

CLARKE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
April 8, 2008 Public Hearing 7:30 p.m.
Board of Supervisors Meeting Room

At a public hearing of the Board of Supervisors of Clarke County, Virginia in the Board of Supervisors' Meeting Room, 1st Floor Circuit Courtroom, 102 N. Church Street, Berryville, Virginia on Tuesday, April 8, 2008.

Board Members Present

Barbara J. Byrd; A.R. "Pete" Dunning, Jr.; J. Michael Hobert; John R. Staelin; David S. Weiss

Staff Present

David Ash, Tom Judge, Lisa Cooke, Donna Peake, Gary Pope, Tony Roper, Sally Sheckels

Also Present

Robina Rich Bouffault, Louise McKay, Linwood Outlaw III, Ruth Marlowe, Stephanie Mangino and other citizens

Call To Order

Chairman John Staelin called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Adoption of Agenda

Supervisor Dunning moved to approve the agenda as presented. The motion carried by the following recorded vote:

John R. Staelin, Chair	-	Aye
J. Michael Hobert, Vice Chair	-	Aye
Barbara J. Byrd	-	Aye
A.R. Dunning, Jr.	-	Aye
David S. Weiss	-	Aye

FY09 Budget Presentation and Public Hearing

Chairman Staelin provided an overview of the budget process. He introduced Tom Judge, Director - Joint Administrative Services, who reviewed the budget providing additional detail on 19 highlighted line items in the FY09 Proposed Budget. He advised that next week at their regular meeting the Board of Supervisors would estimate the final budget as best they could in light of spending cuts made by the General Assembly.

Vice Chair Michael Hobert clarified that the budget line item for Conservation Easements represented both state and federal grant funds that could not be spent on other budget items. Tom Judge confirmed.

Supervisor Dunning posed questions specific to projects noting the economic uncertainty facing the county and the nation.

Ray Glassman asked where he could secure a breakdown of each line item, which Tom Judge advised was available in the Joint Administrative Services Office.

At 7:49 pm Chairman Staelin opened the public comment portion of the public hearing

Mike Ohm, Hermitage, Berryville: distributed to the Supervisors only a six-page report on land use he had generated from information gleaned from the Office of the Commissioner of the Revenue and the Treasurer. Mr. Ohm indicated that the entire 70-page report would be provided to them later. He questioned land use values and methodology asserting that the program was not reasonable and provided random examples from his report to support his allegations. He offered suggestions on how the Supervisors could increase real estate tax by adjusting land use values.

Buddy Hall, Director Northwestern Community Services: thanked the Board of Supervisors for the additional time granted to them to explain their need, for recognizing the need and for increasing their funding in the hardest budget year in the past two to three decades. Mr. Hall expressed appreciation for the Supervisor's kindness. He noted that Northwestern could see even more federal and state funding cuts.

Supervisor Dunning sharply criticized the state for their funding cuts and refusal to raise taxes on the state level, as well as inadequate funding for state-mandated programs. He encouraged Mr. Hall and those present to voice their concerns to their elected state and federal representatives.

Bob Stieg, Clarke County representative on the Northwestern Community Services Board: stated that he supported the proposed budget and tax rate. He stated that the increase given to Northwestern Community Services brought Clarke County into line with other jurisdictions. He concurred with Supervisor Dunning regarding state and federal funding cuts. He expressed his gratitude for staff efforts.

Mimi Mayfield, Northwestern Community Services Mental Health Specialist, Director Page County Office and county resident: expressed her appreciation to the Supervisors for the

increased funding. She advised that Northwestern serves 500 Clarke County residents. Ms. Mayfield put forth that their organization served those in the community who could not advocate for themselves.

Richard Ogata, President of Blue Ridge Volunteer Fire and Rescue Station and Bluemont resident: expressed appreciation for the additional funding provided to Blue Ridge Station, which is an all volunteer force. He opined that with population increases operating budgets would only get worse and this increase would allow them to maintain the same level of service.

Chairman Staelin, noting all the hard work, time, effort and training required of volunteers, thanked Mr. Ogata and the volunteers of Blue Ridge Fire Station for all that they do for the county.

At 8:09 pm there being no additional persons desiring to speak Chairman Staelin closed the public comment portion of the public hearing.

Supervisor Byrd thanked the members of the Finance Committee - John Staelin, Michael Hobert, David Ash, and Tom Judge – for pulling the budget together in a tough year. She thanked the department heads for being frugal and keeping budgets lean. She thanked the Schools for holding the line and remembering teachers.

Chairman Staelin responded to Mr. Ohm's comments noting that land use values are proposed by Virginia Tech and are set by the Commissioner of the Revenue, who is ultimately responsible for determining property values. He further noted that state and federal government supported land use and conservation easement programs. Mr. Staelin advised Mr. Ohm that the Board of Supervisors only role is to determine whether the county remains in land use.

Supervisor Dunning put forth that farmers run their tractors on diesel fuel and the dramatic increase in fuel costs are being felt by local farmers. He did agree that some of the values presented appeared to be ridiculously low. He opined that increasing taxes on farms dramatically would result in loss of agricultural land to developers.

Supervisor Weiss put forth that while the media might show higher crop prices, farm costs are skyrocketing. He speculated that this would be another bad year for agriculture and opined that increasing taxes at this time would cause greater financial hardship.

Mike Ohm responded to the Supervisor's statements that his figures did not support their assertions. Further, that increasing taxes on farmers would not impact development for land use does not control development - zoning stops development.

Chairman Staelin countered that on one level Mr. Ohm was correct in that zoning does limit some development. However, he continued that there were approximately 6,000 existing undeveloped DURs in the County that can be built on tomorrow. He put forward that if farmers

could not make a profit then they might decide to grow houses instead of crops as has happened in surrounding jurisdictions. Thus, the zoning rules would not limit that growth.

Supervisor Byrd contributed that the County is trying to expand its tax base using smaller parcels of land for niche farming.

Supervisor Weiss put forward that one reason the courts allow sliding scale zoning is due to the fact that there is a viable, working agricultural base.

Louise McKay, Millwood, reported that local farms create jobs for County residents.

FY09 Tax Rate and Public Hearing

Tom Judge reviewed the proposed two-cent real estate tax increase for FY09 taking the rate from 48 cents per hundred to 50 cents per hundred of assessed value. He clarified that the reduced tax rate for fire and rescue vehicles applies to the personal vehicles owned by fire and rescue volunteers. Supervisor Dunning put forth for consideration a review of this rate suggesting that the County might wish to altogether waive the tax on the first personal vehicle owned by a volunteer as a means to demonstrate appreciation for efforts in service to the County. Chairman Staelin asked Mr. Judge to check with the Commissioner of the Revenue on how many vehicles this would entail.

At 8:34 pm Chairman Staelin opened the public comment portion of the public hearing

Carl Stephanus, Berryville: spoke in support of the proposed increase. He commended the Board of Supervisors and County staff for holding down costs and keeping them in line, as well as their efforts to keep the State in line. He opined that the proposed increase might not be enough. He also stated that he felt the increase was necessary to keep the good services the County provides. He concluded that he had faith in the Supervisor's judgment.

At 8:41 pm there being no additional persons desiring to speak Chairman Staelin closed the public comment portion of the public hearing.

Adjournment

Chairman Staelin adjourned the meeting at 8:42 pm.

Next Meeting Date

The regular meeting of the Board of Supervisors is set for Tuesday, April 15, 2008 at 1:00 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors' Meeting Room.

ATTEST: April 8, 2008

John Staelin, Chair
Clarke County Board of Supervisors

David L. Ash, County Administrator

Minutes Recorded and Transcribed by:
Lora B. Walburn
Deputy Clerk, Board of Supervisors