

## **Questions July 16, 2014**

**Q. Isn't it a good thing that our courthouse now has courthouse security screening and shouldn't we all feel better about it?**

A. As I have said several times, I was not ready for instituting courthouse security because of the cost, because of the inconvenience to our citizens, and because none of us can ever be completely safe, no matter what our job. But as I also said, there were many others who have been involved in this ultimate decision to begin this process besides just me. So overall, while I was not ready for this, it would probably have had to happen sooner rather than later.

**Q. Why is a courthouse potentially more dangerous than other public buildings?**

A. It is really pretty simple. While there are lots of good things that occur in our courthouse, there are some situations that are out of the ordinary. Many counties have their courthouse completely separated from their county offices and elected officials. However, for convenience to the public and at a tremendous cost savings, in Union County all offices are located in one building.

Let me remind you of some of the situations that go on in our courthouse that do not occur in other public arenas. Parents have children taken away from them in juvenile court, convicted felons lose their freedom, indigent defendants are a part of the system, husbands and wives' lives change forever as the result of a divorce, fortunes can be lost in law suits, family farms and homes can be lost in legal proceedings and repossessions, a person's life can be ruined as a result of a child molestation conviction, people are embarrassed and lose reputations as a result of certain public documents being recorded in a courthouse, and the list goes on and on. So why do these potential issues seem meaningless to some? Our judges, Sheriff's Dept. and county officials are in unison with regards to the new courthouse security.

**Q. Why are you blaming the new gun law for the need for courthouse security?**

A. If you will read my last two weeks Q & A, all the blame does not fall to the new law, but it was the straw that broke the camel's back. The new law, HB 60, does not require courthouse security, but because we are not only a courthouse, but an office building with other elected officials and offices not involved with the court system, it removed our ability to provide adequate security otherwise.

**Q. We are concerned about all the dump trucks traveling along Pat Colwell Rd. and other rural roads on their way to a new development. It is disrupting our peace and quiet in the neighborhood and we do not feel safe on the roads when meeting the large trucks. Is there not anything the county can do?**

A. First, the Sheriff's Dept. has been made aware of the situation and is monitoring speeds of the vehicles. Second, the county is reminding the truck drivers and the developers that we know they have a job to do, but to try to be courteous to other drivers, especially by not speeding on this road. Third, they will be completing another public sale on the property in about a week and the truck traffic should slow down for a little while.

**Q Can the county prevent trucks from using a county road?**

A. No, unless it is a road that is not rated for large trucks. While this is an aggravation for some, it is also a sign of economic recovery on the other hand. Many of these same truck drivers have lost homes, equipment and jobs as a result of the downturn in the economy in Union County and the entire country. This is the first really large construction project to come along in years in our county and the first time many of these guys have seen their bank accounts start to stabilize.

Following the land sales, there will be many additional jobs created as homes begin to be built on the property. Does this all cause increased traffic? Yes it does, but a lot of families will have their quality of life improved as well.

**Q. What can you tell us about this property and why is it being developed?**

A. This property was slated to have a multi-million dollar development built there several years ago that fell through just prior to the economic downturn. The property was taken over by a bank and was recently sold to a group who purchases distressed properties - around 1400 acres. They develop the property and then have a large advertising budget and have periodic public sales of their property. They have been very successful in selling property in our county and several other areas.

**Q. What are the positives and negatives of this development?**

A. The positives are that it brings new people to our area that visit, build second or permanent homes and spend money here. In addition, over time several will settle here and become an integral part of our community. It also drastically improves, over time, our real estate values. This particular development will take property that has been paying minimal property taxes, with values under \$5,000 per acre, to now property valued at over \$30,000 per acre and more in the developed parts of the property. All of this provides more jobs for the entire construction industry and increases revenue for the county, helping to keep property taxes reasonable.

The negatives are obvious. There is more traffic and larger traffic because it will be a large development with construction vehicles involved. It will have an impact on the county roads and will probably require occasional extra repairs. I totally realize that some people who move here like it like it is and do not really want the county to grow. This area, if it follows the typical projection, will develop slowly after the lots are all sold. The average is about 5 years for a new owner building a new home. It is a large parcel of land so will have a larger impact in the immediate area, but the owners are doing an excellent job developing the property so far.

**Q. Will the county have the bill for maintaining the roads within the development?**

A. No. It is a gated community and the streets are all private and the county will not have any cost within the development, only roads approaching it.