

MAY 2009 NEWSLETTER

Railroad Purchase or *Not*

While much attention has focused on the purchase of the Norfolk Southern Railroad, the Board of Commissioner is focused on balancing the FY2010 budget. There are good arguments for and against the purchase of the railroad. However, there are still many questions yet to be answered before a decision will be made to purchase or not purchase the railroad. Stay tuned, once the budget process is complete, we will discuss in much greater detail ALL of the ramifications of purchasing and owning a railroad.

FY 2010 Budget

I have spent the last few weeks doing my due diligence as it relates to the FY2010 budget.

As of today, my general assessment is that we need to do some restructuring to provide a lean county government. There are areas of overlap and we can streamline some departments and some processes. Meanwhile there are Federal and State mandates that require specific positions or numbers of positions in departments. Therefore, the restructuring must comply with these mandates.

I am very keenly aware of the relationship between laying off employees and further impacting the unemployment rate in Newton County. It is my belief that as the unemployment rate increases, so too does petty crime, thereby creating a need for increased spending in the Sheriff's department. Therein lies a vicious circle.

We have seen over the last 6 months the loss of many of our local businesses. We need this commercial and industrial base and cannot afford for another business to lay off people. Jobs are crucial to the financial stability of our community, our tax digest, and our public safety. Therefore, Economic Stability and Public Safety must be our priorities. We must continue to retain and attract business in Newton County. The challenge for the Board of Commissioners is to determine the fair and equitable share for each of these priorities.

Please know that I am not taking any position on this budget lightly. I can assure you that whatever my final decision, it will be made looking from every angle and trying create a budget that is balanced not only fiscally but with empathy for everyone impacted.