

The County Committee of the Whole met in regular session on Monday night, September 8 in front of an overfilled courtroom. A new school roof, gravel for the trap shooting range and approval for the mayor and commissioners to attend the TCCA meeting were all on the agenda, however the two most controversial subjects brought before the committee were a budget change request brought up by Circuit Court Clerk Rick Gann and discussion on Cobb-Vantress and impact by the poultry industry.

Gann's budget change request included an increase to \$170,051 as of July 1, 2008 for Circuit Court Clerks Deputy Clerk's salary line and an increase to \$85,811 as of July 1, 2008 for an increase in the misdemeanor probation office.

The changes were requested to offset the difference in gross pay between the county mayor's office and the Circuit Court Clerk's office and the misdemeanor probation office.

In the document presented, Gann stated, "I ask you to seriously consider the changes to prevent any further attempts to equalize the pay scale which could possibly go back to September of 2005."

"I didn't know there was a discrepancy," said Gann, speaking of why the budget needed amending. "I'm giving you an opportunity at this time to consider it before next week... after that, it's fair game. And I found out tonight that even some of my kin-folks don't understand that this is a problem."

"Do what you want to do, he advised the committee, but warned, "there is a 98.6% chance that I'm going to win, and a 98% chance this will settle out of court, but this is up to you. Do what you want to do, but it's not right, and I'm going to stand up for the people that work in my office, whether I'm elected again or not..."

"We (the budget committee) asked you to come up here, you came up here one time... and got mad and left," said Commissioner Cothron.

"That's correct, I don't deny that whatsoever; the budget committee also cut my budget," replied Gann. He referenced that his budget was cut by \$9,000 because he saved the county that much last year. "I could have made up something and spent it on something, but I didn't, but

you went ahead and cut it, but if we have two or three trials this year I'm going to be back up here asking for it... no, I'm not going to be asking for it, I'm going to be telling you we've got to have it!"

"I'm going to give you a little while, and I'm not alone on this, there are other elected officials, that will in time, back me up," Gann told the committee.

"It's going to be fair in this county, and you all need to be in my shoes, with these people that work for me, that wonder why somebody in another office...makes that much more money, than my people do. And you tell a judge that she is worth more than a clerk, (referencing persons in Mayor Linville's office). I don't believe that it is going to work."

Mayor Linville asked Rick to explain what he was presenting to the committee. To which Gann read the budget change request and clarified line items, "you can either take me seriously or figure it might cost a lot more. I know you all are laughing about it, but it's not a laughing matter, something was done that was illegal."

Commissioner Annette Looper made a motion to pass Gann's budget change request on to the full body for approval, and this was followed by more discussion.

Gann was then advised that a committee had already been formed to review the pay scales. When asked if he was waiting for the committee or trying to move this ahead to the full body he replied, "I've been advised I have to be denied before I can do something else."

"I see a contradiction in the motion," said Mayor Linville, referring to the committee that has been newly formed and now motions are being made to move the budget changes request forward.

Commissioner Looper restated the motion to consider Rick's proposal and move to the full legislative body and the motion passed approving the move.

Voting against the motion were Mike East, Vernon Biggs, Phillip Snow, and Jerry Ray.

With a courtroom of listeners, Jeff Poppen took the stand as a spokesperson for a segment of the county interested in pursuing more facts about the impact of the proposed Cobb-Vantress operation.

“I like chicken and I like manure both, but I’m not here to discuss the chicken industry,” opened Poppen. He asked for an impact statement. “What is an impact statement?” as he prompted the audience.

He explained that this study should be done on what happens in other counties when similar things happen. He stated a desire for three impact statements; one for the environment, one for property value, and another for the social aspects of the operation being in the community.

I don’t want to close any chicken houses that are already here, and I don’t want to discuss whether the chicken industry is a good thing or a bad thing. My concern is the thing is moving too fast... I get nervous when this happens in the community really quickly...,” said Poppen. “An impact study,” he said, “will help us to make a decision more wisely. They want to put in a hatchery... eventually they’ll want to put in a broiler house too.”

“Tyson is the name of the corporation,” he stressed, quickly adding, “they have a subsidiary named Cobb-Vantress, they have targeted Macon County.”

Poppen said one of the first things wanted is an environmental study. “They didn’t like that too much, where the water comes from, where does the manure go.” He also referenced that Oklahoma and Illinois were suing the company and that, “we need to follow this.”

We need to look at property values,” he said. “My opinion is it’s hard to sell your place if a chicken place is next door.” He told those gathered that the biggest concern is the social impact.

“Thank you for considering a temporary halt,” said Poppen.

Questions and answer session came when citizen Olene Wix from Annie Hollow Road spoke about health issues and the current chicken houses in the area in which she lives. She referenced chicken thrown in ditches, and abundance of flies and rodents, and described the scene as 'killing people- slowly' saying, "we don't matter out there."

Ben Green representative from Cobb-Vantress took the floor and assured those attending, that the chicken houses Wix referred to, do not belong to Cobb-Vantress. He spoke of why the pedigree breeder company desires to come to Macon County. A study performed by a graduate student indicated that Macon County has an agricultural-based community with family values and a good work ethic.

"We are not a broiler company," Green told those gathered.

When questioned about whether steroids and hormones would be fed to the chickens, he told the crowd that the FDA prohibits it, and that these products are not placed in their (Cobb-Vantress) feed.

Several attendants spoke about their opposition to the hatchery and outlying operations being in the community.

"Do you ever hatch baby chickens to sell to the broiler farms?" asked David Harper. "No sir, no sir, no sir," responded Green who stated he had been asked and answered the same question at the open meeting at the NCTC community room.

Concerns about the effect on the groundwater were raised and when questions about disposal of dead carcasses arose, Green responded, "there are no dead carcasses."

The only accepted means of disposing of dead birds at the hen and pullet houses, according to the Cobb Vantress representative, would be incineration.

Mayor Linville asked Green to discuss water consumption.

Green quoted average statistics explaining that pullet houses require 1,000 average gallons a day and a hen house averages 2500 gallons per day.

He also referenced the State Department of Agriculture representative attending the open meeting, held last week, discussing the nutrient management plan.

“If soil samples indicate too high of levels, then no more poultry litter.”

He also explained the removal of waste such as eggs and un-hatched chickens, from the hatchery. He explained that a vacuum system loads the waste onto a truck and it is sold as a by-product, and used primarily in the cat and dog food industry. “Like any farm... nothing is wasted,” he said.

When the mayor turned the meeting back to Poppen, Jeff Poppen responded that he felt bringing in a PR guy was really out of place, to bring in “their rap”.

He ended his address to the committee on the same note he started it with, “all citizens deserve an impact study.”

School Director Darrel Law addressed the committee requesting an answer on funding the roof for Fairlane School. “This is a really good bid and we would like to be able to get started,” said Law. Various rates of interest were discussed.

Questions about the money that the Board of Education school system has in their budget arose.

Law referenced the anticipated fuel cost to the system for this upcoming year and that the board had delayed the purchase of two buses. “It will put us in a great difficulty to put this on,” he said.

Various county commissioners spoke about the issue. Commissioner Jerry Ray responded that he felt like they (school system) could pay half and that "there is always a lot of money left in the account."

The school board director explained that in the future the state would likely not fund all the positions in existence now, and the possibility exists of cutting these positions, if all the reserve is gone.

Insurance reimbursement money would be used to offset the roof replacement cost leaving a balance of \$420,349.

At the close of the discussion the committee voted in favor of the county funding the roof with Mike East and Melburn Cothron casting a no vote.

In other business:

* Road Supervisor Audie Cook asked committee approval to gravel the trap shooting range and the motion was approved.

*Minutes from Court Meeting 8/18, Planning Commission Meeting 7/15, Board of Zoning Appeals, and Loss Control Meeting were passed on to the full body meeting.

* Budget amendments for 3-Star and for Sheriff's Department were passed on to the full body meeting.

* A resolution was passed to levy an additional litigation tax with a maximum of \$50 on litigation in all civil and criminal cases instituted in the county, other than those instituted in municipal courts. The proceeds of this tax is to be used exclusively for purposes of jail or workhouse construction, re-construction, upgrading, or to retire debt including principal and interest and related expenses ... except that up to \$25 per case may be used for courthouse security.

* A resolution was passed authorizing the county trustee to accept partial payments of property taxes.

Sept. 8 County Commissioners Meeting

Monday, September 8, 2008

* Approval was granted for Mayor Linville and county commissioners that desired, to attend the TCCA meeting in Cookeville on September 23.

* A resolution was passed to request unclaimed balance of accounts remitted to the state treasurer under the unclaimed property act. This allows the county to reclaim money back on books where checks outstanding have never been cashed for year 2002.

The regularly scheduled meeting for the Committee as a Whole is the first Monday night of each month and the meeting for the legislative body is the third Monday of each month with sessions beginning at 7:00 pm. at the Macon County Courthouse.