

Commissioner Questions December 31 2014

We hope you had a very Merry Christmas and have a Happy and Prosperous New Year

Q. What do you hope to accomplish in 2015?

A. Our focus will be to continue to provide excellent county services, with the emphasis on "excellent", and at the lowest possible cost to the taxpayers. We continue to be proud of our accomplishment of having one of the lowest property tax rates (mil rate) in the State of Georgia, consistently in the 3 to 5 lowest out of 159 counties!! While all property taxes are still a burden to pay, they are so much less than most other counties' and we work hard to maintain that level.

Q. Do you have any big projects planned for 2015?

A. We have been able to redo, repair, clean up and improve just about every aspect of Union County government and facilities during my tenure as commissioner except our transfer station, affectionately called by many, "the dump". We have been working on plans there for a couple of years. We are now awaiting approval of those final plans that have been presented to EPD (Environmental Protection Division) several times this year and feel we are very close to having them approved. It really complicates things when you are attempting to build new structures in the middle of an old landfill site.

Q. You mentioned recently at a county meeting that the county had purchased property next to the Union County Arena and that this might help the trash situation. Could you explain this?

A. We did recently purchase two acres bordering the Arena property on the North and Highway 325 on the South side. This parcel will have two very important uses. First, it will allow for additional parking for the Arena events, which will help alleviate a lot of the crowding especially during rodeos. But most importantly is the portion of that parcel that will be utilized as a Convenience Center for a trash and recycling collection site for a large portion of the county, and will prevent many of you from having to take a trip to the transfer station.

Q. Won't this new convenience be expensive for the county to build and operate?

A. It could have been if not for the cooperation of Advanced Disposal, our garbage contractor. We have worked out an agreement with Advanced Disposal where they will put up \$ 15 ,000 for site improvements to the county and we will be responsible for the concrete and utility installation. Once completed, Advanced Disposal will pay 100% of the cost of providing a full time employee to man the site and keep it neat and clean.

Q. What can we take to the new Convenience Center site?

A. It will be for household bagged garbage and recyclables only. There will be no commercial garbage. For those West and NW of Blairsville, this will prevent having to go sit in line at the current transfer station. They are called convenience centers and that is exactly what they are. They are neat, clean, do not smell and will not provide an eyesore for the public. This will remove a significant amount of traffic from Deep South Farm Road. We are also looking at a couple of other options next year that could improve the situation in the county further.

Q. Will we have other projects in 2015 other than improvement to the transfer station?

A. Certainly we will. We will continue to be sure that our emergency and public services are top quality and that when you need them, you will have the best trained and equipped assistance whether it is an ambulance service, deputy, firemen, road dept. or any type emergency service, because that is the most important for your safety. In addition, we will be adding a small water park and slide to the Meeks Park Pool, we will complete the kayak/canoe launching ramp and walking trail extension and completion of the Tate Mill reconstruction at Meeks Park. We have the plans nearly complete on an amphitheater for the park but anticipate that may have to wait just a little later, maybe 2016.

Q. Are all of these improvements for 2015 to be paid for with SPLOST sales taxes?

A. Most of the projects above are being funded by SPLOST.

Q. Since we have such a good road system in our county, will you be doing any further work on the roads this year?

A. We always have road work to do. You cannot let up even a little bit in keeping our roads graded, patched or resurfaced. We have over 600 miles of county roads to maintain. We are also working with GDOT in making improvements to US 76 (515) E toward Young Harris. This project should begin purchasing R/W by early 2016 with construction possibly 2017 and completed by 2019. All GDOT roads take lots of years to plan and construct.

Q. How do you pay for road work in Union County?

A. It is about evenly split between SPLOST sales tax revenue and the county budget at about \$1 million each. Other than the Sheriff's office operation and jail, this is by far our most expensive part of keeping our county government operating.

Q.