

The County Commissioners had much business on their plate when they met on Monday night, July 6th including Phil Spears' resignation as commissioner, wheel tax, cell phones, and soccer leagues' use of county land.

But, perhaps no business was larger than addressing concerns of citizens dealing with Judicial Commissioner Ralph Meeks.

Wanda Holmes first addressed the Committee of the Whole regarding Meeks. "I want to issue a formal written and verbal complaint," she told commissioners. Holmes explained that Meeks refused her service, though she reported a threat of bodily harm. "He told me he would not help me." Holmes said he advised her on Saturday, June 13th, to wait until Monday.

According to Holmes after he refused to write a warrant, she called Circuit Court Clerk Rick Gann who came, listened, and wrote a warrant of arrest.

"I don't understand the process, why wait until Monday, the threat of abuse or bodily harmed, the threat of physical assault should suffice. I feel like my rights as a Macon County Citizen were violated... I thought his job was to help me," said Holmes.

Mayor Linville told commissioners that following Holmes agenda request, he contacted Meeks and advised him the issue would be on the agenda and offered him the opportunity to present his side. Linville said Mr. Meeks said he wouldn't be there to offer a rebuttal.

Andrea Harmon addressed the body with her own concerns about Meeks' performance. She spoke about her late sister Olivia who went to Meeks, in March of 2008, to get assistance following a domestic violence situation. Harmon reported that her sister had bruises, a bloody lip, a knot on her head, and that test reports following her attempt to get a warrant, confirmed she had suffered a concussion. "She wanted a warrant and to have her husband arrested," remarked Harmon. She told commissioners that Olivia was told by Meeks that her husband could get a warrant too, because she fought back and hit him too. "Ralph scared her, after talking with Ralph, she changed her mind."

"I don't think everything was done that could have been. I don't have that peace in my heart," acknowledged Harmon.

She stressed the importance of getting help, once you take the step to seek it. And that “Ralph should be held accountable for his actions.”

“I think we’ve got a serious issue,” said Commissioner Jeff Hughes.

Commissioner Ronnie McDuffee, who is the father of the late Olivia McDuffee, who died later from domestic violence, told fellow commissioners, “When I was appointed to this job, I talked to Shelvy about the way he (Meeks) handled it, and said I was not going to use my position to bring it up. But after Ms. Holmes’ ordeal, I’m not going to sit back and listen to it. The people of Macon County deserve, a lot better than that.”

Circuit Court Clerk Rick Gann, Sheriff Mark Gammons, and April Hix, who has been serving as temporary Judicial Commissioner in the absence of Ronnie Krantz, commented on the position and named necessary component of jobs including adequate training, importance of knowing the laws, of being a good liaison with the community and with arresting officers.

Gann also reported calling Mr. Meeks about coming to the commissioner’s meeting and stressed to commissioners, “I’m not driving any bus trying to run him out of town.” He also talked about the process of going to the city and then being directed to the county to get the warrant. This raised the issue of paying for the judicial commissioner positions.

“Gammons stressed that the law is clear, “You SHALL make an arrest.”

“We need to take the matter serious,” said Commissioner Scott Gammons.

“I make a motion to replace the Judicial Commissioner of Macon County,” said Commissioner McDuffee. This was quickly followed by a second from Commissioner Hughes, and the motions carried with no verbal objections, and is scheduled to be part of the legislative body meeting on July 20th .

District Attorney General Tommy Thompson addressed former County Mayor Glen Harold Donoho and commissioners in 2003 about the proper issuing of warrants.

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Barry King, representing the Soccer League, asked commissioners for permission to oversee the soccer field without going through the Fair Board who he felt is opposed to erecting permanent fixtures on county fairgrounds. King reported mounting expenses, including \$1200 for portable toilets and requested to erect permanent restroom facilities. The Soccer League has the participation of nearly 400 children and grounds accommodate up to 1200 spectators on game day. Commissioner Scott Gammons made a motion to allow the soccer league to have oversight. This was followed by several commissioners advising King to go back to the fair board on Thursday night, July 9th, though many voiced support for the league and for the children, ages three to 18, participating in it.

After the vote failed to give the soccer league immediate oversight over the grounds they use, Gammons stated, "The County owns it, the Fair Board oversees it, that's why I did what I did." King stressed that he wasn't there to make anyone mad, or take anything away, but was doing it "on behalf of the kids."

The second reading of the increased wheel tax levy was presented and the motion carried for it to be sent on to the full body.

Early in the meeting, Commissioner Mike East asked Sheriff Mark Gammons how many cell phones are in use by persons at the Sheriff's department and was told maybe seven. Later East made a motion that he eventually withdrew, to have the cell phone bills sent to the mayor's office.

"I'm not going to put, at risk, citizens," said Sheriff Gammons, who stated the phone records would show drug informants and jeopardize, "the trust of the citizens." "I will not reveal the confidentiality, to No One... it might get a citizen killed," he asserted.

Commissioner Hesson, who first seconded the motion, told Gammons it was rumored that there were 60 phones. Gammons then told commissioners that he did have 70 phones available from state grants, "funded through the state," he emphasized, and was distributing them out to local agencies such as rescue squads and other agencies that might be involved with working another disaster. Sheriff Gammons asked commissioners to come see him or call him, when they have a question, and quoted his phone number.

Other business approved and sent on the Legislative Body:

- Macon County Board of Trustees recommended J. Michael Wells and Betty M. Scott for a three-year term to Macon County Library Board.
- No opposition was voiced to amending the zoning map of the Lewis Hardin Property located at the Southwest corner of the intersection of Oakdale Road and Highway 52 Bypass West. A public hearing will be scheduled on the rezoning of this from residential to general commercial.
- The 2009-2013 Three-Star Strategic Economic Development Macon County was passed on to the full body.
- Sale of Property Assessor's Vehicle with proceeds to be placed in General Fund was approved.
- Pointe Lane residents petitioned the county for a 35 mile-per-hour speed limit and "Children at Play" signs.
- Sheriff Gammons requested funds of about \$8,000 to have adequate money for erecting of security fencing and gates to combine with grant money to complete project. The motion passed for funding.
- Marion Cassady wishes to donate one set of the original steps from the Woodmore Hotel to be placed on the Courthouse lawn. Linville shared pictures and historic information from County Historian Randy East. Commissioners agreed unanimously to this request to be sent on to the Legislative Body.
- A separate article on Phil Spears and resignation of his commissioner's seat also appears in this week's edition of the Macon County Chronicle.

Commission Votes to Replace Macon County Judicial Commissioner

Tuesday, July 14, 2009

All motions passed at the Committee of the Whole Meeting are sent on to the commissioners at the Legislative Body Meeting, which meets the 3rd Monday night of each month.