

February Newsletter

Fireside Chat

I was thrilled with the turnout for the first District 3 Fireside Chat held at The Oaks Course on Thursday, February 12. The 90+ residents who attended the meeting heard brief presentations from Chief Satterfield of the Newton County Fire Department; EMS director, James Osburn; and representatives from Planning and Development, Marian Eisenberg and Scott Sorotkin. In addition, Board of Commissioners Chair, Kathy Morgan; Tax Assessor, Tommy Knight, and Newton County Chamber Executive, John Boothby made brief remarks.

The presentation by Planning and Development gave an overview of the recently adopted Newton County Comprehensive Plan. This plan gives the Board of Commissioners direction in planning future growth through appropriate zoning and guides allocation of resources for infrastructure and providing services to the community. Many of those in attendance had concerns related to a zoning variance for property on Brown Bridge Road. This meeting provided an opportunity for residents to voice these concerns.

I am hopeful that, as a district, we will continue to work together to address issues. As discussed on Thursday, going forward, we will meet quarterly. Our next Fireside Chat will be held in May and will focus on multi-modal transportation options for District 3. Bring your ideas for the present and the future.

Homeowners Tax Relief Grant

Homeowners are familiar with the Homestead Credit on property tax bills. The amount ranges from \$200 to \$300 depending on the amount of the credit. This credit has been in place since 1999 when the state legislature voted to allow local governments to give a credit on the local property tax bill. The state also agreed to refund the credited portion to local governments in the form of The Homeowners Tax Relief Grant. Since the State of Georgia is facing a \$3Billion shortfall, this grant back to the local governments is in jeopardy. Although the legislature voted to uphold their commitment back to local governments for the current budget, the Governor has vowed to cut the grant unless \$428million in revenue can be found in the state budget to cover the grant. Stay tuned...if the Governor chooses not to fund this grant, all local governments, including Newton, will be forced to send tax bills this spring to homeowners in the amount of the exemption. There is still time to contact the Governor to voice your concerns. Remember to reference House Bill 143.

Newton County Budget Shortfall

It comes as no surprise that Newton County is facing a revenue shortfall. Due to the current state of the economy as a whole, property tax collection is down as are SPLOST funds. During a recent work session of the BOC, we were informed that the revenue shortfall for the current FY09 Budget was \$5 million. The chair asked all department heads and constitutional officers to examine their budgets and attempt to trim their current budgets by at least 20%. The BOC held an all day work session on February 14 to address the budget. I must commend the department

heads and constitutional officers. I can only imagine how difficult this challenge is for them. We continue to look for creative solutions to this shortfall. Please know that we are working diligently to cut the budget fairly so as not to impact necessary services. But the hard reality is that these cuts are inevitable and will be painful.