

Interest group donates to Ashe County for asphalt plant litigation

Plus other business from the board of commissioners meeting July 1

BY LUKE WEIR

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WEST JEFFERSON — A local interest group called Protect Our Fresh Air and Clean Water cut a \$11,240 check to the County of Ashe in support of ongoing litigation against an Appalachian Materials asphalt plant proposed for construction in Glendale Springs.

Of the 19 people present on the third floor of the Ashe County Courthouse for a regular meeting of the Ashe County Board of Commissioners at 6 p.m. Monday, July 1, many were there on behalf of Protect Our Fresh Air and Clean Water, including the movement's facilitator, Pat Considine.

"We thank you for your continued effort to stop the asphalt plant from polluting Glendale Springs," Considine said. "We put out the word that we really needed to support the county in this endeavor, and we ended up with 86 contributors."

The commissioners unanimously voted on June 4 that Ashe County Attorney John Kilby would petition the N.C. Supreme Court for a potential appeal of the *Ashe County v. Ashe County Planning Board* asphalt plant case, after the N.C. Court of Appeals ruled in May that the county planning board was correct to issue a Polluting Industries Development Ordinance permit to Appalachian Materials, *Ashe Post & Times* previously reported.

According to Considine, litigating the PIDO permit that was issued to Appalachian Materials by the Ashe County Planning Board is challenging and expensive, but if the proposed asphalt plant is built, the county will pay perpetual expenses by way of degrading citizens' health and welfare, polluting local air and water, decreasing land value, impacting agriculture and losing income from tourists.

"We certainly appreciate your efforts and your awareness that it does cost a lot," Commissioner Chairman Todd McNeill said. "This is stepping up big-time, this will hopefully encourage some other groups with a vested interest to jump in with us."

Other board of commissioners business

Also during the Ashe County Board of Commis-



Members of local interest group Protect Our Fresh Air and Clean Water present a giant \$11,240 check to the Ashe County Board of Commissioners, to help fund ongoing litigation against a proposed asphalt plant in Glendale Springs. Group facilitator Pat Considine is speaking.

PHOTO BY LUKE WEIR

sioners regular meeting at 6 p.m. July 1, Gene Painter and Laura Dye presented a progress report of ongoing gym renovations at Riverview Community Center in Creston. The commissioners granted \$12,000 to Riverview Community Center for gym renovations in September 2018, and about \$4,621.44 of the funding has been spent since then, Painter said.

According to Painter, some 274 volunteer hours have gone into the Riverview Community Center gym renovations, and cost-saving efforts have been made all-around to stretch the county-funded renovation project, such as more than \$3,800 worth of paint, painting supplies and carpeting donated by the Lowe's Hardware in West Jefferson. Another almost \$3,000 was saved on lighting by purchasing materials online rather than relying on contractors, Painter said.

With \$7,378.56 left to spend on Riverview Community Center gym renovations, Painter said there are still around \$12,400 in outstanding projects, including purchasing and installing new heaters, striping the floor, repairing windows and doors, redoing the stage, repairing the restrooms, purchasing gym equipment and installing padding behind the basketball goal.

On top of the outstanding

projects, future projects — including the installation of a new gym floor, purchasing new goals, upgrading the roof and installing a PA system — could cost between \$54,000 and \$74,000, according to Painter.

A mural was painted on the side of the building at no cost, Painter said.

"I applaud your efforts for doing all you could to save money and cut costs," Commissioner Larry Dix said.

Painter invited the commissioners and community to an open house at the Riverview Community Center during the Lions Club annual rubber ducky race Saturday, Aug. 17.

Acting Ashe County Manager Adam Stumb appeared before the board in his capacity as Ashe County Planning Director to update the commissioners on the NCDOT State Transportation Improvement Program for 2022-2031.

According to Stumb, Ashe County submitted the following four projects for NCDOT's consideration as it plans ahead for the future of state-maintained roads: (1) modernization along U.S. 221 from AMH to the junction of N.C. 16 in Jefferson, (2) intersection improvement at the junction of U.S. 221 and N.C. 16 in Jefferson, (3) modernization along Mt. Jefferson Road/Oakwood Drive to Campus Drive, and

(4) work at the Ashe County Airport terminal.

Projects previously submitted to NCDOT STIP that are in the works are as follows, according to Stumb: (1) Bidding on Section E of the U.S. 221 expansion project from the N.C. 163 four-way intersection to AMH has been delayed 6-12 months, (2) improvements to the intersection of Beaver Creek School Road and U.S. 221 Business have been approved but put on hold, (3) N.C. 88 from Jefferson to Warrensville will initiate right-of-way acquisition in 2022 and begin construction in 2024, and (4) the airport apron expansion will begin construction in 2022.

McNeill said he would like to see a stoplight on the east side of Jefferson, as traffic gets rough, particularly in the morning and evening.

During commissioner comments, the board wished Ashe County a happy Independence Day Thursday, July 4, urging everyone to be safe and encouraging folks to come out for the 33rd annual Christmas in July Festival in downtown West Jefferson July 5 and 6.

Dix noted the ongoing cost of freedom and its significance, Commissioner Paula Perry said to thank veterans and law enforcement on July 4, Vice Chair

William Sands wished Jane Lonon a happy retirement, Commissioner Larry Rhodes said the parking lot expansion at Ashe County Public Library looked nice and McNeill said the board is still working to find solutions to overcrowding caused by illegal out-of-county users at Ashe County Convenience Centers.

The board went into closed executive session to discuss property acquisition at 6:38 p.m., returning at 7:06 p.m. to make no further motions other than adjourn the meeting.

The next meeting of the Ashe County Board of Commissioners is 9 a.m. Monday, July 15.



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