

THE TRUTH LINCOLN COUNTY CITIZENS

Watching TV, reading this week's Lincoln Journal, and listening to citizens around the county raise issues about the way the newly elected officials have conducted themselves so far, requires a different view and response than what is being said by a few people and the media. Our new leadership should be applauded for their efforts and their conduct in such a short time while they perform the job they were elected to do. The spin to discredit our newly elected leaders in the performance of their duties is repulsive and demonstrates that self interest supersedes the best interest for Lincoln County during this financial crisis. Issues such as the present financial status in our government, the swimming pool, the layoff of personnel and furloughs, the move of E-911 Dispatch, the use and opening of the new Gym have rallied a group of our citizens to spin their opinion with little validity but lots of emotion! The average citizens of our county who are trying to make it day by day are hearing and reading a distorted view of our newly elected officials. Opposing groups are blaming our new officials with illegal acts while they are in the process of making the tough decisions to get the county through the financial mess inherited from the previous administration.

It is ironic that these same citizens never raised a voice about the expenditures of our tax dollars, fixing the swimming pool that was allowed to deteriorate until it was unsafe for our children to use, and is a liability to this county in its present state. Also, these same citizens have not raised a concern to the large growth of our county government under the previous administration.

Our local paper, (The Lincoln Journal) has taken a one sided position by printing an editorial on the front page of the Journal without having the writer sign their name (which is against the papers own policy) to an article that the facts stated are ambiguous, show personal bias, and are unsupported and misleading. Anyone reading this last edition of the Lincoln Journal will see the disproportionate, biased, and one-sided view of the paper and which the owner is apparently in agreement with.

Present Financial Status of our Government:

It is fact that in the past 8 years the Lincoln County Government has seen substantial growth within the government itself. New positions funded to increase the Directorates which blossomed inside and outside the courthouse with the purchase of two buildings near the Courthouse required considerable funding. Has anyone really inquired as to what the cost was to purchase these two homes and renovate them into offices for the county government in the past 5 years? They now house the Director of Public Safety (\$93,314.00) and the Director of Public Works (\$165,000.00)? What has been the cost to the taxpayers to hire additional people to operate these two Directorates, and to purchase new vehicles, furniture, equipment, etc? Does anyone really know what the cost is to run the new Lincoln County TV, another addition to the growth of our government?

It is important that the taxpayers know that the Emergency Fund before the election of November 2008, totaled \$420,646.29 (October 08). The past Chairman and his administration left their office on January 01, 2009 leaving Lincoln County with only \$39,154.62 in the Emergency Fund. The past Chairman and Commissioners serving in 2008 should explain how they spent \$381,491.67 in 56 days after the election on November 4, 2008. REMEMBER, the new Chairman and Commissioners were only left with \$39,154.62 in the Emergency Fund to finish the current Fiscal Year ending in June 2009.

Swimming Pool:

Citizens who have a concern about the pool not opening this summer should be concerned about how many kids and adults used the pool during the past summer. You should be able to get a good figure from Director of the Recreation Department. The county is responsible to have two paid lifeguards on duty when the pool is open. With so little usage by our citizens, look at the cost to open which is approximately \$11,400.00 needed to operate 45 days this summer. This includes salary of lifeguards, repairing pool, chemicals needed, filling it up with water and finding a filter that will fit. Let's not blame this on the newly elected officials, why not ask the past Chairman/Commissioners why the pool has been allowed to get into this disrepair? Compare the cost to operate to the revenues brought in. How low will certain people stoop to make the swimming pool a black/white issue for our newly elected officials who are looking at this as; can our county afford the repairs, labor, salary, when the county has less tax money coming in than projected and the county has been left with only \$39,154.62 in the emergency fund.

The New Gym and Parking Lot:

The gym and parking lot at the Recreation Center was also a mess from the start of construction which was not finished by the old Chairman and past commissioners. The cost of building the Gym is around \$1,226,974.00. The old Chairman and Commissioners spent a huge amount of money to build this empty shell (Named after Walker T. Norman himself) and the contractors can't put a floor in it because of the dampness of the concrete. Look at the Commissioner's minutes in November and December 2008 and you will see the past Chairman/Commissioners voting through the approval to spend \$126,770.00 to pave the gym's roadway and parking lot, not stopping till they paved all the way to the tennis court. This action was taken even though the past administration knew they would be leaving office. The past Chairman had to know that the economic situation of the county was questionable while these expenditures were being made and the economy would most likely get worse. Much of the money used to pave the area spoken about could have been saved since this area had been acceptable for years when it was gravel. The past Chairman/Commissioners found it necessary to fund the paving, leaving very little money for the county to work with until the end of this budget year.

Lay off Personnel and Furlough:

Only one person who was a Directorate level employee at Planning and Zoning resigned. One Temporary Director over the Senior Citizens, who was put into that position a couple of weeks before the old Chairman left office without the Commissioner's approval, was replaced. Who are the people the new Commission fired? Furloughs may not have been necessary if the past Commission had been more responsible in their spending, especially after the election in November 2008, when there was over \$420,000.00 in the Emergency Fund.

The new commission has looked at several contracts for possible savings and looked at other ways to provide the service (such as grass cutting around county property). There are arrangements being made between the Sheriff's Office and the Commissioner's Office to use inmate labor to make up this difference at no cost to the taxpayers.

E-911 Dispatch:

2005, The Lincoln County Sheriff's Office was in charge of dispatching for the Sheriff's Office, Fire Departments, Ambulance Service, taking calls and ensuring the right personnel were sent to the appropriate call. The Sheriff's Office had 5 dispatchers and the annual budget was \$154,645.00.

The Commissioners moved the dispatch to form a New Directorate called "Directorate of Public Safety" in 2006. The cost of this move on the taxpayers was:

- Purchase of new CAD System was \$234,640.00
- Purchase of the Communications building (170 School Street) was \$82,000.00
- Cost of renovation of the communications building was \$11,314.00
- Cost of new telephone and computer lines moving from the Sheriff's Office to the communications building was \$13,490.00 by Augusta Telephone.
- The cost to the taxpayers to move the communications from the Sheriff to the newly formed Public Safety was \$341,444.00.

This doesn't include the annual budget which this year is \$172,818.00 to run the E-911 center while under the past Commissioners.

If the past Commissioners had left the E-911 with the Sheriff and only purchased the CAD system; the cost would have been approximately \$234,640.00 saving the taxpayers \$106,804.00.

To be in compliance, the Sheriff would have put the dispatchers in an office by themselves with no additional duties other than dispatch and E-911.

Even though the new Directorate was formed, the Sheriff and the Director of Public Safety had to sign agreements with each other for the two separate entities to operate Management Control Agreement and the Network Service Agreement. The Sheriff's Office had to retain control of the GCIC terminal (GCIC Council Rule 140-2-.09) and the radio license required by the FCC.

The Director of Public Safety managed day to day operations at E-911, where the Sheriff continued to be responsible for all Criminal Justice Information handled by Public Safety.

The decision to move the E-911 (dispatch) back to the Sheriff's Office by the current Commissioners was to reduce redundancy in our government and condense a government that had grown exponentially, consolidating services to make a more efficient organization.

There are no projected costs for the move back to the Sheriff, change in service, change in dispatch duties, or projected loss in the Fire rating.

The Director of Public Safety was not fired from his position but voluntarily resigned. The new Chairman's Administration tried to work with the Director by leaving him as Director of Public Safety with the same pay he had before E-911 was moved back to the Sheriff.

The past Commissioners have left the county almost broke. There was a political machine in Lincoln County that has run this county for years which was defeated in the last election. The opinion of many is that a few of the stragglers who were supporters of the defeated past Commissioner show that they cannot let go.

The majority of the people in Lincoln County spoke and the new leaders are doing what they were elected to do. The new Chairman was handed an almost broke county with projected revenues and taxes down to make it to the end of the budget year. The past Chairman/Commissioners and his cronies built an empire which "benefited a few and neglected the majority of our citizens." The majority of the people voted for a new direction in this critical time.

The dollar amounts disclosed have been verified at the County Finance Office. There are a lot of other costs that are not mentioned. The purpose of this summary is to provide a factual overview of the current status in our local government. The elected officials who are doing their best with what they were left to work with, do not deserve the negative press they have received, trying to manage an inherited broke county. All citizens need to get together and make the past leaders (past Chairman/ Commissioners) give us answers to how all this money was in the emergency fund before the election in November and by the time the New Government took office in January only \$39,154.62 was left to operate the county. To deplete the Emergency Funds, the past Chairman/Commissioners had to spend an average of \$6,812.35 per day from the day after election (Nov 4, 2008) to the beginning of the new Chairman coming into office (Jan 1, 2009). Why was this money allowed to be spent during a financial crisis in our country and county?

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(Paid advertisement by Linda and Johnny Burns)