

Ray Jeffers

Media Report

Draft

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Part I Introduction

This report reviews electronically available news stories on Ray Jeffers, Person County Commissioner, running for the NC House.

The Table of Contents in **Part II** of the report is a useful guide to the entire report and can be used as a stand-alone summary. In one section, it surveys the bulk of the news file, through the headlines we have assigned to each item.

Part III, the **Greatest Hits** section, identifies key points taken from available media articles.

Parts IV, **The News File**, contain edited copies of the most relevant electronically available stories.

We hope you find this useful.

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Part III Jeffers: Greatest Hits from Media Review

Background

- Jeffers is a lifelong resident of Person County, where he attended Person County Schools, later attending Piedmont Community College and North Carolina A&T State University. He and his wife Treco Lea-Jeffers reside in the Cunningham Township of Person County. (Roxboro Courier-Times, 2/1/14). As of 2014, they had two children, Shakira and Ivory.
- In 2007 he was “an after-school coordinator of a grant-funded recreation program to fight obesity.” Then in 2008, his occupation was listed as operating a kennel in Roxboro to train German Shepherds as police dogs. (Courier-Times, 4/16/08). No other articles mention outside work or occupations since that time.

His wife was appointed to the Board of Adjustment for a three year term in 2018, while Jeffers was still a County Commissioner. He insisted there was no conflict of interest. Only one member voted against her appointment (4-1 approval).

- The Person Board of County Commissioners, at their June 18 meeting, made a number of appointments to boards, commissions, authorities and committees.Treco Lea-Jeffers was appointed to the Board of Adjustment for a three-year term.
- Commissioner Ray Jeffers, her husband, disclosed there was not a conflict of interest with his vote as there would be no personal financial gain. He added that any appeal of the Board of Adjustment was with the court system and not the Board of Commissioners.
- Chairman Tracey Kendrick stated his concerns related to the Jeffers’ having family land in the vicinity of the Sun Rock Quarry, noting past conversations where folks and church representatives had contacted Jeffers with complaints. He felt it was not a good precedent for the Board of Commissioners with a potential court case. Kendrick said he would be voting in opposition. Commissioners voted 4-1 to appoint Lea-Jeffers to the Board of Adjustment, with Kendrick casting the dissenting vote. (Courier-Times, 6/23/18)

Person County Commissioner

Jeffers was elected to the Person County Board of Commissioners in 2008 and served three terms, losing his bid for another term in 2020 when he finished outside the top three.

Praised at Last Meeting

At his last meeting in December 2020, fellow commissioners from both parties had kind words for his years of service.

- Jeffers served the board from Dec. 1, 2008 until Dec. 7, 2020. In that time, he was selected to the board's vice chair for 2013, 2015 and 2019 and served as the board's chair in 2020. Sims said he got to know Jeffers on the campaign trail during this year's general election. "Being out there for almost 18 days, I know you and I were probably the last ones to leave at night," he said. "I want to thank you for your service - as many years as you've been here."
- Puryear said Jeffers made the most of his time on the board. "You've served this community with distinction," he said. "I'm going to miss coming to you and trying to figure out how to compromise on some budget issues that we've had in the past." Puryear said the board would be losing a "valuable resource" in Jeffers' involvement with the statewide and national organizations.
- Clayton reiterated that he didn't know Jeffers when he ran for commissioner. "I went and found the kids that went to school with you and asked them what kind of fellow you were and they started telling me all about you and I said, 'well he's probably going to be okay then.' And you were okay - you were better than okay.... you represented Person County well and you put that name all over the country."
- Jeffers thanked his fellow commissioners and the citizens of the county. "Often I'm asked what made me run at 24 or 25 and I always tell people the same thing: I ran because I stayed," he said. He said many of his peers left the county when they could and haven't come back.
- "Since I stayed and started to get involved, I felt like this was the best way for me to try to make a difference here in Person County," he said. "I did get involved. Sometimes I got beat up for going to some meetings, but it cost the county very little those years because it seemed like every organization I got involved in, I worked my way to the executive committee and they footed the bill."
- Jeffers said he served 11 consecutive years on the state Association of County Commissioners board of directors and six years on the National Association of Counties board of directors.
- "I think growing up here in Person County on a farm you learn a good work ethic and that work ethic I tried to put to use for Person County," he said. "At some meeting someone said, 'if you're not at the table, you're on the menu.' So, I always tried to keep Person County at the table and off the menu." (Courier-Times, 12/17/20)

State and National Organizations

During his twelve years, Jeffers held key positions in state and national organizations of county commissioners. First with the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) where he held several positions before becoming First Vice President in 2011 (all while he was still in just his first term as a County Commissioner)

- As first vice president of the NCACC, Jeffers will work closely with the other members of the NCACC Executive Committee to guide the NCACC Board of Directors on legislative and administrative issues affecting counties throughout the year.

- Jeffers is in his first term as a member of the Person Board of County Commissioners. He has served as a member of the NCACC Board of Directors in each of the past two years.
- In 2010-11, he chaired the association's Task Force on Youth Involvement. In 2009-10, he chaired the NCACC Agriculture Steering Committee. Jeffers is also the NCACC's designee on the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund Board. (Courier-Times, 8/24/11)

By 2013, he had become President of the NCACC for a year's term. (Mount Airy News, 9/22/13)

Jeffers soon held positions on the National Association of Counties (NACo), which culminated with serving on their Board of Directors on two separate occasions.

- Jeffers, who is currently serving his second four-year term on the Person Board of County Commissioners, has been active within NACo since becoming a commissioner. Jeffers previously served on the NACo board of directors in 2013-14, when he was appointed by the NACo president as the chairman of the Rural Action Caucus, which represents the nation's rural counties. He has also been a member of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee .
- Jeffers is one of five North Carolina county commissioners who will represent the state on the national board in 2015- 16. Others named from North Carolina include Tracey Johnson (Washington County), Kay Cashion (Guilford County), Betty Lou Ward (Wake County) and Noah Woods (Robeson County).
- North Carolina has one of the largest state contingents on the NACo board, according to Todd McGee, public relations director for the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC).
- Jeffers served as president of the NCACC in 2013- 14 and is currently a member of the organization's board of directors. Last year, Jeffers was one of 24 county leaders from across the country named to participate in NACo's Tenth Annual County Leadership Institute in Washington, D.C.
- NACo was founded in 1935 and unites the nation's 3,069 county governments. NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government, and exercise exemplary leadership in public service. (Courier-Times, 7/23/14)

A 2017 article says Jeffers was running for second VP of NACo but he was not successful. In 2019 he ran again for second VP (according to the NACo website), but did not win.

Taxes - 2019 Budget

The issue of tax hikes in the County Budget did not come into play until 2019, when the County had its first property tax hike since 2007 (before Jeffers was elected). At that point he was unconvinced that a tax hike could be avoided.

- After hearing different approaches to what the board could do instead of increasing property taxes, commissioner Ray Jeffers was at a loss for where the money could come from. "I think we would like to do without a tax increase but we have gone 12 years. I think we are one of the few who have been able to hold out for 12 years especially given some of the priorities that so many of you all have mentioned. I don't know where the money would come from," said Jeffers. (Courier-Times, 6/8/19)

The Board approved Jeffers's call for a three-cent tax hike (one cent higher than the one initially proposed) by a 3-2 vote.

- Person County's Board of Commissioners voted Tuesday morning on adjustments to the proposed budget at their second work session. In a 3-2 vote, commissioners approved a plan offered by vice chairman Ray Jeffers, spurning a competing proposal from commissioner Kyle Puryear.
- Jeffers' proposal calls for adding a penny to the proposed 2-cent property tax rate, bringing it to three cents. At the session, Jeffers proposed funding the budget proposed by county manager Heidi York, but he also suggested adding funds to a handful of projects.
- Jeffers' proposal called for adding an additional \$250,000 to the Economic Development Commission's operating budget, \$25,000 for a YMCA study and implementing a salary study over a two-year period at a cost of \$363,471.50.
- Jeffers also wants to cut funding for the Woodsdale Volunteer Fire Department by \$30,000 and lower fees from \$300 to \$100 to help county farmers pay for agricultural well permits. (Courier Times, 6/12/19)

Since this was a preliminary vote, Commissioner Puryear (a Republican) took to social media to encourage citizens come to the next meeting to speak against the tax hike. Jeffers responded by using social media to encourage supporters to come.

- As time winds down before a final vote on the first county budget in 12 years that would include a property tax increase, county commissioners are turning up the rhetoric on social media. Earlier this week, Person County's Board of Commissioners voted on adjustments to the proposed budget at their second work session.
- In a 3-2 vote, commissioners approved a plan offered by vice chairman Ray Jeffers that would increase the tax rate by three cents - a penny more than county manager Heidi York's proposed budget. In adopting that plan, commissioners spurned a competing proposal from commissioner Kyle Puryear.

- Puryear defended his proposal Wednesday night in a Facebook post and encouraged the public to make its voice heard at the board's June 17 meeting, when the final budget is expected to be adopted. "There is still time for your voice to be heard on Monday, June 17th at 9:00 a.m. at the County Office Building for the final vote," Puryear wrote. "I am very disappointed that three members of the Board of Commissioners did not seriously consider my budget proposal that included no property tax increase, fully funding our schools and volunteer fire departments as the County Manager requested and also only included a penny fire tax increase."
- That post has garnered 86 comments including one from Jeffers who responded to a comment about the cost to taxpayers of Person Area Transportation System. "Given the questions in reference to PATS and the misinformation shared. Here are the real numbers. The county receives a state grant to run PATs (of) which our share is 10 percent on Capital and 15 percent on administration," Jeffers said in his response.
- Jeffers later defended his proposal in another Facebook post and encouraged the public to attend Monday's meeting. "We have a meeting Monday at 9 a.m. at the County Office Building. In the budget, I have funded the study that the YMCA requires for the community so they can decide the viability of coming to Person County and what services could be offered. It is \$25,000 of a \$70 million budget. The naysayers are already starting on the Facebook page Person County Local. Go join the page, share your thoughts and come to the meeting on Monday. If you can't come, email your commissioners. Commissioners Gordon Powell and Kyle Puryear voted against the proposal," Jeffers wrote. (Courier-Times, 6/15/19)

The three-cent hike was approved at the next meeting along with an increase in the fire tax from one cent to 2.75 cents.

- Person County commissioners approved a budget Monday that calls for the first increase in the property tax rate in 12 years. But not before they continued their debate and gathered more comments from the public. In a 3-2 vote, commissioners voted to approve a proposal from Commissioner Ray Jeffers that called for a three-cent property tax hike, a penny more than the budget county manager Heidi York recommended.
- Jeffers' proposal called for funding the budget proposed by county manager Heidi York with added funding for a handful of projects, including an additional \$250,000 to the Economic Development Commission's operating budget, \$25,000 for a YMCA study and the implementation of a salary study over a two-year period at a cost of \$363,471.50.
- The budget also cuts funding for the Woodsdale Volunteer Fire Department by \$30,000 and lowers fees from \$300 to \$100 to help county farmers pay for agricultural well permits. The county will conduct a study of its health department personnel needs, but the budget trims a public health nursing positions and freezes the department's vacant positions.
- Hoping to sway the outcome of Monday's vote at the last minute, the public packed the commissioners' meeting room to voice their concerns before the board voted. During public comment, residents addressed issues that have been central to this year's budget debate, including property tax increases, a YMCA study and economic development funding.

- "It is easy to raise taxes. I don't find it innovative. I find it lazy. I know it is a necessary evil but we have been doing well so far," said Rougemont resident Chris Weaver.
- A resident in favor of raising taxes believed it will be a good investment in the health and welfare of the community. "Look at where the good jobs and good schools are in our state. All of those places have higher taxes because they give better services - services that help everybody," said Person County resident James Haward.
- Others recommended solutions to the board to address revenues and taxation levels in the county. "Why can't you use sales tax to help offset some of these (taxes) on property owners," Person County resident Fred Fox asked.
- A Timberlake resident against increasing property taxes questioned why the board didn't consider commissioner Kyle Puryear's budget proposal and spoke about concerns with funding a YMCA study.
- "I think It was a shame this board did not consider Kyle Puryear's budget proposal and I think approving a YMCA study that will cost these taxpayers \$25,000 is a waste of money," Derrick Sims said. Sims was an unsuccessful candidate in the race for a seat on the county board of commissioners last year.
- Residents advocating for the YMCA study, on the other hand, urged the vote for it. "They need a YMCA. They need a place to go, a shelter, a safe haven, a place they can go after school, before school, during the summer... I hope you vote for this YMCA because it is needed in our county," said April Short.
- In addition to the increased property tax, the newly adopted budget also raises the fire tax paid by property owners living outside the Roxboro city limits from one cent to 2.75 cents. Jeffers was joined by Commissioner Jimmy Clayton and board chairman David Newell in voting for the budget. Puryear and Commissioner Gordon Powell voted against it. The new budget takes effect July 1. (Courier-Times, 6/19/19)

One year later in 2020, the Board would reduce the property tax rate by a penny. But while Jeffers voted for the final penny reduction, he had earlier voted for a failed amendment to maintain the property tax rate at the higher level and only switched when it was inevitable the votes were there to approve the reduction.

- The Person County Board of Commissioners approved a budget for the next fiscal year at its meeting Monday morning that features a one-cent property tax reduction to 72 cents per \$100 in valuation. The commissioners approved the budget by a 4-1 vote with commissioner Jimmy Clayton voting in opposition. Commissioner Kyle Puryear initially made the motion for approval. The average home and property worth \$116,000 will save \$11.60. Next year that home will pay \$835.20 in property taxes, down from \$846.80 in the current fiscal year.

- During the commissioners' discussion of the motion, Clayton said he thinks the county should maintain the current tax rate of 73 cents per \$100 in property valuation.....Clayton made a substitute motion to maintain the county's tax rate, but that vote failed 3-2. Board chair Ray Jeffers voted with Clayton. After that motion failed, the board returned to the original motion, which passed 4-1. (Courier-Times, 6/18/20)

Taxes - 2018 Fire Tax

The year before, Jeffers had been key to pushing for the implementation of an initial fire tax as a way of funding volunteer fire departments. It took a brokered deal to come up with an agreement for a fire tax of one penny for those outside the Roxboro city limits, while Jeffers had been pushing for a higher fire tax (at the rate it was raised to the following year).

- In an unexpected move Wednesday morning, county commissioners voted unanimously to keep the county tax rate at 70 cents per \$100 valuation, while imposing a one cent fire tax on residents living outside the city limits. The penny tax translates to a \$10 annual increase in the property tax bill for a county resident living in a \$100,000 home.
- City residents will see no tax increase because they are not in the Fire Protection Service District, established June 4 by the commissioners during their regular meeting.
- The action by the board marked a departure from County Manager Heidi York's recommended budget which proposed a reduction in county taxes offset by the creation of a fire tax to arrive at neutral tax rate for county residents. She did this because the majority of the board was opposed to any sort of property tax increase. Although the numbers had not been completely finalized, York expected the fire tax to generate an amount equal to what the volunteer fire departments are currently allocated, about \$669,000, with an additional \$330,000 coming from the proposed budget to arrive at a benchmark of \$1 million in funding, to match a proposal by Commissioner Gordon Powell.
- York's proposal called for for a reduction in the property tax rate from 70 cents per \$100 assessed valuation, to 68.18 cents, and a fire tax of 1.82 cents. The county tax rate has stood at 70 cents for 12 years.....
- Commissioner Ray Jeffers, who has been a proponent of fully funding the fire departments with a tax increase, offered a motion to set the fire tax rate at .0.272, and leave the tax rate at 70 cents. Kendrick responded with a substitute motion to put it off until the next meeting.
- "I, like Gordon, have struggled on this," he said, "and I feel like I am on the cusp of making a decision, and by the end of this meeting I may have changed my mind but right now I am still sitting on a fence on what way I want to go." But then he immediately offered a compromise.
- "I'll say it out here in public," he said. "My biggest thought right now is leaving it at 70 and increasing it and calling it a fire tax at one penny, versus the two cents," Kendrick said. "I think

that eases us into the citizens increasing the amount they've got to pay a little bit more. It also gives us the opportunity to see between now and next year how much growth we have.".....

- Other proposals were brought forward, including one by Tax Administrator Russell Jones to reduce property taxes to a rate of 69 cents and add a 2.72 cent fire tax on top of that. However, a breakthrough came when Jeffers backed off his proposal to add 2.72 cents to the 70-cent tax rate and aligned with Kendrick.
- "If we do Tracy's proposal and set it at one penny and leave the tax rate," he said. "By leaving the tax rate alone we are going to keep that \$812,000 in the General Fund. By setting (the fire tax) at one penny it only generates \$369,164 so that leaves us finding \$630,836. You subtract that from the \$812,000, we're still in the positive \$181,164. You make that in the form of a motion, I'll vote for it today." With that Kendrick made the motion, and it passed unanimously. (Courier-Times, 6/9/18)

Taxes - 2011 Occupancy Tax Hike

Another notable tax hike Jeffers pushed for and was successful in enacting was a six percent occupancy tax in 2011.

- "I see it as another way of revenue. If [a] property tax [increase] is not one, then this is the next best thing." Commissioner Ray Jeffers spoke those words Monday night before joining three other commissioners in voting in favor of a resolution supporting an increase in the occupancy tax rate in Person County.
- The Person County Tourism Development Authority (TDA) is seeking state legislation to increase the county's occupancy tax rate from five percent to six percent. If allowed, the additional revenues would be used to promote tourism in Person County. (Courier-Times, 2/9/11)

The measure was approved in August by a 4-1 vote.

Confederate Statues

In 2020, the issue of Confederate statues came up regarding two memorials honoring Person County's Confederate veterans on courthouse grounds. The County Veterans Council came forward with a willingness to relocate them to the Veterans Park. The only issue the Board had to debate was whether to use County funds for a relocation project or to wait for non-county funds to be used. Jeffers was for using County funds, while Republican Puryear wanted the discussion tabled until non-county funds could be found. Puryear prevailed 3-2.

- The statue honoring Person County's Confederate veterans and the marker beside it will remain on the Person County Courthouse grounds at least for a little while longer. Amid concerns about using county funds to move the two monuments, the commissioners voted to table the decision until non-county funds are raised to pay for the removal. County Manager Heidi York said the county has received two estimates for removal. A local estimate and one from a contractor in Raleigh both came out to around \$20,000, she said.
- Chairman Ray Jeffers made a motion to relocate the two Confederate monuments to the Veterans Park with the cost to be paid through the county's Fund Balance. Commissioner Kyle Puryear said he had concerns about using county funds on the project and made a substitute motion to table the discussion until non-county funds are presented to be used for the removal. The substitute motion was voted on first and passed by a 3-2 vote. The commissioners voted along party lines: Republican commissioners Puryear, Vice Chair Gordon Powell and Derrick Sims voted in favor of tabling the request. Democrats Jeffers and Jimmy Clayton voted against the substitute motion.....
- Jeffers said he put the item on the meeting agenda after receiving a petition from PAIR and a letter from Avie Lester Sr., president of the Person County Branch of the NAACP. Jeffers said the conversations he has been a part of have focused on preventing damage to the statue and marker.
- "No one that I spoke with said 'let's relocate it, let's move it or destroy it' or anything like that," he said. "Everyone I talked to, the conversation was around prevention. We did not want to see what we see on the news in these other areas around our state. I was just in Alamance County this week and there was a live showing of what was there in Graham. We definitely don't want to see what we're seeing in these other states. So we wanted to be proactive and to see if we could find a fit for the memorials. Again, the Veterans Council voted unanimously. They let me know that to bring it back to this board and today I'd like to see us support relocating it to the Veterans Park and funding it from our Fund Balance." (Courier-Times, 7/13/20)

The next day, an anonymous pledge to foot the entire bill for relocation came through which prompted a new vote to use that money to relocate them, and it passed unanimously.

- A day after tabling discussion on moving the two Confederate monuments on the courthouse grounds, the Person County Board of Commissioners unanimously voted to move the monuments to the county's Veterans Park at a special called meeting Tuesday. The decision comes after an anonymous source pledged to donate \$20,000 to move the statue and marker, matching the two estimates the county received. The board met in a special session Tuesday called by the three board Republicans. Vice Chairman Gordon Powell moved to revisit the tabled item and made the motion to adopt the resolution authorizing moving the monuments. The board voted unanimously in favor of the resolution. (Courier-Times, 7/16/20)

Miscellaneous

- **2009.** Voted yes in a 3-2 vote to approve an updated solid-waste disposal franchise ordinance. (Courier-Times, 9/23/09)
- **2010.** Voted to put the issue of a sales tax hike on the ballot. (Courier-Time, 8/14/10)
- **2014.** Voted with the 3-2 majority to kill a resolution calling for a county hiring freeze. “Commission Vice Chair Ray Jeffers said he didn’t think it would be fair of the board to balance its budget on the backs of county employees after voting to increase spending for the current year.” (Courier-Times, 8/20/14)
- **2017.** The lone vote in favor of letting a model airplane club have a special use permit on an area of land. (Courier-Times, 8/9/17)
- **2017.** While debating whether to extend the county landfill, Jeffers was in favor of having it closed, though that would have meant higher property taxes. In the end, he agreed to the extension that was approved in 2018. (Courier-Times, 5/26/18)
- **2020.** He voted for a resolution unanimously passed that declared county a “Constitutional Rights Protected County for Second Amendment rights.” It was though a resolution more mild than what Republican members would have preferred on what steps to take in the event gun control legislation was passed. (Courier-Times, 2/22/20)

2014 State House Campaign

In 2014, Jeffers ran for the State House seat being vacated by Democrat incumbent “Winkie” Wilkins. Jeffers won the primary thanks to getting Wilkins’s endorsement.

- “I am excited to announce my candidacy for the State House and look forward to hearing the concerns of the people of District 2,” Jeffers said. “The past few years as an executive officer for the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC), I have been advocating on behalf of all 100 counties at the legislature.
- “My continued support of economic development, education, controlled spending, [and] transparent government, along with my experiences as president of NCACC, which has a principal responsibility to serve as lead advocate on legislative issues, will allow me the opportunity to be an effective legislator for the people of the District.

- “As chairman of the National Association of Counties Rural Action Caucus, I understand the needs of our two rural counties with respect for the need of infrastructure, broadband, job growth, support of our substantial agricultural community and how these correlate with strong legislative support,” Jeffers added. “With every decision made, I promise to put the citizens first and work hard to improve and promote Person and Granville counties. I look forward to getting to know the citizens of District 2 and earning their vote.”
- Wilkins issued a statement this week in which he indicated he is “pleased” with Jeffers’ decision to run for the House District 2 seat. “I am pleased to learn that Commissioner Jeffers intends to seek the District 2 seat in the North Carolina House,” Wilkins wrote in the statement. “My observations of Commissioner Jeffers are that he is well-informed and thoughtful. Above all, I believe that he has the well-being of people in his heart.” (Courier-Times, 2/1/14)

Jeffers faced former Commissioner Larry Yarborough in the general election. Yarborough had lost his seat on the Commission in 2008 when Jeffers had been elected as part of the Obama wave.

Delinquent Tax Payments Revealed

During the campaign, the state GOP distributed a mailer noting that Jeffers had failed to pay vehicular taxes a number of times.

- Some District 2 voters received mailers last week from the North Carolina Republican Party, which point out, “Ray Jeffers has been late paying his personal property taxes on his vehicle eight times. If he cannot pay his taxes on time, how can we trust him to protect our tax dollars in Raleigh?” A disclaimer on the mailer reads that it is “paid for by the North Carolina Republican Party,” and is “not authorized by any candidate or candidate’s committee.”
- The mailer notes that Jeffers, at the time of the printing of the mailer, had not paid his 2012 vehicle taxes. It also notes that he was eight months late paying a 2011 vehicle tax. According to last week’s mailer, which indicated its source of information was the Person County Tax Office, Jeffers was also late paying vehicle taxes in 2010, 2009, 2007, 2004, 2003 and 2001.
- “When the mailer came out I went to the tax office website, saw that in fact I had a bill unpaid on my last truck which I no longer own, and I paid the taxes,” Jeffers wrote in an email to The Courier-Times Tuesday.
- According to Person County Tax Office records, Jeffers paid \$77.49 Tuesday morning to pay off the 2012 tax debt on a 2005 Chevrolet pickup truck.
- “I apologize for not being aware of the taxes being unpaid, especially since I worked on the legislation that was passed to allow counties more flexibility in collecting vehicle taxes,” Jeffers wrote Tuesday, adding that he was unhappy with the Republican Party’s mailer. “I thought the mailer was very distasteful. (Courier-Times, 9/24/14)

Jeffers went on to deny the charge of being for tax hikes by citing the fact that property taxes had not been raised since he joined the Board. That was true in 2014, but for 2022, it is no longer true as the 2019 Budget vote demonstrates, along with his support for the Occupancy Tax in 2011 and the Fire Tax in 2018.

Campaign Message

At a joint appearance he gave this answer on jobs.

- North Carolina House of Representatives, District 2 candidates Ray Jeffers and Larry Yarborough were asked how they would create jobs for North Carolinians. Jeffers answered by saying that citizens need to be trained at an early age in order to be ready for future economic development. He added that a strategic plan needs to be made involving schools and Piedmont Community College. (Courier-Times, 10/11/14)

Not long after, he answered a series of questions from the Courier-Times.

- What past professional, educational and governmental experience do you possess that believe makes you the candidate people should vote for to serve as a representative in the North Carolina House of Representatives?
 - JEFFERS: I am a native of Person County and current Person County Commission vicechairman, past president of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners and past chairman of the National Association of Counties Rural Action Caucus. I have been in Raleigh the past few years as an executive officer for the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners advocating on the behalf of all 100 counties. Taking that experience to Raleigh with the values I hold as a member of the Person County Board of Commissioners to promote economic development, education, controlled spending, and transparent government will allow me to be an effective legislator. As chairman of the National Association of Counties Rural Action Caucus, I understand the needs of our two rural counties with respect to the need for infrastructure, broadband, job growth, and support of our still substantial agricultural community.
- If you were asked to prioritize, what would you list as the most important issue facing North Carolina government right now?
 - JEFFERS: My first priority would be to work with the necessary partners to help bring jobs back home. Since being elected as county commissioner we have been successful in bringing more than \$400 million in new business investments to Person County and I will work to do the same in Granville County to help strengthen the economy and create more jobs in our own backyard. We have been shortchanged in rural areas like ours and our money is being spent in areas like Charlotte and Raleigh. I will stand up for us and bring local tax dollars back home to fund roads and jobs. I would work to create N.C. First, a program to give North Carolinians first crack at state and local contracts.
- Again, if asked to prioritize, what is the single most important goal you wish to accomplish during your term if you are elected to the North Carolina House of Representatives?

- JEFFERS: Along with jobs, I want to be a voice for our children's education, their teachers, and support staff in schools. Many teachers have had to take two jobs or move away - forcing our kids into bigger classes. We need to raise teacher pay to the national average so we can keep and attract the best teachers around and give students the attention they deserve. I will work to make sure that we get the education lottery money we were promised and stop the cuts to education. I would work to expand the use of the lottery dollars for operational expenses and not just capital expenses. I will work to make sure that our schools and kids get the resources they need.
- Each of you have been targets of negative campaign mailers. This is your forum to defend yourselves against any of the negative campaign mailers that have been sent out. Please take a moment to express your retaliatory remarks to the negative campaign mailers.
 - JEFFERS: I said in the May 8 edition of The Courier-Times after the primary that I look forward to a clean campaign. Unfortunately, I have been attacked for weeks for paying DMV taxes late, even though Mr. Yarborough paid his DMV taxes late in 2012 and 2013 also. Not one negative mailer has been on the issues or my record as a county commissioner for the past six years. I chose not to get personal but to discuss Mr. Yarborough's stance on issues such as his vote for the expansion of the landfill, support of fracking, and his lack of a stance on coal ash regulation. I had the discussion with my family prior to deciding to run that this could get ugly, which unfortunately is all too common in state and federal politics. I have done my best to stick to the issues and solutions concerning our citizens. (Courier-Times, 10/25/14)

A supporter in a letter to the editor, said he knew Jeffers was for Obamacare and Medicaid expansion.

- Ray Jeffers has personally texted me and Ray said he supports Obamacare and Ray supports Medicaid expansion, which means if Medicaid expansion was to pass in N.C. each taxpayer would be paying for this after three years. KENNETH RICKMAN, Roxboro (Courier-Times, 10/25/14)

Jeffers lost in the big GOP wave of November 2014.

2020 Defeat For Re-Election & 2022 House Candidacy

Jeffers defeat for re-election to the County Board in 2020 came as a surprise. He finished outside the top three. His defeat was analyzed in the *Courier-Times* as part of a growing conservative trend in the County.

- The red wave crashed right through Person County as republicans won every race on the ballot, starting with the presidency and working its way down. Every partisan race went the way of the republicans, including a sweep of the county commissioners --- highlighted by the ousting of current chairman Ray Jeffers, in what can be described as an upset.

- Frankly, we expected a big night for the republicans, but thought that Jeffers would at least be able to hold on to his seat and there would be a 4-1 split on the board. Jeffers has been an advocate for Person County statewide and even nationally for several years and his presence, knowledge of local matters and unique perspective will certainly be missed. (Courier-Times, 11/13/20)

One year after his defeat, he announced he would be running against Yarborough again for the State House. Yarborough has successfully been re-elected three times since 2014.

- Former county commissioner Ray Jeffers (D-Person) has announced his intention to run for his party's nomination to the state House of Representatives in the newly-redrawn district which includes all of Person County and a portion of north and east Durham County. Previously, the second district included all of Person County and a portion of southern Granville County. (Courier-Times, 12/9/21)

He is running unopposed in the primary

- Ray Jeffers will be running unopposed in the primary for N.C. House and will be facing Republican Larry Yarborough in the general election. Most recently, Jeffers served for 12 years on the Person County Board of Commissioners and was a former president of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Board of Directors.
- "From that time (on the Board of Commissioners), I've always tried to represent Person County to the best of my ability," Jeffers said. "Early on, I heard it said that if you're not on the table, you're on the menu. I've always tried to keep Person County on the table, you're on the menu. I've always tried to keep Person County on the table in my time as county commissioner. (Courier-Times, 3/31/22)

Part IV Jeffers: The News File, 2007-22

2007

MAY 2007 After School Wellness Program Coordinator

Three years ago, Person County Schools received a grant of \$450,000 from the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission to help fight obesity among the county's children. Funding through the grant will end next month, but all involved say much progress has been made.

Bess Hester-Whitt, family/consumer agent with the Person County Cooperative Extension Service, worked with the schools in writing the grant proposal and was instrumental in implementing the programs it ultimately funded

In a meeting with partner agencies after the grant was received, Whitt said, "The number of kids with elevated blood pressure and what is called adult onset diabetes, which is related to weight, is growing. If we can help alleviate this, we will have met an important goal."

The idea behind the initiative, organizers said, was not to single out overweight kids and get them to lose weight. Rather, the "PERSONally Wild About Wellness! Program" focused on the idea that there is a healthy weight for every individual, depending on the gene pool and environment. The school system and its partners hoped to help children learn that there are healthier alternatives that later on serve to prevent diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and some cancers.

This week, Whitt once again met with members of the school system's wellness team and Person County Recreation Arts and Parks Director Mitch Pergerson, along with After School Wellness Program Coordinator Ray Jeffers. PCS Child Nutrition Director Lyn Holt, Wellness Coordinator Nikole Schukraft and Assistant Schools Supt. Sandy Davis also participated. The consensus of the group was that it was pleased with the implementation of such initiatives as offering healthier snack choices, healthier cafeteria menus and more opportunities for physical activity among children and parents in the county.

Holt said that, initially, the school system was shocked, but very happy, to receive the grant, which provided the school system with nearly a half million dollars over three years to implement programs aimed at keeping kids healthy.

She said her staff had implemented new, stricter guidelines, associated with new dietary standards, in all schools, following a pilot program in a few schools.

Whitt said that Holt and her staff were "very proactive" by participating, along with six or eight other North Carolina school systems, in the pilot program to offer healthier choices in school cafeterias.

The grant, which came from the state's \$7.4 million tobacco settlement funds, allowed the school system to hire Schukraft, who worked with the individual schools to offer a curriculum that emphasizes healthy eating and physical exercise.

The Recreation, Arts and Parks Department partnered with the schools by increasing its offerings to children and parents during the hours of 3 to 6 p.m., when, said Director Pergerson, many children are in front of the television or computer instead of outside playing and getting exercise.

Acknowledging that society overall is more sedentary today than ever before, Pergerson, Whitt and Holt agreed the grant helped the schools counteract that lack of physical activity.

"We are not saying, 'tell your kids to exercise,' but to exercise with your kids," said Pergerson.

Jeffers said he had offered kids field trips and hikes at Mayo Lake that incorporate wildlife education as well as physical activity. Also offered are sports camps that help children who don't play organized sports get involved with a team and learn skills. Kids participate in swimming, skiing, ice skating and yoga, to name a few of the activities offered through Recreation, Arts and Parks.

Over the past three years, said Jeffers, 1,900 children have been involved in after school programs that promote physical fitness.

He said one child who previously would not participate in any games or sports "got into the program and got involved. Her mother thinks she just needed that one-on-one" time offered through the after-school programs.

Jeffers said another success story involved a family that had recently moved to the county. The mother told Jeffers that being involved in a Recreation Department program helped ease the transition for her daughter, because she was able to meet new friends in a smaller setting than at school.

Pergerson said that, now that the Wellness grant was ending, his department had applied for a grant through the Blue Cross, Blue Shield Foundation that would help continue programming that would include parents and children getting more physical activity.

Davis pointed out that through the Extension Service's Color Me Healthy program, the schools had been able to teach healthful living across curriculums. The grant funding provided more materials for teachers to use in the classroom to focus on nutrition, physical fitness and healthy choices for students.

She said she believed the grant and subsequent programs "speak highly of our community. We have agencies that can sit down and work together for our community."

Hiring Schukraft, said Davis, allowed the school system a "great opportunity for education." Administrators and teachers, she said, were given guidelines for changing the school environment, not only for students, but for staff as well.

The wellness program encourages adults to be healthy role models for children, Davis said, and in doing so, helps the adults live healthier lives.

"That's just a plus," she said.

In addition to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, the grant allowed the school systems to perform body mass index assessments on elementary students; provide individual health plans for at-risk students; and to provide extra training for child nutrition staff.

Also during the grant, a Health Assessment Report was developed by student screenings. Programs promoting proper nutrition and physical activity in the home affected 330 students over the three-year period; all elementary schools held wellness fairs; and physical activity was incorporated into core subject areas.

Teachers used "Take 10!" to provide students the opportunity to move during classes. About 60 students participated in "Kids in the Kitchen" cooking classes and various elementary grades received in-class training on the new "MyPyramid" food guide.

PE teachers received additional funding for physical activity equipment and new soccer goals were installed at all elementary schools except Oak Lane, which had just purchased one when the grant was awarded.

According to statistics gathered during the grant period, 49 percent of students in Person County elementary schools are at risk of or already are overweight. (Roxboro Courier-Times, 5/5/07)

2008

FEB 2008 Running For Person County Commission

Election filing opened Monday, with Person County Commissioner Larry Bowes all but signaling his retirement after last year's controversy over the Upper Piedmont Environmental landfill.

Meanwhile, four others filed papers declaring their candidacies to fill the likely Bowes void. They are Mike Barrett, David Brooks, Ray Jeffers and ex-commissioner Samuel Winstead, all Democrats.

Barrett and Jeffers said the waste disposal site will be an issue in their campaigns. "I'm not a fan of that mega-landfill thing," Barrett said. "I want to do what I can to hinder that, maybe."

"We're just not being heard on this subject," said Jeffers, also an expansion opponent. "You should have a listening ear and that's what I plan to do up there, to have a listening ear."

Located off U.S. 158 east of Roxboro, the privately-owned site became a major issue when the company, Republic Services, unsuccessfully sought to increase daily tonnage and add Durham to the service area.

Bowes, when asked last week whether he'd seek a second four-year term, replied, "You can pretty much bet that I'm not going to be."

In August, Bowes, a Democrat, said he'd support a landfill expansion.

Bowes then received an anonymous telephone call warning he would never live to vote for it if he continued his support. He later switched to opposing the expansion, which is now on hold anyway by the commission.

Jeffers was an after-school coordinator of a grant-funded recreation program to fight obesity. He currently is a dog trainer.

Jeffers said his platform would include pushing for a countywide recreation facility and a public pool. He said youths have to go to Hillsborough or Virginia to swim because of the lack of facilities. (Durham Herald-Sun, 2/12/08)

APR 2008 Overview of County Commissioners Race

Person County voters get to have their first say in the 2008 elections when early voting in Democratic and Republican primaries begins Thursday, April 17, as well as in a statewide non-partisan primary for state judicial offices.

The early voting, which has proved popular among Personians in recent years, is a run-up to the regularly scheduled May 6 primaries, when all 14 polling places will be open for a full day of voting.

But whether they vote early or wait until May 6, Person voters won't find much of a county flavor to the primary ballots handed to them by election officials. In fact, only one Person County contest is on any of the three ballots - Democratic, Republican or non-partisan - and it shows up on the Democratic ballot.

That sole contest is for the Democratic nominations to three seats on the Person Board of County Commissioners. Five candidates are vying for the nod to carry the Democratic banner into the November general election, where they will face opposition from three Republican hopefuls who don't have to worry with a primary battle this spring. Yet a fourth opponent also could be waiting, should the Person County Board of Elections certify that Frances Blalock has gained the required number of registered voter signatures to place her on the November ballot as an unaffiliated candidate for commissioner.

For the moment, however, the five Democrats are more concerned about simply advancing to that next level.

The Democratic hopefuls include incumbent Commissioner Jimmy B. Clayton, 61, of Timberlake, a semi-retired environmental health specialist, who is seeking his third term on the county board, which he now serves as vice chairman.

Absent from the Democratic ticket this year, however, is incumbent Commissioner Larry H. Bowes, Clayton's running mate from four years ago, who decided against running for re-election. That leaves at least one seat on the five-seat board up for the taking this year.

The four other Democrats campaigning to take up that challenge are Mike Barrett, 46, of Roxboro, an inclusion teacher at Person High School and former chairman of the Person County Democratic Party; David Brooks, a 50-year-old carpenter, who resides on Woodsdale Road north of Roxboro; Ray Jeffers, 24, of Roxboro, operator of a kennel who trains German Shepherd dogs for police work; and Samuel H. Winstead, 82, a Leasburg area farmer and former county commissioner.

To date, the primary campaign for commissioner has been relatively low key, with the candidates running a smattering of newspaper and radio ads and erecting some roadside signs. The pace, however, should pick up considerably within the next couple weeks as Election Day nears.

Waiting in the wings for the Democrats to choose their nominees are the three Republican candidates for commissioner. They are incumbent Commissioner Larry Yarborough, 45, who lives at Hyco Lake; retired businessman Gerry O'Neil, 67, of Mayo Lake, and Sam Kennington, 61, who lives on Gordonton Road, the current principal at Roxboro Community School, who will be retiring from that post later this year. (Roxboro Courier-Times, 4/16/08)

APR 2008 Candidates Debate

Candidates for the Person Board of County Commissioners took center stage Tuesday night in the Person County Office Building auditorium in a debate hosted by the Roxboro Jaycees.

In past years, the Jaycees have hosted a Meet the Candidates Forum, however, this year the group changed to a debate format for the eight candidates vying for the three seats up for grabs on the five-seat commission.

Five of the candidates are Democrats who will square off Tuesday, May 6, in the primary election for the right to advance to November's general election and face the Republican nominees, who have no primary this spring.

The three Republican candidates for commissioner are incumbent Larry Yarborough, 45, Gerry O'Neil, 67, and Sam Kennington, 61.

The five Democratic candidates are incumbent Jimmy B. Clayton, 61, Mike Barrett, 46, David Brooks, 50, Ray Jeffers, 24, and Samuel H. Winstead, 82.

Each candidate for the board of commissioners was allowed two minutes for an opening statement. Each also had one minute to respond to questions addressed specifically to them, which was followed by a period of rebuttal.

In Saturday's edition of The Courier-Times will publish its usual pre-Election Day roundup of profiles of the five Democratic primary candidates, along with their responses to a series of questions posed to each by The C-T.

Questions for Tuesday night's debate were a collaborative effort of a four-person panel, which included current Commissioners Kyle Puryear and Larry Bowes, along with former Commissioner Roy Holler and Micheal Slaughter, an unsuccessful candidate for commissioner in 2006.

Yarborough said Tuesday that the platform he ran on four years ago when he was elected commissioner is "still fairly relevant."

He said he would work to keep property taxes lower since increased taxes are hard on older and younger citizens. He also promised to "work for smarter spending," which he said he has "done for the last four years." >>

Yarborough went on to say he would support the school system. He pointed out that in his three years on the board, the commissioners had increased funding for schools by 14, 11 and eight percent respectively.

O'Neil said economic development was at the top of his list of priorities. New businesses, he said, "are a win-win situation."

O'Neil said he would also stress education and public safety if elected.

"I come to this campaign with no preconceived notion, no hidden agendas," O'Neil added.

Kennington said he was running for commissioner because he wanted "to give something back to the county that has given me so much."

He added that he would be an "open commissioner," and would not support closed-door politics.

Kennington also said he would work to create more jobs, improve public education and the county's infrastructure as well as working to "lower the property tax and control spending."

Clayton said that in his past two terms he had tallied a "record of doing what is in the best interest of Person County." He went on to say that he listens "to all voices on issues," and "strives to be a voice" as a commissioner. Barrett noted that as a teacher at Person High School "education is very important to me." He added that he would work to "ease the funding situation" for public schools." Barrett also said that environmental quality for the county was important to him. He went on to say that Democratic voters have three votes for commissioner this year and he would like to get one of them.

Brooks said he was present Tuesday night to "attempt to present enough evidence" for those in attendance to "convince others" to vote for him. He said he was raised in a time when "a handshake meant something" and wanted to be that type of commissioner. "Your vote will be my voice," Brooks said. "I will speak for you."

Jeffers vowed hard work and commitment if elected to the commission. He said that "we all know the issues," which he added included the landfill, education, recreation and other things. Jeffers added that he would do his best to "make wise decisions," and would not be afraid to "take a different approach."

Winstead, himself a former commissioner, said he was seeking election "because I think I might make a difference."

He said he would work "diligently" on a recycling program, which he said could be accomplished "without increasing the budget." Winstead added "I'll be here for you and not for me." (Courier-Times, 4/30/08)

MAY 2008 Advances to General Election

Incumbent Jimmy Clayton led a slate of five candidates seeking the Democratic nomination to three seats on the Person Board of County Commissioners in the fall general election during Tuesday's primary election.

Newcomer Ray Jeffers ran second, while former commissioner Samuel H. Winstead claimed the third nomination as a result of Tuesday's balloting. All polled more than enough votes to avoid a runoff in June.

Clayton, 61, who is seeking his third consecutive four-year term on the board, collected 4,558 votes (26.11 percent) to lead the field.

Clayton was the top vote getter in nine of the county's 14 precincts and also led the way in one stop voting. In the five precincts where Clayton did not receive the most votes, he finished second.

Clayton's precinct wins came in Allensville, Bushy Fork, Cunningham/Chub Lake, Flat River, Holloway, Hurdle Mills, Mt. Tirzah, Olive Hill and Roxboro 2.

"I'm very pleased," Clayton said when reached at his home Tuesday evening. "I appreciate all the people who helped me, and I appreciate all the people turning out to vote."

A total of 9,856 of Person County's 22,933 registered voters (42.98 percent) cast ballots in the primary election.

Clayton said he believed his vote total signaled approval of the work he has done as a commissioner during his previous two terms.

"I would like to think so," Clayton said. "The people had my record to look at. The others were newcomers, but if they looked at my record and I got a vote, I think that is a sign of support."

Clayton said he would ask for continued support when voters head to the polls in November.

"We're going to try it again in November," Clayton said. "I need the support again then."

The top three Democratic hopefuls will face three Republican challengers in November.

Ray Jeffers, 24, who was the leading vote getter in five precincts Tuesday, placed second in the balloting with 3,912 votes.

Jeffers carried Roxboro 1, Roxboro 3, Roxboro 4, Roxboro 1A and Woodsdale precincts.

Jeffers, at first speechless over his success in the primary, shook his head as a wide smile crossed his face.

After gathering his thoughts on the results, he said he was humbled by the confidence placed in him by the people of Person County.

"I would like to thank everyone from Person County who supported and believed in me," Jeffers said. "The citizens have spoken, and I will try my best not to let them down."

Jeffers added that he was excited about campaigning through the general election in the fall, when he, Clayton and third-place finisher Winstead, will face Republican challengers incumbent Larry Yarborough, Sam Kennington and Gerry O'Neil.

Winstead, 82, who served one term on the county board in the early 1980s, placed third with 3,254 votes, narrowly edging fourth-place finisher Mike Barrett, 46, who garnered 3,125 votes, just 129 votes behind Winstead.

Winstead, reached via telephone at his home Tuesday night, said that he was proud and "glad to still be in the running" for the November election. He thanked all who had supported him and "helped me to get where I am."

Winstead said he was most pleased, however, by the number of voters who went to the polls.

"I want to thank all those who came out and voted," Winstead said. "I am real proud of the turnout." He went on to say that he was now "looking forward to running again in the fall."

Winstead's top precincts Tuesday were Bushy Fork, Olive Hill and Mt. Tirzah, where he placed second in the balloting to Clayton.

Barrett, a teacher at Person High School, thanked his supporters, but he said, shortly after primary results were tabulated that the best thing about his run for county commissioner was having his students get involved.

An obviously disappointed, yet gracious, Barrett said he would now support the Democratic victors in the primary.

"I would like to thank everyone who supported me," said Barrett, who stepped down as the Person County Democratic Party chair to seek the post. "It was a good run, and I learned a lot about the way the county operates.

"It was a bonus that the students at Person High School got involved [in the political process]," Barrett added. "It's cool," he smiled and said, "when a student says, "Hey, I voted for you." Barrett had runner-up finishes in a trio of precincts - Flat River, Holloway and Hurdle Mills.

David Brooks, 50, rounded out the five candidates with 2,610 votes. Brooks' best showings came in the Holloway and Roxboro 4 precincts, where he placed third in each. (Courier-Times, 5/7/08)

JUN 2008 Speaks Against Tax Hike at Commission Budget Hearing

After an initial work session in which they tentatively pared about \$1 million of expenditures from a draft 2008-09 budget and then listened to an auditorium full of citizens demand more money for the public schools on Monday, Person County commissioners are poised for their second budget work session on Thursday.....

Earlier in the day, after concluding their regular mid-June meeting, commissioners held their first work session. For about an hour, they reviewed a list of about 20 items prepared by the 2009 budget team last week after commissioners asked the team to identify areas that might be cut in order to reduce the need for an eight-cent increase in the property tax rate recommended in the budget draft. The list represented about \$2.12 million of expenditures; still about \$1.25 million shy of the total reductions necessary to eliminate the tax hike.

They went through the list item by item determining whether each should either remain in the budget or be discarded.

They managed to pare items totaling approximately \$1 million, but in so doing there seemed to be a sense that even those cuts might not be final. But chief among them were the proposed 3.0 percent cost of living adjustment for county employees, a reduction of \$510,000.

Initially, they also seemed prepared to ax \$513,500 worth of new vehicles, including an EMS ambulance. But they opted instead, at least for now, to leave \$202,000 for new sheriff's department vehicles in the budget while cutting the rest.

Other items falling in the first work session included \$95,000 for dry hydrants for fire protection and volunteer fire department grants, \$50,000 for a MAPS study for adjusting salaries of about one-third of county employees, a \$12,000 livestock trailer for Animal Control, an \$18,000 GIS plotter, more than \$133,000 worth of Information Technology gear, \$52,500 for part-time pay in Finance and Administration, \$10,000 from Recreation and about \$22,000 from Partnership for Children, the Volunteer Center and the Person County Museum of History, among a few other cuts.

Commissioners indicated they could revisit some or all of those projected cuts later. They said at the outset of the session that their goal was to trim the budget draft recommendation sufficiently to eliminate the need to hike the property tax rate to 78 cents per \$100 valuation from the current 70 cents.

At Monday night's hearing, Ray Jeffers, a Democratic candidate for county commissioner in the general election, spoke against an eight-cent tax hike but urged commissioners to fund the schools "to the best of your ability" as well as to adequately fund the sheriff's department and the proposed materials recovery facility for recycling at Person Industries.

Jeffers also said, "Let's not make this budget a political game at the expense of the citizens." And he said of commissioners he hoped to see five men working together to "do what is best for Person County." (Courier-Times, 6/18/08)

NOV 2008 Elected to Commission

One of two incumbents seeking re-election to the Person Board of County Commissioners was among the top three in unofficial voting returns Tuesday night.

Vice Chairman Jimmy B. Clayton, a Democrat, was the leading vote-getter in six of 14 precincts and led all seven candidates with 9,526 votes.

Democrat Ray Jeffers, 25, employed part-time with the Person County Schools and the Person County Recreation Arts and Parks Department, led in three precincts and placed second in the balloting with 7,431, while Republican Sam Kennington, 62, a retired educator led the polling in four precincts and finished third in the unofficial count with 7,331.

Kennington, however, owns just a 18-vote lead over incumbent Republican Larry Yarborough, 46, of Person Emergency Physicians. Yarborough placed fourth with 7,313 votes and was the leading vote getter in one precinct.

Kennington's lead over Yarborough is precarious because Person County Elections Director Brenda Whitlow confirmed Tuesday night that between "75 and 100 provisional ballots" must still be counted. Those ballots will be counted next week.

Clayton, who claimed victories in the Allensville, Flat River, Hurdle Mills, Mt. Tirzah, Roxboro 2 and Roxboro 4 precincts, said he appreciated that, "the people of Person County think enough of me to put me back for a third term" on the commission.

"I have tried to do what the people of Person County wanted," Clayton said, adding that he was glad that citizens seemed to agree that he'd represented them well.

The new board will "have to work together," Clayton said, "to solve the problems of the county, especially with the economy the way it is. We have a lot of work ahead of us."

In addition to leading the ticket in six precincts, Clayton finished second in four other precincts and was also third in four precincts.

Jeffers claimed victories in a trio of precincts - Roxboro 1, Roxboro 3 and Woodsdale - and said he appreciated the support shown him by the people of Person County.

Jeffers, who will become the second African American commissioner, along with incumbent Chairman Johnny Myrl Lunsford, said he looked upon his election to the board of commissioners as a job that the citizens of Person County had hired him to do.

"The citizens have entrusted a job to me," Jeffers said, "and I will do my best to do what's best for the citizens of Person County."

Jeffers placed as the runner-up in two precincts. (Courier-Times, 11/5/08)

DEC 2008 Takes Office on Commission

The will of the voters took effect Monday at the Person County Office Building as three newly-elected commissioners pledged their service to lead; two are new to the county board.

Superior Court Clerk Deborah Barker administered the oath of office to Person County Board of Commissioners members Jimmy Clayton, Ray Jeffers and Sam Kennington at a special ceremony before regular business.

To Jeffers and Kennington, it was a point of realization — the honors and responsibilities of the office have finally come upon them.

Board Chairman Johnny Lunsford congratulated the three who then officially joined him and Commissioner Kyle Puryear in the task of bearing the county's business.

"I am excited for this board," Lunsford said. "I know that this is a commitment you made with a pure heart because you want to serve the people of Person County."

Jeffers said it was a proud moment for him and his family to see. "I'm definitely still excited, and I am ready to serve," he said.

"I thank the people of Person County, and I will do my best not to let them down. ... I will do my best and give 100 percent."

Kennington felt, "relief," he said. "I say that because the vote was so close — we had to wait and wait for the vote numbers to come in; now I feel like it's finally official."

"I feel relief and excitement, I am proud and grateful for the opportunity to serve. ... I am humbled, too, that the people of Person County have entrusted me with this position."

The board re-installed Lunsford as its chairman for 2009, and kept Clayton on as vice chairman, the position the incumbent held before his re-election to office. (Courier-Times, 12/3/08)

2009

JAN 2009 Bad Economic Situation Ahead

An economic forecast that two Person commissioners heard earlier this month does not line up with hopes, however far-fetched, for a quick rebound from 2008 downturns.

The dire predictions they heard were backed up by new statistics on state unemployment rates released over the weekend by the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina.

Commissioners Ray Jeffers and Jimmy Clayton, the vice chairman of the Person Board of County Commissioners, heard troubling predictions of sharply higher unemployment rates for all counties while at the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners convention in Raleigh Jan. 15-16.

UNC Chapel Hill professor of Economics and Government Karl Smith said counties should brace for figures to climb by half.

Clayton and Jeffers relayed the news to fellow commissioners at last Tuesday's board meeting — the only comforting news being no one county is suffering more than others.

"It seems like all of the counties are in the same boat, it's not just impacting one county," Clayton reiterated in comments to The Courier-Times Tuesday.

Jeffers relayed the dire prognostications to celebrants at the Martin Luther King Day ceremonies on Monday, Jan. 19, just days after the association meeting.

"This will be a hard year for all of us," he said. "They are calling for unemployment to go up 50 percent in each county on average.

"That means for Person County, we're at eight percent; they're saying we can expect that level to go up to 12 percent by the end of the year," he added.

Clayton said the numbers for Person track close to state averages.

"This doesn't appear to be turning a corner yet; people are hoping, but apparently it's headed worse before it gets better." For more on this story, see the Wednesday, Jan. 28, edition of The Courier-Times (Courier-Times, 1/28/09)

MAR 2009 Dispute on Attending Conference

To go or not to go.

When it comes to the Person Board of County Commissioners, that appears to be the issue surrounding the upcoming National Association of Counties (NACo) Conference in Nashville, TN. The conference is scheduled for late July.

Commission Vice Chairman Jimmy Clayton, the county's voting delegate to the conference, along with Chairman Johnny M. Lunsford and freshman Commissioner Ray Jeffers have all indicated their intentions to attend.

The board's two Republican members — Kyle Puryear and Sam Kennington — opted against attending, citing the current economic situation.

The cost for each conference attendee is \$465 and that has reportedly been paid with county funds. That does not include lodging, travel or meals. The payment of the conference registration fees comes at a time when the county is supposedly not spending any funds for travel-related expenses. It also comes on the heels of a three-percent budget cut for all departments in the current fiscal year. Department heads have also reportedly been instructed to trim an additional two percent off of their current budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 1.

Clayton, in a voice message left at The Courier-Times Tuesday evening said he plans to "pay my own way" to the conference. "I think it is that important to go," he added.

Lunsford, too, said he would likely pay his accompanying expenses.

"I usually do," Lunsford said. "Very seldom do I turn in a travel voucher."

It was confirmed Tuesday that neither Clayton nor Lunsford generally ask for travel compensation when attending conferences.

"It costs me every year when I fill out my income tax report to be a commissioner," Lunsford said. "I'm doing so because it is a service to the county."

Jeffers, who along with Clayton, recently attended a conference for commissioners in Washington, D.C., said Tuesday he was "looking at the possibility" of paying some of his travel expenses to Nashville. He did not do so on his trip to Washington.

Jeffers said, "As a new commissioner, I want to try and gain all the information I can to bring back and help my county."

He also said that he believed "networking" at national conferences was beneficial.

"I can tell you that I have already learned a lot," Jeffers said. "I think [going to Nashville] will be a great help to me and what I can learn and bring back to Person County." (Courier-Times, 3/18/09)

MAY 2009 Question on Central Office Spending

During Monday night's joint meeting between the school board and county commissioners, some questions were left unanswered, but each side has since attempted to get the answers to the other, resulting in school system central office salaries being released to county commissioners.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers asked during the meeting for a figure on the costs of central office administration, but did not receive a dollar amount from Schools Supt. Dr. Larry W. Cartner or his staff.

Cartner told Jeffers, after several attempts at answering the latter's queries, that he was "not sure what" Jeffers was "looking at" when he asked about \$150,000 in raises at the central office over the past year.

Jeffers said his constituents had been asking him about the possible increases and he felt it was his duty as an elected representative to find an answer to those questions.

Cartner told commissioners at the meeting that he had awarded only "two discretionary raises" over the current fiscal year. Other increases in salary, he said, were a reflection of state-mandated pay increases, the loss or gain of certain positions or switching positions between state, federal and local funding.

Jeffers said he had been told that central office staff received local salary supplements, but Cartner said that was not the case.

He also explained that the increase Jeffers asked about could have come as a result of "who is in local" salary funding from one year to the next.

There was a \$134,479 increase in local funding for central office salaries in 2008-09, according to information provided to commissioners later in the week, but much of that was reflected in switching positions from state to local funding and in regular state-mandated salary increases.

"My concern," Jeffers said during the Monday night meeting, "is whether we could use some of this [central office spending] to save teachers."

Cartner had said earlier that shortfalls in funding, including a lower allocation from the county, could cost the system seven and a half teaching positions.

During the Monday meeting, in which the school system budget was the main topic of discussion, Cartner presented a slide show and handouts concerning the schools' budget, including breakdowns of spending in various departments and the various forms of revenue sources.

Cartner provided enrollment figures, information on average daily membership (ADM) funds, capital projects and spending, a listing of personnel at each school and a breakdown of what is paid for through federal, state and local funds.

He explained that cuts had been made over the past few years in personnel, including classroom teachers, clerical staff and central office staff.

The superintendent also explained that local funding, from the county commissioners, was "what sets us apart" as a school system by augmenting state funding. That allocation from the state, he said, "is not adequate to meet the requirements of the [North Carolina] Constitution" as mandated under the Leandro case of several years back.

Commissioner Sam Kennington said it was his understanding that, according to the Public School Forum, Person County ranked 38th out of the 100 North Carolina counties in its actual effort to fund public education. (Courier-News, 5/2/09)

JUN 2009 Ready to Vote For Amended Budget

The Person Board of County Commissioners appears set to approve a \$60.7 million amended budget recommendation from Manager Heidi York Monday morning.

Monday's 9 a.m. budget work session was slated last month when the five-person board of commissioners received York's initial budget proposal for over \$500,000 more than the original version. However, the third and final budget work session appeared unnecessary Tuesday evening near the end of the commission's second work session.

Vice Chairman Jimmy B. Clayton made a motion to adopt a resolution approving the amended budget less than an hour into Tuesday's proceedings. And, it was evident throughout the discussion of the motion that two other commissioners — Chairman Johnny M. Lunsford and Ray Jeffers — were ready to vote in favor of Clayton's notion.

Commissioners Sam Kennington and Kyle Puryear said they were adamantly opposed to the motion and eventually won unanimous approval to have the adoption halted until Monday morning.

In addition to the fact that a third budget work session had been scheduled, Kennington and Puryear argued that Tuesday's budget work session was not being aired on the Internet via the county's Web site. The first budget work session, as well as all regular meetings of the commission, was aired on the Internet.

York explained to The Courier-Times Tuesday that Clayton had informed her Monday evening that "three commissioners" did not want Tuesday's proceedings aired. Clayton told The C-T his reasoning for not wanting the work session aired was that, prior to this year, no other such session had been shown on the Web site.

"I personally think you shortchanged the citizens when you turned off the Internet tonight," Kennington said.

Puryear, who along with Kennington had asked for several items to be discussed during Tuesday's budget work session, referred to the motion to adopt a resolution as "ramrodding the process."

"It's unfair, it's unprofessional and, quite frankly, why are we here if it's already been decided?" Puryear asked. "If this goes through [tonight], I'm embarrassed."

Kennington said he was "going to vote for the budget," but he felt the public was being cheated by Clayton's motion. He also added that he and Puryear had not had the opportunity to discuss any issues or look over information provided to commissioners Tuesday evening.

"I don't see any need in prolonging this," Lunsford said. He noted that there had already been two opportunities for the public to address commissioners and "I hope we have satisfied them." (Courier-News, 6/3/09)

JUN 2009 Budget Passed Unanimously

The Person Board of County Commissioners wasted little time Monday morning adopting a budget resolution for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 1.

Vice Chairman Jimmy B. Clayton moved for adoption of a \$60.7 million amended budget recommendation from Manager Heidi York shortly after the meeting commenced at 9 a.m. That motion was seconded by Commissioner Ray Jeffers and later passed without dissent among the five-member board.

All five commissioners thanked York and her staff for their work on the budget in a trying economic year. York's initial budget proposal to commissioners was for just over \$500,000 more than the amended version adopted Monday.

"After the many months of work that went into the budget, I am pleased that the commissioners were able to unanimously adopt the budget," York said Tuesday. "This is a testament to the willingness of the board to work together. I am grateful for their leadership.

"This vote sends a much-needed message to staff that the commissioners are behind them," York added. "My staff put a lot of thought into their budget requests this year; a lot of sacrifices were made. In fact they (department directors and county employees) made my job easier and I hope they know how appreciative I am of them and also how proud I am of their work and leadership." (Courier-News, 6/10/09)

AUG 2009 Votes For Public Hearing on Updated Solid Waste Franchise Ordinance

A majority of the Person Board of County Commissioners voted Monday to allow a public hearing regarding an updated solid waste disposal franchise ordinance, which was requested by Republic Services of North Carolina.

Republic Services operates the Upper Piedmont Environmental Landfill in Person County.

The public hearing, which was approved by a 3-2 vote of commissioners, is required before the solid waste disposal franchise ordinance can be updated. The public hearing will be held at 9 a.m. on Monday, Sept. 21, in the auditorium of the Person County Office Building at 304 S. Morgan St.

Commissioners Johnny M. Lunsford, Ray Jeffers and Kyle Puryear voted in favor of the public hearing, while Commissioners Sam Kennington and Jimmy Clayton opposed the motion, which was made by Puryear.

The franchise would update Republic's current solid waste disposal franchise, which commissioners approved on Aug. 7, 1995.

The update would not increase tonnage accepted at the landfill or call for expansion of the landfill.

Previously, the commission granted a special use permit to Republic for the addition of approximately 39 acres within the existing footprint of the landfill. (Courier-Times, 8/18/09)

SEP 2009 Votes For Updated Solid Waste Franchise Ordinance

The Person Board of County Commissioners, by a 3-2 vote Monday morning, approved an updated solid waste disposal franchise ordinance, which was requested by Republic Services of North Carolina.

Republic Services operates the Upper Piedmont Environmental Landfill in Person County. Monday's proceedings included the first of two required readings of the franchise ordinance and the lone required public hearing that must be held before the franchise application can be approved.

A second reading of the franchise ordinance, followed by another vote of the board, will be held at the Monday, Oct. 19 meeting of commissioners. That meeting, like Monday's, will be held at 9 a.m.

The second reading of the proposed franchise could have been conducted at the Oct. 5 meeting of the commission, which will be held at 7 p.m.; however, Commissioner Kyle Puryear made a motion Monday to have the second reading of the ordinance on Monday, Oct. 19.

In explaining his reasoning for scheduling of the second reading, Puryear told Commission Chair Johnny M. Lunsford that he would be unable to attend the Oct. 5 meeting.

Puryear's motion to have the second reading scheduled for Oct. 5 officially passed by a 4-1 vote, with Vice Chair Jimmy B. Clayton casting the lone dissenting vote. Commissioner Sam Kennington did not vote either way, which by law, is recorded as an affirmative vote. He later told The Courier-Times that it was his "intention to vote no."

Puryear also made the motion Monday to approve the updated solid waste disposal franchise ordinance. Commissioner Ray Jeffers seconded the motion and Lunsford also voted affirmatively.

Clayton said he felt Monday's proceedings "opens the door to future expansion... This opens the door to the next step."

Kennington offered a substitute motion to table the request from Republic Services until questions from the public could be "answered truthfully to all Person County residents. "It would behoove us not to approve this today," Kennington added.

Clayton seconded Kennington's motion; however, it was defeated by a 3-2 count. (Courier-Times, 9/23/09)

DEC 2009 Votes For New EDC Director (3-2)

The Person Board of County Commissioners narrowly agreed to move forward with hiring a new economic development director during a regularly scheduled Monday meeting.

The economic development director position has been open since Glen Newsome retired from the post earlier this year. During budget talks for the current fiscal year, which began July 1, a consensus of the commission agreed to freeze funding for the position for at least 12 months.

Monday's action, which was approved by Commission Chairman Johnny Myrl Lunsford and Commissioners Ray Jeffers and Kyle Puryear, could cost the county approximately \$65,000 if a new director is in place by Jan. 1. Commissioners Jimmy Clayton and Sam Kennington opposed the funding of the position in the current fiscal year.

Person County Manager Heidi York estimated the cost of funding the position from Jan. 1 through the end of the current fiscal year at \$65,000. Of that total, \$35,000 would be for salary, \$20,000 for operating expenses and \$9,000 in benefits.

"Please note that there is no recruitment money included in this budget, so that will be an additional expense if the board desires," York wrote in a pre-meeting memo. "The only available funding source is the county's fund balance. Because this is a recurring operating expense, this is not a recommended use for fund balance."

York later agreed that the expense in the current fiscal year could likely be cut in half since it would take time to advertise for the position and conduct interviews.

She said it would take "two to three months to have somebody on board if we move forward now."

Clayton said he realized the position is "something we need, [but] maybe it's better not to do anything at this time."

Kennington also said he favored having an economic development director; however, he preferred leaving the original plan made by commissioners.

"I think it is prudent for us to follow the original timetable," Kennington said.

Puryear called the position "a necessity for our economic development.

"I think the longer we don't have [someone in that position], it looks bad for Person County," Puryear added. "...It may take a few months. I would say begin the process right now."

Prior to Monday, Jeffers said he had been in "limbo" with his decision.

"You either pay now or you pay later," Jeffers said. "I hate to leave a stone unturned." He added that he wanted to make sure "Person County has a place at the table" when it comes to recruiting businesses to the area.

Lunsford also said he believed moving forward now was "something that needs to be done.

"It might be July 1 before we fill it in the first place," Lunsford added. "I hate to spend money in the middle of the year, but I don't want us to miss any golden opportunities.

"I want to make sure we have a seat at the table," Lunsford continued. "The longer we wait, the further we will get behind." (Courier-Times, 12/9/09)

2010

JUN 2010 Voting For Budget

After much debate Wednesday morning, the Person Board of County Commissioners, by a 3-2 vote, approved a budget ordinance for fiscal 2010, which begins July 1.

Vice Chairman Jimmy B. Clayton made the motion to direct Manager Heidi York to prepare the ordinance, which could be approved by commissioners at their June 21 meeting.

Commissioners Johnny M. Lunsford and Ray Jeffers also voted in favor of Clayton’s motion, while Commissioners Sam Kennington and Kyle Puryear opposed the motion.

The version of the budget approved by commissioners Wednesday varied some from York’s original recommended general fund budget of \$49,628,121.

The biggest addition to the budget was the restoration of three furlough days for county employees at a cost of \$191,523. In the current year, county employees had five furlough days and Clayton adamantly said he did not want to “balance the budget [this year] on the backs of our employees.”

Clayton also said throughout the budget process that he did not wish to fund any “recurring expenses from fund balance.”

The additions to the budget Wednesday were funded from fund balance and \$161,503, which was available through capital project financing funds.

In addition to the furlough days, other recurring expenses that were funded Wednesday included \$15,000 for the Person County Museum, \$3,000 for Roots & Wings, \$20,000 for the Person County Recreation Arts & Parks Department (PRRAPD), \$50,000 for a block grant match for the Person County Senior Center and \$15,000 for the county medical director’s contract.

The Person County Museum of History had initially requested \$20,000, while the \$20,000 appropriated for PCRAPD was down from the over \$37,000, which was needed to fully restore all athletic funding. (Courier-Times, 6/12/10)

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A budget ordinance for fiscal 2010 will be up for adoption by the Person Board of County Commissioners when it meets in regular session Monday at 9 a.m.

The meeting will begin at 9 a.m. in the commissioners’ boardroom on the second floor of the Person County Office Building on Morgan Street.

At its last budget work session, commissioners approved the budget ordinance for fiscal 2010, which begins July 1, by a 3-2 vote.

Commissioners Johnny M. Lunsford and Ray Jeffers each voted in favor of Vice Chairman Jimmy B. Clayton's motion for the budget ordinance, while Commissioners Sam Kennington and Kyle Puryear opposed the motion.

The budget ordinance favored by the majority of the commissioners varied some from the original recommended general fund budget of \$49,628,121 proposed by Manager Heidi York.

Three furlough days had been proposed in York's recommended budget, but were restored at a cost of \$191,523. In the current year, county employees had five furlough days. (Courier-Times, 6/19/10)

AUG 2010 Votes to Put Sales Tax Hike on Ballot

The Person Board of County Commissioners will consider adoption of a resolution of intent for use of revenues from a local option quarter-cent sales tax that will appear on the Nov. 2 general election ballot when it meets in regular session Monday morning.

The commissioners will meet at 9 a.m. in their boardroom on the second floor of the Person County Office Building on Morgan Street.

Earlier, commissioners, by a 3-2 vote, opted to place the quarter-cent local sales tax on the general election ballot in November. The three commissioners who voted in favor of placing the item on the ballot - Johnny M. Lunsford, Jimmy Clayton and Ray Jeffers - indicated funds generated from the additional sales tax would be used to fund operations of a proposed recreation/senior center in the county. In the November 2008 general election, 55 percent of Personians who cast ballots favored the issuance of bonds for the construction of a new recreation/senior center.

County governments may not stipulate uses on the ballot as part of the referendum; however, commissioners can adopt a resolution declaring their intended use of the revenue.

According to an agenda abstract from County Manager Heidi York, the resolution reads that the new revenue, if approved, will be used to "support non-mandated, quality of life programs and services. (Courier-Times, 8/14/10)

2011

FEB 2011 Favors Occupancy Tax Hike

"I see it as another way of revenue. If [a] property tax [increase] is not one, then this is the next best thing."

Commissioner Ray Jeffers spoke those words Monday night before joining three other commissioners in voting in favor of a resolution supporting an increase in the occupancy tax rate in Person County.

The Person County Tourism Development Authority (TDA) is seeking state legislation to increase the county's occupancy tax rate from five percent to six percent.

If allowed, the additional revenues would be used to promote tourism in Person County.

County Manager Heidi York estimated that the increase would generate \$27,000 annually.

The tax would only affect persons utilizing hotels, motels and extended stay facilities in the county.

Commissioner Kyle Puryear cast the lone vote against the resolution.

"It is not time for it," Puryear said. He later said that the "way to solve [budget issues] is not through increasing a tax."

Jeffers pointed out that a host of persons seeking continued support for recreation services in the county were in attendance at Monday's meeting. (Courier-Times, 2/9/11)

MAR 2011 Votes For Solar Energy Expansion

The Person Board of County Commissioners, by a 3-2 vote Monday morning, approved a special use permit request for a solar energy generator submitted by Carolina Solar Energy, LLC.

Two years ago, commissioners unanimously approved a similar request from Carolina Solar Energy to place a solar energy generator in the Person Industrial Park near the intersection of U.S. 501 and Crown Craft Boulevard.

Commission Chairman Jimmy B. Clayton, along with Vice Chair Kyle Puryear and Commissioner Ray Jeffers voted in favor of the request, while Commissioners Sam Kennington and Frances Blalock voted against Puryear's substitute motion.

Kennington had earlier offered a motion to approve the request from Carolina Solar Energy with the addition of screening of the project "along the 501 corridor." Kennington said he would like the screening to be evergreens to the height of the fence.

"I feel like it is a minimum request to ask," Kennington said. He later referred to the deal proposed between the county and Carolina Solar Energy as a "sweetheart of a deal."

Stovall told The Courier-Times Tuesday that he took exception to that comment.

"If you look up the definition of 'sweetheart of a deal,' it reads that there is a presence of corruption," Stovall said. "This is a great deal for Person County."

Stovall said that, not only is Person County adding an additional \$5 million to its tax base by approving the request from Carolina Solar Energy, it is also saving between \$6,000 and \$7,200 annually on maintenance at the site, which was being done at a charge of "between \$500 and \$600."

The \$27,500 lease equates to an annual payment of \$1,100 and a monthly payment at close to \$92.

"It also opens the door for other economic opportunities," Stovall said.

In 2009, the estimated property tax that the county would receive annually for the initial investment by Carolina Solar Energy was \$4,500.

Puryear noted that the special use permit had gained unanimous approval from the Person County Planning Board.

Jeffers also pointed out that he was "not in favor of imposing any more" restraints to the request from Carolina Solar Energy. Jeffers said he did not view the current site as "unsightly."

With Monday's approval, Carolina Solar Energy will lease seven acres of a 50-plus acre parcel at the site off U.S. 501. In March of 2009, commissioners granted a special use permit to Carolina Solar Energy for a four-acre site adjacent to the current proposed site.

Stovall said Monday that the terms of the deal with Carolina Solar Energy call for a 25-year property lease at a cost of \$27,500, which is the same as the contract reached in 2009.

Stovall added that, as in 2009, the investment by Carolina Solar Energy would add an additional \$5 million to the county's tax base.

The site approved in 2009 was for 54 panels, measuring 65 feet by 15 feet with each consisting of 72 individual panels. The site approved Monday calls for 102 arrays with 44 panels with dimensions of 73 feet by 12.5 feet.

In 2009, Progress Energy agreed to buy the energy produced at the Carolina Solar Energy facility for distribution to its customers.

Jerry Dudzig, chief operating officer of Carolina Solar Energy, said then that the purchase agreement with Progress Energy would be for 20 years.

Carolina Solar Energy proposed the 2009 solar project in response to Progress Energy's request for renewable energy proposals issued in 2008. (Courier-Times, 3/23/11)

MAY 2011 No Tax Hike in Budget For Sixth Straight Year

Funding levels for Person County Schools (PCS), Piedmont Community College (PCC) and volunteer fire departments in the county will apparently be restored to levels received last year after action by the Person Board of County Commissioners Monday night.

Commissioners met for their first budget work session Monday and had very few items to discuss concerning Manager Heidi York's recommended budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 31.

The topic that drew the most discussion was the restoration of the funds for PCS, PCC and the volunteer fire departments, which would total \$257,851. York proposed a 2.5-percent reduction in funding from last year for each of the three organizations.

Commissioner Sam Kennington proposed restoring \$221,539 to PCS, along with \$24,792 to PCC and \$11,520 to the volunteer fire departments for a total of \$257,851.

In his motion for the restoration of those funds, Kennington proposed eliminating a proposal by York to implement a new merit pay program for county employees in the coming year, which was budgeted at a cost of \$260,390.

Kennington's motion also included a provision that PCS, PCC and the volunteer fire departments provide an outline to York by Tuesday, May 31, of how the additional funding would be spent.

Kennington's motion, which was seconded by Vice Chairman Kyle Puryear, passed by a 4-1 vote, with Chairman Jimmy Clayton casting the lone dissenting vote.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers noted on the record that he was not voting for any funding increase to "the schools...PCC or the fire departments." He pointed out and Kennington agreed that commissioners could re-evaluate their funding vote for each organization after reviewing the documents describing how the funds will be spent.

In discussing the restoration of the funding for PCS to the \$8.8 million received last year, Commissioner Frances Blalock said she knew public schools were facing cuts from the federal and state level.

"I really feel strongly about restoring this," Blalock said.

She, too, said she would like to know how the additional funds would be spent.

Also Monday, commissioners voted unanimously to make a change to York's recommended increase of one percent to the 401k funds of county employees.

Employees currently receive a 2.5 percent contribution from the county for their 401k funds and are not required to provide matching funds for that percentage. A proposal by Clayton called for employees to receive the additional one percent recommended by York if they agreed to match that one percent amount.

York's recommended budget, which she presented to commissioners last week, does not include a tax rate increase for the sixth consecutive year. Therefore, the county's tax rate will remain at 70 cents per \$100 valuation.

"I think we need to point out all the positives [in the manager's recommended budget]," Kennington said. "No tax increase for the sixth straight year."

It was pointed out in York's budget presentation that a one-cent increase in the county's property tax rate would generate an estimated \$372,973 in revenue.

York's recommended budget shows a decrease in the general fund budget again this year. The decrease proposed for the upcoming fiscal year is \$1.2 million.

The general fund budget for the current fiscal year is \$49,859,325, while the recommended general fund budget for fiscal 2011 is \$48,619,655.

As she mentioned last week, York told commissioners again during Monday's work session that county government spending had been decreased by nearly \$7 million in the past six years.

When work on the budget for the upcoming fiscal year began in January, York said the county was facing a deficit of \$4.8 million or a 13-cent tax increase. (Courier-Times, 5/25/11)

JUN 2011 Votes For Unsuccessful Merit Pay Hike Resolution

After three hours of deliberation Tuesday, the Person Board of County Commissioners decided to hold another work session before moving forward on adopting a county budget.

Prior to the decision to schedule another session, however, commissioners agreed to increase the amount of funding for Person County Schools by \$221,539 and to allot Piedmont Community College (PCC) an additional \$24,792. In the latest version of the county budget, volunteer fire departments will each receive approximately \$1,000 more from the county than was first projected.

The appropriations agreed upon for the schools, PCC and the volunteer fire departments restore each entity to current funding levels.

Also, county employees will get a one percent increase in their 401(k) employer contributions.

Commissioners could not reach a consensus on giving county employees a raise based on merit, and decided to defer the possibility to a later date.

For now, it appears employees will receive a one-time, \$300 employer contribution to their 401(k) accounts in August.

Commissioners Kyle Puryear, Sam Kennington and Frances Blalock opposed using fund balance money to give the merit raises. Kennington said he could not support the use of fund balance, or savings, to pay

for what could be a recurring expense. Blalock and Puryear concurred, but all three were in favor of using a fund balance appropriation to make a one-time retirement account contribution that would not be subject to income and Social Security taxation. Commissioners Jimmy Clayton and Ray Jeffers also voted to make the one-time retirement contribution.

Jeffers noted that he believed county employees should get the merit increase and that he was opposed to balancing the budget on the backs of employees.

Kennington said he did not see the decision to hold off on merit pay making county employees suffer. He noted that employees did not currently receive merit pay, therefore, "you can't take away what they don't have."

Commissioner Blalock said she would rather hold off on the decision until "we see what happens and what the economy looks like" in a few months.

The sticking points in the latest version of the budget proposed by County Manager Heidi York were whether to fund a county fire marshal and a position in environmental health at the health department; funding for Roxboro Development Group and a position in the Recreation, Arts and Parks Department.

For now, the fire marshal position is included in the proposed budget, but the manager was directed to bring back options on the cost of making the position full-time, part-time or combining the marshal position with the fire inspector position.

Kennington also asked for funding to demolish the county-owned house located next to the county office building. The house is currently used for storage. It is uninhabitable due to mold and other hazards, Kennington said.

The cost of demolition would be \$4,850, according to an estimate submitted by Earth Movers, Inc. Kennington said he had a donor willing to pay part of the cost if the commissioners could agree to the demolition. (Courier-Times, 6/8/11)

JUN 2011 Budget Finalized

By the close of a third work session, the Person Board of County Commissioners had come to unanimous approval of a budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 1.

At the end of Thursday's budget work session, commissioners instructed County Manager Heidi York to draft a budget ordinance for their approval.

As part of Thursday's work session, commissioners agreed to restore several county employee positions to 100 percent that had been recommended for a reduction to 60-percent pay with full benefits.

Those jobs included a maintenance position with the Person County Recreation, Arts & Parks Department at a cost of \$14,743; an environmental health position at a cost of \$13,609; a position with the Department of Social Services at a cost of \$16,904; and a code enforcement officer at a cost of \$24,232.

Commissioners also opted to increase the current fire inspector position from a 60-percent slot to 100 percent and to eliminate the now vacant fire marshal position. Those two moves netted the county a savings of \$9,702.

Funding of \$16,245 for the Roxboro Development Group was also restored in the budget Thursday night.

All of the aforementioned items left commissioners with a budget deficit of \$76,031. Finance Director Amy Wehrenberg then told the board she felt "comfortable" in increasing anticipated Emergency Management Services (EMS) fees from \$54,568 to \$100,000, which would provide an additional \$45,432 in revenue.

Once that figure was subtracted, commissioners were left with an out-of-balance deficit of \$30,599.

Instead of opting to take the recurring expenses out of fund balance, commissioners instructed York and Wehrenberg to attempt to find the additional monies in other fees collected to make up the deficit.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers had noted earlier that the county would be receiving additional tax revenue in the coming year from CertainTeed and Eaton; however, Vice Chairman Kyle Puryear cautioned that was money the county "did not have" at present.

Earlier in the meeting Commissioner Sam Kennington questioned whether the positions York had recommended for a reduction to 60 percent should be fully funded. He noted that York had told the board that "the workload is not there." He went on to say that if York came back at a later date and said the workload was present, commissioners could make a decision at that time. He also said it would "be hard to judge which [positions] not to fund," if commissioners were to "pick and choose" the posts.

Puryear added, "Obviously, [York] put it in there because she felt we could get by fine without it."

York told commissioners that department heads made the decisions after analysis of each position.

Jeffers noted that commissioners had already agreed to restore funding of over \$220,000 to public schools in the county after York had not recommended restoring them to their funding level of last year in her proposal.

In an earlier budget work session, commissioners increased the funding for public schools by \$221,539, Piedmont Community College by \$24,792 and granted an additional \$11,520 to volunteer fire departments in the county.

In addition, commissioners agreed to a one-percent increase in 401(k) contributions for employees, from 2.5 percent to 3.5 percent, as well as a one-time \$300 contribution to employee 401(k) accounts in August.

Last month, York proposed a general fund budget of \$48,619,655, which was a decrease of \$1.2 million from the current year. It was also noted at the time by the manager that county government spending had been trimmed by nearly \$7 million in the past three years.

York's budget proposal also calls for no change in the county's current tax rate of 70 cents per \$100 valuation. A one-cent increase in the tax rate would have generated an estimated \$372,973 in revenue. (Courier-Times, 6/11/11)

JUN 2011 Budget Approved Unanimously

"I think 40,000 people in Person County benefitted from this budget."

Commissioner Sam Kennington made that statement Monday morning shortly after making a motion to adopt a \$48.8 million budget ordinance for the upcoming fiscal year.

Commissioner Frances Blalock seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

The \$48,843,728 budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 1, is a decrease of over \$1 million from the current year. County Manager Heidi York also noted earlier that county government spending had been trimmed by nearly \$7 million in the past three years.

The budget approved by commissioners Monday does not include a change in the county's current tax rate, which will remain at 70 cents per \$100 valuation for the sixth consecutive year.

As evidenced in comments made by commissioners Monday, concessions were made in order to reach the unanimous vote.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers said the approved budget was "good in some areas and bad in some others."

He went to say that he was glad commissioners came to an agreement to restore all county job positions and that a proposed merit pay system for county employees would be revisited in November.

During budget talks, commissioners agreed to restore several county employee positions that had been recommended for a reduction to 60-percent pay with full benefits.

Those jobs included a maintenance position with the Person County Recreation, Arts & Parks Department at a cost of \$14,743; an environmental health position at a cost of \$13,609; a position with the Department of Social Services at a cost of \$16,904; and a code enforcement officer at a cost of \$24,232.

Neither Jeffers, nor Commission Chairman Jimmy Clayton, however, were in favor of the restoration of \$221,539 in funding for public schools in Person County, which equaled the amount of funding education received locally from commissioners last year.

Clayton pointed out that county departments cut an average of 4.28 percent this year, but that the public schools "did not get cut at all."

"I think we fund education above and beyond here in Person County," Jeffers said later.

Blalock, who along with Kennington and Vice Chairman Kyle Puryear, pushed for funding to be restored for education, said she was pleased with the budget and noted that commissioners were able to "keep all jobs" for county employees this year.

Puryear praised all commissioners for "meeting in the middle," and added, "I think this is a good budget."

The budget approved Monday also includes the restoration of \$24,792 in funding for Piedmont Community College and \$11,520 to the county's volunteer fire departments.

In addition, commissioners agreed to a one-percent increase in 401(k) contributions for employees, from 2.5 percent to 3.5 percent, as well as a one-time \$300 contribution to employee 401(k) accounts in August. (Courier-Times, 6/22/11)

AUG 2011 Occupancy Tax Hike Approved

On Oct. 1, Person County will begin assessing a six percent occupancy tax on hotel, motel and bed and breakfast rooms, and other lodging.

County commissioners on Monday decided, by a 4-1 vote, to increase the occupancy tax by one percent, with proceeds going to the county Tourism Development Authority (TDA). Commission Vice Chairman Kyle Puryear cast the lone nay vote, saying he made a pledge while campaigning that he would not vote to raise taxes.

The commissioners voted on the matter during their regular meeting Monday night, following a public hearing in which several spoke in favor of the tax increase and no one spoke in opposition.

State Rep. W.A. Winkie Wilkins got House Bill 518 passed in the General Assembly in June, giving the county the authority to levy the additional tax, which only affects those renting hotel rooms or other lodging. According to the ratified bill, "Person County shall on a quarterly basis, remit the net proceeds of the occupancy tax to the Person County Tourism Development Authority." The bill goes on to state, "The Authority shall use at least two-thirds of the funds remitted to it under this subsection to promote travel and tourism in Person County and shall use the remainder for tourism-related expenditures."

Funds raised from the additional tax will go to support tourism and travel in the county. TDA will also use a portion of the taxes generated by the levy to provide funding for the Person County Museum of History. Members of the museum's board of directors were at the public hearing on the matter Monday night, and spoke about how important the museum is to the citizens of Person County and to visitors.

Angie Brown, president of the museum's board, said it was the museum's mission to "collect, preserve and present artifacts of the county" for education and programs that benefit all citizens. She also noted that the museum operated largely on volunteer efforts, saying many "wonderful people" make the museum work. "We band together like a family to get things done," Brown stated, adding that all museum volunteers and board members "know [their] jobs and perform them with pride and passion."

Wilkins said in June that he was pleased that the bill passed, and that the TDA would have some extra funding. He said the TDA had been "bending over backward to help" the Person County Museum of History, and he was happy to know that more funds would be available for the museum.

The TDA board has said it hoped the additional funding could help support office facilities that would give the TDA more of a "store-front presence in the uptown area," according to Margaret McMann, TDA director. She said in June that such an office would afford TDA a place that would be easier for visitors to find and that would be more accessible to the general public.

Mac Wagstaff, treasurer of the museum board, said the museum was "deeply indebted to the county, the city and TDA for their support" over the years. "It's been said," Wagstaff contended, "that the museum is a priceless gem. It's the number one tourist attraction to the county." He said the board wanted "to ensure that it is here for future generations."

Commissioners Chairman Jimmy Clyaton thanked Wilkins "for the leg work he did in the legislature" in getting the occupancy tax bill passed. He also thanked the museum board "for all that [they] do. It is a wonderful thing for" the people of Person County "to be able to go down there and look at" their history, he said.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers said the intent of his vote for the increased occupancy tax was "to support the museum with those funds" generated by the tax.

Commissioner Sam Kennington stated that he concurred with Jeffers.

He quoted Wilkins' opinion that the TDA had "bent over backwards" to support the museum. "I hope it is clear to TDA" that it is the intent of the commissioners to have that support continue in the future. (Courier-Times, 8/3/11)

AUG 2011 Elected 1st VP of NCACC

Person County Commissioner Ray Jeffers was elected first vice president of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners on Saturday during the association's annual conference, which was held in Cabarrus County.

Superior Court Judge Jim Ammons performed the inauguration ceremony for Jeffers and the other elected commissioners who will serve as NCACC officers in 2011-12.

As first vice president of the NCACC, Jeffers will work closely with the other members of the NCACC Executive Committee to guide the NCACC Board of Directors on legislative and administrative issues affecting counties throughout the year.

Jeffers is in his first term as a member of the Person Board of County Commissioners. He has served as a member of the NCACC Board of Directors in each of the past two years.

In 2010-11, he chaired the association's Task Force on Youth Involvement. In 2009-10, he chaired the NCACC Agriculture Steering Committee.

Jeffers is also the NCACC's designee on the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund Board.

"I am truly honored to be elected by my peers and colleagues from across the state," Jeffers said. "Having chaired two NCACC committees and serving two consecutive years on the board of directors, I am overjoyed and looking forward to this new position and the years leading up to my term as president.

"I have outlined two initiatives I desire to undertake during my term as president," Jeffers added. "The first initiative is to address the concerns of the aging baby boomer population. The baby boomer population is projected to grow 36 percent by 2020. Addressing the concerns of the seniors and preparing the counties for the adequate and essential services that will be required is a must.

"Second is preserving farmland in our state," Jeffers continued. "Where agriculture contributes 74 billion to the state's economy, it represents 19 percent of the state's budget and 20 percent of the workforce. We must protect our land and the agri-business that depends on it." (Courier-Times, 8/24/11)

NOV 2011 Named to New Generations Initiative Advisory Council

A new initiative designed to engage rural youth and young adults in the life of their communities will launch in January, marking the beginnings of a multimillion-dollar effort that will touch thousands of young people across the state.

The North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center announced the three-year, \$3.6-million project last week during the 2011 Rural Partners Forum.

Person County Commissioner Ray Jeffers has been named to serve on the advisory committee for the project. Piedmont Community College representatives Randy Reynolds and Barbara Wagstaff Currier also attended the Rural Partners Forum last week.

"This is transformational," Gov. Beverly Perdue said at the event. "If we get young people involved and help them understand the opportunities to stay in place, we transform all of North Carolina, but especially rural North Carolina."

The New Generation Initiative will provide rural communities with the resources to reach out to youth and young adults, while creating skilled workers, mentoring the next generation of business owners and fostering economic and community leaders.

"Being a part of the New General Advisory Council affords me the opportunity to hopefully build off and continue work I started as the chair of the Youth Task Force for the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners last year," Jeffers said. "Through this initiative, we hope to retain more of our youth, not only in Person County, but the other 84 rural counties as well, with career training programs, community grant opportunities and, most importantly, job creation.

"Anything to promote and engage our youth across the state and particularly in our rural home communities, I am all for it," Jeffers added. "And, I am happy Person County has a seat at the table."

The initiative is supported by public and private partners and will be guided by the New Generation Advisory Council, made up of rural economic and community leaders.

"This is about building a foundation to grow North Carolina's rural areas," said Lt. Gov. Walter Dalton, who will chair the council. "It is about making our communities stronger. It is about challenging our young people to make a difference in rural North Carolina. It's about challenging adults to assist them."

Earlier during the forum, Rural Center President Billy Ray Hall noted that over the last two decades 54 rural counties lost population in the 24- to 30-year-old age group. Furthermore, he said, 16 rural counties lost more than 20 percent of their young adult population.

"We have to give them a reason to stay," he said. "We have to create jobs that will allow them to earn a living and support a family. We have to continue to build an educational system that will prepare them and their children for the future. We have to enhance the quality of life. And most of all, we have to listen to what they have to say, engage them in identifying solutions and then act on what they tell us."

The New Generation Initiative addresses those points through four distinct programs, touching on entrepreneurship, training for available career opportunities, leadership development and community service. The four programs include:

- New Generation Ventures aims to make self-employment an attractive and attainable career option for young adults, ages 18-30. It will support young entrepreneurs by providing scholarships for business-related training, business counseling, networking opportunities and access to new forms of business capital tailored to the specific needs of young business owners.
- New Generation Careers will encourage young adults to develop careers close to home while engaging rural businesses to cultivate local talent pools. It will provide grants to assist 10 communities with the development of locally based strategies to fill and create jobs in high-demand fields. The project will feature apprenticeships, on-the-job training and wage subsidies to help employers make new hires.
- New Generation Leaders will award challenge grants to stimulate the formation of high-energy youth and young adult action teams in rural communities. Through the action teams, young people ages 16 to 30 will work together and with established leadership to design and implement a project aimed at attracting and retaining young adults in the community. Thirty grants will be awarded over three years.
- New Generation Communities will provide high-quality resources and training programs for rural communities that seek to more fully engage youth and young adults in economic and community life. A 160-page youth engagement resource directory offers information on national, state and local resources for communities seeking to launch or expand local initiatives. A series of training programs will provide how-to information on such topics as working with at-risk youth, fostering entrepreneurship and creating a welcoming environment.

Hall said that by January 2015, the program will have worked directly with nearly 2,000 rural young people, helped 100 young rural entrepreneurs start their own businesses and involved 3,750 young people in community improvement projects. (Courier-Times, 11/30/11)

DEC 2011 Votes For Pay Hike For County Employees

Person County Government employees received an early Christmas gift Monday night.

The Person Board of County Commissioners, by a 3-2 vote, approved a 2.85-percent cost of living adjustment (COLA) for county employees, effective Jan. 1.

The pay hike marks the first COLA received by county employees since July of 2008. The cost to implement the pay raise is \$248,655 for six months and \$497,310 for 12 months.

The money to pay for the pay hike, which is a recurring expense, will come from fund balance in the current fiscal year.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers made the motion to approve the 2.85-percent COLA. Chairman Jimmy Clayton and Vice Chairman Kyle Puryear also voted for the pay increase.

Jeffers' motion came as a substitute to a motion made by Commissioner Sam Kennington and seconded by Frances Blalock. Kennington's motion called for a 1.4-percent bonus to be paid prior to Dec. 31 and an additional 1.4-percent bonus to be paid after Jan. 1.

Kennington said his intention with the total 2.8-percent in bonus pay was to spread the payments out over two separate tax years and then discuss a COLA for county employees during budget talks later next year.

Kennington said he wanted to be sure commissioners were "prudent with all funds" and that they did the "best for all" citizens. He added that he was in favor of a COLA, but that he did not want to do something that was going to "come back and bite us in six to eight months."

Blalock also said she was not opposed to compensating employees. She added, however, that her "suggestion is to give everyone the same raise."

County Manager Heidi York told commissioners Monday that the county currently had a "generous fund balance."

She added that the appropriation "is a hefty price tag," but that the county's "greatest resource is its employees," and they need to be compensated.

Puryear said that if the county has such a healthy fund balance he would also like commissioners to look at "giving taxpayers relief" next year in the form of a tax decrease.

York was directed by commissioners during budget discussions earlier this year to develop a study that would allow the board to consider all possible compensation methods for employees.

York proposed a scaled-back version of merit pay in her budget proposal for the current fiscal year, but a majority of commissioners failed to approve that.

Merit pay, York said earlier, would cost \$218,611 for implementation for half the year and would cost \$436,231 for a full year.

The purpose of merit pay, according to York, is to "provide a systematic program to reward employees based on job performance [and to] provide incentive for improved performance and maintain a high performing workforce."

Employees would receive a two percent merit pay increase if standards were met on performance reviews, a three-percent increase if standards were exceeded and no increase if standards were not met.

Currently, county employees receive longevity pay, which was paid last month. Longevity pay, according to York, "rewards employees on their length of service.s" It is awarded to all permanent employees after five years of continuous service each November. The cost of longevity pay this year was \$233,890 and is estimated at \$256,816 next November.

Certification increases and probationary increases are also currently in place for county employees. (Courier-Times, 12/7/11)

2012**JAN 2012 Against County Funds for 100% Internet Access**

The Person Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously Monday to draft a resolution concerning high-speed Internet service throughout the county.

The resolution, once drafted, will thank CenturyLink for its recent service expansion in Person County and remind the company of its promise made last year to work alongside commissioners to get Internet coverage to areas in the county that do not currently have access.

The motion to draft the resolution was made by Vice Chairman Kyle Puryear and seconded by Commissioner Frances Blalock.

Last June, Larry Liles, area operations manager for CenturyLink, told The Courier-Times that approximately 96 to 98-percent of the county had access to high speed Internet.

Randy King, president of Electronic Solutions, Inc. (ESINC), told commissioners Monday there are "approximately 15 areas [currently] in the county that do not have affordable broadband available." King added there were 212 households and 530 people without high-speed Internet access via CenturyLink's expansion.

King said ESINC proposed to install 45 "neighborhood" broadband base stations using wireless technology to deliver high speed Internet to the 15 areas that did not currently have access.

Cost estimates to get access to those areas, King said, range from \$1.1 million to \$1.9 million. He also estimated that, if installed, the typical monthly rates for homeowners would be \$29 per month.

King also said that a public/private partnership would be needed to obtain funding to support a project of 100-percent broadband coverage for the county and that some local public and private funds may be needed to fully fund the project.

State Rep. W.A. (Winkie) Wilkins, D-Person, told commissioners that officials with the North Carolina Rural Center "are doing some checking now to see what [potential grant funds] may or may not exist.

"There may be some funds available," Wilkins said, "but certainly not \$1 million."

Willkins did caution commissioners that an objection to proposed grant funds from CenturyLink "could be lethal."

"Where are they going to be?" Wilkins asked. "I don't know, but I should know from them in a week."

Wilkins said he had already made contact with CenturyLink officials, but has not received a response as to whether or not they would object to ESINC's proposal.

He went on to say that before commissioners made any decision, they should wait for the CenturyLink response.

"I have a feeling I know what they will say next week," Puryear said.

Puryear went on to ask commissioners if they would support providing some funding to assist with the project.

"I'm certainly in favor of exploring it, but I'm not willing tonight to make a monetary commitment," Commissioner Sam Kennington said.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers added that he supported 100-percent Internet access for the county, but he could not support allocating county funds to do so.

In a presentation to commissioners last June, Liles said that, with the exception of one area in the northern portion of Person County and two areas in the eastern portion of the county, the rest of the county either had Internet service or would be getting it soon.

King showed commissioners a map Monday that outlined the areas in the county without high-speed Internet accessibility. King noted the areas shown without service looked like more than five percent, but that CenturyLink may have based its statistics on the number of people served and not geography. (Courier-Times, 1/11/12)

MAY 2012 Tops Primary Voting

Democratic incumbents Ray Jeffers and Jimmy Clayton, along with political newcomer David Newell, will be in the running for the three spots on the Person Board of County Commissioners in November, where they will face Republican Larry Yarborough, who ran unopposed in the Republican primary. (Courier-Times, 5/9/12)

2013

SEP 2013 President County Commissioners Association

Too often in North Carolina, decisions are made in Raleigh with little regard for how they affect the people and communities across the state. That is particularly so for rural areas, such as Surry County, whose existence often seems to be an afterthought when state officials make policy decisions.

A perfect example of that came earlier this year when boundaries for the state economic development districts were redrawn with no input from the counties. Those redrawn districts lumped many localities, such as Surry, into alignments with other counties with little common interest between them.

That is why it is good to see the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners put together an economic development task force, aimed at giving counties a more unified voice when state officials are looking at policies which affect local governments.

It is even better to see one of our own, Surry County Commissioner Larry Phillips, tapped to not only serve on the association's board of directors, but to chair the new task force.

Phillips' involvement in the state agency came soon after he spoke with Ray Jeffers, the president of the county commissioners association and a member of the Person County Board of Commissioners. The two talked of their concern for rural economic development in the state, and that led to Jeffers asking Phillips to take on the new roles.

Hopefully this will give all rural communities in North Carolina, and even more so Surry County, a bigger voice as state officials work to continue growing the state's job base.

It can also serve as a model of what politics should be. Phillips and Jeffers come from different points on the political spectrum, but both men realize that the jobless, or the under employed, don't really care much for party politics. They simply want work, in decent-paying positions, so they can support themselves and their families.

State, and some local, leaders would do well to follow the example set by Phillips and Jeffers -- set aside petty and sometimes mean-spirited party politics and exhibit true leadership, doing what's best for their constituents without regard to what others might say. (Mount Airy News, 9/22/13)

DEC 2013 Calls For Delay on Vote For "Open Carry" Ban in County Buildings

The Person Board of County Commissioners voted Monday night to table action on an ordinance that would prohibit the "open carrying" or displaying of weapons on county property.

The ordinance, drafted by Person County staff and County Attorney Ron Aycock as a result of three recent incidents of individuals bringing nonconcealed weapons onto county-owned properties, was first introduced and discussed at the Nov. 18 meeting of commissioners. The version of the ordinance being considered Monday included a few changes that had been requested by commissioners. One revision

made it “expressly clear that a rifle or shotgun may, at the designated parking area of a facility, be secured by locking it in the passenger compartment of a motor vehicle,” according to information provided commissioners by Aycock.

Additionally, the definition of “pocket knife” was omitted and replaced by “a general prohibition on openly carrying any knife with a blade length exceeding four inches.”

A couple of people spoke concerning the ordinance during the informal comment portion of Monday’s meeting.

Person County Public Library Director Christy Bondy noted that one of the incidents that spurred the creation of the proposed ordinance happened at the library in September.

She explained that the incident involved a woman attending a class reunion meeting in the library gallery wearing a gun on her side “in the event of an altercation with a fellow classmate attending the meeting.” Bondy said the woman’s classmate told a library staff member that she was uncomfortable with the woman carrying the weapon during the meeting.

The staff member then asked the woman to lock the weapon in her car, due to expressed concern and the fact that there were several families with children in the library at the time, said Bondy. Though she complied with the request, Bondy said the woman challenged the staff member, pointing to the library’s “no concealed weapons sign” and explaining that she had a permit to carry the gun.

“I’m here tonight just to express my concern for the safety of my employees and the visitors to our library,” said Bondy, “which averages around 500 people on any given day, many of which are families with children.”

Speaking in opposition to the ordinance, licensed private investigator and retired special agent Russell Thomas said, “I think there are a lot of legitimate citizens who would like to have the right that this country was kind of founded on, in my opinion, and that is the right of self defense.”

He added, “I think that you should seriously consider tabling the enactment of this ordinance until such time as either I can make further presentation or you can have further examination.”

Commission Vice Chair Ray Jeffers said he thought the board needed to look at the ordinance further, rather than moving forward with an “overall ban” that night. He said he didn’t know if the county needed to look at county properties separately as it did with its smoking ordinance.

Jeffers made mention of a similar ordinance being considered in Alamance County. According to an article in The Times-News, the Alamance County Board of Commissioners voted Monday to repeal an ordinance adopted in 1995 that banned carrying concealed weapons in county buildings. Alamance commissioners also chose not to consider a proposed ordinance prohibiting the open carry of firearms in Alamance County buildings.

Jeffers made the motion to table action on the proposed weapons ordinance, which was approved unanimously by the board. (Courier-Times, 12/4/13)

2014

JAN 2014 Votes to Challenge Roxboro in Court over BOA Decision

A date for a definitive decision on whether the City of Roxboro's Board of Adjustment (BOA) will be required to hold a second hearing on a request from Person County for expansion of a conditional use permit at the Huck Sansbury Recreation Complex could be set next week.

Last August, the city's BOA denied the expansion of the conditional use permit for the Sansbury site at 425 Long Ave. The site is the location proposed by the county for a county-owned recreation/senior citizens' center.

Following the denial of the county's request last year, the BOA in September then denied a second hearing on the request when a majority vote of BOA members was not obtained.

The county then appealed the decision to Person County Superior Court. According to court officials, the appeal request has been placed on the administrative calendar for a civil session of Person County Superior Court on Wednesday, Jan. 8, at 10 a.m.

In October, Roxboro Attorney Alan Hicks, who was retained by the county to handle the appeal process, filed a writ of certiorari at the Person County Courthouse. It requests that the court order the BOA to conduct a rehearing on the county's request for expansion of the conditional use permit at Sansbury.

Hicks said the appeal would not be heard during Wednesday's administrative calendar session, which will be held in the Superior Courtroom, but it is possible that a date could be set for the appeal hearing.

Commission Vice Chairman Ray Jeffers, along with Commission Chairman Jimmy Clayton and Commissioner Frances Blalock, voted in favor of the county seeking court intervention regarding the BOA decision, while Commissioners David Newell and Kyle Puryear were opposed to appealing the decision.

According to BOA meeting minutes, the BOA denied the expansion of the conditional use permit at its Aug. 22 meeting due to the following findings:

- There was no evidence presented that proved the project would not substantially injure the value of adjoining properties.
- The additions proposed were not compatible or suitable for the neighborhood.
- Long Avenue, as presently constructed, is not suitable for increased traffic. No evidence to the contrary.
- There was no evidence presented to prove/support that the proposed use would not materially endanger the public health or safety.

In Superior Court, a judge could decide whether to uphold the BOA decision or send the county's request back to the BOA for another hearing.

“If the request is sent back to the Board of Adjustment for a re-hearing it could be amended or denied again,” Person County Manager Heidi York wrote in a press release last year. “If the city’s Board of Adjustment denies the request again, then the county may appeal to Superior Court again. Upon the second appeal, the Superior Court judge could decide to remand the amendment to the Board of Adjustment with a requirement to accept the amendment.”

Puryear, who has staunchly opposed the proposed facility being located at the current Sansbury site, fears the decision by commissioners to challenge the city’s BOA in court will harm future relationships between the city and county governing bodies.

“I never thought that I would see the day that Person County Government sued the City of Roxboro,” Puryear wrote in an earlier statement to The C-T. “The many years of building rapport and partnerships between each other are quickly being wiped away.

“The real losers of this battle are the citizens,” Puryear added. “Not only are tax dollars being wasted, but what industry would want to come here when the county government just waged war against the city?”

Jeffers, who has been a strong advocate for the proposed center being located at the Morgan Street site, made the motion last year to appeal the decision to Superior Court.

“I am pleased to continue our efforts of getting the rec/senior center approved for the Huck Sansbury site,” Jeffers said of his decision to make the motion to challenge the BOA decision in court. “To use a site the county already owns, plus the amenities that are already there is the most cost-efficient way of providing the services the citizens voted for in 2008.

“To go to another site would cost more and not be beneficial for our seniors who we are trying to keep centrally located in the city of Roxboro and provide a space that is more accurate for their current and future needs, plus a building that would be more senior friendly and ADA approved,” Jeffers added. “The needs of seniors are growing in our county and the city of Roxboro. We should provide them with the services needed to keep them healthy and active while respecting their wishes to have a center within the city limits. Seniors are a wealth of knowledge and productive citizens that we should value.”
(Courier-Times, 1/4/14)

JAN 2014 Youth Advisory Council Created

The Person Board of County Commissioners unanimously voted in favor of creating a Person County Youth Advisory Council when it met last week.

The idea was presented to the board by Vice Chairman Ray Jeffers, who felt such a council would provide a way to involve youth in local government, thus increasing the likelihood of young people desiring to return to Roxboro to live and work after completing their education.

Jeffers said he had talked to people interested in serving on such a council, and volunteered to be the commissioner representative for it.

Jeffers told The Courier-Times this week that he was excited to start a youth advisory council in the county.

“County governments need face to face interaction with youth,” said Jeffers.

“The importance of initial and regular contact between county leaders and youth is important to the futures of both the youth and the county.

“The county needs responsible and informed citizens, as well as future elected officials, and capable, creative staff,” Jeffers continued. “Youth need to know they have a future in Person County, and that Person County government leaders are willing to hear their voice.

“Our youth should feel their voice is valued, and that their future is bright here in Person County.”

Jeffers said the structure of the board had not yet been finalized, but that the intent was for it to be comprised of county teenagers from all high schools in the county.

He said it was intended that the board would “provide an opportunity for young people to be involved in local projects, participate in government and develop leadership skills.” (Courier-Times, 1/15/14)

JAN 2014 Frustrated by NC Fast Complications

With the clock ticking to get through thousands of overdue food stamp applications before a federal deadline, county workers are putting in overtime, and the state has deployed more staff.

State information released Thursday – about a week after the most recent federal warning – shows that the pile of overdue applications was cut nearly in half in seven days, to about 10,000. About of third of those overdue applications are in Wake County, which has a longer waiting list than any other county, one that’s nearly three times longer than No. 2 Cumberland.

Wake leaders vowed Thursday to eliminate the backlog by Feb. 7, with the help of 17 state staffers who are working alongside 110 county workers and 38 temporary employees.

Wake is one of 11 “regional processing centers” the state Department of Health and Human Services established this week where state workers are helping process food stamp applications.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture wants the backlog of the longest-waiting applications cleared by Feb. 10. A missed deadline means another letter, but the state and counties will still have some time after that to show progress before North Carolina loses administrative funds that amount to \$88 million a year.

Wayne Black , the state social services director, said about 200 state workers have been deployed to counties to help file applications and work through NC FAST complications. NC FAST is the state’s new software program that was intended to improve efficiency and speed the delivery of public benefits, but instead has resulted in months of delays for those seeking help.

”The counties are working hard,” Black said. “There are a lot of people working a lot of overtime. The USDA has really put it to us. This is it. It’s got to be done. Everybody understands that.”

A staffer from Apex Rep. Paul Stam’s office sent an email Thursday asking House and Senate legislative assistants to volunteer to help with applications.

Growing caseload

Half the counties’ costs to administer the food stamp program comes from the federal government.

Wake staff is working through the weekend to eliminate the backlog, said Liz Scott , Wake’s assistant division director for social services.

”We have struggled to keep up with the demand in the food and nutrition program,” she said. Part of the problem is that staffing in social services hasn’t kept pace with the growing caseload, she said. While case managers are trying to get through the waiting list, new applications are filed each day.

County staff will present a request to county commissioners in a few weeks to hire more people, Scott said.

NC FAST has cost Wake \$1 million since last summer, and it will need more than the \$1.8 million budgeted for this fiscal year to keep its temporary staff.

Counties have spent millions on new equipment, employee overtime and temporary help, but still can’t keep up with the requests for food assistance.

Ray Jeffers , president of the N.C. Association of County Commissioners , said local government leaders never imagined that getting NC FAST to work would be so hard.

”It was kind of put to us that it was going to make life easier,” said Jeffers, vice-chairman of the Person County board of commissioners. “We were all excited about it.”

Jeffers and social service directors from around the state still have hope that NC FAST will live up to its promises once the problems are fixed. But until that time, they know hungry people are relying on charities for meals while they wait for their food stamp approvals.

’Hours on top of hours’

The goal of NC FAST was to integrate and coordinate food assistance, Medicaid , Work First, child protective services, and other programs so that clients wouldn’t have to work with multiple case managers.

Carlton Paylor , social services director in Person, said it may have been easier to adapt to the new computer system if it hadn’t been introduced while the economy was still struggling.

More than 25 percent of Person residents eat with the help of food stamps, he said.

”We’re putting in hours on top of hours to make this work,” he said. “It’s going through a very hard time right now.”

Buncombe County won praise last year from Aldona Wos, the state secretary of health and human services, for its NC FAST efforts. The county spent nearly \$1 million to get it working.

The county brought on temporary staff three months ago, and the human services department wants to hire more permanent staff, said Jim Holland , director of the human services budget team in Buncombe.

”NC FAST is a radical transformation from the way we’ve done it in the past,” Holland said. “We believe it is the right way to do business. There is a cost to that.” (RNO, 1/31/14)

FEB 2014 Running For State House

Ray Jeffers, D-Person, current vice chairman of the Person Board of County Commissioners and president of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, announced Thursday that he will seek the District 2 seat in the North Carolina House of Representatives.

Roxboro native W.A. (Winkie) Wilkins, D-Person, currently occupies the District 2 House seat. Wilkins, who is in his fifth term in the House, announced Tuesday he will not seek a sixth consecutive two-year term.

House District 2 is comprised of all of Person County and portions of Granville County.

“I am excited to announce my candidacy for the State House and look forward to hearing the concerns of the people of District 2,” Jeffers said. “The past few years as an executive officer for the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC), I have been advocating on behalf of all 100 counties at the legislature.

“My continued support of economic development, education, controlled spending, [and] transparent government, along with my experiences as president of NCACC, which has a principal responsibility to serve as lead advocate on legislative issues, will allow me the opportunity to be an effective legislator for the people of the District.

“As chairman of the National Association of Counties Rural Action Caucus, I understand the needs of our two rural counties with respect for the need of infrastructure, broadband, job growth, support of our substantial agricultural community and how these correlate with strong legislative support,” Jeffers added. “With every decision made, I promise to put the citizens first and work hard to improve and promote Person and Granville counties. I look forward to getting to know the citizens of District 2 and earning their vote.”

Wilkins issued a statement this week in which he indicated he is “pleased” with Jeffers’ decision to run for the House District 2 seat.

“I am pleased to learn that Commissioner Jeffers intends to seek the District 2 seat in the North Carolina House,” Wilkins wrote in the statement. “My observations of Commissioner Jeffers are that he is well-informed and thoughtful. Above all, I believe that he has the well-being of people in his heart.”

Last August, Jeffers became the first Personian to be named president of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) when he was sworn into the position he currently holds at a ceremony in Greensboro.

Jeffers is a lifelong resident of Person County, where he attended

Person County Schools, later attending Piedmont Community College and North Carolina A&T State University. He and his wife Treco Lea-Jeffers reside in the Cunningham Township of Person County.

The candidate filing period for the May primary election begins at noon on Monday, Feb. 10, and continues through noon on Friday, Feb. 28. (Courier-Times, 2/1/14)

FEB 2014 Judge Rules Against County on New Roxboro BOA Hearing

Superior Court Judge Michael J. O’Foghludha of Durham this week dismissed a Petition for Writ of Certiorari by Person County Government regarding a City of Roxboro Board of Adjustment (BOA) decision last year not to grant expansion of a conditional use permit at the Huck Sansbury Recreation Complex.

Last August, the BOA denied the expansion of the conditional use permit for the Sansbury site at 425 Long Ave. The site was the county’s proposed location for a recreation/senior citizens’ center. Following the denial of the county’s request last August, the BOA in September then denied a second hearing on the request when a majority vote of BOA members was not obtained.

The county then appealed the decision to Person County Superior Court. Judge O’Foghludha heard the appeal on Feb. 3 and filed his decision in the Person County Clerk of Courts Office Wednesday.

O’Foghludha wrote in his decision that the petition filed by the county last October set forth “seven, separately numbered ‘reasons’ for issuance of a writ of certiorari, praying that this court ‘remand this matter to the BOA with an order directing it to hold a rehearing on the Petitioner’s application of its conditional use.’”

“This Court has...reviewed the entire Record on Appeal in this case to insure that all procedures specified by law were followed, to insure that due process rights of Petitioner were followed and protected, to insure that the Zoning Board of Adjustment’s (BOA) decision was supported by competent, material and substantial evidence in the whole record, and to insure that the BOA’s decision was not arbitrary and capricious,” O’Foghludha wrote.

Based on his review, O’Foghludha wrote that the following conclusions of law were made:

- “Applying a manifest abuse of discretion standard, the BOA did not abuse its discretion and did not act arbitrarily or capriciously in denying Petitioner’s petition for rehearing for failing to demonstrate that there was ‘a substantial change in facts evidence, or conditions in the case,’ [according to the City of Roxboro Zoning Ordinance].
- “Applying a whole record test, Petitioner failed as a matter of law to present sufficient competent, material and substantial evidence at the August 22, 2013 BOA hearing to make out a prima facie case for Petitioner’s requested conditional use permit... because Petitioner failed... to provide any competent opinion testimony on the questions of whether the project would not substantially injure the value of adjoining properties and would not materially increase traffic volumes on adjacent streets, and therefore the BOA’s denial of Petitioner’s application for a conditional use permit and the BOA’s findings in support of its denial of the application were proper.
- “Petitioner has presented insufficient evidence on this appeal to establish any violation of Petitioner’s due process rights to an impartial decision maker... or to establish any other violation of Petitioner’s due process rights to a fair hearing before the BOA.”

Roxboro attorney Alan Hicks represented the county in the court proceeding. Two members of the Person Board of County Commissioners — David Newell and Kyle Puryear — were opposed to appealing the BOA decision to Person County Superior Court. Commission Vice Chairman Ray Jeffers, along with Commission Chairman Jimmy Clayton and Commissioner Frances Blalock, voted in favor of the county seeking court intervention.

Nick Herman, attorney for the City of Roxboro, represented the BOA in the court proceeding.

According to BOA meeting minutes, the BOA denied the expansion of the conditional use permit at its Aug. 22 meeting due to the following findings:

- There was no evidence presented that proved the project would not substantially injure the value of adjoining properties.
- The additions proposed were not compatible or suitable for the neighborhood.
- Long Avenue, as presently constructed, is not suitable for increased traffic. No evidence to the contrary.
- There was no evidence presented to prove/support that the proposed use would not materially endanger the public health or safety.

In court on Feb. 3, Hicks said the county presented additional documents to the BOA in September when a second hearing was denied after a majority vote was not reached to hold the rehearing. The motion to grant a second hearing failed after a 3-3 vote. In August, the BOA denied the request 5-1.

The additional information, Hicks said, included architectural information, along with traffic design and a capacity plan.

Herman said in court this month that, according to city ordinance, the county “has an absolute right” to come back before the BOA in August of this year and file the request again.

He added, however, that granting a rehearing on the request in court would “set a precedence” the BOA does not wish to set.

The BOA, Herman said, did not want to set a precedence of someone “botching” a request and returning requesting “a doover.”

At the initial hearing before the BOA in August, Herman said, the county “needed to show” that the proposed recreation/senior center “would not have adverse traffic impacts,” and it would not have “adverse impact on the value of adjoining properties.”

At the August hearing, Herman said, “zero evidence” was presented by the county on those matters.

Hicks said he disagreed with that assertion, noting that there was some mention of traffic and property values at the August meeting.

The county, Herman added, responded to the BOA denial by presenting “additional materials on old facts,” when it made its request for a rehearing. (Courier-Times, 2/22/14)

FEB 2014 Votes to Terminate Joint City-County Planning Department

“As we embark on this process, it was never an attempt to gain a cost savings; it was to try to keep things revenue neutral, and provide the most efficient and effective service that we can to the residents.”

Person County Manager Heidi York spoke those words to the Person Board of County Commissioners and Roxboro City Council members last year regarding a joint city-county planning department.

The department, which became effective July 1 of last year, was in essence terminated Monday by a 3-2 vote of county commissioners following a closed session discussion.

Commission Vice Chairman Ray Jeffers made the motion Monday to eliminate the county responsibilities the joint citycounty planning director. The motion was favored by Chairman Jimmy Clayton and Commissioner Frances Blalock. Commissioners Kyle Puryear and David Newell voted against Jeffers’ motion.

Jeffers’ motion instructed York to advertise for a county planning director with duties to include stormwater administration.

As part of Jeffers’ motion, York was also instructed to inform the City of Roxboro of the commissioners’ decision that Aaron Holland, the current joint city-county planning director, would no longer have direct responsibilities for the county.

Jeffers' motion also contained wording that the county would continue to provide office space for Holland at its current location in a county-owned facility on Morgan Street.

Prior to voting against the motion, Kyle Puryear told his commissioners, "This is a setback for us in city and county relations."

Jeffers and Blalock both said they believed it was a good idea to approve the motion due to changes in stormwater regulations in the county.

"It allows us to do two jobs with one employee," Jeffers said.

Commissioners had been holding discussions concerning stormwater regulations well in advance of the formation of the joint city-county planning director position last July 1.

In discussions leading up to the creation of the joint city-county planning director position, York told commissioners and council members during last year's joint meeting that the proposed plan would involve creating a joint planning commission, a joint board of adjustment, and a joint planning department.

The intention of the plan to join the two departments, York said last year, was to improve customer service by creating a "one-stop shop." York added that a unified development ordinance would simplify the rules that govern the planning process. (Courier-Times, 2/26/14)

FEB 2014 Votes For Purchasing Of Recycling Center After Heated Debate

Monday's meeting of the Person Board of County Commissioners featured multiple heated discussions, including one following a closed session regarding the current Person County Recycling Center (PCRC) site on Martin Street.

Commissioners, by a 3-2 vote, approved a motion by Commissioner Frances Blalock to purchase the PCRC site from current owner Wagstaff Associates for \$850,000.

The site is the proposed location to house both PCRC and Person Industries (PI).

The total cost estimated for the facility to be purchased and upfitted to house PCRC and PI is \$2,224,400. In addition to the \$850,000 purchase price, other costs associated with the site include \$1,034,400 for upfit and repairs; \$300,000 to upfit the facility to add PI; \$30,000 to move equipment; and \$10,000 to hire a consultant.

Two appraisals for the site were obtained, according to Person County Manager Heidi York. An appraisal obtained by the county was for \$850,000, while an appraisal obtained by Wagstaff tallied \$925,000.

Commission Chairman Jimmy Clayton, who along with Vice Chairman Ray Jeffers voted in favor of Blalock's motion, pointed out that the approved purchase price was for the lower of the two appraisals.

Commissioner Kyle Puryear, who along with David Newell, voted against the purchase, said he was doing so because commissioners “had an opportunity to get it at a much lower cost late last year.

“We let that offer expire,” Puryear said. “We could have gotten it at a much lower rate.”

Puryear was referencing an offer extended to the county by Wagstaff Associates to purchase the Martin Street facility in late September of last year for \$616,666.67, a discount of \$308,333.33 from the appraised price of \$925,000.

Jeffers and Clayton both said Monday the county did not take advantage of that price last year because it was under a purchase agreement with Dansco, LLC to purchase the former Bromma facility on the Durham Road for \$1.52 million.

“We were not able to take advantage [of the offer,]” Clayton said.

Puryear disagreed and, according to a Sept. 27 letter from J. Linwood Cates, a Roxboro attorney, to York, the county could have accepted the discounted offer from Wagstaff Associates, despite having already entered a purchase agreement for the former Bromma facility.

“Please make sure that all of the Commissioners are aware that even though it was mentioned that the County is contractually bound for the Durham Road property, a quick review of the current Contract after [an earlier] meeting shows otherwise,” Cates wrote in his letter to York. “As I discussed with the County Attorney, Section 4(f) of the current Contract allows the County the ‘right to terminate this Contract for any reason or no reason’ until November 15, 2013. In addition, a termination pursuant to that Section states that the ‘Earnest Money Deposit shall be refunded to the Buyer.’

“The purpose of this letter is to assure the County Commissioners that the offer of the gift equivalent of \$308,333.33 from Wagstaff Associates is still available, and will be held open until October 10, 2013,” Cates continued. “However as we discussed, no long term assurances of this gift can be provided. Please share this with County Commissioners and we look forward to any additional input from the County regarding this matter.”

Newell said Monday he was voting against the purchase because he could not “justify” the expenditure.

“People’s income aren’t going up as fast as we’re spending it,” Newell said. “I think we have exceeded everybody’s budget.”

When quizzed by Jeffers if his recommendation would be to shut down PCRC and PI, Newell answered affirmatively.

“Ninety-five percent of the population have no idea what we’re spending out there,” Newell added later.

In the past five years, the total county subsidy to operate PCRC was \$1,735,345. That includes debt service of \$98,668 annually, and general fund appropriations of \$193,752, \$310,993, \$208,928, \$262,512, and \$265,818.

The county's hopes of purchasing the former Bromma facility at 2285 Durham Rd. were dashed late last year when the City of Roxboro's Planning Board voted 5-1 to deny a request to rezone the site from Highway Business to Light Industrial. Roxboro City Council later upheld the planning board's decision.

Real estate agent Tommy Bowes, who told the planning board last year he was representing Danny Talbert of Dansco LLC, said the land at the former Bromma facility was formerly zoned for industrial use.

"For 43 years, it was industrial," Bowes said, adding that "90 percent" of the land from "Burchwood Cemetery to Lucy Garrett Road" is currently zoned for industrial use.

Joint City-County Planning Director Aaron Holland told the city planning board last year that the city staff recommended approval of the request by the county based on the city's land use plan.

"The land use is projected to be industrial," Holland said. "At one time it was industrial."

Holland also said the site was an "ideal location for industrial use." (Courier-Times, 2/26/14)

FEB 2014 Editorial Chastises Lack of Joint Meeting With Roxboro Over Differences

For now, there will be no joint meeting between the Person Board of County Commissioners and Roxboro City Council. The possibility for that much-needed meeting to take place was shot down by three commissioners Monday morning — without any discussion — not a word of discussion. Well, there were a trio of "no" votes recorded from Chairman Jimmy Clayton, Vice Chairman Ray Jeffers and Commissioner Frances Blalock when Commissioner Kyle Puryear asked for the "possibility" of the joint meeting being added to the agenda for discussion. Puryear did not ask for a vote on whether to conduct a joint meeting. He simply asked to no avail for a discussion to be held on whether or not to schedule a joint meeting.

David Newell was the lone commissioner who sided with Puryear's motion.

City government leaders have indicated they would welcome a joint meeting. Puryear and Newell are also obviously on board to get the two governing bodies together. And, the meeting needs to take place sooner than later.

There's no doubt that hard feelings exist among some commissioners following a recent Superior Court ruling that denied a request for a rehearing by the City of Roxboro Board of Adjustment regarding its decision last year not to grant expansion of a conditional use permit at the Huck Sansbury Recreation Complex. The site was the county's proposed location for a recreation/senior citizens' center.

Puryear was seeking the joint meeting with city government leaders to discuss the possibility of the former Leggett's building on Main Street in Uptown Roxboro being acquired to serve as the Person County Senior Center.

The facility has approximately 33,000 square feet, features two levels and has front and rear entrances, and ample parking behind the site. The tax value on the structure is just over \$500,000. The site could also

house more than just a senior center, albeit it would be taken off the city and county tax books if acquired for use as a senior center.

Clayton, Jeffers and Blalock apparently do not favor the site, nor the notion of a meeting with city officials for any reason at present. Yet, Clayton did wonder aloud Monday about what was then a pending city decision regarding a funding request for a temporary senior center location. He, Jeffers and Blalock could ask any citygovernment related questions they might have in a joint meeting.

The longer the timeframe before a joint meeting is held, the more the ill feelings festering on whichever side are going to continue to grow.

We said it last week and we'll say it again this week. It's time for everyone to put their pride in the backseat, come to the table and hash out their differences.

If everyone is truly in their elected position for the betterment of Roxboro and Person County, then they should be willing to get together and discuss their differences and the possibilities to make our county an even better place to live, work and play. (Courier-Times, 2/26/14)

APR 2014 Gets Wilkins Endorsement

Some key North Carolina General Assembly races in the May 6 primary. Unless otherwise noted, the primary winner faces no rival from the opposing party in November:

HOUSE:

- Three Republicans and three Democrats are running in separate primaries in the 2nd District, where Rep. Winkie Wilkins, D-Person, is retiring after five terms. Wilkins endorsed Ray Jeffers, a Person County commissioner and president of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. (AP, 4/27/14)

MAY 2014 Wins Nomination

"I am already looking forward to November."

Less than an hour after he locked up first place in the Democratic race for the North Carolina House of Representatives District 2 seat, Roxboro's Ray Jeffers was already making plans for his November general election bid.

Jeffers, the current vice chairman of the Person Board of County Commissioners, is seeking to win the House seat currently occupied by Rep. W.A. (Winkie) Wilkins, D-Person. Wilkins announced earlier he would not seek a sixth consecutive House term.

District 2 is comprised of all of Person County and a large portion of Granville County.

In the unofficial vote totals Tuesday night, Jeffers claimed first place by wide margin over Granville County's Dalton Huff. Roxboro attorney Brent Groce placed third in the balloting.

Jeffers tallied a two-county total of 2,859, while Huff had 1,884 votes and Groce garnered 1,780.

"I would like to thank all of my supporters," Jeffers said Tuesday. "I am looking forward to campaigning for November and meeting more people and hearing more concerns they have.

"I also want to thank Brent and Dalton," Jeffers added. "They are two excellent young leaders in the district.

"I was overwhelmed by the support Person County and Granville have shown me, especially Granville County," Jeffers continued.

"My next step is not to sit back, but keep working hard and meeting more people."

Jeffers noted that he has the support of the "state employees and state teachers' associations, plus so many people in this county."

Jeffers will advance to the November general election where he will square off against Republican Larry Yarborough, a Roxboro businessman and a former Person County commissioner.

"I look forward to running a very clean and respectable campaign in November," Jeffers said Tuesday night.

In Person County, Jeffers collected 55.69 percent of the vote. Jeffers had 1,801 votes, while Groce was second with 1,211 votes (37.45 percent). Huff managed just 22 votes (6.86 percent) in Person County.

In Granville County, Huff led the balloting with 1,662 votes (50.53 percent), while Jeffers was second at 1,058 (32.17 percent). Groce was third in Granville County with 569 votes (17.3 percent).

Jeffers won 10 of 14 precincts in Person County to help secure his victory. Groce placed first in the county's other four precincts.

Jeffers' precinct triumphs came in Allensville, Cunningham/ Chub Lake, Flat River, Holloway, Hurdle Mills, Mt. Tirzah, Roxboro 1, Roxboro 3, Roxboro 4 and Woodsdale.

Groce scored precinct wins in Bushy Fork, Olive Hill, Roxboro 2 and Roxboro 1A. (Courier-Times, 5/7/14)

JUN 2014 Votes For Budget

The Person Board of County Commissioners voted 3-2 Thursday to approve a budget ordinance for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 1.

The budget calls for a General Fund appropriation of \$53,651,801, which was slightly higher than the recommended General Fund of \$53,649,933 proposed by County Manager Heidi York.

The recommended General Fund total was a 1.52 percent decrease from last year's total.

Commission Vice Chairman Ray Jeffers, along with Commissioners David Newell and Kyle Puryear voted in favor of the budget ordinance, while Commission

Chairman Jimmy Clayton and Commissioner Frances Blalock voted against it.

Prior to Thursday morning's vote on the budget ordinance, commissioners voted in favor of a resolution requesting the Person County Board of Education utilize a county appropriation of \$184,283 to provide twopercent salary supplements to Person County Schools' (PCS) employees, which will include teachers, classified employees and principals.

In her recommended budget, York had allotted for supplement monies for teachers, but not classified employees or principals.

PCS Supt. Dan Holloman told commissioners Monday he had "absolutely no problem" with the resolution.

"I am fine with that," Holloman added.

Also Thursday, commissioners approved a resolution requesting that a \$3,000 allocation for the Roxboro Area Chamber of Commerce be used to support the annual Personality festival.

Also prior to the vote on the budget ordinance, commissioners, by votes of 3-2, approved two amendments.

Puryear presented one amendment, which moved \$28,000 originally allocated for Person County Animal Services vehicles to Piedmont Community College.

In her budget proposal, York has recommended a funding increase of 5.35 percent of \$54,000.

"This will fully fund property insurance costs (\$17,000), electricity costs (\$16,000), phone service (\$9,000), and provide an increase to custodial staff (\$12,000)," York wrote in her budget message to commissioners.

An amendment by Jeffers to add \$10,000 to current expense funding for the Kirby Civic Auditorium was also approved. The \$10,000 is to be used for an intercom system and microphones. The monies for that were removed from the county's contingency and vehicle maintenance funds.

Clayton said Thursday he did not approve of changes to the budget being made that day.

"What we're doing with this budget is setting up for drastic cuts next year or a tax increase," Clayton said. "We cannot fix the state budget. When we start trying to do it, we're digging a hole deeper and deeper."

“We don’t have enough money to fix the problems [PCC and PCS] are having to deal with,” Clayton added.

Newell said it was “imperative” for the citizens of the county to understand the “obstacles” commissioners would be “up against” at budget time next year.

“The citizens need to be aware that we may very well lose some services,” Newell said. “You can’t get blood out of a turnip.”

Puryear said he was pleased with the approved budget ordinance because it showed commissioners were “doing our best” to help education.

“When we began the budget process earlier this year, it was established that the majority of commissioners had no intention of lowering the tax rate to reflect a revenue neutral position after last year’s property revaluation increase,” Puryear wrote in a statement to The C-T. “Since the board had every intention of keeping this extra revenue, I wanted to make sure it was spent towards the priorities of this county.

“In the past, I have had no problem voting against different budgets; however, I am glad that a compromise was reached with the majority of the board to give increased funding to our schools and PCC,” Puryear added.

Jeffers said he felt good about the budget. “We were able to do something for our schools,” Jeffers said. “We need to do all we can to promote education.”

Jeffers added that he was in favor of the funding for PCS because it favored “not only the teachers, but all the support staff” as well.

Blalock said commissioners would be faced with raising taxes next year or taking away services. “We’ve got to be realistic,” Blalock said, adding later that commissioners were “robbing from Peter to pay Paul.”

The approved budget leaves the county’s tax rate at 70 cents per \$100 valuation.

County departments were directed to submit flat funding requests that kept spending at current levels. While county departments were directed to keep expenditures flat for the upcoming fiscal year, the new merit pay system for the county, which is in its first full year of implementation, caused an increase in all salary lines. (Courier-Times, 6/7/14)

JUN 2014 EDC Reorganized

The Person Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution Monday formalizing action taken by the board at a May 19 meeting that reorganized the Person County Economic Development Commission (EDC).

According to information submitted by County Attorney Ron Aycock, the resolution is being considered in an attempt “to increase community and business representation.”

The resolution provides for the restructuring of the board to include nine members, which would be the chair of the Person Board of County Commissioners; mayor of the City of Roxboro; president of Piedmont Community College (PCC); the elected chair or alternative from the executive board of directors for Roxboro Development Group; the elected chair or alternative from the executive board of directors for the Roxboro Area Chamber of Commerce; a representative of business with a presence in Roxboro, to be appointed by Roxboro City Council; a representative of a business with a presence in Person County, appointed by the board of commissioners; and two members at-large appointed by the board of commissioners.

Aycock said the resolution also provides that the county manager, city manager and PCC dean of corporate and occupational training serve as participants but not voting members of the EDC.

Board Chair Jimmy Clayton added a provision that if the chair of the board of commissioners or mayor were not present, the city or county manager would have the right to vote.

Board vice chair Ray Jeffers asked that both at-large members serve a three-year term, rather than one serving two years and the other three. (Courier-Times, 6/7/14)

JUL 2014 Wants Diversity on Recreation Board

“We want to promote diversity on that board. Currently, there is no woman on the board.”

Those were among the comments made by Ray Jeffers, vice chairman of the Person Board of County Commissioners Monday when discussing proposed revisions to the county’s Recreation Advisory Board Ordinance.

John Hill, director of the Person County Recreation, Arts and Parks Department, presented the changes to commissioners during a Monday morning meeting.

He said the vast majority of the proposed changes to the ordinance dealt with “cleaning some of our stuff up.”

The main change to the ordinance being sought, Hill explained, was that existing members of the board would be allowed to appoint two members. Hill explained that the board wanted to be able to appoint people based on the county’s population breakdown.

Jeffers, who serves on the Recreation Advisory Board, said he approved of the proposed changes and thought it was a good idea for the board to be allowed to appoint two members.

The changes approved unanimously by commissioners Monday include having the recreation advisory board consist of nine members, seven of whom are to be appointed by commissioners and two of whom

are to be appointed by advisory board members. One county commissioner will serve ex-officio as one of the nine members and be a voting member.

Also, the term of office for all appointed and reappointed members of the recreation advisory board will be three years.

By virtue of Monday's unanimous vote, commissioners are not required to present the ordinance changes for a second reading at a future meeting. Commissioners also opted not to hold a non-required public hearing on the ordinance changes.

Hill wrote to commissioners in a pre-meeting agenda abstract that the proposed changes "have been researched and tailored to current recreation industry trends, practices, and needs from our citizens in Person County."

The approved ordinance also included changes to the Arts Council Committee and the Mayo Park and Lake Committee.

The Arts Council Committee will consist of a minimum of six members and a maximum of eight members.

"Members of the Person County Arts Council may consist of members throughout Person County representing various organizations with diverse cultural arts interests," the ordinance reads. "These organizations may include schools, local college, private citizens, civic organizations, parks department and many others."

The Mayo Park and Lake Committee will consist of a minimum of six members and a maximum of eight members.

"Members of the committee may represent citizens in the areas of outdoor recreation, public recreation development, stream education, environmental education, preservation, private citizens, and local and state government," the ordinance reads. "Terms of appointment shall be for a length of two years. Also, terms of appointment shall be on a staggered basis." (Courier-Times, 7/30/14)

AUG 2014 Wife Profile

Treco Lea-Jeffers was named director of Earl Bradsher Preschool this week.

Lea-Jeffers has been employed with Person County Schools (PCS) in various capacities over the last 15 years.

Her first educational employment opportunity was as a teacher's assistant at Person County Head Start. The subsequent year she was presented with the opportunity to become a Head Start teacher at Earl Bradsher Preschool. In this capacity, she found that working with children at this level was not only intrinsically rewarding but that the impact that was being made in the lives of the children would be a lasting one.

Lea-Jeffers said, “Children never forget the people that helped them and they will remember you for your whole life. Making a difference in a child’s life is a reward that’s just simply priceless.”

Her most recent role has been serving as the family services coordinator for Earl Bradsher Preschool. This role has allowed her many opportunities to improve the quality of life of the individuals and families that are served in this program within Person County, said PCS Human Resources Director Lori Stacey. Additionally, Stacey said, by serving in this capacity, Lea-Jeffers has been able to increase community involvement and advocacy opportunities throughout the county by being faithful to enhancing the quality of life for all children and their families.

“Trecó is no stranger to Earl Bradsher Preschool and has played a key role in building engaging family partnerships, gaining community resources, ensuring the program’s compliance with state and federal guidelines, all while providing best practices in working with families,” said Schools Supt. Dan Holloman. “I am confident her continued experience and thorough working knowledge will serve her well in this new role, while serving the staff, students and families of Earl Bradsher Preschool.”

Lea-Jeffers earned an Associate of Applied Science degree in early education and family studies from Piedmont Community College in 2000. She completed a Bachelor of Science degree in social work from Shaw University in 2009 before going on to complete a master’s degree in human Services from Capella University in 2012.

Lea-Jeffers is married to Ray Jeffers. She has two children, Shakira and Ivory, as well as four children – JaCoby, JaKayla, Ja- Kylan and London – that she affectionately calls her own. In her free time, Lea-Jeffers enjoys traveling and volunteering.

Upon her appointment, Lea- Jeffers commented, “It’s an honor to lead the distinguished staff of Earl Bradsher Preschool and continue to be a part of this wonderful school district. I am invested in this community and Earl Bradsher Preschool. I feel humbled by the opportunity to serve some of Person County’s youngest citizens. Each educational level has its own unique set of needs and Earl Bradsher Preschool is no different. Preschool can bring about a drastic change for children. The wonderful staff of Earl Bradsher Preschool strives to ease the transition to school not only for the children but families too.” Lea-Jeffers continued, “My vision for Earl Bradsher is to communicate a clear and powerful voice for children and families by leading the charge for high quality, outcome-oriented services to children and families that will ensure all of Earl Bradsher’s children are prepared for kindergarten and beyond.

“Together, as a committed team of professionals and with community support, I am confident our families and children are positioned, ready and capable to embrace the opportunities of the future. I am looking forward to an exciting and fulfilling journey as the director of this amazing school.” (Courier-Times, 8/2/14)

AUG 2014 Votes Against Hiring Freeze

A motion to institute a hiring freeze for Person County Government failed during Monday’s meeting of the Person Board of County Commissioners.

Commissioner David Newell made the motion to institute an immediate freeze, stating that the county had been depleting its fund balance and had new projects it wanted to take on in the current fiscal year, for which a budget was recently adopted.

Newell said his proposal was to downsize through attrition. He said that he knew some departments needed extra help, but had no doubt that others could be run more efficiently. He also noted that a hiring freeze could allow raises for some positions.

Newell said he doesn't see how the county could avoid a tax increase next year, according to where things stand now, adding that the majority of people in the county couldn't afford a tax increase.

Commissioner Kyle Puryear said he agreed that the county would have a difficult time with next year's budget, and needed to make a plan ahead of time to get spending under control.

Commission Vice Chair Ray Jeffers said he didn't think it would be fair of the board to balance its budget on the backs of county employees after voting to increase spending for the current year.

Puryear said if the board didn't do anything to help out the taxpayers of the county, it would be their backs that the budget was balanced on.

Board Chairman Jimmy Clayton said he voted against this year's budget because the board "took the cap off the bottle" in terms of spending.

Clayton also commented Monday that if an agency such as Emergency Services had someone quit, it wouldn't be able to hire anyone.

Jeffers said that he didn't see how the board could make a decision without the "facts and figures" concerning the county's financial situation in front of them.

According to Assistant County Manager Sybil Tate, the county would have more information about where it stands with this year's budget in December.

Commissioner Frances Blalock introduced a substitute motion to table the consideration of a hiring freeze until January, when the board would have more information about the budget.

Blalock's motion failed by a 3-2 vote.

Clayton voted in favor of Blalock's motion, while Jeffers, Newell and Puryear voted against it.

Jeffers said he voted against the substitute motion because the hiring freeze matter would be brought up at the board's retreat early next year anyway.

Newell's original motion to institute a hiring freeze for Person County government was then restated, failing 3-2, with Clayton, Jeffers and Blalock dissenting. (Courier-Times, 8/20/14)

SEP 2014 Jeffers Hit On Failure to Pay Taxes

Both candidates seeking the District 2 seat in the North Carolina House of Representatives in November's general election voiced displeasure this week in a campaign mailer sent out last week by the North Carolina Republican Party.

Democrat Ray Jeffers, the current vice chairman of the Person Board of County Commissioners, and Republican Larry Yarborough, a Roxboro businessman and a former county commissioner, will square off in November to decide who will replace W.A. (Winkie) Wilkins, D-Person, in the state House of Representatives. Wilkins is retiring after serving five consecutive two-year terms in the House.

District 2 consists of all of Person County and a large portion of Granville County. Jeffers and Yarborough both reside in Person County.

Some District 2 voters received mailers last week from the North Carolina Republican Party, which point out, "Ray Jeffers has been late paying his personal property taxes on his vehicle eight times. If he cannot pay his taxes on time, how can we trust him to protect our tax dollars in Raleigh?"

A disclaimer on the mailer reads that it is "paid for by the North Carolina Republican Party," and is "not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee."

The mailer notes that Jeffers, at the time of the printing of the mailer, had not paid his 2012 vehicle taxes. It also notes that he was eight months late paying a 2011 vehicle tax.

According to last week's mailer, which indicated its source of information was the Person County Tax Office, Jeffers was also late paying vehicle taxes in 2010, 2009, 2007, 2004, 2003 and 2001.

"When the mailer came out I went to the tax office website, saw that in fact I had a bill unpaid on my last truck which I no longer own, and I paid the taxes," Jeffers wrote in an email to The Courier-Times Tuesday.

According to Person County Tax Office records, Jeffers paid \$77.49 Tuesday morning to pay off the 2012 tax debt on a 2005 Chevrolet pickup truck.

"I apologize for not being aware of the taxes being unpaid, especially since I worked on the legislation that was passed to allow counties more flexibility in collecting vehicle taxes," Jeffers wrote Tuesday, adding that he was unhappy with the Republican Party's mailer. "I thought the mailer was very distasteful.

"The one I saw depicted my picture as a mug shot and said I raised taxes, which obviously isn't true," Jeffers added. "The tax rate has been [70 cents per \$100 valuation] my entire tenure on the board.

"I ran for commissioner and am running for the N.C. House to be a voice for our working and middle class citizens," Jeffers continued. "Many of them, just like me are striving to make a better life for their families and need common sense policies to help them be able to create a better life. I have lived here all my life and want only what's best for the people in Person and Granville counties. I hope the voters will judge us on our experience, ideas, and solutions; not on these distasteful mailers."

Yarborough indicated via an email response to The C-T Tuesday that he was unaware of the mailer until he received one his mailbox.

”While I had heard rumors, I have not personally done any investigating,” Yarborough wrote. “I did not know that the state party had researched this and I saw the mailer for the first time when it arrived in my mailbox.

”Personal attacks have not been nor are they now a part of my politics,” Yarborough added. “I have always attacked the message and never the messenger. I know and like Ray Jeffers. He is a good person. We just have different ways of doing things.”

Yarborough went on to write that he felt “bad that this kind of information has to be a part of such an important race.

”I was warned when I first agreed to serve as a candidate to represent our community in Raleigh, that I would be under a lot of scrutiny,” Yarborough wrote. “I was told, that even if I had nothing to hide, that they would say bad things about me and to be sure that my family was prepared. This level of scrutiny in our personal lives is particularly hard in a small close-knit community. I hate that Mr. Jeffers and his family are going through this.

”There is a lot at stake in this race,” Yarborough added. “The Democratic Party is spending a lot of money on mailers and even TV for Commissioner Jeffers. The Republican Party is spending money, too. I am working hard to raise money to try to get on TV.

”This is a very important race for our district,” Yarborough continued. “Our community is not participating in the economic recovery that much of our state is.

”There is a difference between what I have done with my life and Mr. Jeffers’ accomplishments,” Yarborough added. “We need strong representation from someone who has solved problems; who has built things and created jobs; someone who can work with both sides in Raleigh to help us. I am running in this race because I am the best person to represent us in Raleigh.” (Courier-Times, 9/24/14)



To the editor:

I read the article [in the Wednesday, Sept. 24 edition of] The Courier-Times about the mailing that we sent out regarding Ray Jeffers’ failure to pay taxes. I was hoping to give some comment on the piece of mail.

The North Carolina Republican Party authorized the mail because we thought it was important for people to know that Ray Jeffers believes the law doesn’t apply to him.

Families struggle to make ends meet and Ray Jeffers can’t even fulfill his basic obligation.

I am glad Ray has finally decided to do the right thing. It's a shame we had to help be the county's tax collector.

JOSH THOMAS

Political Director, North Carolina House Republican Caucus (Courier-Times, 9/24/14)

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We have received numerous comments this week regarding campaign mailers sent to many Person County residents regarding North Carolina House of Representatives candidate Ray Jeffers.

Jeffers, a Democrat and current vice chairman of the Person Board of County Commissioners, is seeking the District 2 House of Representatives seat currently being held by W.A. (Winkie) Wilkins, D-Person. Wilkins is retiring from politics after serving five straight two-year terms in the House.

Jeffers' foe in the November general election will be Republican Larry Yarborough, a former member of the Person Board of County Commissioners and a Roxboro businessman.

The campaign mailer addressed on page A1 of today's edition targets Jeffers for a history of late vehicle tax payments. The most recent late tax noted, which Jeffers did pay Tuesday morning, was from 2012.

The mailer had a disclaimer that read, "Paid for by the North Carolina Republican Party. Not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee."

Yarborough informed us today that, while he had heard rumors that Jeffers had been late paying taxes in the past, he was not aware of the Republican Party's mailer until one appeared in his mailbox last week.

Now, before all the Democrats scream that Yarborough is lying, keep in mind that we heard the same claims two years ago from Democrats when negative campaign mailers were sent out at the state level in the Democratic House primary race between Wilkins and Granville County's Jim Crawford.

Since we have no reason to believe that Democratic candidates were not being honest about the mailers in 2012, we also have no reason to believe Yarborough is not being honest in his claims this year.

What we do find puzzling, however, is that Republican and Democrat officials at the state level would send out any sort of campaign information via the mail without first making sure the candidate it is supposed to be helping approves of the proposed propaganda.

We certainly are not saying that the late payment of taxes is something voters in District 2 should not be made aware of. For some, that would be an important tidbit to know before heading to the polls.

For others, especially staunch supporters of Jeffers, it is just enough information to make them work even harder to ensure his election in November.

Regardless of where you stand on the issue, you have to admit that leaders with the Republican and Democratic parties at the state level should make every effort to make candidates they support aware of what might show up in their mailbox. (Courier-Times, 9/24/14)

OCT 2014 On How To Create Jobs

North Carolina House of Representatives, District 2 candidates Ray Jeffers and Larry Yarborough were asked how they would create jobs for North Carolinians.

Jeffers answered by saying that citizens need to be trained at an early age in order to be ready for future economic development. He added that a strategic plan needs to be made involving schools and Piedmont Community College.

Yarborough's answer was to bring resources back to Person County to help build a better tax base and add jobs. This could be addressed in part by encouraging more small businesses. He noted that he was a small businessman himself. (Courier-Times, 10/11/14)

OCT 2014 Letter Writer Praises Jeffers

Ray Jeffers has served Person County diligently during this two terms on the board of county commissioners, working relentlessly to keep taxes low, to bring in new industry, and to return our fair share of tax dollars to Person County.

Ray was instrumental in the revamping of the once idle economic development commission, which now is a more cohesive group, representing a broad segment of Person County.

The commission now meets regularly and is moving forward with new and exciting ideas.

Ray and his family have been life-long supporters of farmland preservation and public education. He was the first Person County commissioner to serve as president of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. In 2013, Ray was appointed as chairman of the Rural Action Caucus for the National Association of Counties, where he and others represent America's rural counties in Washington, D.C.

He has given our issues a voice not only in Raleigh, but in Washington, D.C. Ray has shown great maturity in handling scurrilous, raciallytinged attacks, and focused on the issues. We need this maturity in Raleigh.

Person County rejected the rhetoric of Larry Yarborough and voted him off the board of commissioners after one term. Why would we consider sending him to Raleigh? We have the opportunity to send a proven candidate to Raleigh with experience in handling statewide and national issues.

Ray can go to Raleigh and represent us from day one.

VICKIE P. SHULL (Courier-Times, 10/22/14)

OCT 2014 Courier-Times Interviews Candidates

Two Person County residents are seeking the District 2 seat in the House of Representatives in November's general election.

Democrat Ray Jeffers, the current vice chairman of the Person Board of County Commissioners, and Republican Larry Yarborough, a Roxboro businessman and a former county commissioner, will square off in November to decide who will replace W.A. (Winkie) Wilkins, D-Person, in the state House of Representatives. Wilkins is retiring after serving five consecutive two-year terms in the House.

District 2 consists of all of Person County and a large portion of Granville County. Jeffers and Yarborough both reside in Person County.

Jeffers and Yarborough were each asked four questions by The Courier-Times. Their responses are included below. With the exception of a few minor grammatical and style corrections, the following responses are unedited.

What past professional, educational and governmental experience do you possess that believe makes you the candidate people should vote for to serve as a representative in the North Carolina House of Representatives?

JEFFERS: I am a native of Person County and current Person County Commission vicechairman, past president of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners and past chairman of the National Association of Counties Rural Action Caucus.

I have been in Raleigh the past few years as an executive officer for the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners advocating on the behalf of all 100 counties.

Taking that experience to Raleigh with the values I hold as a member of the Person County Board of Commissioners to promote economic development, education, controlled spending, and transparent government will allow me to be an effective legislator.

As chairman of the National Association of Counties Rural Action Caucus, I understand the needs of our two rural counties with respect to the need for infrastructure, broadband, job growth, and support of our still substantial agricultural community.

YARBOROUGH: I have a wide variety of experience and accomplishments. I have a college degree in chemical engineering. I have worked on the space shuttle. I have worked in industry like paper mills and dacron plants.

As a small businessman, I have built buildings and started businesses. I have created jobs. I have served as an elected official. I am chairman of the NC VA Roanoke River Basin Bistate Commission. I have finished all of these endeavors. I start something. I work on it. I solve the problems and I finish it. And that is what I will do to help our community.

If you were asked to prioritize, what would you list as the most important issue facing North Carolina government right now?

JEFFERS: My first priority would be to work with the necessary partners to help bring jobs back home. Since being elected as county commissioner we have been successful in bringing more than \$400 million in new business investments to Person County and I will work to do the same in Granville County to help strengthen the economy and create more jobs in our own backyard.

We have been shortchanged in rural areas like ours and our money is being spent in areas like Charlotte and Raleigh. I will stand up for us and bring local tax dollars back home to fund roads and jobs.

I would work to create N.C. First, a program to give North Carolinians first crack at state and local contracts.

YARBOROUGH: Jobs in our community. After the recession, North Carolina had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country.

The Republicans took over. They lowered taxes and cut regulations and North Carolina's unemployment rate drop was the fastest in the country. Unfortunately, we didn't see that big improvement here. We need help up here and I will go to Raleigh and represent our community. I will work with the leaders in state government to bring jobs here so everyone doesn't have to travel out of our community to work. The Republicans have the power in Raleigh. If a Democrat is elected to this seat, he will not have access to the resources of state government.

Again, if asked to prioritize, what is the single most important goal you wish to accomplish during your term if you are elected to the North Carolina House of Representatives?

JEFFERS: Along with jobs, I want to be a voice for our children's education, their teachers, and support staff in schools.

Many teachers have had to take two jobs or move away - forcing our kids into bigger classes. We need to raise teacher pay to the national average so we can keep and attract the best teachers around and give students the attention they deserve.

I will work to make sure that we get the education lottery money we were promised and stop the cuts to education. I would work to expand the use of the lottery dollars for operational expenses and not just capital expenses. I will work to make sure that our schools and kids get the resources they need.

YARBOROUGH: Small businesses create 80 percent of new jobs. As a small businessman, I know what it takes to create jobs. Excessive regulations and taxes are particularly hard on the small businessperson who has to spend time complying instead of working productively.

Our farmers are small businesses that carry a huge regulatory burden. I will work to help all of the businesses in our community to thrive.

We don't need overly burdensome regulations like the Falls Lake watershed rules that have killed development in the southern half of our district. Everyone in the district is paying an extra tax so Raleigh can have cheaper water.

There is no evidence that the problems with Falls Lake were caused by us. The Democrats passed that law. I will work to get that law repealed or changed.

Each of you have been targets of negative campaign mailers. This is your forum to defend yourselves against any of the negative campaign mailers that have been sent out. Please take a moment to express your retaliatory remarks to the negative campaign mailers.

JEFFERS: I said in the May 8 edition of The Courier-Times after the primary that I look forward to a clean campaign. Unfortunately, I have been attacked for weeks for paying DMV taxes late, even though Mr. Yarborough paid his DMV taxes late in 2012 and 2013 also.

Not one negative mailer has been on the issues or my record as a county commissioner for the past six years. I chose not to get personal but to discuss Mr. Yarborough's stance on issues such as his vote for the expansion of the landfill, support of fracking, and his lack of a stance on coal ash regulation.

I had the discussion with my family prior to deciding to run that this could get ugly, which unfortunately is all too common in state and federal politics. I have done my best to stick to the issues and solutions concerning our citizens.

YARBOROUGH: It is ridiculous to say that anyone wants to trash our environment.

When I was first elected as commissioner, I didn't like the landfill because there was such a loud opposition to it. As I became educated about it, I learned that we have a "state of the art," tightly regulated, class D landfill and that it is run by responsible people, who live here in our community. The chances of a problem there are very slim. At that time, there was a demand for landfills and I believed that I could negotiate a very good deal for Person County. I am skilled at negotiating good deals, but I was voted down. That opportunity has passed, as other communities have seen the value of landfills and more have been built in our area. We are now in danger of losing our landfill and seeing a huge increase in our solid waste disposal bills.

I said, shortly after the coal ash spill, that I believed that Duke Energy would clean it up and would be under enormous pressure to see that it does not happen again. As chairman of the NC VA Roanoke River Basin Bistate Commission, I am very knowledgeable about the coal ash spill. It has been cleaned up and I am pretty sure that Duke Energy does not want to go through that again. The people who make up Duke Energy are good people and they don't want to harm our rivers, air or land.

I love our outdoors. My family eats the game and fish from right here in our community. I will never let anyone harm it. We must use our resources to benefit our people now, but we must protect them for our grandchildren. With sound science and common sense we can do both. I have the scientific background to understand these issues and I will represent with common sense. (Courier-Times, 10/25/14)

OCT 2014 For Obamacare and Medicaid Expansion

To the editor:

On Oct. 4, a letter was sent to the editor titled "Vote your own best interest."

I have come to believe this person is eat up with hate with other races. The letter stated that we don't need Republicans collecting our local taxes.

The Republicans, like the Democrats, don't collect taxes. We have a state and federal IRS department who does the collecting.

Oh, no the Honesty Court struck the writer down again. When will people only write the truth?

As far as collecting taxes, has there ever been a tax that Democrats won't go after or enjoy?

The federal IRS is currently under investigation for targeting conservative groups. I know Obama didn't know (LOL).

It has also been verified through Congressional testimony that the former IRS commissioner visited the White House over 100 times before the scandal broke under the Obama Administration.

We have read that Republicans are trying to keep people from voting. Name one person in Person County that has not been allowed to vote. You can't because it has not happened.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled in favor of Texas recently requiring each voter to have I.D. when voting. I salute Texas.

It was also stated that a Republican said "the purpose of voter suppression was to keep lazy blacks from voting." What was the Republican's name?

It has been mentioned that in 2016 we will be required to have I.D.'s to vote and this amounts to a poll tax.

Listen, I have to ask this person, do you sit around all day making this trash up? I have told you to contact the city of Roxboro to pick up the garbage you throw out.

Allow me to explain how Medicaid expansion works.

For three years the federal government will pay for the expansion. After three years the citizens of this state will have to pay the entire cost.

Ray Jeffers has personally texted me and Ray said he supports Obamacare and Ray supports Medicaid expansion, which means if Medicaid expansion was to pass in N.C. each taxpayer would be paying for this after three years.

This would take more money out of our pockets. Mark your ballot very carefully.

It has been stated that our drinking water is being poisoned and the blame for that has been placed on Republicans. The Democrat-led board of Person County commissioners has not stopped waste from coming to Person County.

Jimmy Clayton, David Newell, Frances Blalock and Ray Jeffers have one thing in common - they are all Democrats. Ray Jeffers is running for state office. What are his views?

As far as fracking goes, I am for it. I am for anything that will help poor Americans have a better life. Just like Obama, I want to spread the wealth around. When Bush left office gas was \$1.86 a gallon.

Last, I am a registered independent. I have called for Kyle Puryear to resign due to the fact he [is facing a charge of driving while impaired.]

Has any other Democrat or Republican called for Kyle Puryear to resign? We don't need to elect lawbreakers and people who fail to pay taxes on time. Nobody else has asked for Puryear to resign but myself. This is why we must vote for our best interest.

KENNETH RICKMAN
Roxboro (Courier-Times, 10/25/14)

NOV 2014 Loses House Race to Yarborough

"Now, the real work begins."

That was among the comments from Republican Larry Yarborough Tuesday evening shortly after he claimed a victory in the District 2 race for the North Carolina House of Representatives.

Yarborough, a Roxboro businessman, defeated Democrat Ray Jeffers, the current vice chairman of the Person Board of County Commissioners, by claiming wins in both Person and Granville counties.

District 2 consists of all of Person County and a large portion of Granville County.

Yarborough will replace retiring Rep. W.A. (Winkie) Wilkins, D-Person, who has served five consecutive two-year terms.

"Our district needs some help getting out of the recession," Yarborough said, "I will be working hard to help our existing businesses grow and be successful, and to help new ones get started."

In Person County, Yarborough defeated Jeffers by a 6,838 (54.24 percent) to 5,770 (45.76 percent) margin in unofficial totals.

Yarborough added a 5,387 (58.37 percent) to 3,842 (41.63) advantage over Jeffers in Granville County to round out his overall cushion of 12,225 to 9,612.

”Ray Jeffers deserves credit for running a very good campaign,” Yarborough said. “I commend him for his hard work as county commissioner and for his tremendous effort in the campaign.” Yarborough owned a narrow lead over Jeffers in one stop voting in Person County and added to that margin on Election Day.

During early voting in Person County, Yarborough garnered 2,774 votes, while Jeffers collected 2,746. Yarborough’s edge over Jeffers in Person County on Election Day was 3,995 to 2,998.

”First, I would like to thank all who supported me with not only their votes, but their prayers, time and kind words,” Jeffers said Tuesday night. “I congratulate Larry and hope he will serve us well.

”I decided to run a clean campaign on the issues and, in the end, I don’t regret that or anything about our race,” Jeffers added. “I still have two more years on the board of commissioners and I look forward to continuing to serve the people of Person County.”

In Person County, Yarborough scored victories over Jeffers in nine of the 14 precincts.

Yarborough’s precinct triumph came in Roxboro 1A, Roxboro 2, Cunningham-Chub Lake, Holloway, Olive Hill, Bushy Fork, Hurdle Mills, Flat River and Mt. Tirzah.

Jeffers claimed precinct triumph in Person County in Woodsdale, Roxboro 1, Roxboro 3, Roxboro 4 and Allensville.

Yarborough defeated Jeffers in 11 of the 12 precincts in Granville County that make up District 2.

”I thank all of the voters in District 2 who voted for me,” Yarborough said. “I especially want to thank all of those who contributed to my campaign by working hard for our victory.

”Their hard work inspired me to work even harder,” Yarborough added. “Thank you to everyone. I won’t let you down.” (Courier-Times, 11/5/14)

NOV 2014 Ideological Shift in Commissioner Board

Shortly after 6:30 p.m. Monday night, the makeup of the Person Board of County Commissioners will become noticeably different.

There will only be one new member; however, that one change could mean a swing in the outcome of votes by the board of commissioners in the coming months.

Person County Clerk of Court Deborah Barker will swear in Republican political newcomer Tracey Kendrick as a new commissioner Monday night. Also being sworn in for a third consecutive four-year term on the board will be Republican Commissioner Kyle Puryear.

Kendrick and Puryear will then take their seats on the board alongside a trio of Democrats - Chairman Jimmy Clayton, Vice Chairman Ray Jeffers and David Newell.

Stepping down after a four-year stint as a commissioner will be Frances Blalock, who was defeated in the May primary election in her bid to serve a second consecutive four-year term.

In the November general election, with nearly 50 percent of registered voters in Person County casting votes, Kendrick and Puryear led the balloting.

Perhaps voters were signaling a request for a change on the board. It has been no secret that there have been a host of 3-2 votes by commissioners in recent years on many issues. The victories by Kendrick and Puryear certainly signaled a swing in the majority on the board. While Kendrick and Puryear will be joining a trio of Democrats, it has also been no secret in the past two years that Newell has been a very conservative-voting Democrat. Many of the 3-2 votes saw Puryear and Newell on the losing end.

The wildcard in the equation now will be Kendrick.

We'll also be watching Monday to see if Clayton retains his position as chairman of the commissioners and if Jeffers remains as vice chairman.

With the seemingly new majority on the board being altered, one could surmise that there may also be a change in who holds the chairmanship and vice-chairmanship in the coming year.

No matter what transpires when the officers for the commission are chosen Monday night, we hope that the new board of commissioners will attempt to work well together.

Personians will be watching. People outside of Person County will be watching. We've heard many times that potential industries and businesses take notes on the outcome of votes by governing bodies. Unanimous votes on key issues, we are told, are much more appealing than narrow decisions.

We wish the entire board of commissioners well as they begin a new chapter. We also hope each will keep the best interest of Person County in mind when making their decisions. (Courier-Times, 11/29/14)



The first two votes cast by a new-look Person Board of County Commissioners Monday night resulted in 3-2 decisions being made.

Kyle Puryear became the first Republican in recent memory to be voted chairman of the fiveperson board of commissioners, while Democrat David Newell was elected vice chairman.

Prior to the election of the chairman and vice chairman of the board, Puryear was sworn in for a third consecutive four-year term and fellow Republican Tracey Kendrick was sworn in for his first term on the board.

Kendrick replaces Frances Blalock, who was unsuccessful in her bid to seek a second consecutive four-year term. Blalock was defeated in the May primary election.

Kendrick and Puryear were the leading vote getters in the November general election. They join Newell and Commissioners Jimmy Clayton and Ray Jeffers on the board. The board seats of Newell, Clayton and Jeffers will be up for election in two years.

"I want to thank the residents for voting me in," Kendrick said. "I hope I will do a good enough job to make them proud."

The first order of business for the commissioners following the swearing-in ceremony of Puryear and Kendrick was the election of the chairman and vice chairman of the board for the upcoming year.

Former Vice Chairman Jeffers nominated former Chairman Clayton to retain the chairmanship, and Kendrick nominated Puryear.

Jeffers and Clayton cast dissenting votes to Puryear's nomination. The two also cast dissenting votes to Newell's nomination by Puryear to serve as vice chairman. Clayton nominated Jeffers for the position.

Blalock left Monday's meeting prior to the swearing-in of Puryear and Kendrick. She told those in attendance that her term was "not pleasant all the time." She added that serving as a commissioner had been hard work, but that it was also educational.

"I trust this board will do all their due diligence," Blalock said, adding that she wanted the board members to "remember they are commissioners for all of Person County, not just a small group."

During his chairman's report at the close of Monday's meeting, Puryear thanked the citizens of the county for allowing him to serve an additional four years.

Puryear went on to say that he had "always seen the office of chairman" as no more important than any other position. He vowed to communicate openly with every commissioner and expressed a desire to bring unity to the board.

"The residents of this county are tired of seeing 3-2 votes," Puryear said. "The people of this county are looking at us." During his comments at the close of the meeting, Clayton said he "did what I thought I needed to do as chairman.

"I expect the business of the county to be done the way it's been done," Clayton added.

The former chairman went on to say that he still had one vote, just as he did when he was chairman. He added that Puryear also only had one vote on the board.

"We all have only got one vote," Clayton said.

When referencing the 3-2 votes by the commission, Clayton said it was his responsibility to vote his conscience and not consider whether the vote is unanimous or not. (Courier-Times, 12/4/14)

2015

FEB 2015 Votes For Alcohol at County Facilities

The Person Board of County Commissioners moved one step closer to adopting a proposed special use permit/policy and revised county ordinance regulating possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages or fortified wine on county-owned property Monday morning.

Commissioners voted 3-2 at their Monday meeting to approve the request from the Person County Recreation Advisory Board (RAB) for special use permitting of alcoholic beverages for specific rental facilities and performance venues.

Since a public hearing was not held for comments at Monday's first reading, adoption of the proposed ordinance would have had to be by unanimous vote. Since the vote was not unanimous, a second reading will take place at the board's next meeting on March 2 at 7 p.m. At that time, a majority vote would be sufficient for passage of the request.

Commissioners Ray Jeffers, Tracey Kendrick and Kyle Puryear voted in favor of the request Monday, while Commissioners Jimmy Clayton and David Newell opposed the proposal.

The commission had denied approval of the proposal in July of 2013 by a 4-1 vote with only Jeffers voting in favor at the time.

The RAB voted unanimously at its Feb. 4 meeting to bring the request back to the board of commissioners for consideration.

The county-owned facilities the recreation advisory board is requesting consideration for special use permitting of malt beverages and fortified wine for include the Mayo Park Amphitheater, the Mayo Park Environmental Education and Community Center, the Kirby Cultural Arts Complex and the grounds of the Person County Museum of History.

The designated boundaries at the Mayo Park Amphitheater include the concrete seating areas directly in front of the stage; the grass seating area directly in front of the stage in an area 200 feet long by 130 feet wide; and in the stage area within 50 feet from the left, right and back of the stage.

At the Mayo Park Environmental Education and Community Center, the proposed boundaries are within 50 feet from all sides of the building.

The boundaries proposed at the Kirby Cultural Arts Complex include the front room and hallway of the gallery and the main theater seating area (upstairs and downstairs).

At the Person County Museum, the proposed boundaries include within the museum and no more than 50 feet from the property line.

Donald Long, chairman of the RAB, told commissioners Monday that passage of the proposal would allow the county an opportunity to gain revenue that is lost every year.

”We lose a lot of revenue every year because we cannot serve alcohol in a respectable manner,” Long said, adding later that he felt the proposal was “a very good policy.”

Prior to voting against the request, Clayton said he did not believe passage would be “a good example” to the young people in the county.

Clayton added that his vote against the request was “not a personal issue.” Instead, Clayton said, it was a “philosophical issue.”

During Monday’s public comment period, Margaret McMann, director of the Person County Tourism Development Authority, spoke in favor of the RAB request.

Others speaking in favor of the proposal included Blossom Gardner, chairperson of the Person County Museum of History’s board of directors, and Person County Arts Council representative Michael Slaughter.

All said the alcohol consumption would be done in a responsible manner and would be regulated.

”We will work as hard as possible to make sure our events are well-regulated,” Gardner said.

When the proposal was presented to commissioners in 2013, Person County Recreation, Arts and Parks Director John Hill said he believed approval of the recommendation would allow for better policing of events at county-owned facilities.

Person County currently has an ordinance in place that prohibits the use or consumption of any alcoholic beverages on all property “owned, occupied or controlled” by the county. That ordinance was enacted in 2008. (Courier-Times, 2/19/15)

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A request from the Person County Recreation Advisory Board (RAB) for special use permitting of alcoholic beverages for specific county-owned rental facilities and performance venues was granted by the Person Board of County Commissioners Monday with a 3-2 vote of approval.

The commissioners also voted to approve the request last month, but since a public hearing was not held for comments at last month’s reading of the proposal, adoption of the proposed ordinance would have had to be by unanimous vote. The majority vote Monday night was sufficient for passage of the request.

As they did last month, Commissioners Ray Jeffers, Tracey Kendrick and Kyle Puryear voted in favor of the request, and Commissioners Jimmy Clayton and David Newell opposed it.

The county-owned facilities the special use permitting of malt beverages and fortified wine now applies to are the Mayo Park Amphitheater, the Mayo Park Environmental Education and Community Center, the Kirby Cultural Arts Complex and the grounds of the Person County Museum of History.

Citizens for and against approval of the proposal spoke during the public comment portion of Monday night's meeting held in the commissioners' boardroom at the Person County Office Building on Morgan Street.

"Basically, what we're looking at, we're not trying to overserve folks in an irresponsible manner," said Michael Slaughter, who spoke in support of the proposal Monday. "People just want to have a glass of wine when they come to watch a show at the Kirby."

Slaughter noted that the Person County Arts Council would be overseeing most of the Kirby events and assured the board of commissioners that the serving of alcoholic beverages would be done in a responsible manner and run like a business, adding that it would be taken "very seriously" and would be highly regulated.

He said without the possibility for serving alcoholic beverages at events, no one would want to rent the newly renovated upthe stairs area of the Kirby.

Also speaking in favor of the proposed permitting, Margaret McMann said she felt approval of the ordinance would be a good move by the county, adding that she had also been a member of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and personally financed programs for Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), and took alcohol consumption seriously.

"But I'd like to continue to have it as my choice," said Mc- Mann, "and not a choice made by someone else that purports that Christian people can't have a glass of wine responsibly.

"Don't take away the freedom of choice because someone pressures you or your seat on this board as promoting drinking because you vote in favor of a controlled alcoholic beverage law. You're not voting for alcohol consumption, you're voting for the right of a person renting one of the three named county properties to have a function where wine or beer may or may not be served."

Pastor of New Life Baptist Church, Mike Whitt, spoke against the proposal, contending that it "sends the wrong message to our youth."

He said he and his wife had worked with Person County youth for almost 30 years, and steered them away from alcohol. Whitt said he had also preached several funerals of teenagers whose deaths were related to alcohol or drug use.

Whitt also raised several questions about how the consumption of alcohol at the proposed venues would be regulated.

Speaking as a member of the arts council, a performer and a former bartender, Lawrie Ira noted that those who would be regulating the sale of alcoholic beverages at events would have had conversations with people "who understand how to serve and not serve alcohol."

She also said that as part of performances held in other towns, she had witnessed alcohol being served at the venues and had never seen anyone get out of hand or behave inappropriately. Ira also said she had

watched over 100 drinks be served at the recent dinner theater held at the Homestead Festival House, and saw no one who was “out of hand.”

Blossom Gardner, who spoke in favor of the ordinance as a representative of the history museum, said, “This is a choice. We’re not advocating the drinking of alcohol, we’re advocating the ability to choose and to revitalize and vitalize the three areas that would be using this.”

She said the ordinance was agreed upon unanimously by the museum board.

Arts council member Norwood Walker spoke Monday from his perspective as a teacher in the county. He said one of the things he always tried to teach his students was the idea of personal responsibility. He said adults could help children in making good decisions by setting a good example.

Walker said the price of the beverages sold would help keep things under control.

”We’re not talking about places that are going to turn into honky tonks or things like that,” said Walker, “we’re talking about places where people are going to go, have a good time, relax and enjoy the show. They’re going there for the show.”

P.J. Gentry spoke in favor of the ordinance as well, saying that one group of citizens should not tell another group what can and can’t be done on county property if the activity is already legal.

After presenting the request to the board Monday evening, RAB Chair Donald Long affirmed for Kendrick that the individual or company requesting a permit for an event would be responsible for paying the law enforcement personnel required to be present.

Kendrick also asked what the RAB was going to do to make sure the requests were properly handled in the future when the advisory board members were different.

Long said that had been a concern of the board’s, but said that not only does the director of the recreation department have to sign off on the permit, but the county manager does as well.

During discussion after the motion to approve the ordinance request was made by Jeffers, Clayton said he didn’t vote in favor of “liquor by the drink” when that proposal came before the board several years ago.

He concluded by saying, “We’re not a private entity, we’re a public agency, and I just feel like it’s a bad example for the youth, and I’m going to leave it at that.”

Enacted in 2008, an ordinance previously in place in Person County prohibited the use or consumption of any alcoholic beverages on all property “owned, occupied or controlled” by the county. (Courier-Times, 3/5/15)

The Person Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously Monday night to obtain preliminary plans for construction of a new Person County Senior Center at the site of the old facility off Depot Street in Uptown Roxboro.

The decision came following a closed session by commissioners.

Initially, the five-member board voted unanimously to accept property from the City of Roxboro as a gift to the county.

Last month, Roxboro City Council voted to transfer three parcels of property to Person County as possible sites for the Person County Senior Center.

The decision stemmed from discussions that took place between the city and county earlier last month during a joint meeting held to discuss the center's current services and a future permanent location for the center.

During that special called meeting of council last month, city officials voted to transfer to the county the former senior center building and lot, the vacant lot that was once the site of the former Roxboro Hotel, and an adjacent lot to the south of the former senior center that once served as the picnic area.

The city would continue to own and maintain the parking lots adjacent to the former senior center, and therefore voted to survey off the lots from the building, as the current map includes the property the building and parking lots are on in the same tax number, according to Roxboro Mayor Marilyn Newell.

The surveying would be completed at cost to the city.

The tax value of the parcels to be transferred to Person County is \$353,350. Adding in the cost to the city of demolishing the old hotel and defending a board of adjustment lawsuit, the city's total participation in the proposal is \$408,436.

At Monday's commissioners' meeting, Commissioner Ray Jeffers noted that the property being donated to the county is zoned B-3 and would be usable for not only a senior center, but also a recreation center.

Jeffers quoted an email from City of Roxboro Planning Director Aaron Holland regarding potential uses of the property, that read, "Publicly owned and operated indoor and/or outdoor recreation facilities such as gym, athletic field, tennis courts, track, swimming pool, etc."

County Manager Heidi York said the senior center would be the primary use at the site, therefore falling under the community center definition, "A publicly owned and operated facility used for recreation, social, educational and for cultural activities."

Jeffers added that the senior center would be the main proposed activity at the site with an opportunity in the future to add a recreational center to include any of the above noted amenities.

Commission Chairman Kyle Puryear said his intent was to use the gift of property for the city solely as a senior center.

An amended motion to direct York to begin dialogue with Brockwell Engineering firm to obtain preliminary plans that include a steel frame structure with a façade acceptable to the city was approved unanimously.

Commissioner Tracey Kendrick amended the original motion from Commissioner David Newell in order for the county to have a freestanding steel structure that would allow changes instead of a fixed structure with load bearing walls.

At last month's joint meeting of city council and county commissioners, Kerr Tar Regional Council of Governments (COG) Executive Director Diane Cox provided both boards with an update on current matters concerning the senior center. She reported that problems with the laminate flooring at the Perfect Venue, the current temporary location of the Person County Senior Center, would need to be fixed in order to renew the lease in March and keep insurance on the center. Otherwise, the center would need to seek another location at the end of the lease agreement.

She told commissioners and council that she was going to recommend to the Region K Community Assistance Corporation that the center work with the landlord at the current location in exchange for a lease extension of up to 24 months. This, she said, would prevent the center from having to disrupt activities by moving to another temporary location before finding a permanent one, and would save in moving costs.

Cox said she was also going to recommend that at the end of the 24-month lease, COG stop managing senior activities in Person County if a permanent location for the center had not been secured by then. (Courier-Times, 3/5/15)

MAR 2015 Nuisance Ordinance For Abandoned Structures

The Person Board of County Commissioners added "more backbone" to the county's current enforcement authority Monday with the passage of a nuisance ordinance for abandoned structures in the county.

The ordinance passed 3-2 with Commissioners Tracey Kendrick and Jimmy Clayton opposing the measure.

Clayton voted in favor of the ordinance at the March 2 meeting of commissioners, but changed his vote Monday.

A simple majority vote by commissioners Monday was all that was needed to pass the ordinance. At its first reading, passage of the ordinance would have required a unanimous vote by commissioners.

Kendrick, in opposing the measure, said he was not pleased with "county government dictating what [citizens] can do on their own property."

We can certainly appreciate Kendrick's stance on the matter; however, we tend to side with Sam Hobgood, director of inspections and permits for Person County, on the matter.

Hobgood told commissioners Monday that the approval of the abandoned structures ordinance simply gives the existing ordinance the county has “more backbone.”

Commissioner Ray Jeffers added that commissioners were “not creating anything new. We’re just giving them more enforcement power.”

The ordinance covers mobile homes and abandoned residential and commercial structures. It does not, however, apply to structures further than 500 feet from residential or public uses (schools, playgrounds) on adjacent properties and those not visible from transportation right-of-way.

There are exceptions in the ordinance for farm structures and historic properties.

As described in the ordinance, a residential or commercial building shall be considered an abandoned structure “if it is unoccupied and damaged or in disrepair to the point of being condemnable [as defined by state law] and is found to be a nuisance “

Also as described in the ordinance, a manufactured home shall be considered an abandoned structure “if it is in a wrecked, scrapped, disassembled, unusable, cannibalized, burnt, inoperable [condition] or if available, is not connected to an approved sewer system and not occupied and is found to be a nuisance “

Appeals of violations of the abandoned structures ordinance will be heard by commissioners. It was also pointed out Monday that the county could pay for removal costs of violations; however, those costs could not be collected via a property tax bill. They could only be collected via a lien on the property.

Hobgood told Kendrick Monday that over the past five years his department had received approximately 10 complaints. That, Kendrick said, was not a very high number.

That’s true, but to the citizens making those 10 complaints, the passage of Monday’s ordinance may get them one step closer to satisfaction. (Courier-Times, 3/23/15)

APR 2015 Votes Against Construction Option On Senior Center

The Person Board of County Commissioners voted 4-1 Monday to construct a new Person County Senior Center in Uptown Roxboro.

The plan approved by commissioners Monday is for an estimated construction cost of \$2,271,200. It includes new construction of an addition to the former senior center site located off Depot Street, plus renovation of 6,000 square feet of the existing building at the site.

Commissioner Tracey Kendrick made the motion to chose “Option 4” of a total of six senior center construction options that were presented to commissioners by Brockwell Associates of Durham.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers was the lone commissioner to vote in opposition to Kendrick’s motion; however, he indicated it was due to his belief that another option was better.

Commissioners delayed a construction decision at their April 6 meeting when Jeffers made a successful motion that the county look into the possibility of acquiring a building near the site of the former senior center building and using it as part of the construction process.

The county does not currently own that building, which faces Depot Street and reportedly has approximately 7,800 square feet of space.

The building, which currently houses Carol's Collectables and formerly housed Banks Berry, Inc., is owned by Carolyn Oakley. The tax value on file in the Person County Tax Office for the property is \$56,994. That tax value includes the land at the site and the 7,878-square-foot building.

Prior to Monday's vote to proceed with Option 4, commissioners met in closed session. When they returned to open session for their vote on the matter, they did not discuss any details of cost estimates obtained through the county's inquiry into purchasing the Oakley building; however, the Option 5 construction cost estimate supplied by Brockwell and Associates listed the potential "purchase of the Oakley building" at \$150,000.

Jeffers said he was voting against Kendrick's motion Monday "not because he was against the senior center."

Instead, Jeffers said his vote was against the motion because he believed Option 5 was the better choice for current and future needs of the county. He also added that by 2030, estimates are that 62 percent of the population in Person County will be at or over age 65.

"I don't think this is the right fit," Jeffers said. "I do not support Option 4. I prefer Option 5."

Option 5 would have included the county obtaining the Oakley building and renovating that facility, along with renovations to 6,000 square feet of the former senior center at an estimated cost of \$2,294,290.

"Option 5 is an excellent option for several reasons," information provided to commissioners by Brockwell and Associates read. "Although it is not the least expensive option, Option 5 would provide nearly 14,000 square feet of program space compared to 12,000 square feet for the other options.

"This option also provides the connection needed to tie all of the properties together allowing for far greater flexibility of future expansion."

While Commissioner Jimmy Clayton voted in favor of Kendrick's proposal, he also voted in favor of a substitute motion by Jeffers for the county to pursue Option 5. Jeffers' substitute motion failed, 3-2.

"I think Option 5 is the better option," Clayton told commissioners.

In February, Roxboro City Council voted to transfer three parcels of property to Person County as possible sites for the senior center - the former senior center building and lot, the vacant lot that was once the site of the former Roxboro Hotel, and an adjacent lot to the south of the former senior center that once served as the picnic area.

The decision stemmed from discussions that took place between the city and county during a joint meeting held to discuss the center's current services and a future permanent location for the center.

In addition to Option 4 and Option 5, other options presented to commissioners by Brockwell Associates included:

- Option 1 - New construction of a 12,000-square-foot building on existing vacant hotel lot at a cost of \$2.35 million.
- Option 1A - Same as above, however, building would be designed to mimic the former hotel at a cost of \$2.35 million.
- Option 2 - Renovation of existing senior center building for a two-story, 12,000-square-foot facility at a cost of \$2.52 million.
- Option 3 - New construction of a 12,000-square-foot facility on the existing senior center lot at a cost of \$2.61 million.

Earlier this month, Kendrick said he was ready to move forward with Option 4. He added that would also allow "for future ownership of existing buildings."

Kendrick quoted the notes from Brockwell Associates regarding Option 4, which read in part, "This is probably the best overall option with the most potential."

Kendrick went on to say, "Our seniors have been waiting a long time. I don't think we should put them off any longer.

"I think we should move forward with what we've got," Kendrick added.

Commissioners were told last month that it would likely take six months after a plan is chosen to begin construction.

Construction, they were told, could take from 10 to 12 months, and possibly as long as 18 months. (Courier-Times, 4/23/15)

APR 2015 Editorial Defends Jeffers Vote on Senior Center

Commissioner Ray Jeffers voted against a construction option for the Person County Senior Center Monday; however, make no mistake about it, Jeffers did not vote against the senior citizens of Person County.

Prior to voting against a motion by Commissioner Tracey Kendrick for the county to move forward with construction of a 12,000-square-foot facility at an estimated cost of \$2.27 million, Jeffers informed his fellow commissioners that he was going to vote against the motion.

In fact, he offered up a substitute motion favoring another option for the senior center; however, that motion failed after only Commissioner Jimmy Clayton voted with Jeffers.

Jeffers said Monday that he was voting against Kendrick's motion because he didn't think it was the "right fit."

Jeffers also told commissioners during their Monday meeting that he had long been a supporter of a new senior center and a new recreation center in Person County.

We certainly don't disagree with that. While we may have not agreed with every decision or idea Jeffers has had regarding a senior center or recreation center in the past years and months, we definitely have sensed his passion and desire to make both a reality in Person County. He has fought long and hard for each.

Jeffers maintained that same passion and desire Monday. He did not side with the option that was approved by a 4-1 vote. The plan commissioners approved Monday includes new construction of an addition to the former senior center site located off Depot Street, plus renovation of 6,000 square feet of the existing building at the site.

"I don't think this is the right fit," Jeffers said. "I do not support Option 4. I prefer Option 5."

Option 5 would have included the county obtaining the building that currently houses Carol's Collectables and formerly housed Banks Berry, Inc., and is owned by Carolyn Oakley.

Option 5 would have allowed commissioners to link together three parcels of land they currently own at or near the site of the former senior center and would have also given them nearly 14,000 square feet of space, compared to 12,000. The cost of Option 5 was estimated at \$2.29 million.

Brockwell Associates wrote in their notes to commissioners that Option 5 "also provides the connection needed to tie all of the properties together allowing for far greater flexibility of future expansion."

That, Jeffers said, was key to him. He said that it has been estimated that 62 percent of the population in Person County will be age 65 or over by 2030.

Yes, Jeffers voted against a construction option for the Person County Senior Center Monday, but no, he did not vote against the county's senior citizens or the senior center. (Courier-Times, 4/23/15)

JUN 2015 Votes Against Budget

The Person Board of County Commissioners narrowly approved a budget ordinance for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 1, during its regularly scheduled meeting Monday morning.

The budget for the upcoming fiscal year leaves the county's property tax rate at 70 cents per \$100 valuation for the ninth consecutive year. The \$54,966,390 budget also reflects an increase of \$1,314,589 over the current year's budget.

A hiring freeze that currently affects eight positions in the county, including two in the environmental health department, was the item that kept the approval of the budget process from being a unanimous decision.

Commissioners Jimmy Clayton and Ray Jeffers both voted against the eventual motion that gained enough votes for passage of the ordinance.

Clayton and Jeffers both said they would support the entire budget package if the remaining members of the board - Chairman Kyle Puryear, Vice Chairman David Newell and Commissioner Tracey Kendrick - would agree to remove the hiring freeze from a building inspector position and an environmental health specialist position.

Clayton said those two positions could be reinstated for \$172,941. Both offered alternatives to keep the budget balanced if the positions were reinstated.

Puryear offered a motion to adopt the budget ordinance with \$129,900 allocated from debt service funds to be used if a 90-day evaluation of the two positions determined the two positions should be added back in the budget for the upcoming year.

Jeffers said he would not vote for Puryear's motion because the budget was "not more efficient, not smaller government and not conservative values."

Jeffers noted that the budget would be \$1.3 million more than that of the current fiscal year.

Puryear said Tuesday the reason the budget was more for the upcoming year was due to a ninepercent increase in funding for education in the county and the construction of a new senior center.

Clayton argued that leaving the health inspector and environmental health specialist positions open would do damage to the county's economy.

"When they jam up with problems I hope folks remember who voted for this," Clayton said.

Newell said it was his "contention" that the hiring freeze could help the "county run more efficiently."

Person County Schools (PCS) received funding of \$9.48 million, which County Manager Heidi York said earlier, "totally funds all but [its] personnel and professional development increases, which I believe need to remain the responsibility of the board of education."

The budget also included a capital appropriation for PCS of \$834,889 for new middle school laptops and 105 laptops for elementary schools.

County departments were held at flat funding requests for the second consecutive year.

”In an effort to keep our spending in line with what our taxpayers (our market) will support, departmental operations have been asked to hold spending at fiscal year 2014 levels - two consecutive years of hold-the-line spending - although, according to the Consumer Price Index, the cost of providing services over the last year has increased by one percent,” York wrote in her budget message.

County government spending increases, York said earlier, were “primarily” limited to increased costs in employee health insurance; continued implementation of performance pay/merit pay; probationary and longevity increases; and an accounting change to the distribution of stormwater fees, which subsidize some personnel costs for employees tasked with stormwater regulation duties. (Courier-Times, 6/18/15)

JUL 2015 Elected to NACO Board

Person County Commissioner Ray Jeffers has been elected as a representative to the board of directors for the National Association of Counties (NACo).

Jeffers’ appointment was announced at the annual NACo Conference, which was held July 10-13 in Mecklenburg County. He will serve a two-year term.

”I am honored to have been elected by my colleagues from across the state to represent all 100 counties on the NACo Board of Directors,” Jeffers said. “North Carolina’s participation on the board is imperative to keep counties moving forward and to keep our state abreast of federal issues facing counties.

”I am honored to be that voice for North Carolina and all of our counties,” Jeffers added.

Jeffers, who is currently serving his second four-year term on the Person Board of County Commissioners, has been active within NACo since becoming a commissioner.

Jeffers previously served on the NACo board of directors in 2013-14, when he was appointed by the NACo president as the chairman of the Rural Action Caucus, which represents the nation’s rural counties. He has also been a member of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee .

Jeffers is one of five North Carolina county commissioners who will represent the state on the national board in 2015- 16. Others named from North Carolina include Tracey Johnson (Washington County), Kay Cashion (Guilford County), Betty Lou Ward (Wake County) and Noah Woods (Robeson County).

North Carolina has one of the largest state contingents on the NACo board, according to Todd McGee, public relations director for the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC).

Jeffers served as president of the NCACC in 2013- 14 and is currently a member of the organization’s board of directors.

Last year, Jeffers was one of 24 county leaders from across the country named to participate in NACo’s Tenth Annual County Leadership Institute in Washington, D.C.

NACo was founded in 1935 and unites the nation's 3,069 county governments. NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government, and exercise exemplary leadership in public service.

The NCACC is the official voice of all 100 counties in the state on issues being considered by the General Assembly, Congress, and federal and North Carolina agencies.

The NCACC was founded in 1908 and provides expertise to counties in the areas of lobbying, fiscal and legal research, communications, intergovernmental relations, information technology, field visits and risk management exercises. (Courier-Times, 7/23/15)

AUG 2015 Loses Vote on Filling Inspector Positions

The Person Board of County Commissioners voted 3-2 Monday morning to leave two positions - building inspector and environmental health specialist - unfilled after hearing impacts of the reductions of those positions from County Manager Heidi York.

Commissioners Jimmy Clayton and Ray Jeffers voted to reinstate the two positions at a combined total annual cost of \$172,941. Commission Chairman Kyle Puryear, Vice Chairman David Newell and Commissioner Tracey Kendrick, however, voted against Clayton's reinstatement motion.

York had written in a pre-meeting agenda abstract to commissioners that during the budget process for the current year, which began July 1 and continues through June 30, 2016, eight fulltime positions were eliminated, resulting in a cost reduction of \$365,629 for the fiscal year.

"Two positions - building inspector and environmental health specialist - were discussed at length by the board," York wrote. "The manager was asked to bring back data to demonstrate the impact that these vacancies were having on service delivery as well as contingency plans for continuing to provide services with less employees."

York said Monday that "overall," county staff was "not seeing staggering spikes in data." She went on to say that her staff was "not receiving a lot of citizen complaints" either. She did note, however, that the "lag and delay time" from services being performed due to the positions being unfilled "could potentially increase."

The environmental health specialist position has been vacant since April and the building inspector position has been vacant since March.

"The overall impact to the environmental health department had been an increased turnaround time for site evaluations and other services," York wrote in regards to the environmental health specialist position. "When fully staffed, site evaluations were conducted within one to two weeks. With the vacancy, the turnaround time is now two weeks."

York wrote that with the environmental health specialist position currently being vacant, county staff has had to prioritize services to respond to complaints and septic system repairs first, and has maintained a same-day response for those.

”Site evaluations are the lowest priority with the two-week turnaround,” York wrote. “Another impact is that staff has been unable to maintain the well pump maintenance evaluations, which generated approximately \$17,000 in revenue annually.”

As a result of the building inspector position being vacant, York wrote, the turnaround time for scheduling inspections has dropped from 100 percent of inspections scheduled for the next day to 91 percent scheduled for the next day.

”Additionally, inspectors have less time to respond to contractor and citizen phone calls and the director conducts fewer quality control inspections,” York added.

Person County Director of Inspections and Permits Sam Hobgood told commissioners that the North Carolina Department of Insurance recommends that inspectors perform, on average, 12 to 15 inspections per day.

”When we were fully staffed, we were averaging 14 inspections per day,” Hobgood said. “Since March, we have been averaging 25 inspections per day.”

In July, Hobgood said he and his staff of two other inspectors averaged 27.5 inspections per day.

”It’s getting bigger,” Hobgood said. (Courier-Times, 8/20/15)

OCT 2015 New Plan For Senior Center Approved

After much debate and compromise Monday night, the Person Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously to move forward with a new plan for the Person County Senior Center.

The plan approved by commissioners Monday calls for the former senior center facility, located off of Depot Street in Uptown Roxboro, to be demolished and a new 12,000 square foot building to be constructed at that site at an estimated cost of \$2.87 million.

In May, commissioners voted on a plan with an estimated construction cost of \$2.27 million. That plan included new construction of an addition to the former senior center building, plus renovation of 6,000 square feet of the existing building at the site.

Commissioners made their decision Monday to demolish the former senior center facility and construct a completely new facility after receiving a structural assessment of the former senior center building to determine its condition for future use.

The building was evaluated by Stroud Pence, Structural Engineers.

”Overall, their report confirms what the county building inspector found previously; there are substantial structural and serviceability issues that require repair,” County Manager Heidi York wrote in a report to commissioners.

During Monday’s meeting, Kristen Hess of HH Architecture presented the findings of the report to commissioners. She told commissioners there were “substantial” issues with the former facility.

”It’s pretty bad,” Hess said, adding that she did not recommend attempting to renovate the facility.

Hess said there was substantial water damage and mold, along with sagging support beams and structural cracking. She said it would be highly unlikely that moisture could ever be completely removed from the facility.

Hess added that renovation of the facility would actually be more expensive than demolishing the former senior center building and constructing a brand new facility.

During Monday’s meeting, Vice Chairman David Newell presented the eventual motion that was approved by commissioners. It was an amended substitute motion that called for demolition of the existing facility at the Depot Street location, construction of a 12,000-square-foot senior center facility on the site of the former facility, and development of a community park that will include basketball courts in the vacant lot where Hotel Roxboro formerly stood.

In February, Roxboro City Council voted to transfer three parcels of property to Person County as possible sites for the senior center - the former senior center building and lot, the vacant lot that was once the site of the former Roxboro Hotel, and an adjacent lot to the south of the former senior center that once served as the picnic area.

Newell’s amended substitute motion came after multiple earlier motions, including one by the vice chairman that was the same as his amended substitute motion with the exception that construction of basketball courts was not included.

The basketball courts were added to the amended substitute motion after Commissioner Ray Jeffers said he would vote in favor of the plan if they were included.

He noted that John Hill, director of the Person County Recreation Arts & Parks Department, had requested basketball courts to be constructed for recreational use in the county in earlier planning meetings.

Newell made Monday’s first motion regarding a new senior center. That motion called for demolition of the former senior center building, construction of a 10,000-square-foot facility at that site and development of a green space park at the former Hotel Roxboro lot.

Jeffers voiced opposition to that plan, stating it would not net the senior center any additional square footage and the projected population for senior citizens in the county continues to grow.

Jeffers then offered a substitute motion to demolish the former senior center building, and construct a new 12,000-square-foot building on the site of the former Hotel Roxboro. That site would also include

construction of a new parking lot. The substitute motion failed 3-2 with only Jeffers and Commissioner Jimmy Clayton voting in favor of it.

Newell's original motion then failed 4-1 with Jeffers and Clayton joining Commissioner Tracey Kendrick and Chairman Kyle Puryear in voting against it.

Newell's substitute motion prior to the approved amended substitute motion came after Kendrick had made a motion for commissioners to demolish the existing former senior center facility and construct a new 12,000-square-foot facility at that site. (Courier-Times, 10/7/15)

DEC 2015 Concealed Carry Ordinance Repealed

Effective Jan. 1, persons with a concealed carry permit will be able to bring handguns on county property with the exception of the Person County Human Services facility on Madison Boulevard.

At present, the county has an ordinance in place that was approved in 1995 and permits the posting of signs on county property that read that carrying concealed weapons on county premises is in violation of NC General Statute Chapter 14, Article 54B.

Following a lengthy discussion and after hearing from a host of citizens regarding the matter, commissioners voted 3-2 Monday night to repeal the current county ordinance permitting the posting of signs to prohibit the carrying of concealed handguns on county property.

The motion approved by commissioners Monday, however, now bans all guns, concealed or openly carried, from the Person County Human Services facility, which houses, among other departments, the county's mental health department and the department of social services.

Commissioners Jimmy Clayton and Ray Jeffers voted in favor of Chairman David Newell's motion, while Commissioner Kyle Puryear sided with Vice Chairman Tracey Kendrick in voting against the motion. Puryear and Kendrick were in favor of allowing concealed handguns at all applicable county-owned facilities.

During a public hearing on the matter Monday, commissioners heard from Person County Department of Social Services (DSS) Director Carlton Paylor, who pleaded with commissioners to not allow guns on DSS property.

Paylor said people visit DSS for a "lot of services," and there are a lot of things that people are denied when they are in the facility.

He went on to say that in some instances you have children being "removed from parents" for various reasons. Those instances can be emotional and they can be volatile, Paylor explained.

"If this person has a gun in their hand, what will they think?" Paylor asked commissioners.

Newell said his logic in making his motion was that concealed guns are not allowed in the Person County Courthouse and that it “would be prudent” to not allow them in the human services facility either.

”Albeit,” Newell added, “if a man is going to come in there shooting, he is going to come in there shooting.”

Even with the commissioners’ repeal of the ordinance Monday night, County Attorney Ron Aycock said there were some exceptions where concealed weapons would still not be allowed on county-owned property due to current state law.

Concealed carry will not be allowed at the Kirby Theater since it is under the control of Piedmont Community College, Aycock said. He also noted that concealed carry will not be allowed on the bottom floor of the Person County Office Building, which houses the Person County Board of Education offices.

Concealed carry will also not be allowed at Person County Recreation, Arts & Parks Department activities that take place on school property, such as school gyms and athletic fields, Aycock added.

In addition to Paylor, several other citizens spoke against commissioners allowing concealed carry weapons on county property at Monday’s meeting.

Michael Lloyd, a retired U.S. Army infantry officer who is currently a middle school teacher, said the county’s ordinance policy “should be left alone.”

Lloyd asked if anyone had considered the opinions of the county employees.

”Why don’t you ask them?” Lloyd questioned.

Later in the meeting, after being questioned by commissioners, County Manager Heidi York said she had received multiple correspondences from employees who were not in favor of eliminating the concealed carry ban at county facilities; however, she had not heard from any employees who were in favor of allowing concealed carry weapons on county property.

Sandy Pleasant, who formerly worked in the Person County District Attorney’s office, told commissioners of an incident “in the late 1990s” when a “young lady walked in” her office and had a handgun in her purse.

No one was harmed that day, Pleasant said; however, it was a very unsettling situation for her. Shortly thereafter, Pleasant said, the current signage banning concealed carry weapons on county property were put in place.

”It made me feel good, as an employee, that sign went up,” Pleasant said. “The safety of employees is an important issue for me.”

City of Roxboro resident Robert Trotter, who told commissioners he worked in social services for over 30 years, said he wanted to “leave the ordinance as it stands.

"We should not be here trying to promote the sell of guns," Trotter added.

Amanda Weaver, the children's librarian at the Person County Public Library (PCPL), also asked commissioners to not allow concealed carry weapons. She said that she was concerned that there could be "multiple bullets flying."

She went on to say that people with mental illness and people who are "just angry" sometimes visit the library. She also said that there were over 130 parents and children in the library last Thursday when PCPL hosted a production of the Gingerbread Boy.

Roxboro resident Robert Allen posed just one question to commissioners when he spoke in opposition of repealing the concealed carry ordinance. Allen's question referenced the recent shootings in San Bernardino, California.

"Did guns save the lives of those people?" Allen asked. "Guns took the lives of those people."

Among citizens speaking in favor of commissioners repealing the concealed carry ordinance was P.J. Gentry, chairman of the Person County Republican Party.

Gentry said the "common theme in mass shootings" that have taken place since 1950, with just one exception, is that they occurred in gun-free zones. She then referred to those places as "helpless victim zones."

By allowing concealed carry, Gentry said, the possibility would exist that someone could stop a killer.

The county's ban on concealed carry weapons, Frank Stevenson Jr. told commissioners, was denying "law-abiding citizens the right to defend themselves."

Nancy Winter, who also spoke in favor of repealing the ordinance, said she had a right to defend herself.

"Concealed carry is the most elegant way to defend ourselves in this modern day," Winter said.

U.S. 6th District Congressional candidate Chris Hardin told commissioners that, while he did not reside in Person County, he was in favor of repealing the ordinance locally and throughout the state.

"Criminals do not care," Hardin said. "They could care less about your signs."

Harden went on to say that people who think a mass shooting could not take place in Person County are incorrect.

"It's just a matter of time," Hardin said. "It's spreading out more and more." "I don't live in Mayberry," Semora resident Bruce Wrenn told commissioners. "Our sheriff has a gun and his deputies have more than one bullet."

Wrenn said he wasn't endorsing giving "crazy people guns." He also warned of the dangers commissioners faced if they decided to not repeal the concealed carry ordinance.

"The blood is on your hands when you make that decision," Wrenn said.

Semora resident Andy Withers shared several slogans with commissioners when speaking in favor of repealing the concealed carry ordinance.

"When seconds count, help is just minutes away," Withers said, adding, "When guns are outlawed, only outlaws have guns."

Prior to voting in favor of Newell's motion, Jeffers said he was going to vote against Kendrick's motion of a full repeal of the concealed carry permit. Initially, Jeffers said he planned to vote in favor of the full repeal, but after learning that the county employees were not in favor of it, he said, "I think I'm going to have to be that political leader and stand up for our employees."

Clayton said that by keeping the concealed carry signs in place, commissioners might be "keeping out the people who might help you.

"I feel like you're limiting the people who might help you out," Clayton said. "I feel like you've got a right to defend yourself. We are in a new day and government can't do it all."

After Newell made his amended motion, Kendrick said commissioners "shouldn't be picking and choosing" sites. He said a full repeal would have more potential to avoid violence from "a crazed, insane, radical, religious nut." (Courier-Times, 12/9/15)

2016

MAR 2016 Support For Bond Referendum

The Person Board of County Commissioners voted Monday to pass a resolution of support for the Connect NC bond referendum, after hearing a presentation on how it would benefit Piedmont Community College (PCC) without raising taxes.

The \$2 billion bond referendum, the first in North Carolina since 2000, would bring \$4.8 million to benefit PCC if it passes in the March primary election - \$3.4 million for the Person County campus and the rest for PCC in Caswell County.

The board voted informally 3-2 to back the bond, but the split voting was misleading.

One of the nay votes came from Commissioner Kyle Puryear, who said he was not opposing the bond with his vote. Puryear said, however, he was opposed to commissioners issuing a resolution.

"I want the voters to make their own informed decision, after evaluating the information for themselves," Puryear said, adding that in his 10 years as a commissioner, the board had never taken any formal position on a referendum.

"We've always left it up to the voters," Puryear said.

Commission Vice Chairman Tracey Kendrick, who also cast a dissenting vote regarding the resolution, also said he didn't think it was his responsibility as an elected official to endorse specific bonds put forward, but he did offer some additional points for consideration.

Kendrick was somewhat skeptical of the claim that taxes would not go up as a result of the bond. He said a lot would depend on economic forces in the marketplace that were hard to predict.

Kendrick said that in 2000, the last time there was a bond referendum on the ballot, there was a promise taxes would not go up, but when a new legislature convened the following year, it raised taxes.

Kendrick also said the original bond was intended to provide much more funding for roads and infrastructure, including some road upgrades for Person County, but this didn't make it into the final bill. From the language of the bill, the money apparently has already been allotted to very specific projects, Kendrick said.

Kendrick also said there appears to be a lot of money being spent to promote Connect NC, but if he didn't speak up, none of the cons would come to light.

The majority of commissioners sided with Commissioner

Ray Jeffers, who made the motion to vote on a resolution of support for the bond. Commission Chairman David Newell and Commissioner Jimmy Clayton both voted in favor of Jeffers' motion.

”It brings real dollars to Person County in an area we need it the most,” Jeffers said. “A community college, in my opinion, is a backbone to rural areas like ours.

”It provides training and education to our citizens, who have been displaced from their jobs or would like to further their education,” Jeffers added. “The \$4.85 million the college stands to receive will go a long ways to updating infrastructure needs that otherwise would have to be paid for by using county property tax dollars.”

Beth Townsend, director of public information and marketing for PCC, used a Powerpoint presentation to make a case for supporting the bond referendum before the 3-2 vote.

Townsend said the bond would affect infrastructure across the state, with 76 counties receiving funding.

Townsend said the bond would come with no tax increase because of the state’s AAA bond rating and the rapid rate at which debt was coming off the state’s books. Also, interest rates are at historic lows, making it a great time to issue a bond, Townsend added.

Townsend said that, at the rate debt service is coming off the books, the state would actually be paying less for debt service in five years than it is today.

The bond would have long-lasting effects, with infrastructure projects expected to last 50 years, about double the length of time of debt service, Townsend added.

Most of the bond would go toward education, 49 percent for the 17 campuses in the University of North Carolina system, and 17 percent to community colleges.

Other funding would go to three new National Guard Readiness Centers, state parks and the state zoo.

Townsend said community colleges play a vital role in post secondary school education in North Carolina, that 40 percent of the state’s workforce has been educated in community colleges.

The PCC campus was built in the late 1970s, Townsend said, and renovations are needed to update the campus and prepare students to be part of the global workforce.

Townsend added that many of the projects planned at PCC would involve work performed by local companies, contributing to the local economy.

The campus renovations include Barnette Auditorium in Building D (\$1,175,000); Student Services & Facilities in Building E (\$470,000); campus-wide HVAC (\$100,000) and covered walkways (\$210,000).

The Business Development Entrepreneurship Center would, if the bond passes, be renovated for \$600,000.

The final \$840,605 is earmarked for roadway and utility expansion. (Courier-Times, 3/2/16)

MAR 2016 Editorial Criticizes “Unneeded Vote” on Bond Referendum

Sometimes no vote is better than a 3-2 vote. That’s the message we heard from several Piedmont Community College (PCC) supporters, who are also backers of the \$2 billion Connect NC bond referendum on the March primary election ballot.

The bond referendum, the first in the state since 2000, would bring \$4.8 million to PCC’s coffers, the majority of which would be used for upgrades at the college’s Person County campus. A portion would also be used for upgrades at the PCC campus in Caswell County.

We learned this week that PCC officials, who were on the agenda to make a presentation on how the Connect NC Bond would benefit PCC, weren’t seeking a vote on a resolution of support from commissioners. It was already known that there would not be unanimous support, so requesting no vote on the matter was deemed to be the better choice than having a mixed signal sent from commissioners on the matter.

Those plans were altered, however, when Commissioner Ray Jeffers offered a resolution in favor of the Connect NC Bond to the board. Jeffers, along with Commission Chairman David Newell and Commissioner Jimmy Clayton voted in favor of the resolution. Commission Vice Chairman Tracey Kendrick and Commissioner Kyle Puryear opposed the motion.

While we agree with Jeffers that “the \$4.85 million the college stands to receive will go a long ways to updating infrastructure needs that otherwise would have to be paid for by using county property tax dollars,” we’re not sure he did PCC any favors by offering up Monday’s motion.

We certainly see the benefits of Connect NC and we know that if the bond funds are not approved, the day will come when Person County taxpayers will be called upon to foot the bill for aging facilities and needed upgrades at the PCC campus.

Puryear told us Monday he was not saying that he was opposed to the Connect NC Bond with his vote against Jeffers’ motion. Instead, he said he was opposed to the resolution.

”I want the voters to make their own informed decision, after evaluating the information for themselves,” Puryear said. “We’ve always left it up to the voters.”

While we do favor the Connect NC Bond, it would have probably served everyone better if Jeffers had simply voiced his support of the issue without setting the stage for a 3-2 vote. (Courier-Times, 3/2/16)

JUN 2016 Senior Center Project Delayed Due to Bad Soil

We were certainly shocked and saddened Monday morning when it was announced at the Person Board of County Commissioners’ meeting that the Person County Senior Center project had been dealt another setback.

The long-awaited senior center project was put on hold by a unanimous vote of commissioners Monday after it was announced that poor soils at the site of the former senior center and the location of the proposed new facility had been discovered. The soils at the site are reportedly so bad that a firm foundation for the new facility would not be supported.

The cheapest remedy to solve the problem was estimated at \$500,000. That price tag could soar to \$1 million or higher if other remedies were put in place.

While we sympathize greatly with the senior citizens who have spoken out about the latest setback, we have to say that we were encouraged to see that all five commissioners appear solidly behind rectifying the latest hiccup and moving forward with construction of a new senior center as soon as possible.

This latest delay was certainly not a political ploy by any of the commissioners. They, too, were blindsided by the news.

It appears quite likely that the solution to the latest issue could entail finding another site and then continuing the project, likely with the same floorplan that has already been selected.

For those who are criticizing some members of the commission board for the latest delay, our advice is to allow the process that was approved Monday to play out over the next couple of months and be patient.

Good things can indeed come to those who wait.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers, a staunch supporter of the senior center project, offered up the notion, which passed unanimously, to “put together a team, so to speak, where we can start discussing this so it is not just tabled sitting on a shelf somewhere. I’d be willing to serve on it; I think our chairman should, and the manager.”

Commission Vice Chairman Tracey Kendrick also offered promise of finding the light at the end of the senior center project tunnel during Monday’s meeting.

”I think we need to set a time frame because we have already set the expectation that we are going to move forward and I don’t want people to think that we are not...”

Prior to the unanimous vote by commissioners Monday, Chairman David Newell also offered up words of encouragement that the senior center project would not be put on the back burner for a long period of time.

”We can’t justify spending a half million dollars just to keep it on one specific site,” Newell said. “You could build a hell of a lot more building if you want to move it a little ways.”

Certainly, the news was not good Monday morning for the people who have waited and longed for ground to be broken for the new senior center.

However, we are encouraged that all five commissioners appear to be in agreement that the project would not be “tabled” for a long period of time. Good things can indeed come to those who wait.
(Courier-Times, 6/22/16)

2017

AUG 2017 Lone Vote Against Denying Model Airplane Club Use of Land

County commissioners, in a 4-1 vote on Monday night, denied a special use permit for a model airplane flying club to operate on a 14-acre parcel off of Mt. Harmony Church Road.

After listening to an hour of testimony during a public hearing, commissioners agreed to follow the recommendation of the planning board, which recommended denial of a special use permit for the Tri-County Radio Control Club to operate on the property because the use did not meet the requirements of two of the four Findings of Fact, including that it would not harm public safety and that it was not in compliance with the county's comprehensive land use plan.

The property had been purchased by airplane club member Pete Duty after the Person County Board of Adjustment denied a conditional use permit for the club to continue operating at its original location along Whitmore Road in Hurdle Mills.

The property Duty purchased is located in a Rural Conservation Zoning District, which lists "private recreation club or swimming club activities not operated as a business or profit" as a special use.

Board chairman Tracey Kendrick made a statement immediately after closing the public hearing.

"I have a record of voting with our local Planning and Zoning Board," he said. "We put those people in place to look at findings of fact as a quasijudicial board and they came back with a 4-0 decision to deny the request so I tend to stick with their decision, so I am going to say that up front."

Commission Gordon Powell said essentially the same thing.

"If we don't respect the opinion of planning and zoning, we don't need them," he said.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers said he thought of the board of commissioners as being an elected officials who served as a buffer between the people and an appointed board, and it was his opinion commissioners did not always need to follow the planning board's opinions.

Commissioner Jimmy Clayton said his biggest concern was the property's proximity to Siloam Baptist Church (about 1,000 feet), with events such as funerals and weddings that might be disturbed by the flying club's activities.

Jeffers said in this case he believed in property rights and not dictating too much what people can and cannot do with their land.

He moved to approve their special use permit for two years, prohibit them from flying on Sundays between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m., and be in touch with the church so as not to fly during special events such as funerals.

His motion failed on a 4-1 vote. A subsequent motion by Kendrick to deny the permit passed on a 4-1 vote, with Jeffers casting the nay vote. planning board meeting, about five people showed up to speak in opposition to the club, with eight in favor.

Club member Chris Silvia spoke for the majority of the 30 minutes allotted for support.

He said the fact that the club was chartered with the Academy of Model Aeronautics meant that members followed safety guidelines. He said the club's mission was to create a safe environment and be in harmony with the community.

He mentioned that the club supports the community through the annual TCRC Fireflight event, a fundraiser for local fire departments, aided the Boy Scouts in getting their aviation badge, and encouraged STEM education.

He said the club had addressed the noise concern by engaging a professional sound engineer who had collected sound data from the largest planes in the club, 100 cc gasoline powered aircraft, and determined that the noise level dropped to conversation level at 675 feet.

He said the problems started when there started to be too many members using the former cropdusting landing area on Whitmore Road, and the technology of the planes improved.

"We outgrew the field," he said. "It's all different now. That's why we're here."

Duty used his few minutes at the podium to talk about safety, that there had never been any damage to property or injury in the 30 years the club operated near Whitmore Road.

He asked commissioners to consider whether it would be better to have radio-controlled flying backed by a club, or unsupervised on the property.

James Toole, who drove five hours to attend the meeting, is an adjacent landowner. He said he purchased the property to have a place to relax and get away from the stress of his job as a contractor.

"This is really going to impact this community," he said. "Would you want this in your backyard?" He had a list of 17 signatures from nearby residents opposed to the flying club.

On Tuesday, Duty said there is no longer a TCRC, and therefore no charter with the AMA to provide liability insurance.

Despite the ruling, Duty, the property owner, is free to use his property on a personal basis with a few friends to continue enjoying his hobby of flying radio-controlled model aircraft. (Courier-Times, 8/9/17)

AUG 2017 Favors Landfill Being Closed

It is a question that affects every taxpaying citizen in Person County. Should the county end its contract with Republic Services to operate its regional landfill in Person County?

Closing the landfill would almost inevitably mean higher property taxes for county residents. Keeping the landfill open would maintain what some call a “mega dump,” importing garbage from counties up to 60 miles away.

The issue came into sharp relief Monday in a 3-2 split vote by county commissioners on whether to seek proposals from businesses to equip and operate a transfer station at the old county landfill that would be used to transport the county’s waste to Granville County’s landfill.

This is the option commissioners are focusing on as the most feasible, but the county would not be under any obligation to accept any of the proposals.

In April, it seemed the commissioners were united in seeking options, within the next two years, for closing the landfill. They voted unanimously in support of vice chairman Gordon Powell’s motion to limit Republic Service’s franchise to operate the landfill for only two years, instead of 10, while extending its contract in one-year increments.

It might have made sense that all the commissioners would therefore vote to explore further the transfer station option, but Chairman Tracey Kendrick and Commissioner Kyle Puryear revealed with their votes that they remain firmly convinced that closing the landfill is a mistake.

”If we do away with the contract, the county will need to get into the trash business,” Kendrick said, “and we would need to come up with about \$650,000 in revenues from the landfill that are being used to prop up the budget.”

Commissioners speak out

Puryear said he is most passionate about the landfill issue of all the issues facing the county.

”If Person County government decides to not renew a contract with the current landfill that still has many years of life left in it and send our trash to Granville County, the economic impact will be felt by every resident in the county,” he said. “If you are a property owner, expect your taxes to go up to pay for the loss of revenue from the landfill and the dump transfer site.”

Currently, the county receives an estimated \$545,000 annually in host revenue fees from Republic, and \$98,563 in tax revenue, along with an additional \$25,000 to promote recycling.

Puryear said it is not just the \$650,000 in lost revenue that must be accounted for, equal to about 1.5 cents on the property tax rate, but there is the additional expense of building and operating the transfer station, which he estimated at \$1.5 million in the first year, with continuing operating expenses after that. He said the recycling fees help keep the Recycling Center’s doors open. Puryear said that figure comes from county staff estimates.

He pointed out that there are other things to consider.

”If you use a private disposal service, your rates will go up to pay for the dump transfer site,” he said. “If this passes, it might be good idea to get in the burn barrel business because trash disposal service may become unaffordable at a time when families are already struggling.”

Two commissioners, Ray Jeffers and Jimmy Clayton, have long supported closing the landfill and still believe that’s the best option.

”I voted for it because I think we need to look at the one-year contract with Republic and look at options, anything we can do to keep Person County from becoming a mega-dump, and look for ways to handle Person County trash. We need to find ways to grow Person County and entice young families to move here,” Jeffers said.

Clayton said he was interested in seeing the results of the RFP and he was hoping to see private haulers bid on operating the transfer station. He said the transfer station is not something the county needs to operate.

”The transfer station might need some renovation, and getting private enterprise to look at it will give us an idea how much that will cost,” he said.

Powell also said he voted for issuing RFPs as a way to gather information.

”My reasoning was I didn’t believe the board had sufficient information on the operational cost of a transfer station to make an informed decision,” he said. “The topic of operating a transfer station has been discussed previously, however the estimates were not firm numbers on which to make a decision. This is a complex issue and deserves as much information and consideration as possible.”

Back in April, Powell’s formal motion was to extend the franchise agreement with Republic Services for not more than two years, maintaining the current per day tonnage rate, and have the county staff submit options for closure of the landfill during this period and to include proper procedures, legal requirements and costs of implementing each option for consideration by commissioners.

The franchise agreement currently in place is essentially the same as the one that expired a few months ago. It maintains the range of collections at a 60-mile radius, and the daily tonnage rate at 660 tons. About 100 tons of the waste originates in Person County. (Courier-Times, 8/26/17)

SEP 2017 County Kills Landfill RFP Plan

The regional landfill may keep operating in Person County for a lot longer than two years.

County commissioners on Monday, in a narrow 3-2 vote, abandoned their effort to obtain a permit to open a transfer station at the site of the old county landfill.

In doing so, they abandoned their most viable alternative to sending the county’s trash to the Upper Piedmont Environmental Landfill, operated by Republic Services.

Vice Chairman Gordon Powell cast the deciding vote, saying he was not willing to spend approximately

\$25,000 to obtain a permit when there was no guarantee they were going to choose the transfer station option in the end.

Currently, the county has a two-year franchise agreement with Republic Services, with a separate contract that is renewed annually.

Republic Services initially applied for a 10-year franchise, but commissioners voted to limit the agreement to two years. Powell led the initiative to limit the time frame because he wanted to collect more hard data and information, he said, before making up his mind on the best course of action.

In order to do that, he supported drafting Requests for Proposals from businesses for operating a transfer station that would be used to collect and haul Person County's trash to Granville County's landfill.

On Monday, Assistant County Manager Sybil Tate told commissioners that county staff had drawn up a draft RFP for their review, but immediately warned that the permitting process was complicated, time consuming and expensive, upwards of \$25,000 to \$30,000 for a new permit, or \$20,000 for a modified permit.

While she mentioned the state may allow a permit modification, she said in either case the permitting process takes a long time.

"The state (DENR) is unwilling to give us a time estimate, because the information required for a permit requires that information be shared with other departments, for example a traffic study within DOT," she said.

At a minimum, the county would be responsible for a traffic study, an erosion and sedimentation control study, a special use permit that in itself would require a site plan, topography, buildings, buffers and other features.

Most importantly, however, would be an updated operations plan, outlining how the facility would operate on a day-to-day basis.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers said he had no problem with the additional expense to see if the old landfill was a viable site for a transfer station, but Commissioner Kyle Puryear strongly disagreed, calling the proposed transfer station "absolutely catastrophic and detrimental to the county's finances. We are talking about an increase in taxes. Adding the cost of operating the transfer station would inevitably trickle down to the consumer."

Change of heart

Powell held the most important swing vote, though, and he expressed skepticism about the permit's expense.

"I think this backs us into a corner as a board," he said. "It puts us in a position where we are spending more money without any guaranteed outcomes. I don't know what our option is, otherwise, but I don't see spending that extra money at this point without any guaranteed results."

County Manager Heidi York said soliciting RFPs was not the appropriate vehicle for information gathering, because the board was asking businesses to invest time and resources to come up with a proposal when the county may choose not to even have a transfer station.

"It just got a lot more complicated when have to go through the state permitting process," she said.

She said other communities have employed consultants to do studies, to gather price data, tonnage amounts, and so on.

"The kind of information that you would want is really more of an additional study than it is a request for proposals from a private business," she said.

Powell, when contacted by phone Tuesday, said an additional study would cost more money, and he was reluctant to support that without any guarantees.

"I would need it proven to me in a concrete way that it was worth it to spend that money," he said. (Courier-Times, 9/13/17)

SEP 2017 False Alarm Ordinance

The Person Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously Monday night, Sept. 11, to enact a false alarm ordinance, which levies fines against businesses or residences that have an excessive number of false fire alarms.

The ordinance was drafted at the request of volunteer fire departments and on the suggestion of County Commissioner Ray Jeffers.

The ordinance will be enforced by the Person County Inspections Department, with cooperation from the volunteer fire departments.

Doug Young, director of Person County Emergency Services, said the county already has an ordinance with penalties for too many fire alarms at commercial properties, but the new ordinance also covers residential structures.

Dale Tillman, director of Inspections for Person County, helped draw up the new document.

Under the new rules, property owners will receive a written warning for each of the first two false alarms. They will face a \$50 fine for the third through fifth alarm. The penalties escalate in steps until a property owner is fined \$500 for the 10th and succeeding fire alarms.

The county will count the false alarms based on the fiscal year which runs from July to June.

The ordinance allows for a written appeal to the Inspections director.

If property owners fail to pay the fines, the new county policy allows the county to place a lien on the property.

Young said there is already a similar ordinance covering the City of Roxboro.

There was some discussion about where the collected fines should go - into the General Fund or back to the responding fire department.

Jeffers suggested half go into the General Fund and half back to the responding fire department.

County Manager Heidi York said commissioners could decide how to disburse the funds during budget talks.

She said there has not been much money collected this year from fines imposed because of commercial false fire alarms with only one instance of a violation and \$50 collected in the past year.

Jeffers said the Timberlake Fire Department responds to many false alarms.

Young added that the Ceffo district also had problems with false fire alarms at lake homes, with owners away for the winter. (Courier-Times, 9/20/17)

DEC 2017 Running For Second VP of NACo

Person County Commissioner Ray Jeffers has announced he is running to become Second Vice President of the National Association of Counties, a national advocacy and leadership organization representing the common interests of 3,069 county governments throughout the country.

Jeffers is a past president of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners.

"I have gained valuable perspective serving as a county commissioner, past president for North Carolina's 100 counties, and as a National Association of Counties board member. Each county offers important insight and the county voice is needed to produce effective solutions. As Second

Vice President, I will bring the rich diversity of views among counties into harmony to solve our toughest problems," said Jeffers said.

Jeffers is currently serving in his third term as a Person County commissioner and fourth term on the NACo Board of Directors. He previously served as the 97th President of the NCACC (from 2013- 2014) and has the distinction of being the youngest president in the Association's history. As NCACC President, Jeffers led an initiative to examine and enhance the county role in economic development to achieve sustainable growth for all counties - large and small, rural and urban. He has also focused on farmland preservation, senior services and recreation for all citizens.

The NCACC is the official voice of all 100 counties on issues being considered by the General Assembly, Congress and federal and state agencies. The Association provides expertise to counties in the areas of advocacy, research, risk management and education and leadership training. (Courier-Times, 12/9/17)

DEC 2017 Potential Interest in Fire Tax, Sales Tax Referendum

The cost of establishing a fire tax would be about three times less than what it would cost a homeowner in increased insurance rates if they find themselves without fire protection.

That was part of a report by Person County Manager Heidi York to commissioners as she continues to gather information about funding for the county's volunteer fire and rescue departments.

At the board's December meeting, Commissioner Ray Jeffers asked about the cost to the homeowner of the proposed fire tax (4.25 cents) compared to the increase in homeowners' insurance for not having fire coverage (going from a 9s to a 10 rating).

"Not all insurance companies will insure a home in a service district with a rating of a 10," she said. "Those that will, have quoted us a ballpark increase of an additional \$159 on a median priced home (\$115,000). A median home in a 9s district costs approximately \$612 per year to insure, whereas the same home in a 10 rated district costs approximately \$771 per year to insure. Alternatively, the proposed fire tax increase (4.25 cents) will add an additional \$48.88 annually to the property tax bill of a median priced home."

Commissioner Kyle Puryear, at the same meeting earlier this month, suggested putting a referendum on the ballot for a quarter-cent increase in the local sales tax. If successful, the increase would generate between \$725,000 and \$820,000. Taking into account current funding for fire and rescue, this would more than cover the \$524,000 that is being requested by the Fire Chiefs Association.

York said the county could include a referendum on the May 8, 2018 primary ballot, although state law encourages counties to set an election date that will result in the highest possible voter turnout. That typically is a general election, which is held in November. "Candidate filing ends February 28, therefore, we need the approval from the commissioners no later than this date in order to get the referendum printed on our ballots." York said.

At Puryear's request, York is currently polling commissioners on their interest in pursuing this option. On Friday, York said she had spoken with each commissioner and there appears to be a consensus to explore a sale tax referendum at a future meeting or, perhaps at the board's annual planning retreat in February. She said commissioners were also leaning toward putting the measure on the May ballot instead of the November ballot - if they chose to pursue holding a referendum at all. (Courier-Times, 12/16/17)

2018

JAN 2018 Supports Fire Tax

The volunteer fire departments in the county and Roxboro-Person Rescue Squad have recently made a strong push to get adequate funding in the coming fiscal year.

About two weeks ago, Timberlake Fire and Rescue announced it would not sign a new contract with the county unless it received significantly more funding to replace outdated equipment and keep firefighters safe. Four other departments soon followed suit, saying they, too, would not sign new contracts without more funding. Two departments indicated they would sign contracts, while the Hurdle Mills department and the Roxboro-Person Rescue Squad both issued “letters of concern.”

Commissioners received the letters last Friday. The fire departments are proposing a 4.25-cent (per \$100 valuation) add-on Contracted Emergency Services tax that would increase the tax rate from 70 cents to 74.25 cents and represent the first tax increase for county residents in more than a decade.

Meanwhile, the county has come up with a plan that would not raise taxes but represent a much smaller allotment for the fire departments. Also, commissioners voted 4-1 to include a quarter-cent sales tax increase on the May 8 ballot as an option to raise the necessary funds to meet the stated requirements of the volunteer fire departments.

The final decision will rest with the five commissioners.

In order to gauge their thoughts on the proposed fire tax, they were asked the following question:

What is your reaction to the stance that the volunteer fire departments have taken whereby five are threatening to not sign their contracts for the coming fiscal year to provide fire/rescue services, unless they receive significantly more funding, most likely in the form of a fire tax?

Here’s what they said:

Jimmy Clayton: “We will be looking at it during all of our budget work sessions, and I think it will be handled like any other department and it will be handled similar to that. We’ll see what we can do. We need all of our emergency services adequately funded and they are part of our emergency services.

”We’ve got first responders at these fire departments that get there lots of times before the ambulances do, so we are going to look at it and see what we can do.

I support working with them to get adequate funding but we will work through it with our budget process.

Ray Jeffers: I support a Fire services tax. I am beginning my tenth year in service to the county as a Commissioner and in all of that time I have served as the representative from the board of commissioners to the Fire Chiefs Association.

"I know and hear firsthand the financial struggles our volunteers are dealing with just to maintain safe working equipment. Remember they run toward danger when most of us are running away. If you live in the county a volunteer is more than likely the first person you will see if you dial 911. As a community and county we should support our local volunteers.

Tracey Kendrick: I was disappointed to see the letters threatening not to sign the contract. There has always been an agreement with all five commissioners that VFD's need funding.

The sticking point is on how much and how to fund them. VFD's want a dedicated fire tax. A sales tax increase has been voted on to put it on the ballot. I, personally, want to cut it out of the existing budget.

Government should provide, safety, security and education. Anything other than those three are nice to have, not a necessity. We have \$16 million in unmandated services that the county provides.

By cutting 10 percent out of our budget, we could give the fire departments \$1.6 million. I've heard from people on both sides of the issue and there are great points from both sides.

I've had just as many calls about not raising taxes as I have supporting a tax. We will work on funding in the budget session this February. Feel free to come and sit in on the negotiations. If this has done nothing else, it has engaged people in the discussion of local government and its funding priorities. I have enjoyed seeing everyone getting involved. (Courier-Times, 1/27/18)

FEB 2018 Landfill Extension Still Being Debated

County commissioners emerged from a closed session with representatives of Republic Services last month and attempted to come to a consensus on a long-term contract with the company for operation of the Upper Piedmont Regional Landfill, but fell short after two motions failed.

Chairman Tracey Kendrick made the first motion.

"My motion would be to accept the proposal that Republic has placed in front of us," he said, "for an expansion to increase the tonnage to 2,000 tons a day from the 660, increasing the host fee for the upper tier that was proposed in notes, and also to increase the franchise fee from the existing fee that they are paying to the increased fee that is proposed."

This is identical to a proposal made by Republic in 2016, but does not include an increase in radius of collections from 60 miles to 100 miles. That is a moot point now because of a new state law that counties can no longer limit where waste brought to the landfill can originate.

Although Kendrick's motion did not specify the length of contract, the new state law specifies that any new contract must be for the life of the site, which means until the landfill reaches capacity.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers said he thought it was premature to vote on a proposal they had just heard that night.

"We have a year and a half left on the contract we have now," he said. "I think it is a little premature to vote on it tonight. If I had to vote on it, I would vote no tonight."

A representative from Republic clarified that the contract expires in about six months, while the franchise expires in a year and six months.

"My position still stays the same on six months," Jeffers said.

As Kendrick was about to call for the vote, Commissioner

Kyle Puryear made a substitute motion to maintain the limit of landfill intake to 660 tons per day for life of site, which would be 39 years at the current rate of intake.

The motion failed 3-2. Puryear and Vice Chairman Gordon Powell voted for it, while Kendrick and Commissioners Jimmy Clayton and Jeffers voted against it.

Kendrick then called for a vote on his motion to increase the tonnage with increased payments by Republic Services. It failed on a 4-1 vote, with Kendrick the lone supporter.

"There we have it," Kendrick said. "We're still sitting where we are."

Commissioners will need to decide by June 30 whether to exercise their option for a one-year contract extension. Choosing this option does not involve a new contract which would trigger the life-of-site provisions.

Commissioners, meanwhile, have not had any further discussions on building a transfer station as an alternative to keeping the landfill open past June, 2019, which is when the current franchise expires. (Courier-Times, 2/3/18)

MAR 2018 Cutting Services to Pay for Volunteer Fire Departments

The Person Board of County Commissioners on Monday voted 4-1 to adopt a plan that will avoid a walkout by five county volunteer fire departments.

The plan does not increase property taxes but means County Manager Heidi York will need to cut \$330,000 in services from the upcoming budget.

"That's tough," she said. "That's really tough."

She said all the county departments had requested budget increases but now she will have to find ways to reduce services.

The fire departments, as part of the deal, reduced their request for increased funding from \$512,000 to about \$330,000, or from a total request of \$1.18 million to a "benchmark" of \$1 million. This

“benchmark” figure was proposed by Commissioner Gordon Powell in January, as one of two proposals to bring back for discussion at Monday’s meeting.

The proposal would reduce property taxes by 1.51 cents per \$100 valuation. But it creates a dedicated fire tax of 1.82 cents. The revenue from the fire tax could only be spent for fire services.

The other proposal by Commissioner Ray Jeffers would have added a 2.7- cent (per \$100 assessed valuation) fire tax to the current property tax paid by county residents. However, this plan was voted down 3-2 on Monday, with Commissioners Kyle Puryear, Gordon Powell and Tracey Kendrick casting the nay votes.

Jeffers defended his plan and said increasing the tax rate made sense.

”I think I’ve relayed enough about us getting it all out of the fire tax, given our current budget year that we’re going to face,” he said.

After his substitute motion failed Jeffers said he would vote for Puryear’s original motion to reduce the property tax, create a fire tax that did not effectively increase the tax rate, and lead to cost-cutting in the budget.

Commissioner Jimmy Clayton cast the single nay vote.

”I will support this because I said I was going to support the fire departments and get them to that \$1 million base,” Jeffers said. “I do not support cutting services when we have obviously other options out there but since we are a couple of months out from our budget sessions, hopefully I can persuade some bi-partisanship, as Kyle Puryear put it, to find other ways to fund this when we get to the budget.”

One way that the commissioners might realize more revenues for the General Fund, which would allow them to avoid cutting services, is a 1/4-cent sales tax referendum on the May 8 primary ballot.

If it passes, the county can count on between \$600,000 to \$800,000 in additional revenue annually, more than enough to satisfy the increased funding request by the fire departments. The referendum faces an uphill battle, though, because the last two sales tax referenda on the ballot, in 2008 and 2010, failed, and the Roxboro Area Merchants Association has come out in opposition to the May 8 referendum.

The motion made by Puryear both reduces the property tax rate and creates a new fire tax.

This will mark the first time in 11 years the county has changed its tax rate from 70 cents per \$100 valuation.

The new rate will be 68.49 cents, but residents will not see any advantage because of the creation of a 1.82-cent fire tax.

The overall fire tax increase of 1.82 cents is higher than the 1.51-cent property tax reduction because it does not include city residents.

Puryear said it will ultimately be up to commissioners which services are cut.

”Come up with solutions,” Puryear said to York. “We’re going to be the ones voting on it.”

York said she would get to work in the coming weeks.

”It will be part of my proposed budget,” she said. (Courier-Times, 3/21/18)

MAY 2018 Landfill Extension Approved

The Person Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously Monday to extend the county’s contract with Republic Services to operate the Upper Piedmont Environmental Landfill for another year.

This marks the second one-year contract extension out of a possible 10.

The action was widely expected after a vote to sign a new contract with Republic Services for the life of the landfill site failed on a 3-2 vote last December. The additional year gives the board time to consider its options and negotiate with Republic for a new contract.

The board will need to decide something in the coming year because the county’s existing two-year franchise agreement with Republic expires June 30, 2019.

County Attorney Ron Aycock said that, last year, the county had extended the franchise for a two-year period but in the meantime the General Assembly had enacted legislation limiting the county’s options.

”Between what you did and currently, the General Assembly took action which had the effect of foreclosing to you many options,” he said. “They have in a sense taken the decision away from you by enacting two provisions. One is generically called the life of site provision and the other is called flow control.”

The life of site provision provides that an existing landfill has the right to continue as a landfill for the life of that site not to exceed 60 years. The start date for the 60-year period is the issuance of the state permit, meaning the landfill has about 39 years remaining.

”That has the effect of extending the life of the landfill without regard to an underlying franchise,” Aycock said.

He said a second provision of the General Assembly legislation limits the ability of the county to direct the flow of waste to a particular site.

He said this means Republic could accept waste from further away than the 60-mile radius allowed in the current franchise.

Three options on ta ble

In looking to the future, Aycock said he thought county commissioners effectively had three options.

The first was to take no action.

”Republic would secure an extension of its state permit to a life of site or 60 years from the original 1997 first receipt of waste which would be 2057,” he said. “This would enable Republic to continue to receive waste and operate the facility without paying anything to the county. The permit would contain the same conditions as the existing permit as far as daily tonnage and area, but the county would receive no compensation.”

Currently, the county receives almost \$600,000 annually from Republic Services to operate the landfill.

The second option would be for Republic to secure the extension of its permit to a life of site permit and the county would enact a new franchise to comply with the new state permit and enter into a new contract to match that new state permit.

In that case the county would be entitled to the same compensation as it is in the existing contract.

An aspect of this option is that the county’s new franchise would not be subject to certain procedural requirements, such as a public hearing, and there would be an opportunity to negotiate with Republic.

”It is possible that the county could negotiate some changes in the franchise fee and contract provisions,” Aycock said, potentially negotiating more favorable terms than are currently in place.

Additionally, it would be possible to increase the allowed daily tonnage amount by as much as 110 percent of the original amount, Aycock said.

County Commissioner Ray Jeffers said he liked the idea of doubling the tonnage and closing the landfill more quickly.

”If Republic increased its tonnage from 660 tons a day to 1,386 tons, representing a 110 percent increase, then the landfill would fill up in 15 years and be gone,” he said.

Aycock said the third option was for Republic and the county to negotiate a new agreement allowing a larger amount of daily tonnage, different rates and franchise fees.

”This would require a new state permit for Republic with the consequent procedural requirements of studies of environmental impact and public hearings,” he said. “The county would have to enact a new franchise. This approach would likely require at least a one-year extension in order to allow the necessary time to comply with the more extensive procedural requirements.”

Commission Chairman Tracey Kendrick said there was time to consider these options. “Before you now is the one year extension because it is due at the end of June,” he said. “By doing the extension to match the contract with the franchise, it would give us the opportunity to discuss even further the different options that are on the table now.”

Jeffers wanted to know the exact numbers for filling up the landfill.

Chris Gustin, operations manager for the landfill, said the number can fluctuate based on incoming waste streams, and their different densities.

”The existing life of site permit, that 60 year number, is from the original date of the original contract,” he said. “At no point are we talking any more than 39 years at this time.” (Courier-Times, 5/26/18)

MAY 2018 Votes Against County Selling Home Health and Hospice Programs

The Person Board of County Commissioners voted 3-2 on Monday, May 21, to adopt a resolution to explore the feasibility of selling the county’s home health and hospice programs, with Commissioners Ray Jeffers and Jimmy Clayton casting the dissenting votes.

Commission Chair Tracey Kendrick reminded the commissioners that this was a request “to go out and solicit bids and explore the feasibility of the sale. This vote is not to authorize the sale of home health or hospice or both.”

The issue dates to January 22, when commissioners authorized a contract with CliftonLarsonAllen to assist the county with the process of preparing a request for non-binding proposals to consider divesting both agencies.

At a meeting April 9 the board held a public hearing to formally adopt the resolution to seek bids, but a majority of commissioners wanted the opportunity to talk with health department staff to gain a better understanding of the situation at the agencies before the adoption of the resolution, so it was tabled.

As required by state law, the county must adopt a Resolution of Intent and conduct a public hearing before it can request proposals for purchase.

”Once proposals are received the board must conduct another public hearing,” York said. “The board will have the opportunity to consider all proposals and negotiate with any potential buyers. During the negotiations process, terms such as employee transitions, and purchase price can be discussed.”

By state regulation, the office of the buyer must remain within the geographic limits of Person County, York added.

The consultant has estimated that the process of selling the two services would take about six months, she said.

Person County not alone

Person County is not alone in this issue. ”Counties across the state are facing the same struggles as Person County as it is becoming increasingly difficult to compete with private sector providers of these services,” York said. “New federal Home Health Conditions of Participation are very onerous and costly, and, payment rates continue to decline and not keep pace with inflation.”

The CliftonLarsonAllen firm has brokered the sale of 23 county and regional home health and hospice services, and today only 11 such county-owned agencies exist across the state.

The average sale price for both services is about \$2 million, York said.

Both home health and hospice have private sector providers serving patients in Person County.

The county currently funds seven full-time positions in the two agencies.

"Most other counties have negotiated a transition plan for their employees with the private sector buyers," she said.

The Board of Health discussed their options at a meeting in November and again in January.

Their recommendation was to sell home health, but retain hospice. They expressed concern over serving indigent patients, although the data showed that in fiscal year 2016 the county served three indigent patients in home health and none in hospice. The next year, the county served one indigent patient in home health and none in hospice.

"The Board of Health and staff believe that with additional investments in hospice to provide for better marketing and enhanced technology, they might be able to increase revenues and make the program more viable," York said.

At the commissioners meeting, Clayton said he had thought about the issue a lot, met with Health Department staff, and he wanted to take hospice off the table as far as a potential sale.

"For my part I would like to see the hospice part taken out and see if they can get that headed in the right direction," he said. "I think it is headed in the right direction and that is a completely different animal than home health."

Kendrick asked York if the proposal offered the opportunity to sell either or both services, and York said the proposal was to sell them bundled.

York said the consultant had told her the sale of home health alone was not enough to generate competitive proposals and they recommended the bundling of the two services together "to get the best return on investment and a more competitive offer." (Courier-Times, 5/30/18)

JUN 2018 Fire Tax Deal Reached

In an unexpected move Wednesday morning, county commissioners voted unanimously to keep the county tax rate at 70 cents per \$100 valuation, while imposing a one-cent fire tax on residents living outside the city limits.

The penny tax translates to a \$10 annual increase in the property tax bill for a county resident living in a \$100,000 home.

City residents will see no tax increase because they are not in the Fire Protection Service District, established June 4 by the commissioners during their regular meeting.

The action by the board marked a departure from County Manager Heidi York's recommended budget which proposed a reduction in county taxes offset by the creation of a fire tax to arrive at neutral tax rate for county residents. She did this because the majority of the board was opposed to any sort of property tax increase.

Although the numbers had not been completely finalized, York expected the fire tax to generate an amount equal to what the volunteer fire departments are currently allocated, about \$669,000, with an additional \$330,000 coming from the proposed budget to arrive at a benchmark of \$1 million in funding, to match a proposal by Commissioner Gordon Powell.

York's proposal called for a reduction in the property tax rate from 70 cents per \$100 assessed valuation, to 68.18 cents, and a fire tax of 1.82 cents. The county tax rate has stood at 70 cents for 12 years.

Powell emphasized the importance of the volunteer fire departments.

"Citizens deserve the best protection and safety they can get," he said. "When there is an emergency, every man, woman and child in the county, at any given time, would need their assistance, not just for burning buildings but for other issues as well. That is where your first responders come in. We need those people. They're dedicated. They're loyal."

Commissioner Kyle Puryear said he agreed with Powell but proposed sticking with the Manager's recommended budget.

"It's been no secret that I've not been a proponent of raising taxes," he said. "I look at it from the standpoint of the many people that I come across who are on fixed incomes or simply can't afford it because they have mortgage payments. They have car payments. I see it this way, we're getting the million dollar mark for the fire departments, the funding that they need, and not passing on the burden to the struggling families of Person County," Puryear said.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers, who has been a proponent of fully funding the fire departments with a tax increase, offered a motion to set the fire tax rate at .0272, and leave the tax rate at 70 cents.

Kendrick responded with a substitute motion to put it off until the next meeting.

"I, like Gordon, have struggled on this," he said, "and I feel like I am on the cusp of making a decision, and by the end of this meeting I may have changed my mind but right now I am still sitting on a fence on what way I want to go."

Kendrick's compromise

But then he immediately offered a compromise.

”I’ll say it out here in public,” he said. “My biggest thought right now is leaving it at 70 and increasing it and calling it a fire tax at one penny, versus the two cents,” Kendrick said. “I think that eases us into the citizens increasing the amount they’ve got to pay a little bit more. It also gives us the opportunity to see between now and next year how much growth we have.”

He said any economic growth would help both on the property tax end and fire tax end.

This sentiment was a departure from previous statements he had made that taxes remain flat and the money for the fire departments come from cuts in the budget to services which were not mandated by the state.

Other proposals were brought forward, including one by Tax Administrator Russell Jones to reduce property taxes to a rate of 69 cents and add a 2.72 cent fire tax on top of that.

However, a breakthrough came when Jeffers backed off his proposal to add 2.72 cents to the 70-cent tax rate and aligned with Kendrick.

”If we do Tracy’s proposal and set it at one penny and leave the tax rate,” he said. “By leaving the tax rate alone we are going to keep that \$812,000 in the General Fund. By setting (the fire tax) at one penny it only generates \$369,164 so that leaves us finding \$630,836. You subtract that from the \$812,000, we’re still in the positive \$181,164. You make that in the form of a motion, I’ll vote for it today.”

With that Kendrick made the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Since \$330,000 had been allocated in the proposed budget for the fire departments, that amount will be returned to the General Fund in the final budget. In the end, Finance Director Amy Wehrenberg calculated the new surplus in the budget at a little over \$411,000.

Powell said the unanimous vote by the board on such an important issue should be appreciated.

”That was just as important to me as what we accomplished otherwise,” he said. “It showed some unity and I think the people of the county should not only recognize that but appreciate that.” (Courier-Times, 6/9/18)

JUN 2018 Wife Appointed to Board of Adjustment

The Person Board of County Commissioners, at their June 18 meeting, made a number of appointments to boards, commissions, authorities and committees.

Dr. John R. Bradsher was appointed to the ABC board for a three-year term.

Treco Lea-Jeffers was appointed to the Board of Adjustment for a three-year term.

Commissioner Ray Jeffers, her husband, disclosed there was not a conflict of interest with his vote as there would be no personal financial gain.

He added that any appeal of the Board of Adjustment was with the court system and not the Board of Commissioners.

Chairman Tracey Kendrick stated his concerns related to the Jeffers' having family land in the vicinity of the Sun Rock Quarry, noting past conversations where folks and church representatives had contacted Jeffers with complaints.

He felt it was not a good precedent for the Board of Commissioners with a potential court case. Kendrick said he would be voting in opposition.

Commissioners voted 4-1 to appoint Lea-Jeffers to the Board of Adjustment, with Kendrick casting the dissenting vote.

For the Board of Health, there were a total of five open positions for three-year terms.

Commissioners voted unanimously to reappoint Dr. Kimberly Yarborough (physician rep), Patsy Clayton (nurse rep) and Ben Tillett (general public rep) as well as to appoint Dr. Barbara Harris (veterinarian) and Philip Edelblute (general public rep) to the Board of Health.

For the Environmental Issues Advisory Committee, to serve three-year terms, there were one position each representing the townships of Bushy Fork, Holloway, Roxboro and Woodsdale, but no applications were received.

There were also no applications received for the six-year-term on the Industrial Facilities and Pollution Control Financing Authority, with four positions available.

For the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, the board voted 5-0 to appoint Carolina Carver (substance abuse rep) for an initial 1-year term, and to reappoint Kelly Foti (United Way rep) and Margaret Bradsher (citizen rep), each for a 2-year term.

No applications were received for Juvenile Defense Attorney, two positions for youth under 18.

Also, no applications were received for a position on the Animal Services Advisory Committee, and three positions on the Adult Care Home Community Advisory Committee. (Courier-Times, 6/23/18)

OCT 2018 Votes Against RV Park

Person County commissioners, in a split vote, gave their approval to plans for a new RV park just outside Roxboro that could eventually be home to as many as 117 RV camper and cabin sites.

The plans drew complaints from surrounding property owners who said they were concerned about the threat to public safety and the loss of value to their own property if the RV park was allowed to go forward.

Joe Berryhill, who was seeking permission from the county to operate the RV park, told commissioners the demand for this kind of housing exists in Person County.

"Our camping sites are booked during the holidays. There seems to be some belief that we are building this just for shutdown workers (temporary workers who perform maintenance on the two Duke Energy power plants). That's not true. There are race tracks that bring people here, hunting season. This will be a controlled environment," Berryhill said.

Neighbors, however, questioned those assertions.

"I feel as if this entire project was misrepresented to us from the beginning," said Timothy McElroy. "An RV park suggests a family setting, whereas when you hear that it's a shutdown park for Duke workers, I do feel that it's going to have a negative impact on the value of my property."

McElroy said commissioners should decide on the basis of how many people will be impacted by the project.

"The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few - or the one. I think it is supremely unfair to let one man negatively impact our neighborhood for the sake of profit," McElroy said.

Other neighbors said the project doesn't meet the findings of fact which are required to approve a special use permit like the one Berryhill was seeking.

'Money in Berryhill's pocket'

Emily Tingen said Berryhill's application failed to meet three of the four findings of fact, among them that the project must be a public necessity. "I don't see how anything of this magnitude is a public necessity at all," Tingen said. "I think this should be a commercial zoning issue. This is a commercial project to put money in Berryhill's pocket."

She also argued that Duke Energy has said it expects to shut the two coal-fired power plants down by 2035, which would mean the primary customer she believes Berryhill is targeting - shutdown workers - would dry up.

"What will we be left with then?" Tingen asked.

Christy Puett, whose mother owns property next to the site, said safety is her primary concern.

"We already have problems with people thinking they can come right down through there on their ATVs. This is not for families. It is for shutdown workers. I've known the Berryhills all my life. If this was something they wanted to do, why didn't they try it on their own property," Puett asked.

Berryhill has said he chose the 26-acre site off U.S. 501 because of its proximity to water and sewer lines, which would allow him to place more RV campers on the site than he could have if the land was served by a well and septic tank.

Berryhill said he plans to construct the RV park in phases.

The first phase will consist of between 30 and 33 RV sites. Berryhill said he expects to employ on-site security at the park by the time all the sites in Phase 1 are filled.

Following the public hearing, Commissioner Tracey Kendrick asked if Berryhill would agree to lighting requirements for the park and Berryhill said he would.

Kendrick also rebutted Tingen's comment about Duke's plans for the two power plants.

"What Duke has said is they expect to stop using them as coal-fired plants by 2035, but it could be used for a combined cycle. It's a viable option for those plants," Kendrick said.

Kendrick moved for approval of the request and was joined by commissioners Kyle Puryear and Gordon Powell.

Commissioners Jimmy Clayton and Ray Jeffers voted against the request.

"You go to these conferences and you hear about urban sprawl. Every time I think about one of these projects, I try to think about what it would look like 25 years from now. I have nothing against the park, but I don't think this is the right place," Jeffers said. (Courier-Times, 10/27/18)

OCT 2018 County Sells Hospice and Homecare

Person County is getting out of the home health and hospice business.

Commissioners unanimously approved the sale of their home health and hospice services last week, agreeing to accept a \$200,000 offer from Medical Services of America.

The deal ends a 10-month effort by commissioners to divest of the operation. Initially, selling the operations was seen by some commissioners as an option for helping to pay for increases in the county's budget for fire protection by the eight area volunteer fire departments.

When commissioners first considered the idea, they agreed to hire a consultant, Clifton Larsen Allen, to evaluate the programs and help lead the effort to sell them.

Consultants told commissioners that the average sale for a home health and hospice operation was in the \$2 million range. Person County sold its operation for just 10 percent of that figure.

Under the terms of the sale, the buyers are obligated to offer positions to all of the five remaining staff members working for the programs. According to county manager Heidi York, only one of those employees agreed to continue working with MSA.

MSA will also continue to operate out of the existing county facilities for now, but the contract says they must find new facilities within a year. MSA will pay the county nearly \$69,000 in rent each month that it is in the county facility.

The company will also pay Person County \$750 per month for use of the existing home health and hospice software program and related IT services.

Commissioners Jimmy Clayton and Ray Jeffers, who voted earlier in the year against a plan to employ consultants to explore the sale, joined their colleagues on Monday in voting in favor of the sale.

"I'm going to vote for this resolution, but personally this is the saddest vote I've taken in some while. After the last financial revealings the county manager brought us, I don't think we have any choice," Clayton said.

Those numbers Clayton referred to were reports that showed Hospice turned a \$12,500 profit in 2017, while the county's home health operation recorded a \$238,000 deficit.

Commissioner Gordon Powell echoed Clayton's comments, but he said the sale assures that people will continue to be served.

"People in need will not go unserved. From the business standpoint, the financial records showed a high loss to the county for that service," Powell said. (Courier-Times, 10/31/18)

2019

MAR 2019 Editorial Critical of Jeffers Objections to Using County Phones

Person County commissioners have been asked to consider a new policy under which county staff (and county commissioners) would be issued county-owned cell phones. The reaction of some commissioners to the idea was, well, pretty transparent.

Commissioners Ray Jeffers and Jimmy Clayton voiced concerns over having to use the county-issued phones for their public business.

Both men argued that their privately-owned phone numbers and email addresses are already widely known and the hassle of moving their public business to a new phone would be problematic.

But county staff - and the county attorney - rightfully pointed out that operating with publicly-owned cell phones or smart phones would make it easier on everyone to provide public records - which include call logs, emails and text messages - when they are requested.

The system county staff is proposing would include an automatic archiving system that would congregate all those public records in a single place and allow county staff to comply with public records requests within a reasonable period of time as the law requires.

Clayton and Jeffers both clearly understand that emails and texts about public business are public records, whether they are stored on a county-owned device or a personal device and, in their arguments, neither man suggested messages on their personal devices should not be available for public inspection.

But if they insist on keeping public data on privately-owned phones, they run the risk of having to turn in their private phones to allow staff to comply with public records requests. And at the same time, that gives a public employee access to whatever private information is on those devices as well.

In short, the new plan would save county employees time, increasing their efficiency and making better use of public resources. We would hate to see county commissioners pass up that opportunity because it's inconvenient for them. We elect them to be good stewards of public resources. The new phone policy accomplishes that. But only if commissioners are willing to step up to the plate and operate under the same rules as everyone else. (Courier-Times, 3/20/19)



A proposal by county staff to issue county-owned mobile devices to staff and county commissioners met with a barrage of questions Monday morning.

Two commissioners, Jimmy Clayton and Ray Jeffers, voiced concern about having to use county-issued phones for county business, instead of their personal phones.

"No one's going to call this new number. You're handicapping me by taking my email off my cellphone," Jeffers said.

County manager Heidi York said the switch to county-owned phones and mobile devices gives the county greater control over its resources and aids in the ability to produce public records when they are requested.

"This policy is trying to use our county resources wisely, but also meet the state's public records law," York told commissioners. She said the switch to county-owned phones would cost the county \$144,000 per year - about \$23,000 per year more than it currently pays employees in the form of a monthly stipend for the use of their personal phones. The county would need about 200 phones to cover the county employees and commissioners. Not every employee in the county would be issued a county-owned device.

If commissioners choose to adopt the policy, they would be joining a growing number of local governments across the state who are moving toward the issuance of county-owned phones and electronic devices.

Clayton said he didn't want an additional phone because he doesn't use a county-issued email address. He gets all his emails, both public and private, through his personal email account on his personal cellphone.

"The worst case-scenario is someone calls for all your records and you've got a mess on your hands," Clayton said.

That's because no matter where the emails are housed, communications, including electronic communications, such as emails and texts about county business, are considered public records and would have to be produced if someone asks for them.

That means a commissioner could have to turn his personal cellphone in to a member of the county staff to allow him or her to retrieve texts and emails of a public nature if such a request were made. That would expose a commissioner's private texts and emails to whatever county employee is tasked with retrieving the public documents, because he or she would have to examine each communication to determine if it was public or private.

According to York, the new policy would also create an automated archiving system which would allow county employees to fulfill public records requests without having access to the device where the electronic communications reside. Those communications would be stored electronically in a central location and could be more easily retrieved.

York also said the new policy would likely require employees to carry two phones with them if they want to conduct any personal business during work hours. York said the idea of carrying two phones was not popular among many on the staff, but she said the policy would forbid personal use on the county devices. Person County IT director Chris Martin said the idea of having two phones was appealing to some employees. "We've heard from some of the caseworkers in DSS. They like the fact that they would have an additional device because they don't want clients to have their personal phone number," Martin said.

Clayton asked about the possibility of instituting the policy for county employees, but leaving commissioners out of the process.

That idea drew a rebuke from Commissioner Kyle Puryear. “We say we’re no better than county employees and then you say we’re not including us. We’re not everyday county workers, but we would be creating an exception for ourselves,” Puryear said.

Commissioners agreed to delay action on the policy until next month. York said the county is under no time pressure to implement the policy, but she said she would need some guidance from commissioners about whether they want to move to the county-owned devices in time to include it in the budget for the upcoming year, which begins in July. (Courier-Times, 3/20/19)

APR 2019 Debate Over STEM Center

Monday morning the Person County commissioners approved the recommended Capital Improvement Plan in a 4 to 1 vote.

The CIP serves as a planning tool for implementing large, capital projects and includes projects costing \$50,000 or more from county departments, Piedmont Community College and Person County Schools.

An estimated \$6.37 million would be allocated for funding projects in the 2020 fiscal year, which begins July 1.

Although a PCC study would cost the board an estimated \$54,000, it generated a lot of discussion over the idea of dishing out thousands of dollars for a feasibility study some commissioners say may not generate any concrete action over the years to come.

The study is intended to examine PCC’s request for an advanced manufacturing technical STEM center.

According to Assistant County Manager Sybil Tate, the study would address the level of need, facility space and provide a cost analysis.

The study was recommended after County Manager Heidi York said they took the STEM project itself off the list due to the high cost of purchasing new land and a new building.

Building the STEM center would cost an estimated \$32 million.

The study’s results would let the board know whether it should proceed with developing the project.

However, at the last meeting board members raised concerns as they did at this meeting, over the fact if funding the feasibility study would result in a commitment to funding the hefty price for the project.

”I mean the study could come back and say ‘Yes it is a go.’ But if we don’t have \$32 million then it is a no go anyway,” said county commissioner Ray Jeffers at the board’s April 1 meeting.

At Monday’s meeting, Jeffers raised similar concerns and explained later why he voted against funding for the feasibility study.

"I don't think we have come to a consensus yet that we want to do the project and so I don't know why we are spending money to study it when we are not committed yet to funding the project."

He believes the board's priorities should be on renovating Person County Schools.

"Our secondary schools are 70 years old and we have already identified deficiencies in them as far as needing renovations and improvements. We addressed some of that today with ADA improvements but our children should be in an environment conducive to learning and I think that is what we should concentrate on first," said Jeffers.

The study could be a critical step toward bringing PCC's labs and equipment to up to date, assist with the county's growth and help PCC answer questions about what kind of training space regional employers say they need today and assess the cost effectiveness of renovating existing campus spaces.

"I think it is a valid request going forward, looking at economic development and looking into the future," said county commissioner Gordon Powell.

After the completion of the study, it is anticipated that the board will start seeing smaller requests first, such as bringing PCC's labs and equipments up to speed.

"I might anticipate after this study was conducted that we would see a follow up request to start implementing this gradually without having to bite off that \$33 million dollar project," said York. (Courier-Times, 4/17/19)

APR 2019 Votes For New Phone Policy

In an effort to keep up with technology in the workplace, county commissioners approved a mobile device policy, that will affect most Person County employees as well as elected officials.

At an April 1 meeting, the board approved the policy in a 3-1 vote after tabling it at a March meeting for further discussion over separating business uses from personal uses on a mobile device.

The new policy will require most county employees to transition from using their personal device to using a county-issued phone to conduct county business.

The program will also cover the county's five elected commissioners, who will each be issued a county-owned cell phone. Including commissioners in the program was among the questions board members had when the policy was first proposed. Commissioners Jimmy Clayton and Ray Jeffers questioned whether they would need to carry two cellphones - one for personal use and one for county use. Jeffers said it was unlikely people would call him on the new phone, because his existing personal phone number is already widely distributed. County Manager Heidi York told commissioners in March that it could mean that people covered under the policy have to carry two cellphones. She admitted that idea was not popular with employees, but she reiterated that the policy would be good for business in helping to protect county resources and employees' right to privacy.

"We are modeling this after best practices, to help us manage the mobile devices better, preserve public information (and) protect individual privacy rights," said York.

Some county employees who use their personal phones to conduct day-to-day business currently receive a stipend.

The county spends about \$121,000 per year in stipend payments, but the transition from stipend-based to government-owned phones could have a financial impact.

"As we went through to evaluate the business use for each position we have added approximately 25 additional users who are already using their cell phone to conduct business and the laws will require they be compensated for doing so," said York.

The additional users would increase the price by an estimated \$20,000, setting the county's projected payout at approximately \$144,000 annually, including nearly 200 users.

Despite their questions, Clayton and Jeffers voted to adopt the new policy. Commissioner Gordon Powell cast the lone vote against the measure.

The policy's standard procedure will establish ground rules not only for using county-issued cell phones but tablets and other mobile devices.

The policy is expected to take effect July 1. (Courier-Times, 4/20/19)

APR 2019 Editorial Questions Jeffers Opposition to STEM Center

We were surprised at Commissioner Ray Jeffers' opposition to a study that would consider the feasibility of establishing a STEM center on the campus of Piedmont Community College.

That facility, if it is eventually built, is estimated to cost about \$32 million. We can expect that number to climb over the next few years as inflation takes its toll.

But PCC president Pam Senegal and county manager Heidi York proposed a more common-sense approach when they agreed to propose the creation of a study that would consider, among other things, whether such a facility is necessary and where the money to build it might come from.

Jeffers' argument was that the county doesn't have \$32 million to build such a facility, but that if the county commissions a study of the idea that people will expect them to build it.

Actually, that's completely opposite of the truth. The people expect county leaders to make certain that dollars are spent wisely and that's exactly what this study would tell county leaders how to do.

It is possible that such a study would say such a facility isn't necessary because of the proximity of similar facilities in Danville and South Boston, Va. It may also say the idea is a great one and that the need is high,

but the funding will be hard to get and commissioners should turn to other sources outside the county for the money or give up on it altogether.

The very name of this study - a feasibility study - should tell anyone that the goal of the proposed study is to determine if this is a good idea.

Perhaps Jeffers believes it is not a good idea, even if the money were readily available. If so, we would encourage him to say so. He is, after all, entitled to his opinion.

And, perhaps, in the long run, that may be the opinion that takes the day. But before county commissioners go off on a dog hunt and throw \$32 million at a project because the county has a newfound focus on economic development, we would certainly prefer they get a second, unbiased opinion on whether that's a good idea. That's all the feasibility study is designed to do. Jeffers ought to appreciate the steady-as-she-goes approach as opposed to voting an idea up or down based on nothing more than the whims of the day. (Courier-Times, 4/20/19)

JUN 2019 At Loss On How to Avoid Property Tax Hike

The Person County board of commissioners combed through the proposed budget at Tuesday morning's budget work session looking for other approaches to establish priorities and funding for them and voicing their views on property taxes.

"There are a couple of ways we (can) go about this. We don't have to raise taxes at all if we prioritize some things that are already in the budget, that would take a little bit of studying, (but) that is one way of approaching it," said Chairman David Newell.

Commissioner Kyle Puryear stated his priorities, which was to maintain a property tax rate of 70 cents per \$100, and suggested looking at possible revenues coming into the county.

"I think we have a duty to our residents to be fiscally responsible," said Puryear.

Board members reviewed revenue projects to see if they could look at adjusting options.

Newell said the county will have to address school needs among its top priorities.

"I am going to make a statement that is probably going to offend some people... The commissioners are responsible for funding the public school system. When the legislature mandates that any capital funds have to be shared with the charter schools then our responsibility is going to start being diluted by whatever that amount turns out to be and it is my opinion that I think we ought to get ahead of that as much as we can to start to do something this year," said Newell.

Commissioner Gordon Powell said his priorities were education and economic development. He said board members heard what the public is saying about wanting a quality education without a tax increase.

"I think if we do our due diligence and do our job as commissioners we can do our job without a tax increase," Powell said.

Commissioner Jimmy Clayton agreed with Powell on funding education needs but he said the county wouldn't walk away without some type of tax increase because the cost for things have changed.

"You are not going to get through it without some tax increase if you do it that way. You have got to have it to fund it. We haven't done it in 12 years. If you are going to do it make it an adequate amount to cover to your (expenses)," said Clayton.

After hearing different approaches to what the board could do instead of increasing property taxes, commissioner Ray Jeffers was at a loss for where the money could come from.

"I think we would like to do without a tax increase but we have gone 12 years. I think we are one of the few who have been able to hold out for 12 years especially given some of the priorities that so many of you all have mentioned. I don't know where the money would come from," said Jeffers.

The next budget work session is slated for 9 a.m., June 11. (Courier-Times, 6/8/19)

JUN 2019 Higher Tax Hike Approved

Person County's Board of Commissioners voted Tuesday morning on adjustments to the proposed budget at their second work session.

In a 3-2 vote, commissioners approved a plan offered by vice chairman Ray Jeffers, spurning a competing proposal from commissioner Kyle Puryear.

Jeffers' proposal calls for adding a penny to the proposed 2-cent property tax rate, bringing it to three cents.

At the session, Jeffers proposed funding the budget proposed by county manager Heidi York, but he also suggested adding funds to a handful of projects.

Jeffers' proposal called for adding an additional \$250,000 to the Economic Development Commission's operating budget, \$25,000 for a YMCA study and implementing a salary study over a two-year period at a cost of \$363,471.50.

Jeffers also wants to cut funding for the Woodsdale Volunteer Fire Department by \$30,000 and lower fees from \$300 to \$100 to help county farmers pay for agricultural well permits.

Since there have been discussions about possible cuts to the Person County Health Department, he proposed that the county does a study of services offered by the health department.

While this study is underway, he proposed eliminating a Public Health Nurse Director I position and freezing the department's vacant positions to get answers to the commissioners' questions.

According to York, no money is attached to the health department study.

Before voting on Jeffers' proposal, some commissioners raised questions about why the Y board could not fund the study themselves and whether the community could financially support a YMCA.

Jeffers explained that if the county funds the study, everyone will know whether there is community support for the Y, and if there is not sufficient support, he would be willing to drop the idea.

Puryear and commissioner Gordon Powell voted against Jeffers' proposal.

Puryear's proposal looked at how the board could fund \$896,000 for education by keeping the property tax rate flat.

He called for a 1 percent reduction across the board for all county departments, saving a total of \$382,151 in the proposed budget.

Puryear also recommended having the health department fund \$400,000 out of the department's own funds, instead of the county spending \$400,000 out of its own money. That would mean a county appropriation of \$782,151. Puryear also sought to hold off on the salary study this year, believing that it was highly probable that a new revenue stream could come next year from a non-tax base source. His plan would also retain the current cell phone policy. The county would also have to hold off on implementing a countywide land use plan. To make up for lost revenue, Puryear recommended raising the fire tax by one penny.

All told, Puryear's plan would save the county \$1,020,741.

Not mentioned in his proposed budget was funding for economic development, a water and sewer fund and schools, but said he was "willing to look at using a fund balance distribution" for economic development and the schools will remain "fully funded as proposed by the county manager."
(Courier-Times, 6/12/19)

JUN 2019 Clash With Puryear on Social Media Over Budget and Tax Hike

As time winds down before a final vote on the first county budget in 12 years that would include a property tax increase, county commissioners are turning up the rhetoric on social media.

Earlier this week, Person County's Board of Commissioners voted on adjustments to the proposed budget at their second work session.

In a 3-2 vote, commissioners approved a plan offered by vice chairman Ray Jeffers that would increase the tax rate by three cents - a penny more than county manager Heidi York's proposed budget. In adopting that plan, commissioners spurned a competing proposal from commissioner Kyle Puryear.

Puryear defended his proposal Wednesday night in a Facebook post and encouraged the public to make its voice heard at the board's June 17 meeting, when the final budget is expected to be adopted.

"There is still time for your voice to be heard on Monday, June 17th at 9:00 a.m. at the County Office Building for the final vote," Puryear wrote. "I am very disappointed that three members of the Board of Commissioners did not seriously consider my budget proposal that included no property tax increase, fully funding our schools and volunteer fire departments as the County Manager requested and also only included a penny fire tax increase."

That post has garnered 86 comments including one from Jeffers who responded to a comment about the cost to taxpayers of Person Area Transportation System.

"Given the questions in reference to PATS and the misinformation shared. Here are the real numbers. The county receives a state grant to run PATs (of) which our share is 10 percent on Capital and 15 percent on administration," Jeffers said in his response.

Jeffers later defended his proposal in another Facebook post and encouraged the public to attend Monday's meeting.

"We have a meeting Monday at 9 a.m. at the County Office Building. In the budget, I have funded the study that the YMCA requires for the community so they can decide the viability of coming to Person County and what services could be offered. It is \$25,000 of a \$70 million budget. The naysayers are already starting on the Facebook page Person County Local. Go join the page, share your thoughts and come to the meeting on Monday. If you can't come, email your commissioners. Commissioners Gordon Powell and Kyle Puryear voted against the proposal," Jeffers wrote. (Courier-Times, 6/15/19)

JUN 2019 Three Cent Tax Hike

Person County commissioners approved a budget Monday that calls for the first increase in the property tax rate in 12 years.

But not before they continued their debate and gathered more comments from the public.

In a 3-2 vote, commissioners voted to approve a proposal from Commissioner Ray Jeffers that called for a three-cent property tax hike, a penny more than the budget county manager Heidi York recommended.

Jeffers' proposal called for funding the budget proposed by county manager Heidi York with added funding for a handful of projects, including an additional \$250,000 to the Economic Development Commission's operating budget, \$25,000 for a YMCA study and the implementation of a salary study over a two-year period at a cost of \$363,471.50.

The budget also cuts funding for the Woodsdale Volunteer Fire Department by \$30,000 and lowers fees from \$300 to \$100 to help county farmers pay for agricultural well permits.

The county will conduct a study of its health department personnel needs, but the budget trims a public health nursing positions and freezes the department's vacant positions.

Hoping to sway the outcome of Monday's vote at the last minute, the public packed the commissioners' meeting room to voice their concerns before the board voted.

During public comment, residents addressed issues that have been central to this year's budget debate, including property tax increases, a YMCA study and economic development funding.

"It is easy to raise taxes. I don't find it innovative. I find it lazy. I know it is a necessary evil but we have been doing well so far," said Rougemont resident Chris Weaver.

A resident in favor of raising taxes believed it will be a good investment in the health and welfare of the community.

"Look at where the good jobs and good schools are in our state. All of those places have higher taxes because they give better services - services that help everybody," said Person County resident James Haward.

Others recommended solutions to the board to address revenues and taxation levels in the county.

"Why can't you use sales tax to help offset some of these (taxes) on property owners," Person County resident Fred Fox asked.

A Timberlake resident against increasing property taxes questioned why the board didn't considered commissioner Kyle Puryear's budget proposal and spoke about concerns with funding a YMCA study.

"I think It was a shame this board did not consider Kyle Puryear's budget proposal and I think approving a YMCA study that will cost these taxpayers \$25,000 is a waste of money," Derrick Sims said. Sims was an unsuccessful candidate in the race for a seat on the county board of commissioners last year.

Residents advocating for the YMCA study, on the other hand, urged the vote for it.

"They need a YMCA. They need a place to go, a shelter, a safe haven, a place they can go after school, before school, during the summer... I hope you vote for this YMCA because it is needed in our county," said April Short.

In addition to the increased property tax, the newly adopted budget also raises the fire tax paid by property owners living outside the Roxboro city limits from one cent to 2.75 cents.

Jeffers was joined by Commissioner Jimmy Clayton and board chairman David Newell in voting for the budget. Puryear and Commissioner Gordon Powell voted against it.

The new budget takes effect July 1. (Courier-Times, 6/19/19)

AUG 2019 Nursing Position Reinstated

The Person County Board of Commissioners reinstated a nursing position that had been eliminated with the adoption of the 2019-20 fiscal year budget.

Commissioners also approved the unfreezing of two clinic nurse position and a community health technician position. As part of their approval, commissioners want a report to them when the positions are ready to be filled.

The motion, made by Vice Chairman Ray Jeffers, passed 3-2. Commissioners Kyle Puryear and Gordon Powell voted against the motion.

Person County Health Department Director Janet Clayton had requested that a public health nursing director I position be reinstated and a licensed practical nurse and processing assistant III be eliminated. Clayton also requested that all health department positions be unfrozen with the understanding that positions will be filled as needed with the approval of the county manager.

Clayton said the health department is going through a rebuild of its programs and services following a period of a high turnover but that would require the positions to be unfrozen and individuals trained to offer more services which would bring in more money.

Clayton said the department is having to forego \$500,000 in grants that it could otherwise receive because it isn't offering the services needed to receive them.

Jeffers expressed concern that the commissioners would be left out of the loop regarding the rebuild under Clayton's request.

County Manager Heidi York suggested that the Board of Health and commissioners be brought together and allow herself and Clayton to work together on the day to day operation of the department. York said commissioners would not need to be involved because Clayton already reports to the Board of Health who would be more engaged.

Chairman David Newell Sr. said his biggest concern was that people don't use the health department.

Newell suggested cross training employees to lower the number of new hires needed.

"We have to have some business logic to this," Newell said. "It is a business - you are the CEO of about a \$3.5 million business and we need to make sure that its run like one. Anything we can do to increase efficiency is something that we have to do."

Newell said the department has two options to achieve this: cross train and eliminate positions or offer more services to the county.

Puryear made an initial motion to approve Clayton's request, but commissioners adopted Jeffers' substitute motion.

Jeffers responded by asking if Puryear had all the information that the commissioners would need to make a decision.

”Do you have the answers?” Jeffers said. “Can you give them to me?”

Jeffers mentioned that the positions at the health department had been frozen to get a better idea of what services needed to be offered by the department. He also wanted to see the numbers regarding how many people are served by the department for its services.

Puryear responded by saying that the commissioners didn’t need to know those answers.

”I have complete confidence in the director of the Health Department,” Puryear said.

”How many people did we see in June?” Jeffers responded.

”I shouldn’t have to know that as a commissioner,” Puryear said.

Clayton said the department is referring patients to Person Family Medical and to Durham County.

According to York, the county’s home health and hospice services were sold last year because those services could make a profit elsewhere, however there is no market for the county’s other services.

York pointed out that the commissioners have to assess how they are serving the community.

”Right now we are encouraging young pregnant mothers to go to Durham to receive care and I don’t think that’s a good thing for our community,” York said. “I don’t feel like we are serving our community well by sending them to downtown Durham.”

York told The Courier-Times that she would like to see the health department become a high-quality, one-stop shop for its patients and members of the community.

York said that going back to the previous position will only delay the hiring and rebuild process.

Clayton said priorities are at heart the problem.

”It is a question of priorities: do you want to sub out services and require patients to go outside the county or not receive the care or end up at the emergency room for STDs or other things that could’ve been treated at the health department?” Clayton said. (Courier-Times, 8/24/19)

DEC 2019 Elected Chair of Commissioners

After 11 years on the Person County Board of Commissioners, former Vice Chairman Ray Jeffers was elected chairman of the board for the first time Monday night by a 3-2 margin. Former Chairman David Newell was selected to be vice chair by the same margin.

With County Attorney Ron Aycock presiding over the board, nominations were opened beginning with the chairmanship.

Newell nominated Jeffers and Commissioner Kyle Puryear nominated Gordon Powell.

Powell and Puryear voted for Powell while Newell, Jeffers and Jimmy Clayton voted for Jeffers.

For vice chairman, Clayton nominated Newell and Powell nominated Puryear.

The following vote ended similarly to the first with Jeffers, Newell and Clayton voting for Newell and Puryear and Powell for Puryear.

This year's vote saw a similar trend as last year's as Newell, a Republican, voted along with Democrats Jeffers and Clayton while Puryear and Powell, both Republicans, voted together.

Unlike last year's vote which saw public outbursts from members of the Person County Republican Party when Newell was elected chairman, there were no reactions from this year's crowd.

However, the Newell naysayers took their criticism online.

Chris Weaver, the administrator of the Facebook group Person County Local posted his criticisms there, saying Newell "showed his real colors" by voting for Jeffers and not Powell.

Weaver's post drew commentary from both sides of the issue with some agreeing that Newell had lied to his party to get elected before siding with Democrats and others saying that the only loyalty should be to one's community, not their political party.

On Sunday - the day before the the election - Weaver posed a question to Jeffers on the page asking if he would be voted chairman to which Jeffers said he didn't know, but he felt ready if he would be chosen.

Weaver then asked if he would be happy receiving three of the five votes and if Jeffers would take punitive actions against those who didn't vote for him.

In his response, Jeffers criticized the partisan focus that the question had taken.

"The chairman has one vote like the rest. Other counties don't make this a big deal as they rotate amongst the members," he wrote. "I am a Personian before a Dem or Repub. And truth be told rather middle of the road. I was born here and will likely die here. I'm glad to be able to serve my hometown and its residents in whatever capacity."

In his chairman's report to close the night, Jeffers thanked the board for the opportunity.

"I would just like to thank the board for this opportunity to serve as the chairman for the next year," he said. "We don't always agree on the road to get there, but I think we're all going in the right direction which is what's best for Person County and I look forward to taking that ride with you all this year and working with each and every one of you." (Courier-Times, 12/4/19)

2020

FEB 2020 Process to Fill Commission Seat

In a memo sent to the county commissioners Wednesday morning, Chairman Ray Jeffers outlined the process to fill the open seat left by the resignation of David Newell.

In the memo, Jeffers writes that he worked with County Manager Heidi York and County Attorney Ron Aycock to understand state laws that govern the replacement of elected officials.

According to the memo, the replacement is to be appointed by the current board to serve until after the November general election. If the board does not fill the vacancy within 60 days, the Person County Clerk of Court will fill it.

The new member must be of the same political party as the person they are replacing. In this case, Newell's replacement must also be a Republican. The board of commissioners is required to consult with the county executive committee of the party before filling a vacancy, but neither the board nor the Clerk of Court is bound by the party's recommendation.

Because Newell was serving a four-year term and the vacancy occurred more than 60 days before the general election for county commissioner, a replacement will be elected at the November general election. The county executive committee of each party will make a nomination for the election. The elected candidate will serve until the end of the term in December 2022.

Jeffers' memo closes by stating that the process will be discussed at the board's next meeting, which is slated for 9 a.m., Tuesday, Feb. 18. After that meeting, Jeffers will send official notice to the Person County Republican Party requesting its recommendation to be considered by the board at its March 9 meeting. (Courier-Times, 2/8/20)

FEB 2020 County Resolution On 2nd Amendment Rights Approved

The Person County Board of Commissioners approved a resolution declaring the county a "Constitutional Rights Protected County for Second Amendment rights" at its meeting Tuesday morning.

The matter was not initially on the commissioners' agenda, but Chairman Ray Jeffers made a motion to add the item, which passed unanimously.

During the meeting's informal comment period, Person County Republican Party Chairman Chris Weaver presented the commissioners with a draft resolution.

Weaver said he would like to see more action in the county's resolution stating what the county will not do if the "state should lose its mind" and more language on red flag laws.

"Its very disconcerting for a lot of people in the state who have seen what has happened up in Virginia and it's nice to see the legislature up there be rebuffed a little bit and we would like to go ahead and join other

counties in sending the signal to our legislature that we are going to protect our constitutional liberties and rights as much as we possibly can,” Weaver said.

When the board reached the issue, Jeffers read his proposed resolution in its entirety and asked County Attorney Ron Aycock to explain the differences in the two proposed resolutions.

Aycock said the differences in the two resolutions are “fairly minimal, but probably substantial.”

Aycock said the Republican Party’s resolution includes a clause stating that the county will oppose any efforts by any entity to restrict citizens’ Second Amendment rights that is not included in the county’s proposal.

Aycock said the “whereas” clauses in the resolution only state opinion and have no legal, enforceable effect and that the “resolved” clauses are intended to be action-oriented.

Both resolutions include a clause that reads: “Now, therefore, be it resolved by the Board of Commissioners of Person County, that acting within its powers, duties and responsibilities, the board shall respect, protect and defend the Second Amendment rights of the citizens of Person County and the board will oppose, within the limits of the Constitutions of the United States and the State of North Carolina, any efforts to unconstitutionally restrict such rights, and to use such constitutional means at its disposal to protect the rights of its citizens to keep and bear arms.”

The Republican Party’s resolution also includes a statement that the county government “will not authorize or appropriate government funds, resources, employees, agencies, contractors, buildings or offices for the purpose of enforcing or assisting in gun confiscation or other restrictions that infringe on the right to keep and bear arms by law-abiding citizens as expressed in the Second Amendment to the United States constitution.”

Aycock explained that the Supreme Court’s decision in *District of Columbia v. Heller* grants the right to bear arms outside of serving in a militia, but it’s not an absolute right.

”This last paragraph in the [Republican Party’s] “resolved” may tend to try to authorize the county to do things which the Constitution and Supreme Court’s decision would not authorize you to do,” he said.

Weaver said the final paragraph in the resolution he presented mirrors resolutions passed in other counties and that it says the county will not assist the state in enforcing gun control laws.

Commissioner Jimmy Clayton said the resolution can be passed, but the county will remain under the state’s power.

Commissioner Gordon Powell said the resolution is an opportunity to let everyone know the county’s stance, despite its position under the state.

Weaver said his resolution follows verbatim the one passed in Surry County, which has been used as a model throughout the state.

Aycock said the county's model is "pretty much identical" to one passed in Catawba County that was worded to be sure the county only does what it is authorized to do.

Asked if the county could add the final paragraph from the GOP resolution, Aycock said it's within the commissioners' power to do so, but the wording of the "resolved" clause was "problematic" because it may say the county will do things it cannot do.

Jeffers made a motion to adopt the county's resolution. Commissioner Kyle Puryear made a substitute motion to adopt the Republican Party's resolution.

Powell noted that the final paragraph would be a good addition. Clayton said it was legally problematic.

"I think neither one of them are worth the paper they're written on, we're just stating a matter of record here where we stand as the Person County government," Jeffers said. "I would hope that we could pass something today. I do feel as the attorney who we pay to give us legal advice to not add something in the resolution that we do not have authority over."

Puryear's motion failed 1-3 and the county's resolution was adopted. (Courier-Times, 2/22/20)

JUN 2020 One Cent Tax Reduction

The Person County Board of Commissioners approved a budget for the next fiscal year at its meeting Monday morning that features a one-cent property tax reduction to 72 cents per \$100 in valuation.

The commissioners approved the budget by a 4-1 vote with commissioner Jimmy Clayton voting in opposition.

Commissioner Kyle Puryear initially made the motion for approval.

The average home and property worth \$116,000 will save \$11.60. Next year that home will pay \$835.20 in property taxes, down from \$846.80 in the current fiscal year.

During the commissioners' discussion of the motion, Clayton said he thinks the county should maintain the current tax rate of 73 cents per \$100 in property valuation.

"I have a problem with us taking a cent out of the budget at this point in time with the things that we've got going on here," he said. "We've got a pandemic and the cyber incident and the county is struggling with that. I didn't feel like we were adequately funding the EDC at their request at the last hearing that we had. The fire departments dropped their ISO rating - I would say probably the average homeowner that's got a pretty good home is going to get a \$30 tax reduction, but they're getting probably a \$300 insurance reduction, so we need to be supporting that. We've got this software or malware, whatever you want to call it, problem. The schools don't seem to be fussing with us this year, but they're coming back and we don't know where we're going to be when they do that."

The one-cent reduction will eliminate \$450,418 from the county's fiscal year revenue.

Clayton said the reduction is a problem.

”I don’t have a real problem with this budget other than the fact that I think you’re shooting yourself in the foot taking almost a half-a-million dollars away from the county’s use at a time like this,” he said. “In normal times you probably could’ve got away with this fine because you’d have sales tax and other things that would make up enough of it, but you’ve got a reduction in that and other reductions in the budget.”

Clayton made a substitute motion to maintain the county’s tax rate, but that vote failed 3-2. Board chair Ray Jeffers voted with Clayton.

After that motion failed, the board returned to the original motion, which passed 4-1. (Courier-Times, 6/18/20)

JUL 2020 Confederate Statues To Stay (Jeffers Votes to Move)

The statue honoring Person County’s Confederate veterans and the marker beside it will remain on the Person County Courthouse grounds at least for a little while longer.

Amid concerns about using county funds to move the two monuments, the commissioners voted to table the decision until non-county funds are raised to pay for the removal.

County Manager Heidi York said the county has received two estimates for removal. A local estimate and one from a contractor in Raleigh both came out to around \$20,000, she said.

Chairman Ray Jeffers made a motion to relocate the two Confederate monuments to the Veterans Park with the cost to be paid through the county’s Fund Balance.

Commissioner Kyle Puryear said he had concerns about using county funds on the project and made a substitute motion to table the discussion until non-county funds are presented to be used for the removal.

The substitute motion was voted on first and passed by a 3-2 vote.

The commissioners voted along party lines: Republican commissioners Puryear, Vice Chair Gordon Powell and Derrick Sims voted in favor of tabling the request. Democrats Jeffers and Jimmy Clayton voted against the substitute motion.

When asked by The Courier-Times about his concerns, Puryear did not elaborate beyond repeating the language of his substitute motion.

During the meeting’s informal comments period, seven individuals spoke on the issue.

John Seepe, Ray Winstead, Linda Ford and candidate for county commissioner Charlie Palmer spoke against removing the statue.

Personians Against Injustices and Racisms President April Short, Secretary Shaina Outlaw, and Sergeant at Arms Chance Sanford spoke in favor of moving the monuments to the Person County Veterans Park located on South Morgan Street beside the Person County Office Building.

During her informal comment, Outlaw said she went to speak with people who were “guarding” the statues one night in an attempt to facilitate conversation.

She said in those discussions, others had agreed that moving the monuments would be better than destroying them.

When she returned later in the night to continue her conversations, Outlaw said she was threatened.

”I came back and once again had good conversations and in the midst of learning and communication, a black car circled us five times,” she said. “An elder gentleman said something out of the window and I couldn’t hear so I went a little closer. At that point, he pointed an AR-15 at me and said ‘I suggest you not touch those statues.’”

County Attorney Ron Aycock explained North Carolina General Statute 100-2.1 on the protection of monuments, memorials and works of art.

”That law prohibits the removal of such objects of remembrance, except under certain circumstances,” Aycock said. “Those circumstances includes the need to protect the object or memorial and the safety of the public. We have seen several factions removing memorials close to us. Granville County and Franklin County have had such objects removed. I think it is important to realize the purpose needs to be to protect the monument from destruction or damage and to protect the public. You have heard discussion here from the public. Concerns expressed about the monuments themselves defaced or damaged. You have heard discussion about confrontations on the courthouse grounds. Those two concerns are the concerns that this board must legally concern itself with.”

Aycock said there are specific limitations on where such a monument may be moved.

The statute states: “An object of remembrance that is permanently relocated shall be relocated to a site of similar prominence, honor, visibility, availability, and access that are within the boundaries of the jurisdiction from which it was relocated. An object of remembrance may not be relocated to a museum, cemetery, or mausoleum unless it was originally placed at such a location.”

Aycock said moving the monuments to the Veterans Park would be compliant with the statute.

Jeffers said he put the item on the meeting agenda after receiving a petition from PAIR and a letter from Avie Lester Sr., president of the Person County Branch of the NAACP.

Jeffers said the conversations he has been a part of have focused on preventing damage to the statue and marker.

”No one that I spoke with said ‘let’s relocate it, let’s move it or destroy it’ or anything like that,” he said. “Everyone I talked to, the conversation was around prevention. We did not want to see what we see on the

news in these other areas around our state. I was just in Alamance County this week and there was a live showing of what was there in Graham. We definitely don't want to see what we're seeing in these other states. So we wanted to be proactive and to see if we could find a fit for the memorials. Again, the Veterans Council voted unanimously. They let me know that to bring it back to this board and today I'd like to see us support relocating it to the Veterans Park and funding it from our Fund Balance."

When asked for their input, all of the other commissioners declined to comment except Puryear who asked the cost of removal.

On behalf of the Person County Veterans Council, Teresa Burch said the council would accept the statues.

"We did meet at the park as we had seen what's going on and we don't want blood spilled on Main Street because of monuments," she said. "We do feel like there is some historical value for these monuments and we don't think that should be destroyed.... We do have the room and we'll take any and all of them. We won't pay for the relocation, but we will maintain and house them... Before we see anything destroyed and Person County being ripped in two, we would rather see those monuments relocated to the Veterans Park than to see some of the mess that's going on around the nation." (Courier-Times, 7/13/20)

JUL 2020 Confederate Statues to Move to Veterans Park

A day after tabling discussion on moving the two Confederate monuments on the courthouse grounds, the Person County Board of Commissioners unanimously voted to move the monuments to the county's Veterans Park at a special called meeting Tuesday.

The decision comes after an anonymous source pledged to donate \$20,000 to move the statue and marker, matching the two estimates the county received.

The board met in a special session Tuesday called by the three board Republicans.

Vice Chairman Gordon Powell moved to revisit the tabled item and made the motion to adopt the resolution authorizing moving the monuments. The board voted unanimously in favor of the resolution.

At their regularly scheduled meeting Monday, the commissioners voted to table the discussion to move the monuments amid concerns about using county funds for the project.

The commissioners voted 3-2 to table the discussion.

The commissioners voted along party lines: Republican commissioners Kyle Puryear, Vice Chair Gordon Powell and Derrick Sims voted in favor of tabling the request. Democrats Jimmy Clayton and Chairman Ray Jeffers voted against the substitute motion.

At that meeting, County Attorney Ron Aycock said moving the monuments to the Veterans Park complies with North Carolina General Statute § 100-2.1.

Under the statute, objects of remembrance that are permanently relocated must be moved to a site of similar prominence, honor, visibility, availability and access.

The language of the statute also prohibited the monuments from being moved to a location like the Person County Museum of History because “an object of remembrance may not be relocated to a museum, cemetery, or mausoleum unless it was originally placed at such a location.”

Monday’s meeting

During Monday’s informal comments period, seven individuals spoke on the issue.

John Seepe, Ray Winstead, Linda Ford and candidate for county commissioner Charlie Palmer spoke against removing the statue.

Personians Against Injustices and Racism President April Short, Secretary Shaina Outlaw, and Sergeant at Arms Chance Sanford spoke in favor of moving the monuments to the Person County Veterans Park, located on South Morgan Street beside the Person County Office Building.

During her informal comment, Outlaw said she went to speak with people who were “guarding” the statues recently in an attempt to facilitate conversation.

She said in those discussions, others had agreed that moving the monuments would be better than destroying them.

When she returned later in the night to continue her conversations, Outlaw said she was threatened.

”I came back and once again had good conversations and in the midst of learning and communication, a black car circled us five times,” she said. “An elder gentleman said something out of the window and I couldn’t hear so I went a little closer. At that point, he pointed an AR-15 at me and said ‘I suggest you not touch those statues.’”

Aycock explained that there are only certain circumstances that allow memorials to be moved under G.S. § 100-2.1.

”Those circumstances includes the need to protect the object or memorial and the safety of the public. We have seen several factions removing memorials close to us. Granville County and Franklin County have had such objects removed. I think it is important to realize the purpose needs to be to protect the monument from destruction or damage and to protect the public. You have heard discussion here, from the public, concerns expressed about the monuments themselves defaced or damaged. You have heard discussion about confrontations on the courthouse grounds. Those two concerns are the concerns that this board must legally concern itself with.”

Jeffers said he put the item on the meeting agenda after receiving a petition from PAIR and a letter from Avie Lester Sr., president of the Person County branch of the NAACP.

Jeffers said the conversations he has been a part of have focused on preventing damage to the statue and marker.

"No one that I spoke with said 'let's relocate it, let's move it or destroy it' or anything like that," he said. "Everyone I talked to, the conversation was around prevention. We did not want to see what we see on the news in these other areas around our state. I was just in Alamance County this week and there was a live showing of what was there in Graham. We definitely don't want to see what we're seeing in these other states. So we wanted to be proactive and to see if we could find a fit for the memorials. Again, the Veterans Council voted unanimously. They let me know that to bring it back to this board and today I'd like to see us support relocating it to the Veterans Park and funding it from our Fund Balance."

When Jeffers asked the other commissioners for their input Monday, all others declined to comment except Puryear, who asked the cost of moving the monuments.

On behalf of the Person County Veterans Council, Teresa Burch said the council would accept all eight monuments on courthouse grounds.

"We did meet at the park as we had seen what's going on and we don't want blood spilled on Main Street because of monuments," she said. "We do feel like there is some historical value for these monuments and we don't think that should be destroyed... We do have the room and we'll take any and all of them. We won't pay for the relocation, but we will maintain and house them... Before we see anything destroyed and Person County being ripped in two, we would rather see those monuments relocated to the Veterans Park than to see some of the mess that's going on around the nation. We'd be happy to take all eight of them - we have the room over there for them. But because of what we're seeing, if we need to take the two Confederate monuments, we most certainly would be happy to do so."

However, due to restrictions in the statute, as the Confederate monuments are the only ones that require measures to protect them, the other six monuments on the courthouse grounds cannot legally be moved to the Veterans Park.

Protesters gathered at the monument and protested the commissioners' decision Monday afternoon.

They were met by some counter protesters who came in to be sure they did not damage the statue, but altercations remained verbal.

Both parties remained at the monument into Monday night.

Reaction to the vote

In a Tuesday night Facebook post, PAIR called the vote a "major win."

"A huge thank you to the community for helping PAIR reach our goal of having the statues relocated to the Veterans Park," the post reads. "We appreciate your continued support through this process."

Some were not satisfied with the commissioners' decision.

Linda Ford, who spoke against moving the statue Monday, said she would like to see the written approval of the North Carolina Historical Commission.

"I would like to see, in writing, the documentation from the North Carolina Historical Commission allowing them to move it," she said.

However, as the statue is not owned by the State of North Carolina, it does not require the approval of the state Historical Commission.

A 2017 article by Adam Lovelady of the University of North Carolina School of Government explains the conundrum.

"In addition to the limitations described above, an object owned by the State cannot be removed, relocated or altered without approval from the North Carolina Historical Commission," he writes. "This provision of G.S. § 100-2.1(a) specifically applies to "a monument, memorial, or work of art owned by the State." If a monument is owned by a city, county, or other political subdivision of the State with corporate powers to own property-or if a monument is privately owned and placed on public property-then there is no requirement to seek approval from the North Carolina Historical Commission." (Courier-Times, 7/16/20)

AUG 2020 Mask Mandate At Meetings

In a 4-1 vote, the Person County Board of Commissioners moved to require face masks to be worn at the body's meetings.

Commissioner Kyle Puryear voted against the motion.

Chairman Ray Jeffers said he put the item on the agenda amid questions from other commissioners about what measures could be taken by the board.

County Manager Heidi York said county employees are currently recommended to wear a mask if they are unable to keep six feet of distance between themselves and their coworkers or customers. She also said all of the health department's staff will be wearing masks as they begin reopening clinics in the coming weeks.

Commissioner Derrick Sims, the Environmental, Health, and Safety Manager for U.S. Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers, said he checks employee symptoms every day and hands out masks.

Sims noted that there are some medical restrictions that mean not everyone can wear a mask and said there would be no way to confirm those claims, but did express his support for the mask requirement.

Jeffers said he would like to go as far as requiring masks at the meetings and for county employees who cannot be socially distant.

"I think we need to lead somewhat by example here with the rest of the departments," he said.

Puryear said he would like to hear from the county's department heads as they would be the ones who would enforce the requirement. The commissioners decided that York could discuss such a requirement separately with the department heads.

The commissioners agreed that such a requirement will be hard to enforce.

"It's the honor system right?" Jeffers said. "We can't ask and see their medical file, but we just hope that they would understand where we're coming from and we have to accept that. I don't think we're going to turn anyone away if they say they have a medical issue."

The commissioners are currently holding all of their meetings until further notice in the auditorium at the Person County Office Building to allow for proper social distancing. Hand sanitizer stations have been placed at each entrance to the room. (Courier-Times, 8/6/20)

SEP 2020 Trash Burning Ordinance Fails

The Person County Board of Commissioners failed to pass a new open burning ordinance by a split 3-2 vote at its regularly-scheduled meeting Monday morning.

The ordinance was presented to the commissioners by Keith Duncan, the county's new fire marshal.

In his presentation, Duncan said the ordinance would give him, and the Person County Sheriff's Office, the ability to enforce the state's open burning regulations created in the North Carolina Administrative Codes.

According to the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, the open burning rule was adopted in 1971, making it one of the oldest air regulations in the state.

"What we're asking is nothing new," Duncan said. "It only gives us a chance to educate the public and enforce the code, if necessary. It will be helpful for the wellbeing and protection of all the residents here in Person County."

Chairman Ray Jeffers said the item often comes up at meetings of the volunteer fire chiefs of the county.

"I will say that this has come up at the volunteer chiefs association meetings for several years now - especially from our forestry department here in the county because they do witness a lot of illegal burnings," Jeffers said. "But until we had the fire marshal, there was no one who could enforce those state laws that were already on the books."

Under that state law, it is illegal to burn household trash, lumber or any other synthetic materials.

It is legal and no permit is required to openly burn leaves, logs, stumps, tree branches and yard trimmings if they originated on the property, the burning does not create a nuisance and material is not burned when the North Carolina Forest Service has banned burning in the area. Under the law, smoke created from the burn is not considered a nuisance.

Under the proposed ordinance, large bonfires would require a permit from the fire marshal, campfires could not be conducted within 25 feet of a structure or combustible material and burning would be prohibited within 50 feet from any structure except in approved containers if they remain under a certain size.

The ordinance would require residents to get a permit from the N.C. Forest Service if their fire would be within 500 feet of woodlands and would require all allowed open burnings to be supervised by an adult until extinguished.

Burning weeds, brush and crop stubble on agricultural land would be allowed.

The permit would not regulate outdoor grilling or cooking or burning for the purpose of generating heat in a stove, furnace or fireplace.

The first violation would result in a warning citation and a one-year probationary period. The second violation would result a \$100 fine. The third and further violations would result in a \$300 fine.

Duncan said it would not be the intent to go out looking for such violations.

"It is not our intent to go out to residents and enforce any fines unless it is absolutely necessary," he said. "My intent is to educate the public."

He said he would create informational brochures to give out when responding to open burn complaints.

"It has made a difference in the two counties I have come from before - especially when it came to property loss and damage. It really helps."

Duncan said another motive is to reduce the health risks that come with burning trash.

When asked, Duncan could not provide the number of open burning complaints received in the county in the past year.

Commissioner Kyle Puryear said he had not received any related complaints.

"Sometimes we do stuff and we have the best intentions and sometimes it turns out to be red tape and it backfires in our face," he said. "That's why I'm bringing it up. Is this absolutely necessary at this time?"

Jeffers said the ordinance would limit the times the county's volunteer fire departments have to respond to fire calls involving open burns.

"I don't think we've got a lot of neighbors calling in saying 'my neighbor is burning something they shouldn't,'" he said. "I think it's the fact that we're expending resources through our volunteer fire departments and tying up trucks to go out to calls that possibly could have been prevented if those people had been educated about what they should and should not be burning."

When asked about permitting, Duncan said most burn permits are issued by the state forest service, but if residents have specific questions about what is permitted, they can call the fire marshal's office and they will figure out what needs to be done.

Commissioner Jimmy Clayton made a motion to adopt the ordinance.

The subsequent vote failed by a 3-2 margin.

The commissioners voted along party lines with Clayton and Jeffers, both Democrats, voting in favor of the ordinance.

Board Republicans Puryear, Derrick Sims and board Vice Chairman Gordon Powell voted against the motion. (Courier-Times, 9/25/20)

OCT 2020 Votes Against Bradsher for EDC Seat

After an interview period Monday night, the Person Board of County Commissioners selected Elizabeth Bradsher to fill an open seat on the county's Economic Development Commission.

With a 3-2 vote, the commissioners selected Bradsher to fill the seat of Terry Nealy.

Bradsher, who also serves in a communications role with the county's Republican Party, split the commissioners vote by party lines with Republicans Derrick Sims, Kyle Puryear and board Vice Chair Gordon Powell voting in favor of her appointment and Democrats Jimmy Clayton and Chairman **Ray Jeffers** voting against.

The commissioners appointed Bradsher over Person Memorial Hospital CEO David Ziolkowski and Furniture Mart owner Larry Cole.

In a Wednesday, Sept. 30 Facebook post, the Person County Republican Party said that the party's executive board had endorsed Bradsher for the open voting seat.

During the interview period, Bradsher said the county is at a crossroads and needs to look at creative ways to bring in businesses.

She said she believes the Person County Mega Park is one of the best sites in the country, but said she is aware there are unanswered inquiries from businesses about locating there.

She said she has a strong business and economic development background that includes presenting developmental strategies on Capitol Hill, lobbying for increased funding for Richmond schools and roads and developing the economy in southern Fairfax County, Va.

"I want to work with the people of Person County for the strategic changes needed and to do so in a productive, collaborative manner to seek positive growth which will provide jobs for county residents," she said.

When asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the county, Bradsher said the county's location could allow it to become regionally involved with Research Triangle Park and southern Virginia.

She also said she has seen a lack of transparency about what the EDC is doing and the board has not been working in the best way for the Mega Park and the board needs to look at itself to become more efficient with the possibility of reporting directly to the commissioners.

When asked about her fit into the board, Bradsher said she would come in as a team player and would bring in an ability to listen and learn from others. She said she would come in and listen before advocating for any changes to the board.

Following the interview period, Chairman Ray Jeffers made a motion to appoint Cole, but a substitute motion to appoint Bradsher passed by the 3-2 margin.

Derrick Sims, a veteran of the EDC and a Republican, made the motion, but told The Courier-Times that Bradsher's role with the party did not factor into his decision.

Sims said Bradsher would bring a lot of experience to the board.

"She wants to go out and pursue industry – that was one of the big things when I listened to her talk today," he said. "She knows what she wants to do and I think she'll work together with this board very well."

Sims said he believes Bradsher will bring connections from her past experiences in Virginia and establish more connections once she is in place with the EDC while also bringing an outsider's perspective to the board. (Courier-Times, 10/9/20)

OCT 2020 Running For Re-Election

The seven candidates for the four available Person County Board of Commissioner seats were gracious enough to answer a variety of questions about their public service and ways they would help improve the community.

Those running for four-year terms include incumbents Ray Jeffers, Gordon Powell and Derrick Sims along with Cindy Martin and Charlie Palmer. Sims was appointed to the Board of Commissioners after the resignation of David Newell in February.

Sims will be running for one of the three four-year terms seats.

P.J. Gentry and Kenneth Perry are vying to win Newell's former seat and complete the remaining two years on the four-year term.

Why are you among the best candidates to be selected for the Person County Board of Commissioners?

Palmer: My life has been centered here in Roxboro and Person County professionally and personally since birth. I understand we need change in this county so that we can provide career choices for our youth and for all residences. We need vitality in the county, the vitality that was here years ago. To regain this, we

need effective changes that will provide business growth, smart residential growth and provide increased dollars for education and county technology needs.

Jeffers: What makes me the best candidate is my experience and commitment to all of Person County. If re-elected I will be the second in seniority on the board. That institutional knowledge I believe will be needed as we guide Person County's future. A future that we know now will be difficult with the announcement of possible closures of our Duke Energy plants. I understand the need for responsible growth to attract jobs and families to the county while maintaining our small-town feel and preservation of our agricultural heritage.

Martin: As a Person County native, I have an absolute passion to watch this county thrive and flourish. I love Person County, and I want to make it a place that our children look forward to staying and raising their own families. I believe in my heart that we can come together as a community to make this county something amazing, and I know that I can absolutely facilitate conversations and ideas to work toward that goal. I believe wholeheartedly in the power of conversation and hearing what every individual has to say. I have spent most of my life working with people of all backgrounds and learning to see all perspectives. I want to hear the views and desires of all people in this county. I am not a voice for a party line. I am a voice for the people.

Gentry: I know that we cannot have a thriving community without county prosperity which translates into family prosperity and job growth. With over 40 years of business ownership experience in real estate, construction and budget development and analysis I believe I can help Person County move forward. I have had the privilege of living across this great country as well as Europe. Several years ago, our family decided to move back to Person County, where my husband is from, to call this county home. I have benefited from seeing how other communities have developed economic growth strategies, restoring pride and prosperity back into their communities. These strategies are important to Person County for reasons of economic growth and stability. It is one of my top priorities should be elected as Commissioner.

Sims: Person County is my home and I care deeply about its future. During the past 15+ years I have served on numerous boards in the County and understand the importance of community, education, safety and business. In so doing I believe I have gained an understanding of the needs in Person County and believe my seasoned and strong leadership skills will help steer Person County and our residents in a positive direction for the future.

Powell: First, as Commissioner, I work for the people. I have no other political or personal aspirations beyond Person County and improved life conditions for all. I believe I am among the best candidates for the Commission Board based on being a life-long resident, active community member and dedicated to serving others. I always strive to be involved in the community with an attitude of concern for others and I will continue to serve our citizens with respect, honor and dignity.

Perry: For the Unexpired Term for Person County Commissioner, the Person County Democratic Party nominated me as their candidate and as a life-long resident of Person County I humbly accepted.

What would be your primary focus and how would you go about accomplishing that?

Palmer: My primary focus to is to regain business growth in the county. This includes finalizing the Mega-site to operating status and seeking aggressive but appropriate business development from major corporations. In addition, my focus will include working on commonalities with the City to create positive business growth on Main Street and thus revitalize the entire historic downtown area of Roxboro. The County and City must work together and seek agreement on this important matter as it is not only important for City residents but County residents as well.

Jeffers: My focus will be on Economic Development, increased broadband access, and working to improve our aging school buildings. Concerning Economic Development, I think we are on the right path. We have placed business persons on the ED board that have experience in creating jobs first hand. Our ED director is a Personian and invested in our community. Now we need to be willing to invest in our team to provide the assistance needed to get companies to look at Person County. We need to invest in move-in ready sites where companies can visually see the opportunities here and be up in running in a matter of months.

I will continue to advocate at the state and national level as a member of the N.C. Association of County Commissioners and the National Association of Counties Board of Directors for more local control in investing in Broadband infrastructure. As a current member of the board, I have supported the county's efforts in laying fiber throughout the county and building four communication towers to improve access in the county. If re-elected I will continue to support all efforts in increasing our access throughout the county.

I am committed to working with the Board of Education as we work toward a solution to solve our school facility needs. Our schools are aging and were not built to last 70 years. Our technology needs, ADA requirements, and security needs are not the same as in 1950. We must figure a way to provide for our students so they have the same opportunities to learn in an environment conducive to learning.

Martin: I have three main areas that I believe need immediate attention - reliable internet services, mental health and specialized services, and bringing in job opportunities that can keep our Duke Employees here and our tax revenue comparable when the local plants close.

My first focus would be to address mental health and special needs, working with providers that have successful businesses in Durham and other areas to evaluate what it would take for them to come to Person County and provide the numbers of those needing services to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship. ABA nonprofit foundation outreach would also take place to provide families a local group of providers to serve them.

I have done a great deal of research, and I am willing and ready to do the leg work to ensure our citizens get the services they need. We have got to have our elected officials on the ground ready and willing to do the work.

Gentry: I believe it is important to educate one's self on current conditions of the county's organizational structure and budget. Additionally, it is important to listen to all personnel and work together to devise plans to maximize the use of tax dollars, whether it is in reductions and/or joint cooperation with the City of Roxboro. We need to look for the best tactical approaches to keep the county government lean and efficient but also effective for all residents.

Sims: Economic Development is my primary focus. We need jobs in Person County for purposes of county economic health and prosperity for our residents. I believe that we should not only support the Mega-park, but we should also look at some smaller sites in the county and investigate building certain sized spec buildings to attract small to mid-sized manufacturing companies into Person County. I will work with the EDC Board, its Director and the other Commissioners to improve our county's economic future.

Powell: I believe economic development and education are key to Person County's future. My focus will be to continue securing new jobs through support of existing business and industry with an increased attention on new business and industry. I was lead Commissioner in securing Polywood Industries and bring over 300 jobs to Person County; we must have more of the same.

Perry: My focus would be implementing my campaign platform: 1-Taking care of our very young and elderly. 2-Education. 3-Economic Development and Entrepreneurship. 4-Fiscal Responsibility. I will work with all aspects of Person County's community to accomplish my campaign platform.

Do you think that enough progress has been made with the Megapark and the EDC, in general?

Palmer: No, I do not think enough progress has been made on the Mega-site. I believe current leadership has let the residents down on this project and has caused undo delay.

Jeffers: I think the mega-park has been a slow process, but well worth it. The potential of this site in Person County for our workforce is astronomical. It won't happen overnight but we are already being paid attention to by site selectors across the country. Doing our due diligence now to prepare a site that will be ready when a company calls is very important and I'm supportive of the project.

Martin: I am a firm believer that growth in Person County is necessary and imperative. I am pleased with the Megapark addition to our county, the resources it has available and potential to draw in great business opportunities. I do feel there is still more work to do and that we need as many feet on the ground, not only with the Megapark promotions, but also the Economic Development Committee.

Person County has several invested, talented, and trained citizens who are willing to volunteer their time and efforts to help this community grow. With proper guidance and leadership, these volunteers and county officials could have a huge impact in speeding up growth and attraction of new businesses.

We are in a vital time for this to happen with the upcoming closures of Duke Power plants. We need to ensure those families employed or contracted by the plants stay in Person County and thrive here.

Gentry: I think many people have worked diligently to get the Mega Park to where it is currently, but so much more needs to be done. This Mega Park is one of 20 in the entire world, we have a gem and we need to make good use of the investment we already have made in it. The Mega Park is our future, we must promote this county asset. It will assist with future jobs, maintain our current low residential tax base and assist to fund public education needs and certain services within the county.

Sims: Considering our funding, the EDC has done a good job with the progress on the Megapark. We still need a sewer line and pump station to serve the Megapark and should continue looking for grants that may help with this project. The marketing and promotion of this Megapark remains very important. We must do all we can to partner with others, if so needed, within the state for purposes of promotion and interest of the site.

Powell: We shouldn't say enough progress has been made on the Megapark until its objective has been realized, that is, securement of a large or several small industries for the site. The site continues to become more attractive to clients with the addition of a direct water supply from the City of Roxboro, fiber optic cable, engineering and design has been completed and most recently the site was approved by the Army Corps of Engineers. Efforts must continue to obtain sewer service to the site through state and federal grants, partnerships and private investments.

Perry: When every acre of Person County's Mega-Park is occupied by a business, then we can work on expanding the mega-park because economic development and entrepreneurship always keeps moving forward.

What part of county government would receive more attention from you if you were elected?

Palmer: My primary focus in county government will be seeking accountability in all departments. I want to see organizational changes that will create better efficiencies and increase the effectiveness of our county government. Fiscal responsibility is most important.

Jeffers: If re-elected I will continue the service I have for 12 years giving my all to all areas of county government. There is no particular area I will focus on more because all the services we provide to our citizens are important. However public safety is our chief responsibility as commissioners. I am committed to working with our Sheriff and first responders to ensure Person County stays a safe place to live and work.

Martin: If I were elected, there would be a great deal of attention given to education, social services, and health and human services. We must ensure that our students and educators have the resources and the funding they need. As a former educator, I know firsthand how many services are lacking and the support needed for our students and school staff.

We must provide support systems for our social workers and make this a place that not only brings in the best and most knowledgeable employees but provides them with an environment that makes them stay for the longevity of their career. Consistency is key to providing children and families in our social service system the best care possible. Our health and human services should be able to expand, providing more mental health services and resources to the community.

Gentry: All areas of government need attention. However, without economic growth and stability we won't have the financial capability to maintain current county budgets and other expenses. To date the county government is already the largest employer in the county. This is not sustainable. We need leaders that can make difficult decisions as well as collaborative decisions that will benefit the county and its residents. Our county's future depends on elected leaders that can lead with transparency.

Sims: If elected there are two key areas which I believe will support this county for its future: Economic Development, Improving Fiber Optics in Person County.

Powell: As Commissioner, I will continue to protect the tax payer's money through fiscal management, careful budgeting and careful placement of funds for best results. Secondly, broad band continues to be a major need shortcoming in the County. The lack of county wide connectivity has impacted our schools as well as business and industry.

Broadband is extremely important for economic growth. Without adequate broadband, business and industry prospects simply look elsewhere. I will continue to support partnering with the City of Roxboro to improve infrastructure which will enhance business, industrial and housing growth.

Thirdly, I will continue support of public safety in Person County. Our Sheriff, EMS, 911, Animal Services, Volunteer Fire Departments and Roxboro Fire Department deserve our support in making our county a safe place to live, work and raise children.

Perry: Every part of Person County's government and our community would receive my equal attention to implement my campaign platform.

What has been your proudest moment in serving the public?

Palmer: I am proud every day to live in Person County. It has been my pleasure to continue my family's business which has survived for 40 years by serving our customers with honesty and integrity. The insight from running a business and knowing this county like the back of my hand has led me to this candidacy and seek the elected office of Commissioner.

Jeffers: My proudest moment serving the public is when I see a Person County child go off to college and return, or enter the workforce and choose Person County as their home. I hope that some of the decisions the people of Person County entrusted to me played a part in making us a better place to live.

Martin: My proudest moment serving the public would have to be the day our local Autism Chapter had our ribbon cutting ceremony. On that day, we were able to bring awareness to the families in Person County living with Autism. We were able to have our children and families engaged and seen in the community. It was a day where voices were heard that are normally silenced, and the citizens of Person County were able to see that our children and families are not so very different from others, but with just "extra" abilities not disabilities.

Our chapter's members stood proudly in unison and celebrated being a part of a group where they were heard, seen, and had hope that they could be a part of a county where they would be accepted and someday have services right here to meet their individual needs.

Gentry: One of my proudest moments was helping to get the first Republican elected to our North Carolina State House seat since Reconstruction and getting several Republicans elected to our local commission to add balance to that board. Another proud moment is the realization of raising great sons who are principled and employed young adults. Our young people are our future in this country and Person County.

Sims: My proudest moment was serving as Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce for 3 years. During this time, I had the opportunity and pleasure to meet many people and to truly get involved in our community. As Chairman I volunteered to work on various Chamber events such as; Personality Festival, Chamber Bingo, Chamber Golf Tournaments etc. These were all such great events and despite the amount of time and work needed to organize such events I always was pleased at their outcome and to see and hear the community's positive response. Another proud moment for me was at the at the 2016 Annual Chamber of Commerce Banquet, I received the Chamber Champion Award. This was very unexpected and I felt so honored to receive this award from the members of the Chamber. This meant a great deal to me; Person County means a great deal to me.

Powell: My proudest moments are when I assist our citizens in solving their concerns. I take each phone call, email, letter or face to face communication seriously. If there is anything county government can or should do to assist our citizens, it should be done.

I am very proud to have been a part of bringing Polywood Industries to Person County along with over 300 new jobs. We must continue economic development and growth in the County for future growth and prosperity.

I am also proud to have been involved in the County's broadband efforts. Within the past four years, we have made great strides toward county wide connectivity. New cell towers and equipment plus 52 miles of underground fiber throughout the County has greatly improved connectivity; this effort has drawn state wide attention and praise for being progressive, forward thinking project.

Perry: Volunteering in my community is my on- going proudest moment. An example of my volunteering is inspecting our local nursing homes and assisting living facilities and talking with the residents to make sure they felt safe and were receiving the care they needed and were paying for. (Courier-Times, 10/15/20)

NOV 2020 Loses Re-Election

We're now a little more than a week removed from the election and there are still several undecided races statewide and nationally. There's still no clear winner in the North Carolina Attorney General contest, among others, and which way the U.S. Senate will swing will come down to a pair of runoff races in the state of Georgia.

Locally, no runoffs were needed and there simply was no doubt.

The red wave crashed right through Person County as republicans won every race on the ballot, starting with the presidency and working its way down.

Every partisan race went the way of the republicans, including a sweep of the county commissioners --- highlighted by the ousting of current chairman Ray Jeffers, in what can be described as an upset.

Frankly, we expected a big night for the republicans, but thought that Jeffers would at least be able to hold on to his seat and there would be a 4-1 split on the board. Jeffers has been an advocate for Person County

statewide and even nationally for several years and his presence, knowledge of local matters and unique perspective will certainly be missed.

There is honor and usefulness in being a dissenting voice with a different viewpoint in government.

So how exactly did this republican domination in Person County happen?

WRAL did a piece late last week and tried to dissect the differences between voters in the neighboring counties of Person and Durham. Anyone who has lived in Person County and traveled down 501 to Durham will tell you that it's a whole different world, and that's just fine.

The reporter focused on the educational differences in the electorate in the communities and interviewed a political professor at Duke and a classical singer and restaurateur as examples of typical Durham County voters.

In the nearly three-minute story, roughly 30 seconds were devoted to Person County with the lone examples of our home being a quick quote from a member of the community and a line about the reporter being kicked out of a local gym.

We could certainly be critical of the way the reporter framed Person County, and many of you have on social media, but we're going to focus on one simple fact.

People are going to vote their values and despite there being more registered democrats than republicans, the county has skewed red in recent elections.

The republican values of smaller government, a focus on the protection of the Second Amendment and religious freedom appear to resonate with rural voters. Despite the result (or reported results based on your news viewing preference) of the election, President Donald Trump certainly has a following here in Person County and his popularity, coupled with a strong team effort by the local GOP helped swing the community red.

If the democratic party in Person County expects to have a meaningful voice in community matters, it will need to regroup before the next election cycle. (Courier-Times, 11/13/20)

DEC 2020 Honored at Last Meeting

At the final meeting of their terms, the Person County Board of Commissioners honored outgoing commissioners Jimmy Clayton and Ray Jeffers Monday, Dec. 7.

As the sitting chair, Jeffers opened the meeting and joked that he was never given the opportunity to offer an invocation before a meeting.

"No chairman ever called me to offer the invocation," he said. "I think I'll call myself tonight and offer the invocation."

The sitting board offered a proclamation naming December 2020 Race Unity Month and approved the minutes of its Nov. 16 meeting before honoring Clayton and Jeffers.

Clayton chose not to run for re-election in the general election in November, ending his stint on the board after 20 years.

Jeffers presented Clayton a plaque commemorating his service from Dec. 4, 2000 to Dec. 7, 2020.

In that time, Clayton was chosen as the board's vice chairman for 2005 and 2010 and was the board's chair for 2011 and 2015.

Jeffers then opened the floor for the commissioners to pay tribute to Clayton.

Commissioner Gordon Powell thanked Clayton for his longevity of service.

"Thank you for your service to Person County and endurance at that," Powell said. "Thank you for representing the county, in the county as well as outside the county."

Derrick Sims said his experience with Clayton went back to his service on other boards.

"I remember going way back when I was on the Kerr Tar Work Development Board," Sims said. "I remember they were announcing me as a new member and I remember your show of support back then and that's been many years ago. I thank you for that and I thank you for your leadership and for everything you've done for this county. I appreciate it and I wish you well as you go forward."

Jeffers thanked Clayton for taking him to a "meeting in Raleigh"

"I think out of most of the members, I think I owe the most gratitude to Jimmy," Jeffers said. "Being a 25-year-old kid elected to the county Board of Commissioners... I was sworn in, in December and in February he said 'come on and go with me to a meeting in Raleigh and get involved in our state association and our national association,' and I can say Person County is better off for it."

Jeffers said he and Clayton both served on the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners - a rarity for commissioners from the same county.

"The programs and the cost savings through those programs that we brought back to Person County - the citizens were better off for that," Jeffers said. "So, I just have to thank him for getting me involved. I'm sure he didn't know when he took me, that later on I'd be the president of the state association and serving on the executive committee for both organizations, but I owe that to Jimmy and I thank him for taking me."

Commissioner Kyle Puryear served with Clayton for 14 years on the board.

"When I first joined this board in December of 2006, you are the only member of that board that's still on this board now," he said. "You taught me how to come prepared for every meeting. And I know that we've butted heads quite a bit, but I'll say that I will miss you and I wish you the best - you and your family."

Always feel free to give me a call if you need to, but I do thank you for your service - 20 years is a long time to serve on the board.”

Puryear said that there was 46 years of board experience among himself, Clayton and Jeffers.

”That’s a lot that this county is losing tonight because we could always bounce things back from 2000 or 2006 or 2008 because we all make mistakes on this board and we learn from those mistakes and that’s something we’re losing tonight.”

”I reckon you expect me to say something after all of that,” Clayton said.

He thanked each of the board members for their words and held a moment of silence for former commissioners Eugene Berryhill and Larry Bowes who passed away while he served on the board before thanking his family and other campaign workers who helped him over the years.

Formerly a county employee himself, Clayton emphasized the work they do every day.

”I’ve tried to serve the people of this county the best I knew how,” he said. “I want to thank the county employees, of which I was one for 20 years, for all you do for Person County on a daily basis. We’ve probably got one of the best small-county group of employees there is in the state. I hope they continue doing what they’ve been doing. They’ve done their job through thick and thin. When we had a recession and we had to cut back - we didn’t quite lay anybody off, but we thought we were and the county employees did that they had to do and I want to thank them for that. The people you surround yourself with are the ones that make you look like you’re doing a good job.”

Clayton shared an anecdote from when Jeffers was first elected.

”I want to say about the kid from Roxboro who ran for commissioner who went on be president of the Association of County Commissioners and the regional director for the National Association of Counties - somebody asked me who he was - this Ray Jeffers who was running for commissioner - and I said ‘I don’t know. He’s some kid from Roxboro, but I don’t have a clue.’ He got enough votes to get in and he did a good job.”

Powell presented Jeffers with a similar plaque commemorating his years of service to the board.

”To say that I appreciate your 12 years of service is not enough,” Powell said. “Words aren’t worth what your value has been to the county and I appreciate that.”

Powell noted that Jeffers only missed two meetings in his 12 years on the board.

Jeffers served the board from Dec. 1, 2008 until Dec. 7, 2020.

In that time, he was selected to the board’s vice chair for 2013, 2015 and 2019 and served as the board’s chair in 2020.

Sims said he got to know Jeffers on the campaign trail during this year’s general election.

"Being out there for almost 18 days, I know you and I were probably the last ones to leave at night," he said. "I want to thank you for your service - as many years as you've been here."

Puryear said Jeffers made the most of his time on the board.

"You've served this community with distinction," he said. "I'm going to miss coming to you and trying to figure out how to compromise on some budget issues that we've had in the past."

Puryear said the board would be losing a "valuable resource" in Jeffers' involvement with the statewide and national organizations.

Clayton reiterated that he didn't know Jeffers when he ran for commissioner.

"I went and found the kids that went to school with you and asked them what kind of fellow you were and they started telling me all about you and I said, 'well he's probably going to be okay then.' And you were okay - you were better than okay.... you represented Person County well and you put that name all over the country."

Jeffers thanked his fellow commissioners and the citizens of the county

"Often I'm asked what made me run at 24 or 25 and I always tell people the same thing: I ran because I stayed," he said.

He said many of his peers left the county when they could and haven't come back.

"Since I stayed and started to get involved, I felt like this was the best way for me to try to make a difference here in Person County," he said. "I did get involved. Sometimes I got beat up for going to some meetings, but it cost the county very little those years because it seemed like every organization I got involved in, I worked my way to the executive committee and they footed the bill."

Jeffers said he served 11 consecutive years on the state Association of County Commissioners board of directors and six years on the National Association of Counties board of directors.

"I think growing up here in Person County on a farm you learn a good work ethic and that work ethic I tried to put to use for Person County," he said. "At some meeting someone said, 'if you're not at the table, you're on the menu.' So, I always tried to keep Person County at the table and off the menu."

He encouraged the incoming commissioners to attend training with the UNC School of Government and to care for the county employees.

"I was always invited to the UNC School of Government new commissioner's school and I hope you all attend and learn the dos and the don'ts - what you have control of and what you don't. One thing I always told them when they invited me to speak was: there's a difference in campaigning and governing. You have campaigned. You have got here. Now it's time to govern. I hope that you look after our county employees because those are the ones providing the services to our citizens."

Both commissioners exited to a round of applause before the new commissioners were sworn in. (Courier-Times, 12/17/20)

DEC 2020 Year In Review

The past year was one of tragedy in Person County.

But, amidst the loss and heartbreak from a number of shootings and the global COVID-19 pandemic taking hold in Person County, some progress has been made, including recovery from a “worst case scenario hack” and progress on several city and county projects.

Here are the 10 biggest stories of the year in Person County.

COVID-19 hits Person County

With the novel coronavirus and the associated disease of COVID-19 spreading around the world, Person County was not immune to its spread.

The first case in the state was announced on March 3.

An Executive Order signed March 23 canceled the state’s in-person instruction and moving all learning online, a move that would be extended for the rest of the school year April 24.

The first case was announced in the county on March 24 with the cases trickling in slowly at first.

Six days later, Gov. Roy Cooper announced a statewide stay-at-home order.

A month later, there were only 20 total cases, of which only five were active, but the first county had also announced its first COVID-19-related death.

On April 23, Cooper extended the stay-at-home order to last until May 8, when he transitioned the state into the first phase of its reopening plan, implementing a mass gathering restriction of 10 people and allowing retail stores to reopen with social distancing requirements.

On May 22, the state moved into phase two, from the stay-at-home order to a “safer-at-home” order, limiting mass gatherings at 10 indoors and 25 outdoors.

Restaurants were able to open at 50-percent capacity.

In June, Cooper required state residents to wear cloth face masks when in public, both indoors and outdoors.

By July, the cases had continued coming in for Person County.

The first day with new cases in the double digits was July 6. The 12 new cases took the county to 122 total.

Gov. Cooper also announced in July that schools would be able to reopen for the 2020-21 school year at 50 percent capacity or continue with online instruction.

The Person County Board of Education, Roxboro Community School and Bethel Hill Charter School elected to reopen at 50-percent capacity and reopen elementary schools fully, when the option became available in October, but have closed when faced with outbreaks throughout the year.

Person County passed the 200 cases threshold on Aug. 5 and 300 with 44 cases announced Aug. 26.

At that time four county residents were classified as COVID-19-related deaths.

On Sept. 4, the state increased the mass gathering limitation and allowed museums, aquariums and gyms to reopen under capacity limits.

The cases continued for the county, averaging about 59 new cases per week in October and 65 per week in November and passing the 1,000 case mark in the county health department's Dec. 3 update.

Gov. Cooper announced a new curfew between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. in an effort to combat rising statewide metrics.

On Tuesday Dec. 29, Person County experienced its third straight week with more than 100 new cases with 1,553 total cases announced since March. There have been 21 deaths associated with COVID-19.

However, there is hope at the end of the tunnel.

The Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration and Person County received its first shipment of Moderna doses Dec. 22

A week later 178 individuals in the county have received their first dose of the vaccine, according to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

Officer-involved shooting on Old Durham Road

On Friday, July 24, an officer shot and killed 45-year-old David Brooks Jr. on Old Durham Road near the Dollar General at 198 Weeks Drive.

The 7 minute, 45 second dashcam video shows the officers' response to the 911 call that reported a masked man walking down Old Durham Road with a shotgun.

At 10:40 a.m., uniformed officers arrived on the scene in marked patrol vehicles.

On released dashcam footage, an officer can be heard telling Brooks to drop his weapon three times before he fires a single shot. The entire encounter lasted approximately five seconds.

A loaded, .410 gauge double barrel shotgun with a sling was removed from Brooks before officers rendered aid. The gun and two shells were sent to the State Crime Lab for analysis. According to Person County District Attorney Michael Waters, the shotgun stock and barrels had been shortened.

The gun was operational and the shells were unfired.

In his investigative report, Waters detailed his interview with the officer involved.

In his statement, the officer said he could see Brooks' left hand on the gun's foregrip and right hand on the pistol grip as he began to raise the gun. The officer believed Brooks was going to fire so he fired a single shot.

In his analysis of applicable state law, Waters said state law authorizes an officer to use deadly force to prevent death or serious injury to himself or others and announced Wednesday, Sept. 10 that the officer would not be charged for the shooting.

The incident sparked a number of protests.

The day after the shooting, members of Brooks' family and the community gathered for a peaceful protest and march in Uptown that ended when local activists called for attendees to disperse around 9 p.m.

About an hour later, a group of up to 30 people arrived in Uptown with incendiary devices and Molotov cocktails, according to law enforcement officials.

Officers gave the group a 10-second count to disperse and arrested seven individuals when they did not heed the command - four individuals were from Roxboro and the others were from Chapel Hill, Raleigh and Waxhaw.

After the incident that Saturday night, the Roxboro City Council issued a state of emergency and imposed a curfew for the following Tuesday and Wednesday nights.

When the dashcam footage was released Wednesday, July 29, members of the Brooks family, community activists and the general public gathered at a memorial near the place where the 45-year-old was shot.

The protesters were met by a heavy police presence at the makeshift memorial, but the group peacefully dispersed without incident.

Protesters gathered at the Person County Courthouse Sunday, Aug. 16 and marched to Madison Boulevard holding signs calling for the officer involved to be fired.

Protesters held another demonstration Friday, Sept. 4, gathering at Merritt Commons, moving to the sidewalk in front of the Roxboro Police Department and later in front of the Person County Courthouse.

Officers arrested 10 protesters in the days following the demonstration. All were charged with assembling without a permit.

Historic general election

In November's general election, county republicans scored a major win, installing the county's first-ever full Republican Board of County Commissioners.

In the race for three seats, Gordon Powell won re-election for a second term while Derrick Sims and Charlie Palmer each earned their first four-year term.

Previously, Sims served in David Newell's seat from March until December when he took his own seat.

Under state law, the remaining two years of Newel's term were put on the ballot where Republican candidate P.J. Gentry defeated Kenneth Perry.

Board chair Ray Jeffers finished fourth in the three-seat race, ending his 12-year stint on the board.

Commissioner Jimmy Clayton did not run for re-election after winning his set in five elections and serving on the board for 20 years.

In the race to fill all five seats on the Person County Board of Education, incumbents Margaret Bradsher, Phillip Gillis, Freda Tillman and Harriett Tillett all handily won re-election and were joined by newcomer Jason Torian, beating out Pauling Lopez and first-time candidate Vaxaeadrene Allen.

Board chair Kay Allen did not run for re-election, telling The Courier-Times that she would finish her term on the board before moving back to Wake County.

Commissioners authorize removal of Confederate statues

In the wake of national unrest, local activists aimed to move two Confederate monuments to the Person County Veterans Park on Morgan Street from their spots on the Person County Courthouse grounds.

After a public comment period at the Person County Board of Commissioners' July 13 meeting, Commissioner Kyle Puryear's motion to table the county's decision until non-county funds were raised to pay for the removal, which County Manager Heidi York said would cost about \$20,000, passed with the commissioners voting along party lines.

The monuments had garnered some support, with armed individuals "guarding" them for several nights during the summer.

During her turn in the informal comment period, Personians Against Injustices and Racism secretary Shaina Outlaw said she went to speak with people who were at the statues one night in an attempt to facilitate conversation and, in those discussions, others had agreed that moving the monuments would be better than destroying them.

But during those conversations, she said another individual circled the courthouse in a car five times before pointing an AR-15 at her and warning against touching the monuments.

Protesters gathered at the monument in opposition to the commissioners' decision that Monday afternoon.

They were met by some counter protesters who indicated they were there to ensure the statues were not damaged and interactions remained verbal.

Both parties remained at the monument into Monday night.

The following day, after an anonymous source pledged to donate \$20,000 to move the statue and marker, the county commissioners met and unanimously voted to authorize the monuments' removal to the Veterans Park.

Later that evening, PAIR called the vote a "major win" on its Facebook page.

However, more than five months later, the statues honoring and memorializing the county residents who fought for the Confederacy remain in place at the courthouse.

Hack takes down city, county systems

On May 30, the City of Roxboro and Person County computer systems were hit with a ransomware cyber attack, limiting access to phone lines, email and internet.

Experts called the attack a "worst case scenario".

County Manager Heidi York said the incident was discovered when employees reported problems accessing their email.

A task force of representatives from the FBI, National Guard and state Department of Information Technology was established to investigate the attack.

City and county employees were forced to operate without email, but set up temporary emails for interdepartmental items.

Two months after the initial attack, County IT Director Chris Puryear said the county spent around \$455,000 on the recovery efforts and logged approximately 8,000 collective hours within the IT department and support staff on the recovery effort, not including the efforts of other departments like finance department who worked to restore their own service.

Dr. Shannon Tufts, an associate professor of public law and government at UNC-Chapel Hill and director of the Center for Public Technology, said the attack was a targeted approach designed to cripple the government.

Greg Manson, vice president of security, audit and compliance with the information technology security company Logically, said the variant was purchased on the dark web and said a Russian IP address was used to launch the attack, but both he and the National Guard did not believe it was an attacker associated with the Russian government.

The attack was brought in through a compromised account that circumvented the county's anti-virus system.

Several injured, killed in shootings

In November and December, a rash of shootings took place in Person County.

On Nov. 7, the Person County Sheriff's Office responded to two separate incidents.

Around 10 p.m., Kenneth Hatchett, 70, of Jones Lester Road was arrested and charged with the shooting death of his grandson, 21-year old Kahlil Hatchett.

According to the report, the two got into an argument and Kenneth shot Kahlil once in the chest and he was pronounced dead approximately an hour later.

Later that same night, deputies responded to a home on Boston Road where 37-year-old Macrino Olvera was found dead in his home.

Deputies reported that Olvera had a gunshot wound to his chest.

On Nov. 15, the Roxboro Police Department responded to two separate incidents of its own.

Around 8:30 p.m., officers were dispatched to the 1400 block of Pointer Street where they found a vehicle shot close to 30 times and a victim shot once in the back.

About two hours later, officers were dispatched to a home on the 200 block of Shale Circle where they found a vehicle shot multiple times and a victim who was also shot once in the back.

Both victims were treated and released.

Investigators said they did not believe the two incidents were related.

After executing two search warrants, investigators located a revolver used in the Shale Circle attack.

Officers made two arrests in relation to the incident.

Roosevelt Martin, 26, of Greensboro, was charged with felony attempted murder and misdemeanor conspiracy to commit a felony. Martin was placed under a \$500,000 secured bond.

Gregorio Gonzalez, 51, of Shale Circle, Roxboro was charged Wednesday, Nov. 18 with felony attempted murder and misdemeanor conspiracy to commit a felony. Gonzalez was placed under a \$200,000 secured bond.

On Dec. 5, officers were dispatched to the scene of the drive-by shooting at 513 Broad Street Saturday at 2:35 p.m where they found 22-year-old Dontavyn Shyheim Long shot three times.

Long was transported to Person Memorial Hospital where he later died.

Two days after the incident, officers arrested and charged Quamine Cuningham, 26, of Roxboro with first degree murder.

Cunningham was held without bond.

Airport gets new name

In March, The Person County Airport was no more.

In it's place: the Raleigh Regional Airport at Person County.

The Federal Aviation Administration recognized the name change March 26 after the county commissioners approved the renaming in May 2019 with the expectation that the change would take about a year to get approved and fully implemented by the FAA.

In March, the county airport commission reviewed drawings for the new corporate hangar project and unanimously recommended the \$4.6 million project to the Board of Commissioners in December.

The recommendation comes about \$243,000 over budget, including the county's future FAA grant monies but also included in the project is about \$400,000 in upgrades to the airport's sewer system.

The item will still need approval from the Person Board of County Commissioners.

Economic Development Commission making progress

In 2020, the Person County Economic Development Commission made steps forward with the Person County Mega Park and the county's North Park site.

In June, the EDC unanimously voted to apply for a \$15 million grant from the \$1.5 billion made available through the U.S. Economic Development Administration's funding from the CARES Act to construct a \$5 million sewer line and \$10 lift station at the Mega Park, moving the site closer to being able to place a company at the site.

However, that grant application was denied in the review process.

But 2020 also saw the county construct a waterline to the site that can carry more than two million gallons per day using a \$1.6 million N.C. Commerce Rural ReadySites grant.

In September, the EDC received a permit for grading and site preparation at the Mega Park from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - the culmination of a two-year process.

Officials voted to resubmit its permit application at its Feb. 25 meeting after its previous permit application was denied in September 2019.

At its Dec. 7 meeting, the Person County Board of Commissioners unanimously voted to pursue a public-private partnership on a shell building at the North Park site to combat the low availability of industrial space in the county.

The Woodsdale Volunteer Fire Department's certification process continues

In October, the Woodsdale Volunteer Fire Department received a helping hand from the Board of County Commissioners as the commissioners unanimously voted to allocate the department \$33,700 for its ongoing costs, despite facing decertification from the Office of the State Fire Marshal since August 2019.

The additional funding took the department to \$53,700 for the fiscal year.

Department president Laurie Dunn said securing funding for the department's recertification was a big step for the department.

"To secure funding for the basic expenses - the propane, the electricity, the insurance and the truck payments - while we're decertified is huge," Dunn said. "[The process] will be very hard, but just to secure the basics there is a huge relief."

The department withdrew its appeal with the state on Sept. 15 and the Department of Insurance officially closed the case two days later, clearing the way for the state to officially decertify the department.

At the department's Nov. 19 membership meeting, the citizens of the fire district unanimously voted to take the new name of Bethel Hill Fire Department and adopted a number of changes to the department's bylaws.

"Woodsdale had left a bad taste in everybody's mouth after what had happened and nobody's going to come and volunteer under that moniker," Dunn said. "People don't want any part of it. It had to go. Once the state pulls the certification away from Woodsdale, the rebuilding will be under the Bethel Hill name so we can start recruiting, doing some community functions and outreach and throw some positive things out there under our new name."

City of Roxboro to take on sewer project

The City of Roxboro will move forward with its Western Sewer System project which will add gravity sewer to 700 acres of the city's western boundary and add significant sewer capacity to the southern portion of the city.

In January, the Roxboro City Council agreed to move forward with the \$10 million sewer line after it was reported that the Marlowe's Creek Outfall sewer line was insufficient for future growth.

The Western Sewer System was initially conceived in 1998, but was never constructed due to cost concerns at the time.

In May, the Person County Board of Commissioners voted to pledge \$568,000 to the fund the project's initial design and engineering.

The city's initial proposed budget included \$0.09 increases to the city's water and sewer rates to offset the project, but council eliminated those increases in favor of a free rate analysis from the North Carolina Rural Water Association when a firmer cost estimate is available. (Courier-Times, 12/31/20)

2021**DEC 2021 Files For State House Race**

Since the filing for those seats opened, state House Rep. Larry Yarborough (R-Person) has filed for re-election.

Former county commissioner Ray Jeffers (D-Person) has announced his intention to run for his party's nomination to the state House of Representatives in the newly-redrawn district which includes all of Person County and a portion of north and east Durham County.

Previously, the second district included all of Person County and a portion of southern Granville County. (Courier-Times, 12/9/21)

2022**MAR 2022 Unopposed in Primary**

Ray Jeffers will be running unopposed in the primary for N.C. House and will be facing Republican Larry Yarborough in the general election.

Most recently, Jeffers served for 12 years on the Person County Board of Commissioners and was a former president of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Board of Directors.

”From that time (on the Board of Commisioners), I’ve always tried to represent Person County to the best of my ability,” Jeffers said. “Early on, I heard it said that if you’re not on the table, you’re on the menu. I’ve always tried to keep Person County on the table, you’re on the menu. I’ve always tried to keep Person County on the table in my time as county commissioner. (Courier-Times, 3/31/22)