

Greetings District 3 residents

This is the first installment of monthly newsletters that will update you regarding the Board of Commissioners.

SINCE THE ELECTION:

During the first week of December, I , along with Tim Fleming and Kathy Morgan, attended a required four day training for newly elected county commissioners in Athens at the Carl Vinson Institute of Government. The training was intense and covered subjects such as ethics, economic development, financial management, taxation, and teamwork. Throughout the year, we will continue to attend an average of one training session each month. The training is especially helpful in educating each commissioner on laws and best practices. In addition, we have the opportunity to network with other counties and share ideas for improving our local governments.

TAKING OFFICE:

The swearing-in ceremony took place on December 31, 2008 at the Courthouse in Covington with the Honorable Judge Henry Baker officiating. Three Commissioners, Chair of the BOC, and four constitutional officers were sworn in before a standing room only crowd who had gathered to witness the historic event. Excitement and anticipation filled the room as the first woman Chair and the first African American Sheriff took their oaths of office.

NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION PLAN:

The BOC voted during our first meeting of the year on January 6 to submit a grant application to the Department of Community Affairs under the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP). If awarded the grant, just over \$1.7 million, the county will use the money to purchase foreclosed homes and rehabilitate blighted neighborhoods. The grant requirements are stringent and apply only to areas with significant foreclosure impact. We have submitted several proposals that comply with the guidelines. We will not know until late February whether or not Newton County will receive its allocation. I will continue to update you on the progress of this grant money.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Economic development continues to be one of the most important areas of concern for me because it direct relates to jobs.. Over the course of the last month, I have had numerous discussions with community business leaders, the Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, representatives from the state Department of Economic Development, and I attended a training in Macon dedicated to Economic Development. From these discussions, I have learned that one of our greatest assets as a community is the collaboration that takes place between and among our various governmental agencies. Repeatedly, I have been told that our Leadership Collaborative, The Center, and the Four County Joint Development Authority are assets that make us more attractive for development than most communities in Georgia. However, we still have some weaknesses that need to be addressed and make us less attractive to businesses locating here. Recommendations for improving our appeal include enhancing our workforce readiness, decreasing the cost of utilities in the City of Covington, and expanding the availability of alcohol outside of the city limits. In addition, a spec building at Stanton Springs would greatly enhance our ability to market the project aggressively.

FINANCIAL PICTURE:

It comes as no surprise that one of the most discussed topics in our two board meetings and work session in the month of January is money. In our first meeting on January 6, a motion was made to approve the county attorney. I abstained from this vote because I was not provided information to make an informed decision. Whereas, I have the utmost confidence in Mr. Craig's ability as an attorney for the Board of Commissioners, I have some serious concerns regarding the amount of money spent on legal services. I have requested a scope of practice, comparables from surrounding counties, and a copy of the contract. Along with Commissioner Simmons, I plan to discuss these concerns with the board during our work session/retreat to be held January 30 and 31. During our January 20 meeting, we received a preliminary Financial report from Marcia Allen. Motions were made to implement hiring and spending freezes. I am very concerned about the current economic climate and I believe the Board of Commissioners must be prudent especially as it relates to financial matters, afterall we are managing taxpayer money. However, I feel strongly that we must work together as a team and enlist the support of the constitutional officers when deciding on measures as severe as hiring and spending freezes. Unfortunately, I believe the decision that was made at the January 20 meeting was premature as we did not have all of the final numbers.

CLOSING:

In closing, I would like to reaffirm that I have no personal agendas other than to serve the residents of Newton County to the best of my ability. Please continue to communicate with me via email or phone so that I may know your concerns. I want to remind you of the [Fireside Chat](#) on February 12 at 7pm at The Oaks Course. Please plan to attend and encourage as many of your friends and neighbors in District 3 to attend as well. Together, we can make Newton County the Jewel of Georgia.
