decision for an additional water source until a withdrawal permit is issued for this project.

Oconee County Chamber of Commerce President Charles Grimes said the county must plan for additional water supply so there isn't a scramble to find water when a new business decides to locate here.

Ben Lumpkin commended the Board of Commissioners for listening to the public's input, but noted the Board members have the responsibility to prepare a vision for Oconee County and plan for the future.

Lee Becker said the county's consultants used inaccurate population projections to determine when Oconee County would run out of water and stated the projections were grossly overestimated. Mr. Becker expressed concern for the county's ability to pay for the \$100 million expenditure if the estimates for growth are wrong. He said the county is not facing a water crisis and noted the county does not plan to offer water county-wide. Mr. Becker noted the proposed wastewater treatment plant on Rocky Branch Road will produce 1 mgd of water treated to "reuse" standards. Mr. Becker said the Board of Commissioners should be more conservative in estimating the county's need for water.

Charles Baugh stated he also felt the population estimates were inflated and expressed concern for the impact a large debt would have on the county citizens. He urged the Board to look at options other than the Hard Labor Creek Reservoir and the Barnett Shoals Reservoir.

William Dix said he was opposed to excessive development and stated either reservoir project would subsidize the developers at the expense of the taxpayers.

John Washington encouraged the Board of Commissioners to reconsider ground water sources. He explained the costs of developing high-yield wells can be a small percentage of the costs for developing reservoirs of equivalent potential production rates.

Norm Grayson said the county must have water and urged the Board to move forward with a decision.

Russ Page suggested the use of impact fees to fund additional water sources.

Trey Thompson said he was opposed to the Hard Labor Creek Reservoir option and remarked the county should hire an independent engineer to determine if a reservoir at Jack's Creek would best serve Oconee County's needs. Mr. Thompson said full build-out of Jack's Creek (1,200 acres) would yield 39 mgd. He suggested half could be sold to the City of Monroe or take their offer as a 50% partner. Mr. Thompson estimated Oconee County's 50% share would cost under \$43 million.

Final comments were made by the Board of Commissioners and Chairman Davis again invited citizens to write their questions on note cards and turn them in at the end of the meeting or submit them by email. He noted answers to all questions submitted would be posted on the county's web site.

There being no further business, on motion by Commissioner Horton and second by Commissioner Luke, the meeting was adjourned.

County Clerk

Chairman

Date