

**RICHMOND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
DOBBINS HEIGHTS TOWN HALL  
REGULAR MID-MONTH MEETING  
TUESDAY, MARCH 20, 2007, 12:00 NOON**

*The Richmond County Board of Commissioners met for the Regular Mid-Month Noon Meeting on Tuesday, March 20, 2007 at 12:00 Noon at the Dobbins Heights Town Hall. The following Commissioners were present: Chairman Kenneth R. Robinette; Vice-Chairman John B. Garner; Commissioners Pamela N. Dillman, Jimmy L. Maske, Thad Ussery, and Paul Wilson, Jr.*

*Commissioner J. C. Watkins was unable to attend.*

*Staff present: County Manager James E. Haynes; County Attorney Stephan R. Futrell; Director of Development Rick Sago; Planning Director Jamie Armstrong; Public Information Officer Crystal Cagle; and Clerk to the Board Marian Savage.*

*Members of Dobbins Heights Town Council and Town staff present were: Mayor William Ward; Councilwoman Gracie Jackson; Councilwoman Angeline David; Councilwoman Mary Ann Gibson; Councilman Curtis Ratliff; and Town Clerk Mary Magee.*

*The Town of Dobbins Heights had invited the Board of Commissioners to host the Mid-Month Meeting as an open-forum meeting for the community, and Chairman Robinette called the meeting to order at 12:00 Noon.*

*Chairman Robinette thanked Mayor Ward and Council members for hosting the meeting and providing the Board with the opportunity to meet in the community in an open forum.*

**ITEM NO. 1 – INVOCATION**

*The invocation was delivered by Dobbins Heights Mayor William Ward.*

**ITEM NO. 2 – STAFF REPORTS**

**Report By Director of Development Rick Sago**

*Director of Development Rick Sago provided an update and report on the most recent Economic Development activities. Mr. Sago discussed with regret the recent announcement by Hanes Brands to close the Rockingham Plant. Mr. Sago advised that the Governor's Rapid Response Team had already met with local employees to discuss options and benefits, and he advised that the building is already listed and being marketed on the North Carolina Southeast web site.*

*Mr. Sago was very complimentary of the attention that Richmond County has received from the State in assisting with recent Economic Development projects. Mr. Sago complimented the Board of Commissioners for their focus on Economic Development and advised that because of the County's interest, funding assistance for recent projects has been provided by the Governor's Office, the Department of Commerce, the Rural Center, and the Golden Leaf Foundation. Mr. Sago further reported that since 2004, Richmond County has received \$7.1 million in assistance from the State; \$5.8 million from the Department of Commerce; 600 new jobs have been created in Richmond County; and a total of \$94 million in investment has been made in Richmond*

County. Mr. Sago proudly reported that Richmond County has not been turned down by the State for assistance on Economic Development projects.

A person in the audience asked Mr. Sago what projects are now being planned. Mr. Sago advised that he is currently working with 15 active projects. In response to another question, Mr. Sago advised that Richmond Community College and Workforce Development provide training for industries, and Employment Security Commission accepts applications for new industries.

Chairman Robinette also stressed the value of training provided by RCC and their guarantee that employees will be properly trained, with a focus on technical training.

Mr. Sago commended the contributions of the Economic Development Team, which is comprised of representatives from each municipality. Mr. Sago thanked Mayor Ward for his active participation on the Development Team.

Mr. Sago announced that the groundbreaking ceremony for BST, the new industry that will locate in a portion of the Burlington Industries Building, will be held on April 12 at 11:30 A.M. Mr. Sago went on to advise that BST will create 200 new jobs and represents a \$35,000,000.00 investment in Richmond County. Mr. Sago was optimistic that BST will be a great corporate partner to help stabilize the Burlington Plant.

### **Report By Planning Director Jamie Armstrong**

Planning Director Jamie Armstrong followed up on his discussion during the previous meeting concerning property in East Rockingham. Mr. Armstrong referred to property that had been ordered for demolition, and then at his recommendation, the Board had suspended the Order for Demolition to allow an opportunity for the new owner to bring the property up to code standards. Mr. Armstrong reported that the new owner, Mr. England, had provided a list of repairs planned for the property, including \$1,900.00 in electrical repair work; replacement of sills; and repairs to plumbing that he had committed to have completed within 120 to 160 days. Mr. Armstrong asked if the Board desired to proceed.

Commissioner Ussery offered a motion to allow Mr. England to proceed with the repair work, and for Mr. Armstrong to provide a monthly review of the progress being made on the repairs, which should be completed within 140 days. Mr. Armstrong noted that Building Inspector Gary Williams, Code Enforcement Officer Shannon Brigman, Director of Community Services B. K. Jones, and himself would all oversee and inspect the work on this property. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Dillman and carried unanimously.

### **ITEM NO. 3 – OTHER BUSINESS**

County Manager Haynes discussed Medicaid costs, noting that the County's required match to Medicaid totals \$4,000,000.00 from the County budget. Mr. Haynes described some of the different ideas that are being proposed in the Legislature as possible options to address the counties' burden of funding Medicaid. Mr. Haynes explained that one option being considered by the Legislature is changing sales tax laws to allow counties to levy a 1% Land Transfer Tax to generate revenue to help offset the cost of Medicaid. Mr. Haynes went on to explain that some counties are requesting special legislation that would allow them to implement the Land Transfer Tax by local option.

*Chairman Robinette advised that he had received several telephone calls expressing concern about the Land Transfer Tax. Chairman Robinette expressed concern that those who are attempting to develop the County and to build tax base would be hampered by such a tax. In further discussion, Chairman Robinette noted that the real estate market in North Carolina is down 37% and that an additional tax could be detrimental to growth, especially in poor counties where many transactions are based on 100% financing.*

*Commissioner Dillman stated that she had a different view on the Land Transfer Tax option. Commissioner Dillman cited the Land Transfer Tax as a means of generating an additional \$1,000,000.00 in revenue for the County, and that the people who have the means to buy property would be those who would pay the tax. Commissioner Dillman stated that the tax has not yet been passed, but that it would provide a means of putting something back into the community.*

*Chairman Robinette recommended that sales tax is a more fair tax since it would affect everyone, and he expressed concern that the Medicaid Program has been used far beyond its original intent. Chairman Robinette felt that developers should not be penalized with a Land Transfer Tax that could possibly stop growth and Economic Development opportunities, and impact the quality of life in the County.*

*Commissioner Garner felt that a local option sales tax would be a more fair tax and would be distributed to everyone in the County and to those who come into the County and make purchases. Commissioner Garner noted that the 1% Land Transfer Tax as restrictive to the seller and the buyer, while a sales tax is spread out among everyone. In further discussion, Commissioner Garner was of the opinion that big investment would be impaired by a real estate tax and that as a result, fewer transactions would occur.*

*Commissioner Maske cautioned that implementation of a 1% Land Transfer Tax would negatively impact first-time home buyers. Commissioner Maske emphasized the fact that North Carolina is now the only state that requires counties to contribute toward Medicaid funding.*

*Commissioner Ussery agreed that a 1% Land Transfer Tax would impede development, and he felt that it was unfair for an individual who sells a home to pay another tax after having paid Ad Valorem taxes for owning the home. Commissioner Ussery also concurred that sales tax is a more fair tax that is paid by everyone, and he further stressed that the State should take responsibility for funding of Medicaid. Commissioner Ussery urged everyone in the room to contact our Legislators to request relief for the cost of Medicaid. Commissioner Ussery noted that counties do not make laws and do not levy sales taxes.*

*County Manager Haynes noted that counties pay 15% of the State's share toward Medicaid funding, which is 5.5% of the total cost the federal share. Mr. Haynes added that 16% of the County budget is allocated for Medicaid funding.*

*Chairman Robinette asked the wishes of the Board with regard to the option of a 1% Land Transfer Tax.*

*Commissioner Maske offered a motion to adopt a Resolution opposing the 1% Land Transfer Tax option. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wilson. Commissioner Garner stressed the importance of building value for property owners rather than increasing the tax rate, noting*

*that it is more beneficial to the property owner to have a home valued at \$100,000.00 and a .50 tax rate than to have a \$50,000.00 home with a \$1.00 tax rate. The motion to adopt a Resolution opposing the Land Transfer Tax and to request relief from the burden of Medicaid funding was approved by the following 5 to 1 vote:*

*FOR: Commissioners Maske, Wilson, Garner, Robinette, and Ussery  
OPPOSED: Commissioner Dillman*

*A question from the audience was raised about sales tax, and County Manager Haynes explained that sales tax is implemented by one of two methods – by point of sale or based on population.*

*Commissioner Garner commented that the tax rate is a direct reflection on how the County is managed.*

*Chairman Robinette referred to a letter written by Judge Beale to the Board of Commissioners suggesting that some of the Board members meet with him to discuss a timeline on construction of the judicial center. Chairman Robinette recommended that the best approach would be a meeting of the full Board rather than just one or two Board members meeting with Judge Beale.*

*At 12:45 P.M. Chairman Robinette deferred to Mayor Ward, and he thanked the Mayor for hosting this meeting in Dobbins Heights.*

*Mayor Ward advised that three citizens has requested an opportunity to address the Board of Commissioners.*

*Councilwoman Angeline David asked the possibility of having law enforcement officers to patrol in the Town of Dobbins Heights day and night in an effort to control illegal activities. Councilwoman David expressed concern about gang and drug activity in the community and graffiti on houses, noting that sometimes by the time that an officer can be dispatched, the suspect will have fled the scene. Councilwoman David felt that presence of an officer often inhibits illegal activity before it occurs.*

*County Manager Haynes advised that since Dobbins Heights is a town, it becomes the town's responsibility to provide law enforcement. Mr. Haynes went on to explain that law enforcement coverage could be provided through a contract as the Town of Ellerbe has arranged with the Sheriff's Department. County Manager Haynes went on to explain that the Sheriff determines where his officers are assigned, but as a municipality, Dobbins Heights could approach the Sheriff to consider a contract for law enforcement services. Mr. Haynes advised that Ellerbe pays the County for all costs associated with the officers assigned in Ellerbe, including the vehicle, equipment, etc. Mr. Haynes offered to help the Town negotiate such an agreement with the Sheriff's Department if they choose to pursue such an arrangement.*

*Mayor Ward asked if the cost of the law enforcement services contract is based on the area covered. County Manager Haynes advised that the agreement is based strictly on actual cost for providing the service. Mr. Haynes agreed that law enforcement presence would help to address gang activity.*

*Mr. Cary Barnes expressed concern about vicious dogs in the community and the many elderly citizens who walk and are bothered by the dogs.*

*County Manager Haynes advised that the County has an Animal Control Program that covers the County as well as the City of Rockingham. Mr. Haynes explained that the County's Animal Control rules may not apply if the Town of Dobbins Heights has its own ordinance. Mr. Haynes offered to work with the town to determine how rules can best be enforced.*

*Councilwoman David stated that the town does have an Animal Control Ordinance but that they need an agreement to enforce the rules.*

*Mayor Ward confirmed that property owners must grant permission for a trap to be set for a dog.*

*Commissioners Ussery and Dillman noted that vaccinations are required; there is a limit of ownership of three dogs per household; and vicious dogs are monitored by the Health Department.*

*Dobbins Heights Town Clerk Mary Magee discussed "Keep Richmond County Beautiful", expressing a desire to improve the appearance of Dobbins Heights. Ms. Magee noted that many property owners take pride in their property, but there is a problem of junk vehicles.*

*Planning Director Jamie Armstrong explained that the County has a Junk Car Ordinance written in accordance with General Statute requirements. Mr. Armstrong went on to advise that the ordinance is successfully enforced through the County's Code Enforcement Officer. Mr. Armstrong elaborated on the success of enforcing this ordinance in East Rockingham and removing 30 cars under provisions of the ordinance. Mr. Armstrong advised that a city ordinance could be adopted and that County Code Enforcement Officer Shannon Brigman could assist the town with enforcement of the ordinance.*

*Councilwoman Gracie Jackson discussed the possibility of the County collecting property taxes for the Town of Dobbins Heights. Councilwoman Jackson advised that tax collection is a problem for the Town and that there are a number of absentee property owners who do not pay.*

*Chairman Robinette stated that the County has made an assertive effort to collect taxes by attaching bank accounts and through foreclosures. Chairman Robinette noted that everyone must be treated the same.*

*County Manager Haynes also stressed the need to be aggressive with collection efforts, noting that the County has four full-time people collecting. Mr. Haynes expressed concern that if the County assumed responsibility for collection of Dobbins Heights taxes, it would take away from efforts to collect county taxes. Mr. Haynes advised that as a result of more aggressive collection methods this year, the collection rate should be 96%. Mr. Haynes offered to have County Tax Collection staff to advise the town on the methods used, but the Board of Commissioners would make the final decision on providing tax collection service for the town.*

*Commissioner Ussery referenced the Debt Setoff Program made available by the State to collect taxes. Commissioner Ussery felt that once citizens understand that tax collection efforts have become more aggressive then they will begin to pay to avoid the consequences.*

*Councilwoman Gracie Jackson recommended that the County Tax Collector meet with Dobbins Heights staff to advise on tax collection methods.*

*Mayor Ward commented on the number of absentee property owners in Dobbins Heights and the difficulty that staff has in pursuing collection of these taxes. The Mayor went on to state that the town is limited in its ability to borrow money because of the low tax collection rate.*

*County Manager Haynes assured the Mayor that the County would be willing to assist the town on the tools that are available to them in aggressively collecting taxes.*

*Councilwoman Jackson advised that approximately 2/3 of the Town of Dobbins Heights has sewer, but there are often problems during periods of heavy rain. Councilwoman Jackson asked if the County could provide sewer service to the town.*

*Chairman Robinette stated that the County does not have a sewer system but that Rockingham and Hamlet both have sewer systems. Chairman Robinette suggested that consolidated sewer services might be pursued.*

*Councilwoman Jackson expressed concern about small, poor communities like Dobbins Heights, and she stressed the need for all to work together to help one another.*

*Chairman Robinette agreed that whenever people visit the County they look at the whole county. Chairman Robinette stated that we cannot make promises that we cannot keep, and sometimes the County feels left out by the State just as Dobbins Heights feels left behind. Chairman Robinette went on to state that we are all in this together, and even with limited resources, the County has been able to keep the tax rate down. Chairman Robinette assured Dobbins Heights officials that anytime that we can do something together and assist with staff, the County will be glad to help.*

*Mayor Ward expressed appreciation to Mr. Robert McRae and Mr. Howard McLaurin as big supporters of the town, and the Mayor thanked the Board of Commissioners for their support.*

*Mr. McRae also thanked the Board of Commissioners for their contributions and he extended an invitation to all to attend the Easter Egg Hunt.*

*Commissioner Wilson commended Mayor Ward and Town Council members for all of the work that has been done to in Dobbins Heights.*

*Commissioner Dillman expressed appreciation for the town hosting the meeting.*

*There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 1:25 P.M. by motion of Commissioner Ussery, seconded by Commissioner Maske and unanimously carried.*

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*Marian S. Savage, CMC  
Clerk to the Board of Commissioners*