

# Gas pipeline seeks permission to cross several county roads

By Tommy Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER — Vernon Baugh, a representative of ABL Land Services, of Flowood, Miss., asked the board to consider giving his group permission to cross several county roads during the installation process for a new natural gas pipeline.

Baugh, whose company is working with Gulf South Pipeline, said the 42-inch pipeline route will basically follow the old Transco corridor from the Mississippi state line through the communities of Camp Springs, West Butler, and others.

"We would be crossing pretty much the same roads as they did," Baugh said, adding that he would like to have the Commission's approval for the project within 90 days.

Probate Judge Michael Armistead recommended giving the information provided by Baugh to attorney J. Lee McPhearson for review so that it can be addressed at the board's next meeting.

Commissioner C.D. "Budd" Ruffin said he wanted to study the proposed plan closely since several of the roads the project would be crossing are in District Two. Some of the roads may also be in District Three.

Baugh said that he is fairly sure the pipeline would cross CR 9, West Butler Road, and the Bailey Road.

In other matters Monday, the board went into a short closed-door executive session to discuss an employee's request for a medical leave of absence. After the closed-door session, the board came back into public forum and, on a motion by Commissioners Ruffin and Henry

Lovette, voted unanimously to grant a family medical leave to John P. Diamond, after all of his existing sick-leave days have been used up, effective Feb. 26 through April 2, 2007.

Because of legal ramifications, the board — on a motion by Commissioners Ruffin and Dandy Brown — voted unanimously to reject all bids received on the purchase of new dump trucks because of legal ramifications that they were not made aware of prior to the "invitations to bid" being mailed.

Apparently, under the terms of the lease/purchase agreement the board uses to buy new dump trucks, it cannot accept new trucks for delivery for one year from the date of the last trucks' delivery.

The board discussed, but took no action, on a request to hire a new jailer to fill the position left vacant by the recent death of Jerome Carlisle.

Sheriff Donald Lolley made the request to the board on behalf of incoming Sheriff James Lovette.

"James came and talked to me, and wanted me to talk to you about hiring Dale Sturdivant as a corrections officer, effective Jan. 16th," Lolley said.

Commissioner Dandy Brown said he feels that since the last three people hired by the Sheriff's Department have been white, that consideration needs to be given to some black applicants.

"I just want to keep it halfway balanced," said Brown, who is himself a former deputy in the department.

Commissioner Ruffin said he is also concerned because the department has no women employed in

deputy or jailer positions.

"Sooner or later there's going to be a lawsuit filed on us because of that," he warned.

Commissioner Henry Lovette said that if a vote were held on the request, he would abstain from voting because the Sheriff-elect is his brother.

Armistead said the request could be taken under advisement but stated that sooner or later the board will have to address the need for additional jailers.

On a motion by Ruffin and Brown, the board voted unanimously to table the request for further discussion at a later date.

In final business, Armistead thanked the retiring Sheriff Lolley for his 32 years of service.

"You have done an outstanding job and have been a very productive leader in Choctaw County," he said.

Commissioner Ruffin said he has enjoyed working with the outgoing sheriff.

"I think he is one I could call a friend of the Commission and a friend of people," Ruffin said. His job has been a tough one but he has done it with ease."

Commissioner Brown, who spent nine years as a deputy under Lolley, also thanked the sheriff for his service.

"Well, my 'sentence' will be over with on Monday," Lolley quipped.

Armistead, who is also leaving office as Probate Judge this week, said the meeting is his last as chairman of the commission, and that he has enjoyed his six years of service.

## Commission temporarily transfers Singley to oversee road/bridge inspections

By Tommy Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER — Voicing concerns over the fact that the state usually conducts its annual road and bridge inspections between the months of December and February, Commissioner C.D. "Budd" Ruffin recommended at the board's Jan. 8th meeting that a district employee who is trained in that area be moved temporarily to the engineer's office.

Ruffin said that since the county is still without a professional engineer, someone who is experienced in road and bridge inspections needs to be there "until further notice" to accompany officials from the Ala. Dept. of Transportation when they come to do the inspection.

Ruffin said he had spoken to Commissioner Clyde Dixon about the idea — since the man is employed by District Three — and that Dixon

agreed.

Dixon was absent from the Jan. 8th meeting because of a doctor's appointment.

On a motion by Ruffin and Commissioner Henry Lovette, the board voted unanimously to transfer Larry Singley to the engineer's office, with his salary paid from the Engineer's budget. With no engineer on duty, Singley will report directly to the Commission.

## Raise

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Choctaw at \$74,295, plus \$3500 for expenses."

Johnson's list included the superintendent's salaries for several surrounding counties, including the following:

- Sumter — \$91,125
- Clarke — \$89,991
- Marengo — \$77,380
- Washington — \$90,000
- Greene — \$95,400
- Wilcox — \$107,382

The average salary of these counties, Johnson stated, is \$91,880. The average statewide stands at \$102,444. (NOTE: Much of this information was presented in a report in the December 7 issue of The Choctaw Sun.)

The list also included salaries for other administrative positions within the Choctaw County School System, including School Improvement Specialist (total of \$74,775), Voc. Director (\$69,300), Federal Programs Coordinator (\$68,250), and Special Education Coordinator (\$68,250).

Currently the superintendent's salary stands at \$74,295 plus \$3500 for expenses. Johnson added that the superintendent's position has not seen an increase in 10 years because the position is not included in the raises given to other employees of the system annually.

"It is my belief that we should support our superintendent," Johnson added. "That salary has not been moved in 10 years, when it went from \$66,000 to what it is today."

Johnson further noted that an increase of 10% would move the salary to \$81,773, while an increase of 13.5% would move it to \$84,390. With even the higher of the two increases, Choctaw County's superintendent would remain at 63rd in the state.

"Was the student count taken into consideration?" asked Wayne Taylor. "We've got one of the smaller county schools in the state.

We can't compare to Jefferson County or Mobile County."

"When we gave the last raise, we averaged our contingent counties and came up with a salary for Mr. (Vernon) Underwood," added Turk Phillips.

"The contingent counties average \$90,000," answered Johnson.

"We're talking about a principal's salary tonight — \$67,200," Ronald Hampton added. "The Superintendent's salary is roughly \$78,000. That's a margin of \$11,000 between the two. We could compare with others but we need to just do what's right for our system."

Hampton also questioned the reason for the potential salary increase.

"My first concern is, are we giving a raise for the sake of giving a raise?" he asked. "My 2nd concern is that the law just says we have to set the salary. Are we giving a raise when we don't have to? There are a lot of others — take the CNP workers for example. If we're going to raise salaries, let's do it for everyone."

"A businessman would say that if you're getting personnel for less money," Hampton added, "you're getting a bargain."

Hampton went on to explain that he thought Moore would do an excellent job and that he intended to work with her. He added that the state superintendent had recently received a 3.5% raise, something that he would be agreeable to in the county's situation.

"I share the same sentiments," echoed Wayne Taylor. "It doesn't matter what they pay in Sumter County. We've already told the bus drivers the money's not there. We've got CNP's coming to me, computer people ... If we can't help everybody out, I say leave it alone."

Johnson repeated that the discussion was just his board concern, not a recommendation, adding that the teachers and support personnel get annual raises, but the superintendent does not.

"The superintendent oversees 2,200 students," he added. "The

salary does not measure up to the job. I realize we have other people who need raises. Transportation raises come from transportation funding (state funds), but the superintendent's salary comes from local funds. They are 2 separate funds."

"We should have gotten off our butts and dealt with it prior to now," he continued. "That's my fault as chairman of this board."

"I appreciate you presenting us with this stuff," BOE member Sharon Shepherd responded. "But I'd like to see it done before the end of the year. It should have been talked about before we knew who the superintendent would be, not when we're pushed in the corner. I wish we'd look at important issues like this earlier."

With state law requiring superintendent salary increases to be decided prior to the new term of office, board attorney Fred Boling told the BOE at Thursday's meeting that he would do some research into possible avenues that the board could follow to increase the salary and stay within the law.

"As to a direct raise, it is not permissible," Boling explained, citing Alabama codes that deal with the issue. "Going beyond that, if it is the board's intention to effectuate a raise, there may be a provision to craft it for board employees. If the board so charges me, I will endeavor to figure out a way to do whatever they want to do."

Taylor reminded the board that there could be legal fees attached to the move, especially if it resulted in court action.

"He's not doing this for his health," Taylor stated, referring to Boling. "He's a high-dollar guy."

"If I come back and say this is the route we can take," Boling answered, "that means I feel like it is something we can defend in court. If not, I'll come back and say it just can't be done."

Johnson asked the board for a consensus requesting that Boling look into the matter. The board agreed, 4-1, with Taylor opposed.

## Sun

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announce that two new members have joined the team of Choctaw County's #1 source for news ... Sue Wyche is the receptionist for the Butler office, and Marcus Gates will be contributing his talents in a variety of areas.

Grand Opening of the new Butler office will be held Saturday, Jan. 13th from 8 a.m. until noon, with the ribbon cutting ceremony planned for noon. Readers are invited to come by and check out our line of office supplies, enjoy free refreshments, register for free door prizes to be given away throughout the morning, and let the children visit with Chuckles the Clown who will be giving away free balloons. WPRN Radio will be on hand from 8-11 a.m. for a live remote broadcast on 107.7 FM.

## Airport

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Frank Farmer, Jason Hare, and Kline Jeffcoat, of the Alabama Dept. of Transportation's Aeronautics Bureau, conducted the annual inspection of the airport on Nov. 1, 2006.

The inspection revealed the following violations/deficiencies:

■ Three trees on Runway 29 and one tree on Runway 11 violate the 20:1 approach and departure path slope as set by the state. In order for a license to be issued, those trees must be removed. If the county does not own the property on which the trees are growing, it must gain ownership in fee simple or come to a written, perpetual agreement with the owner to keep the approach slope cleared of large trees.

■ A non-allowable sign was found to be on the primary runway surface. That sign must be removed or replaced with an approved sign.

■ The distance from the top of the paved surface to the shoulder on the southern edge of Runway 29 was found to exceed three inches. State regulations require that the distance not exceed that depth. As a result, the area must be compacted and graded smooth to provide less than three inches between the edge of the pavement and the adjacent soil.

■ Runways are required to be marked in a manner identifying the boundaries of the landing areas. The runway markings must be painted white and be maintained in a legible condition. The runway markings for runway 4/22 were found to be in poor condition and will soon require re-painting.

■ Airports are required to have an operational wind direction indicator, commonly known as a "wind sock". Night operations require that the "sock" be lighted. According to the inspection, the lights were found to be inoperative and must be repaired or replaced.

■ Runway lights and rotating beacons and a lighted wind direction indicator are required for night operations, and must be maintained in operational condition and not obscured by grass, weeds or other items. The inspection revealed that a number of light fixtures were broken and a number of lights burned out.

The Airport was ordered to notify the Federal Aviation Administration's Flight Service Station that the facility is closed to night flights until such time as the lights are repaired/replaced.

■ All runway, taxiway and apron surfaces must be kept smooth and free of any defect or obstruction that could damage an aircraft. The lip of the pavement must not exceed three inches from the top of the surface to the adjacent shoulder soil. The inspection revealed the surface to be in good condition. However, the lip of the pavement surface near the end of Runway 29 is greater than three inches and must be corrected.

At the Jan. 8th meeting of the Commission, Commissioner Henry Lovette asked what is being done about the situation.

"I suggest the Commission read this report because at a future meeting you're going to have to come up with a plan," he said.

According to Gibson, the trees in the landing and take-off paths are the biggest issue.

"Basically, the airport's license is suspended until you do these things," Gibson added.

At an earlier meeting of the Commission, Aldridge said the Authority is working with Volkert and Associates, an engineering firm out of Mobile, on trying to get a \$450,000 federal grant that would allow a number of major renovations to be undertaken at the facility.

Aldridge agreed that clearing trees that obstruct a safe flight path will be number one on the list, since the first priority for the funds is to improve safety and security at the facility, which is located on Ala. 10 east of Butler in the Lavaca community.

Aldridge said that the Airport hanger and office is basically in decent shape but just needs some cosmetic renovations and modernizations, none of which are priorities at this time.

"We've got a GPS approach system which is as modern as you can get," he said.

Commissioner C.D. "Budd" Ruffin said at the time that from his observations, the wind sock is damaged and several lights along the runway have been taken out of their sockets or are broken or blown out — issues that were confirmed by the state inspection.

Aldridge at that time recommended a list of seven people to be appointed to serve on the Airport Authority — Claude Owen, Jack McLemore, Dr. Keith Aldridge, Frank Land, Arthur Ward, Butch Owen and himself. Land, however, later asked that his name be removed from the list because his company does business with the county. The name of James Abston, Jr., was later mentioned as a possible replacement. The name of Dr. Keith Aldridge will have to be removed from the list because of his recent death.

However, as of this date, no vote has been taken on reappointing persons to serve on the Authority. Attorney Lee McPhearson said that, under state law, if a person is not reappointed when his or her term expires, they continue to serve until such action is taken to reappoint that person or a replacement.

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