

Fireworks at TLRSD meeting

Board refuses to answer questions during public hearing for rate increase

By Debbie Lowe
Staff writer

A roomful of angry customers with complaints met with resistance from the Twin Lakes Regional Sewer District Board of Directors at last Thursday night's public hearing for the proposed rate increase. The same prevailed during the regular board meeting afterward.

John Julien of H.J. Umbaugh and Associates provided the basis of the rate increases for all current and proposed service areas, including the Jefferson Township service area, south of Lake Freeman, in Carroll County. Julien was directed by the board to answer no questions from the audience as he began the explanation.

Julien said the Phase IIIB service area is expected to cost \$25 million dollars, based on the engineering firm's estimates.

Julien said the rate increases were designed to recoup a \$200,000 annual deficit district-wide. He said of the proposed \$65/month user fee for Carroll County residents, \$22.50 was for operation and maintenance of the system and \$42.48 was for debt

service.

The meeting was opened for public comments after Julien's presentation, however board president Jim Smith informed the audience the board would answer no questions.

"We need some true oversight on this system," James Reynolds of the Big Monon Bay service area said.

"This board has alienated people. There is something seriously wrong when the board members talk to the public like they do," said Phase III resident Larry Clue.

Carroll County board representative Wayne Garrison asked board president Jim Smith to direct audience members to restrict their comments to the proposed rate ordinance only.

John Land, who owns property in Phase II, said his service has been in operation for five months and he is experiencing a nine percent increase.

"You're totally out of bounds," he said. "I'm pleading with you to allow constituents to voice their concerns."

Jefferson Township resident Pat Robertson read from the State

Board of Accounts (SBA) district audit report for 2004: "...records maintained by the district related to capital assets and accumulated depreciation, other accounts receivable, materials and supplies inventory, revenues and expenses were incomplete and/or contained posting errors. Due to the condition of these records we were not able to determine the validity of the amounts recorded for these accounts."

The report continued to state the SBA was not able to be satisfied about the validity of the amounts shown for the accounts in the financial statements.

"How can you increase debt service rates when you haven't been able to manage your books so far?" she asked. "How can you propose rates for Phase IIIB when you have not gone to bid on that phase?"

Robertson also questioned the legality of increasing the debt service fee as presented by Julien.

Former TLRSD board member Don Apple said, "We weren't honest with the people in sitting down with them before."

He suggested board members

hold a question and answer session with concerned customers and potential customers. He emphasized the need for honesty in those discussions.

"I think you're making some innuendo and accusations that you shouldn't, because I don't think you can back them up," Smith replied to Apple.

"I can't go along with this rate ordinance," Apple said.

Smith told Apple to discuss the matter with Julien "out in the hall."

"That's not the point of a public meeting," Apple replied. He pleaded with board members to "uphold the constitution."

"There is no compelling need to rush this project," Jefferson Township resident Gregory Smith said. "The size and scope of this project is overblown and out of proportion to the limited need of the few problem areas along the Lake Freeman shoreline."

Smith suggested a project the size of the Idaville system be used in conjunction with the "completely functioning White Oaks facility."

He said it would "address all current problems and result in a lower rate for the Carroll County popula-

tion."

Jefferson Township resident John Shellcrosslee, who is running for township advisory board in the November general election, said the e-Coli problem in the lakes was generated "far up north."

"We don't have a sewer problem here on these lakes," he emphasized.

And finally, Jim Promeski of Upper Sunset Park in White County called for the current board members to resign due to their rudeness and arrogance toward the public.

The regular board meeting was held after a five-minute break.

GRW Engineering firm representative Joe Tierney reported another letter was received from the Office of Rural Development requesting additional information about the Phase IIIB funding request.

He stated he did not know when the next round of funding would occur and he said the current funding request had not been forwarded to the next level.

Tierney said 25 out of the 94 mainline Phase IIIB easements were received by the Sept. 25 dead-

line. GRW will recommend at a future board meeting what action to take against those who have not met the deadline.

"Let's keep it short," Smith said as he opened the public comments portion of the meeting.

Clue of Phase III said, "You've got to make rates reasonable and fair. (Rates) need to be under the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission. There's no accountability."

Board treasurer Art Anderson disagreed with comments he'd heard.

"I think you guys should be paying the higher rate," he directed at Carroll County residents.

Anderson said no one would run to be elected to the sewer board and "listen to all the complaining."

Anderson said Phase IIIB customers should pay more and not rely on the other phases to help with funding for that area.

The meeting was adjourned shortly afterwards.

The proposed rate increase is scheduled for adoption by the board at the next meeting set for Oct. 12 at 7 p.m.

Commissioners adopt zoning ordinance

By Debbie Lowe
Staff writer

Carroll County Commissioners set the stage for construction permits needed for all large confined or concentrated animal feeding operations that want to locate in the county. Those operations will have tighter setback distance restrictions, but they will not have to go before a county governing board or the public to obtain or

review the need for a construction permit.

Acting upon a recommendation by the Carroll County Area Plan Commission, commissioners unanimously passed the proposed amended zoning ordinance.

When asked for a recommendation, county attorney Barry Emerson refused stating, "greater minds than mine" reviewed the document.

"It would be a disservice to

them if I made a recommendation," he said

Zoning administrator Dale Huffer explained the revised ordinance was debated in meetings "for months and months."

"There are a lot of changes," he said. "There is a lot more detail and setbacks are a little farther."

Carroll Manor

Commissioners did not accept the lone bid for renovation to Carroll Manor.

"As it stands, we don't have the money to accept the bid," commissioners' president Bill Brown said.

Dan Kiser of Cornerstone Engineering presented issues designed to "value engineer the project," which would eliminate costs to more closely match the money available for the project.

Commissioners decided to rebid the project in October. Bids will be due at the Nov. 20 commissioners' meeting.

Construction could begin the first week of December according to grant administrator Tina Henderson.

Highway department

County highway supervisor Ramzi Awwad announced the Lancaster Bridge project needs more money for inspection services, performed in September and those for the future. Between \$15,000 and \$18,000 is needed, which will cost the county approximately \$3,000 in an 80/20 funding situation.

Commissioners endorsed a letter of request to INDOT for the additional funding.

Awwad said the project has experienced \$60,000 worth of additional expenses so far. This amounts to approximately a \$12,000 cost overrun for the county.

Bridge #81 on CR150E north of SR218 will be replaced rather than renovated according to Awwad. The structure will be

stored by the county for up to 15 years, with the hope of gifting it to a not-for-profit group. After that time, it can be demolished.

A courthouse grounds and sign application by Carol's Candies and Cookies did not receive approval. The business requested the use of the sidewalk on the eastside of the courthouse on Wednesdays and Fridays from 9 a.m. to noon from May to October in 2007. Commissioners requested the owner supply the county with clarification of insurance coverage and apply to use county property after the first of the year.

Payroll claims for \$183,355.99, highway claims for \$618,761.70 and county general claims for \$60,465.44 and \$156,521.64 were approved.

The next meeting will be Oct. 16 at 6 p.m. in the commissioners' meeting room on the second floor of the courthouse.

Board to appeal budget cut

Secretary to leave position

By Debbie Lowe
Staff writer

The Carroll County Drainage Board is displeased with the county council's decision to decrease their 2007 budget and they plan to formally object. An appeal will be filed at the Nov. 3 council meeting.

Drainage board president Loren Hylton reported the department's budget was decreased about 35 percent overall. The largest decrease was in the salary for the secretary, Wanda Duff. Her salary was cut more than 50 percent.

Hylton said he presented the budget to the council during budget time and there were no questions about Duff's duties, the amount of time she spent on the job, or what her expenses were for the year.

Duff said she was not bitter about the decision, however

because of the action, she will leave the position at the end of 2006.

"I have to say, I am a little bitter about it," drainage board

member and county commissioners' president Bill Brown said. "I feel this is ridiculous. This decision is a disaster for our drainage board."

County surveyor Wayne Chapman reminded board members the first-deputy position in the surveyor's office was downgraded to a clerk position by the council in the 2006 budget.

"For no reason, they just did it," he said.

County attorney Barry Emerson said the drainage board secretary must be knowledgeable about drainage

issues and legal issues as they relate to notification to property owners when an action is pending.

"What we have accomplished, we couldn't have done without Wanda," Chapman said.

"It was very poor management to make this drastic cut," Brown said talking about long-term economic effects of having someone less qualified in the secretary's position.

"I think it will be impossible to find a competent replacement for Wanda," he concluded.

Other business

Chapman said he has heard nothing about a drainage plan from the proposed Boerman Carroll dairy, to be located in Democrat Township.

He reported the department addressed waterway issues during September.

"Things are getting busy out there," Chapman said.

The next meeting will be Nov. 6 at 8:30 a.m.

Department of Revenue gets aggressive on tax collections

Comet staff report

The Department of Revenue is continuing its charge to strictly enforce collections on taxpayers who did not take advantage of the state's 2005 amnesty offer. Those efforts are outlined in the final Indiana Tax Amnesty report released by Governor Mitch Daniels.

Among efforts, more than 32,000 bank account levies and more than 2,000 garnishments have been issued, and \$2.5 million has been collected. These actions alone have the potential to bring in \$39 million.

"We said we'd go after everyone who didn't take advantage of the one-time amnesty opportunity, and we're making good on that promise. Follow-up and enforcement are equally as important," said Daniels.

The final report of Indiana's successful amnesty program shows that the program recovered more than \$244 million in delinquent taxes dating back as far as the 1970s. Since August, shortly after the Dept. of Revenue processed the final amnesty payment plans that were due June 30, it has enlisted three collection agencies to initiate aggressive collection actions, including garnishments, bank account levies and the initiation of collection lawsuits to pursue the more than \$1.9 billion in tax debt that was amnesty eligible. Revenue Commissioner John Eckart said this firm approach is working.

On Sept. 7, the Dept. of Revenue also launched a mass-billing campaign to collect on unpaid sales tax from more than 70,000 businesses for tax periods from July 1, 2004,

through May 31, 2006. These are businesses that have not filed taxes or which filed, but have not paid. The billings were for tax periods outside the scope of amnesty.

"Sales and withholding taxes are the most abused in terms of missed filings and payments," said Eckart. Sales and withholding tax make up 75 percent of Indiana's annual tax revenue sources.

Since the start of the mass-billing

campaign, more than 12,000 businesses have contacted the department to address their tax debts and more than \$2.5 million has been collected. Another collection campaign for withholding tax targeting 42,000 businesses will start in October.

The final Indiana Tax Amnesty report is available on the Department of Revenue's Web site at www.in.gov/dor

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Recognized for family farm

Helen Yeager and her daughter, Marianne Ash, are pictured with Lt. Governor Becky Skillman (left) after receiving the Hoosier Homestead Award in recognition of their more than 100-year commitment to Indiana agriculture. The presentation was made at the Indiana State Fair in August. The farm, located in Carroll County, was established in 1893. The Yeager family joins nearly 4,500 Hoosier Homestead farms. To be named a Hoosier Homestead, farms must be owned by the same family for more than 100 consecutive years and consist of more than 20 acres or produce more than \$1,000 of agricultural products per year. The person in back is unidentified. Photo provided

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