

# Questions arise over funding for Chamber

By Tommy Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

**BUTLER** – The Choctaw Co. Chamber of Commerce and Community Development Foundation will have to wait to get a portion of its budgeted \$20,000 appropriation from the County Commission until questions are answered about the legality of such contributions using public money.

At Monday's meeting of the Commission, Probate Judge D'Wayne May said that he put an item on the agenda for a partial payment of \$6,666.66 as one-third of the budgeted amount.

May said that the board has apparently made such a contribution for the past two years,

but attorney Lee McPhearson said that the Alabama Constitution prohibits public money from being used to aid partnerships or corporations – even those considered “non profit”.

“It is my opinion that a blanket donation cannot be made,” McPhearson said. “You can expend public money if that entity is going to use it for a specific public use, but the problem in this case is, this is a blanket donation to the Chamber and you don't know what it's going to be used for.”

McPhearson said that one answer might be a simple contract with the Chamber whereby that group agrees to provide certain services for the county in exchange for the money.

“We can make it fairly broad

but I would want to run it by the Attorney General's office to make sure we are covered,” he said. Another way would be to make a donation to an industrial development board and let that organization channel the money to the Chamber, he said.

May added that the county really doesn't have the money to give the Chamber, or any other group right now.

Commissioner Ruffin agreed.

“The Chamber is important, but it was a pet project of one of our former elected officials, and I don't want us to forget about the Extension Service, Soil and Water Conservation office, West Alabama Transportation, and the Choctaw Co. Public Library, just to mention a few of the

groups that we try to help,” he said. “I don't want us to forget about all of them.”

Ruffin said he is afraid that as soon as the county gives money to the Chamber, “we're going to get calls from the rest wanting to know when they will get theirs.”

“Some of them got funded in the past and some were forgotten about,” Ruffin said. “Maybe we could pinch off some for the Chamber and some for all the rest. I don't want to be seen as showing favoritism.”

A motion to allow McPhearson to draft a contract between the county and the Chamber for an unspecified dollar amount – contingent upon approval by the Attorney General's office – was made by

Commissioners Ruffin and Dandy Brown and passed unanimously.

“I will draft a proposed contract and send it to Montgomery for review and if you ultimately decide to go that route, we'll be ahead of the game,” McPhearson said.

However, since it can take weeks or even months to get a response from that state agency on such a matter, the board said the matter would be taken up at such time that a response is received.

Commissioner Henry Lovette said he would like to have a list of the amounts that have been pledged in the current budget and what, if any, has been paid to date before any decision is made.

# Airport runways must be marked with temporary closure “X's”

By Tommy Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

**BUTLER** – The ends of the runways at Choctaw County's airport – closed since late 2006 because of safety concerns – will have to be temporarily marked with large “X's” that are visible from the air by pilots who may have not gotten the word that the facility is closed.

Engineer Garry Grantham advised the Co. Commission on Monday that the State Dept. of Transportation's Aeronautics Board will require the markings to be posted as soon as possible.

Grantham said that he will get prices on the lettering and report back to the board at the May 14th meeting.

Attorney Lee McPhearson said that former airport manager Franklin Boney has been working to make sure that all of the appropriate agencies have been notified that the facility is temporarily closed.

“Airplanes don't need to be using the airport right now,” McPhearson said. “We don't want to expose ourselves to liabilities if some crop duster or other pilots were to use it and something bad were to happen.”

Although the airport was ordered closed in the late fall of 2006, the Federal Aviation Administration was apparently never notified by any local authorities of that action. As a result, a number of planes – especially crop dusters – have continued to use the facility.

McPhearson said he has received a clearer copy of an aerial photograph from Volkert and Associates, a Mobile-based engineering firm that is working with the Airport Authority to obtain a more than \$400,000 federal grant for the airport – of trees that are in the “approach zones” to the runways and must be removed before the state will re-issue a license.

“Hopefully, Mr. Grantham will soon be able to locate the county's property lines and we can get those trees cut,” McPhearson said. “If

Commissioner Brown and the engineer will go and talk to people on east end of runway that would help.”

Several of the tall trees are near St. Mary United Methodist Church and some nearby houses.

“We just need to get some closure on this as soon as possible,” Probate Judge D'Wayne May said.

The work to repair the shoulders of the runways could be done in a matter of a couple of days with a few loads of dirt and the cooperation of all district and road crews.

“It's really small stuff for us to get done,” Grantham said. “We just need to get an electrician to repair the lights.”

Commissioners agreed to go to the site with Grantham later this week and look at the work that needs to be done.

“I am ready to send my men out there whenever they are needed,” Commissioner C.D. “Budd” Ruffin said.

In an item related to the airport, Gary Johnson, whose Johnson Racing Enterprises and home are located directly across Ala. 10 from the airport, told the commission that he would be willing to do “whatever I can” to help keep the airport running.

Johnson said he has timber-cutting equipment, tow motors, a generator, and other equipment that could be used.

The lack on on-site security and management has been an ongoing concern at the airport for a number of years.

Johnson said that since he lives across the street it would be an easy matter for him to make periodic loops around the property to make sure it is secure. He also said that he has a security surveillance camera system in place in his business that could be expanded to the airport with minimal time and expense.

“I can help set up a wireless video system that will let me know if someone is on the property,” he said.

Johnson said he also has a mechanic working for him who might be interested in staying in the airport's living quar-

ters as on-site night security.

“I think we could make it pay for itself,” Johnson said. “Right now its costing us. I am an electrician and I could maintain the lights, I have tractor with a bushhog and I could help keep the grass cut.”

Commissioner Ruffin said everything he heard sounded good, and Commissioner Dandy Brown thanked Johnson for his interest.

Commissioner Henry Lovette suggested that the county might be able to take care of the nighttime security issue by renting the living quarters to engineer Grantham.

Judge May asked Ruffin to meet with Johnson and get a list of specific items that he is proposing and to bring that back to the May 14th meeting.

In unrelated matters, the engineer asked for permission to get bid prices on a new, larger truck for his use, and to let the bridge inspector use the Colorado truck that he is currently using.

Grantham said that a Dodge 1500 quad-cab would cost about \$16,900 under state bid prices.

He also advised the board that John Pedro Diamond, who works in his department, wanted to talk to the board in private.

“We will have to determine if that needs to be in open session or executive session,” May said. The matter was to be added to the agenda, but Diamond had to leave before the lengthy meeting concluded.

Grantham said that he and Diamond were working diligently to prepare for the state's annual review of local roads and bridges.

“The inspectors will be here tomorrow (Tuesday) to finish up,” he said. “We had three or four roads that had failed previously, and we have brought them up to where they are passing this year.”

“I want to thank my crew, because they have been working relentlessly to bring the numbers up,” Commissioner Clyde

Dixon said. “All of the numbers look better.”

When a county road's inspection score falls below a “70” on the state scale for several consecutive years, that particular road loses any applicable state and federal aid road improvement funds until the safety issues are corrected and the road gets a passing score – 70 or above.

“Just adding a center-line stripe to a road adds six points to the score,” Grantham said.

Judge May said that a demonstration is being set up locally of a new asphalt machine that supposedly can help repair roads at a fraction of the cost of doing the work the traditional way.

“I have been to one demonstration and I am impressed with it,” Grantham said.

He suggested choosing a location that log trucks or other heavy traffic has torn up, fix it with the machine during the demonstration, and then monitor it for six months to a year to see how well it holds up before making a decision as to whether or not to buy the machine.

Commissioner Lovette said he has the “perfect spot” in his district at an intersection that has been severely damaged by log truck traffic. He also said that a company has donated the cost of the materials for use in fixing the road, so the demonstration and repairs won't cost the county a dime.

Commissioner Dixon said his crew is currently trying to repair the badly eroded shoulders and edges of pavement on CR 9 at Toxey (New Hope Road).

“There's some places there where two vehicles can't meet a school bus without one of them having to get off the pavement,” he said.

# Grant will fund two emergency generators for Butler, Gilberttown

By Tommy Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

**BUTLER** – Two federal hazard mitigation grants – in the amounts of \$62,000 of \$64,000 – will help purchase generators that will ensure public water systems in Butler and Lisman are able to supply customers in the event of a major electrical power outage.

Bill Gibson, Director of the Choctaw Emergency Management Agency, said Monday that he has received confirmation that applications for generators for the Butler Utilities Board and the North Choctaw Water and Sewer Authority have been approved.

In addition, Gibson said the state has agreed to loan the EMA two additional 55KW, three-phase generators for use during major emergencies. Those two generators can be used for most any “critical public safety power application” needs, he said.

The four generators won't solve all of the county's emergency power needs, Gibson said, “but it puts us in much better shape.”

Gibson said that another grant to put emergency weather warning sirens at several additional locations in the county is also pending and that he anticipates that application will be approved as well.

Gibson said the EMA has also received a \$1,500 grant for use in supporting the Strategic National Stockpile Initiative.

The Commission gave approval for Gibson to attend the Alabama-Mississippi Hurricane Conference on June 27-29. The local Long Term Recovery Committee will fund the cost of registration, tuition and Gibson's lodging for the conference.

# Commission working on lease for McCarty's Ferry

By Tommy Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

**BUTLER** – Commissioner Henry Lovette said at Monday's meeting of the Choctaw Co. Commission that efforts to obtain a lease for the closed McCarty's Ferry river landing are “coming along” and that he expects to have a draft of a proposed lease in hand so that it can be discussed at the board's May 14th meeting.

The popular river park was closed several years ago by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which owns and formerly maintained the park and boat launching ramp on the Tombigbee River in the Ararat community on CR 23.

A number of local fishermen and boaters have pressed the Commission for years to try and get control of the park so that the county can maintain it and keep it open.

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June 21, 2006  
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This is our first Mother's Day without you.  
Since you went away  
You were the center of our lives  
Before your soul passed on;  
It's just so hard for us to believe that you are really gone  
But we celebrate the life you lived  
And all the things you gave us;  
Because remembering you is easy, we do it everyday,  
but there's an ache within our hearts that will never go away.  
Our wonderful memories, Mom, of you  
Are the things that will comfort and save us.  
Please think of us, as we think of you  
With hearts so full of love;  
We're looking up at you, sweet Mom,  
As you look at us from above.  
Your children,  
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