

Parks & Recreation Board re-organized

By Tommy Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER – Choctaw County has a brand new, re-organized Parks and Recreation Board, one that will be incorporated properly as required by state law, officials said Tuesday at a special-called meeting of the County Commission.

The board, which was appointed several years ago to oversee funds that are collected and dispersed through a local 10-cent per pack tax on cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and other tobacco-related products, had been operating on the assumption that all of its legal paperwork was in order. As was discovered recently, however, that was not the case: the group was never incorporated.

At the April 24th meeting, attorney J. Perry Newton and current P&R board member Lanelle Turner presented a request for the Commission to give its permission – through the passage of a resolution – for new board members to be named and the group incorporated.

“This is similar to a resolution that was approved at some point in the past but was never formally followed through,” Newton said.

According to the Code of Alabama, which authorizes the establishment of

such boards, members are appointed for six-year terms.

Initially, those terms will be staggered, with two members serving for two years, two for four years, and three for six years. Afterward, all members will serve six year terms.

A motion to approve the application, subject to legal review by county attorney J. Lee McPhearson, was approved unanimously on a motion by Commissioners C.D. “Budd” Ruffin and Clyde Dixon.

A second motion, to appoint the following persons to the new seven-member board -- with the district in which they reside and their initial terms of service shown in brackets -- was unanimously approved on a motion by Commissioners Ruffin and Dandy Brown:

Lanelle Turner (Dist. 4, two years)
Dawn Sikes (Dist. 3, two years)
Merrill Johnson (Dist. 1, four years)
Nellie Page (Dist. 1, four years)
Larry Linder (Dist. 4, six years)
Shirley Perry (Dist. 3, six years)
Callie Ridgeway (Dist. 2, six years)
A motion by Commissioners Ruffin and Henry Lovette to approve the new board's certificate of incorporation was likewise approved unanimously.

Probate Judge D'Wayne May recommended that the new board, at its first meeting, adopt a set of bylaws and

present a copy of those bylaws to the Commission.

Commissioner Dixon wanted to know if commitments made in recent months by the former P&R board would be honored.

“I'd like to know where it stands? Will they just start over?” he wanted to know.

May said he feels the new board members will take up that question at their first meeting.

“I'm sure they will have some legal advice as to what they should do,” the judge said.

“That is correct,” Newton replied. “We will cover those issues at the first meeting, and we will try to set that meeting as soon as possible.”

Commissioner Lovette said he would like for the new board to strongly consider honoring any “verbal or written” commitments that had been made by the former board.

“There have been some promises made, and it would be good to stand by those promises if at all possible,” Lovette urged.

Newton said he would take care of preparing and getting to McPhearson any papers that need to be filed. May said that, once those documents are reviewed by the attorney, he will make sure they

are filed with the Secretary of State's office.

Linda Turner-Gaines, who was a member of the former P&R board, was present at the meeting and said that she enjoyed serving on the board.

“I'm just disappointed that my Commissioner did not feel like I should be reappointed,” she said.

Law passed in 2001

The Choctaw Co. Tobacco Tax Act, No. 2001-913, was sponsored and passed in the Alabama Legislature by the late Rep. Jeff Dolbare with proceeds earmarked for improving public recreational opportunities within the county.

The taxes include a 10-cents per pack tax on cigarettes, each container of smoking tobacco or chewing tobacco, each can of snuff, individual cigars, and per package of cigarette rolling papers.

For the months of Oct., 2006 through Jan., 2007, the tax has brought in a total of \$42,068, or an average of \$10,517 per month, according to the Treasurer's Office.

Dolbare said in 2001, before the bill became law, that a board would have to be appointed and incorporated as a non-profit corporation to oversee the disbursement of the tax.

Obituaries

Coyett Wilcox

BUTLER – Services for Coyett Wilcox were held April 10, 2007 at Butler Chapel A.M.E. Church with Rev. Patrick Burt officiating. Interment was in the Butler Chapel Cemetery.

Wilcox, 49, died on April 2 in Seattle, WA.

Survivors include his wife, Donna Frazier, of Seattle, WA; two sons, Jamahl Donte Wilcox and Patrick Triston Wilcox, both of Seattle; his mother, Willie Berge Wilcox, of Butler; his father, Willie E. Winston, of Lisman; two sisters, Alexis (Sanders) Eddie, of Butler, and Debra Winston of Ratcliff, KY; and one brother, Alyousis “Skippy” Wilcox, of Seattle.

Weatherly – Studdard Memorial Chapel of Butler was in charge of the arrangements.

Mamie M. Jones

BUTLER – Services for Mamie M. Jones were held April 3, 2007 at Wahalak Baptist Church in Butler with Pastor James T. Steel officiating.

Jones, 79, died March 28.

Survivors include one son, Richard (Carolyn) Jones, of Lisman; five daughters, Ruby Nettles, of Butler, Losie (James) Ivery, of Savannah, GA, Telanice (Darryl) Sneed, of Thompson, GA, Vanessa Jones, of Butler, and Loretta Jones, of Severn, M.; one sister, Amanda Morgan, of Troy; one brother, Lewis Turner, of Cleveland, OH; nine

grandchildren and one great grandchild.

Hayden and Butler Funeral Home in Lisman was in charge of the arrangements.

Elizabeth J. “Betty” Ramsey

FAIRHOPE – Elizabeth “Betty” J. Ramsey, 82, a resident of Fairhope, died April 19, 2007.

Graveside services were held in Nanafalia.

Survivors include a son, Fredrick Dent Ramsey Jr. of Enfield, Conn.; three daughters, Sandra (Gary) Anderson of Tuscaloosa, Barbara Ramsey of Fairhope and Nancy Wright of Fairhope; grandchildren, Russ (Michial) Anderson, Caroline Hinz, Ashlee Anderson, Katie (Darryl) Jacks and Lucas Wright; two sisters, Dotty Rich of California and Barbara (Bill) Murray of Massachusetts; nieces, nephews, other relatives and friends.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Fredrick Dent Ramsey Sr.

Wolfe-Bayview Funeral Homes and Crematory Inc., of Fairhope was in charge of the arrangements.

John William Ford

MILLRY – Services for John William Ford, a Washington County native and resident of Millry, were held April 21, 2007 at Pine Tree Holiness Church with burial will be in Pine Tree Cemetery.

Mr. Ford, 79, died on April 18 at

an area hospital.

Survivors include his wife, Louise Ford; three daughters, Mildred Nowell, Ann Stewart and Kim Dyess, all of Millry; one sister, Ellen Day of Quitman, Miss.; six grandchildren; and 11 great-grandchildren.

Freeman Funeral Home was in charge of the arrangements.

Fannie Mae Brown - Smith

CROMWELL – Fannie Mae Brown – Smith, 72, died April 5, 2007 at Jeff Anderson Regional Medical Center in Meridian, MS.

Smith was a retired Certified Nurse Assistant with Choctaw General Hospital/Rush Health Systems. Services were held April 11th at Shiloh C.M.E. Church in Cromwell with Rev. Larry Williams officiating. Interment was in the Shiloh Cemetery in Cromwell.

Survivors include her mother, Mattie, of Lisman; four sons, Ralph, of Tuscaloosa, Michael, of Mobile, Tyrone and Stacy, both of Lisman; four daughters, Annie Ruffin, of Tuscaloosa, Brenda Williams, of Selma, Greta Brazil, of Las Vegas, NV, and Lisa Henderson of Birmingham; 21 grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.

Pallbearers were Joe Anderson, Gregory Dunn, Amos Ezell Kendrick Graham, Clifton Spears, Jr., and Clinton Thomas, Sr.

Hayden and Butler Funeral Home in Butler was in charge of arrangements.

Special election set for June 5th

By Tommy Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

GILBERTOWN – Voters in Choctaw and Alabama's 66 other counties will go to the polls on Tuesday, June 5th to cast ballots in a special constitutional amendment referendum.

Polls will be open from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. on election day and since only the two proposed amendments will be on the ballot, statewide voter turnout is expected to be light.

According to information from

Alabama Secretary of State Beth Moore, the two proposed amendments – passed this year by the state Legislature – are as follows:

Amendment Number One

Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of Alabama, 1901, as amended relating to the Capital Improvement Trust Fund to increase the amount of the General Obligation Bonds authorized herein and to provide for competitive bidding of said bonds. (Proposed by Act 2007-005).

Amendment Number Two

Proposing an amendment to the

Constitution of Alabama, 1901, to require that funds dedicated for the purpose of paying health care costs of retired state and educational employees be used for that purpose. (Proposed by Act 2007-007).

Persons who would like to vote in the election but are not already registered have until Friday, May 25th to do so. Thursday, May 31st is the last day to make application for an absentee ballot, and Monday, June 4th is the last day to postmark an absentee ballot being returned by U.S. Mail.

Landfill

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issue,” May said. “This issue has to be resolved.”

If a lawsuit is filed, May said candidly, it will be a great deal of expense to the county.

“I want to move forward with it because it is a great deal of expense to the Commission right now,” he said, referring to the approximately \$270,000 per year it is costing the county in interest alone on the \$3.8 million which was borrowed to renovate the landfill in anticipation of the sale. “We're paying out and not receiving anything in return,” he added.

May asked the board to give him the authority to contact a law firm to handle matters relating to filing any necessary paperwork and to represent the county should the matter end up in court.

“I feel that this is going to have to be resolved,” May said. “The people of Choctaw County cannot keep paying this amount of money without knowing where the County Commission stands and where other parties stand.”

However, May said that if negotiations do break down and if a lawsuit is filed, that does not preclude negotiations from picking up at some point.

“For the record, I have read the documents pertaining to the landfill on several occasions, and I see no guidance from those documents,

nothing about management, nothing about remuneration,” May said. “It is one of most unconscionable contracts I have ever read.”

Attorney Lee McPhearson said he and May have been in “constant discussion” about the matter since May took office in January.

“I agree, it's time to take steps to get it resolved,” McPhearson said.

The board, on a motion by Commissioners Henry Lovette and C.D. “Budd” Ruffin, voted to give May the authority to contact a law firm to handle the matter.

“I am 100% with you,” Brown said to May. “I think it's time to do something about it. It's been dragged around for too long and it's time to get it settled.”

Ruffin echoed Brown's sentiments.

“This has been ongoing since before my time as a Commissioner,” he said. “I'd guess that we have probably spent somewhere in the neighborhood of three-quarters of a million dollars on paying that bond back. I'd like to see some closure, and I'd like to see it soon. I think this would be a step in the right direction to try and recoup some of what we have laid out.”

Commissioner Clyde Dixon agreed.

“I'd just like for us as a board to be aware, budgetwise, that when we give you the authority to do this, there will be some bills that will need to be paid, and I'd like for the board to be together on this when those bills come in,” he said.

Repair work could begin this week at Airport

By Tommy Campbell
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BUTLER – Choctaw County's Airport has been closed to traffic since late last year after the Ala. Dept. of Transportation suspended the facility's license due to several safety issues that need to be addressed.

The matter has been discussed several times in the months since, but little has been done toward actually fixing the problems.

At Tuesday's special-called meeting of the County Commission, Probate Judge D'Wayne May said flatly that there has been more than enough discussion and the time has come to make some decisions.

“Nobody has come up with a specific list of items that need to be repaired to get it up and running again,” he said. “I think the critical issue is, how many trees do we have to cut and how many lights need to be repaired or replaced.”

The state cited the facility for allowing tall trees to grow into the approach zones to the runway, as well as for having several dozen runway lights blown out or non-functional, and a hazardous “drop off” from the runway pavement to the shoulders.

“I think the Commission could handle this with the personnel we have now with little additional expense and get it back up and running.”

Franklin Boney, a former manager of the Airport, was in attendance, and said that he would be glad to help out in any way as an advisor.

“It's really not a big problem,” he said. “I have met with the Airport Authority and the engineer, and we just need to cut some trees, a few loads of dirt to fix the shoulders with, and get the lights working. Let's get it back licensed again.”

Boney said that, with the Commission's help, he thinks the Airport could be ready for a state re-inspection and could re-open in a matter of two or three weeks.

However, Boney said that even though it has been years since he managed the facility, he is still listed as the airport manager in some aeronautical publications and has received several calls from pilots who say the Federal Aviation Administration is still telling people the Airport is open for business.

The board authorized Boney to work with McPhearson to call the FAA and have an advisory issued noting that the facility is closed to all air traffic until further notice.

May said that AA board member Jack McLemore dropped off a letter at his office last week recommending that Claude Owen, Jeremy Aldridge, Butch Owen, Arthur Ward and McLemore be appointed or reappointed as board members.

Franklin Boney's son, John Boney, said that he would also be interested in an appointment to the board.

The senior Boney said he would be glad to serve as an “advisor” but not as a board member.

May suggested that, if allowed by law, Commissioner Ruffin would be a good board member, given his interest in the airport.

Commissioner Clyde Dixon said he would be glad to help if the board wanted to set a work day at the airport.

“If we could all get together and take our men and equipment out there, we could greatly improve the appearance of the airport,” he said. “I don't see anything we couldn't take care of in a day or two days' time.”

Commissioners Lovette, Brown and Ruffin agreed. “We just need to have a little bit of movement,” May said. This has been discussed used since October of last year. This work could have been done a half a dozen times since then.”

Engineer Garry Grantham said he could work with the board and other engineers to help in checking property-line corners, to determine which trees need to be cut and whether they are on county-owned property, or on property for which the county has an easement.

Boney said that there are some trees on both ends of the runway that need to be cut, but that the county could effectively eliminate much of that burden by simply shortening the length the runway by a couple of hundred feet.

“Mr. Boney, you get with Mr. Grantham as soon as possible,” May said. “Let's don't wait until Friday to do this. Let's have some movement. Let's get it open again and then we'll worry about building Choctaw International.”

In an unrelated matter, Grantham said the county stands to benefit from a \$60,000 federal High Risk Rural Road Program grant that could be used to paint traffic stripes on four county roads that failed state inspection last year.

By so doing, Grantham said, the roads' inspection scores would be more than a passing grade of 75 which would prevent the loss of Federal Aid System funds for those roads.

“They still need other work but this would get them above the failing grade,” he said.

On a motion by Commissioners Ruffin and Dixon, the board authorized Grantham to apply for the grant, which he said would pay for traffic striping on approximately 8.7 miles of CR 2, CR 8, CR 27 and CR 45.