

December Newsletter

Tis the season to be jolly.... this timeless phrase is what we have needed all year. Stocks, investment markets, 401k's, and home prices are at an all time low. Now comes Christmas...I sure hope we have some money left in our checking accounts or piggy banks!

The election last month was a shocker, both nationally and locally. Democrats now dominate our commission board and the future looks very interesting.

In local news we have, finally, got a good plan from the Georgia Department of Transportation...

** GA20 & 212: The intersection will be moved 300 feet north

** Brown Bridge Road & GA 20/212 will get a traffic signal...hooray! Pittman Construction will be awarded the contract. Newton County's cost will be \$553,119.00. Beginning date is January 2009. This could take from eight to 12 months to complete. We are hopeful that there will not be any more delays other than what is normal at that intersection.

**Newton County's Senior Planner Scott Sirotkin (Planning & Development Department) appeared before the board and gave a very good overview on the Neighborhood Stabilization Program. This involves a federal grant that was passed by congress in September of this year. These grants give local government money to purchase, repair, and resale properties direct to the public. Yes, there is a very stringent criteria attached to this program, and even though most of the present board opposes the county getting involved, Commissioner Henderson and myself offered our support of this program. My suggestion was to use the \$2 million that we may qualify for as down payment assistance on houses. This way, we can help with a significant amount for the applicants. However, the program as offered will not have enough votes to pass.

** The Board of Commissioners approved the submission of an application for a grant from the Federal Transportation Act. This act grants \$500,000.00 to schools to encourage children to walk and ride their bikes to school. It is administered by the Georgia Department of Transportation. It requires no local money, and through a series of meetings between the school board, the sheriff's office, county engineering department, and The Center for Community Preservation many school districts were studied for this project. The committee selected Veteran's Middle School and West Newton Elementary School as the recipients of the grant program. If the application is approved, and the funding source is awarded the project will include adding sidewalks, lighting, and handicap accessible entrance ramps on both sides of Brown Bridge Road east to Salem Road.

Lastly, I have some final thoughts for you people facing difficult times. If your mortgage is in trouble, please call your loan servicer, the government has come out with help for you since October of this year. Also, call Faith Works and the Salvation Army. They, too, have resources to help you. May I suggest we cut cable bills, internet access, and even some extra features we have on our phones. It is my understanding that all national companies are seeing customers do this in masses and possibly they will come up with ways to lower our cost. There are several chains that still offer a lay-away program, such as T.J. Maxx, Marshall's, K-Mart and Target.

Please ask and shop-around, but whatever you do, please have a safe and enjoyable Christmas.

Commissioner Simmons