

**Commissioners to Give-away
\$133,000 to Shelby, Take over
Health Department Board, get
rid of Health Department
Director Dorothea Wyant,
Deceive People with their
meeting Minutes, pass new
Animal Control Ordinance AND
Raise Taxes!!! All featured
at September 17, 2019
Commissioner's Meeting!!!
Report, arguendo, gossip and
the truth provided by Robert
A. Williams**

The Commissioner's Meeting held September 17, 2018 is probably one of the shortest commissioner's meetings in the history of Cleveland County. But full of bull-ony in what was done. Even more so on what was not done or talked about. The fact is, there was hardly any discussion at all. Everybody appeared to know in advance about everything and made every vote unanimous without a word of discussion.

The first (of many) tell-tale signs of trouble in paradise was during the very early part of the meeting when the County

Department Heads were recognized. The Health Department Director, Dorothea Wyant, was conspicuously missing. Wyant, along with the Commissioners, County Manager Brian Epley and former employee Sam Lockridge are under a Federal Lawsuit for sexual harassment where Wyant and Lockridge were alleged to be romantically involved. Lockridge was fired (forced to resign) earlier in the year and now Wyant appears to be forced into "early retirement." As typical of Cleveland County, Lockridge quickly found another job in Gaston County, most likely with a good recommendation from Cleveland County. Such as this has been a standard MO for Cleveland County for years. Don't know about where Wyant has landed; probably with another good recommendation from Cleveland County. Or a Golden Parachute (\$150,000+ to leave) similar to what Steve Thornburg got from Cleveland Community College in his top-level sex scandal. None of this was even talked about for Wyant and Lockridge.

Around 6:06 PM the Consent Agenda was approved by a unanimous vote with no discussion. Note that every vote in this meeting was unanimous and without discussion. So, I won't have to mention again that sad way the commissioners conduct their business—illegally behind closed doors.

The first real issue in the meeting was to adopt new Commissioner Meeting Procedural Rules that were published and recommended by the North Carolina Institute of Government—a group mostly involved in helping state and local governments hide information from citizens. In this particular instance, I had provided written suggestions in advance to the commissioners regarding these rules that would have provided better minutes of meetings to fairly and accurately record what truly and factually transpired in county meetings. The Commissioners stormed on by those suggestions without even noting and one word of them. I am not complaining though, as overall, the Institute of Governments guidelines that were then approved as-is contained may rules that the Commissioners typically have been violating with wild abandon. So, when I

ask for records and documents in the future, I will just tell the Commissioners that according to their very own newly adopted rules this is what they have to do. It was almost like I set a trap for the Commissioners and they fell right on in. All the while thinking they had just gotten by with screwing the public one more time. I will be reminding them of that soon enough.

The next item on the agenda was deceptively titled "Real Property Transaction Plato Lee Road." In reality it was about giving away to the City of Shelby \$133,000 in a land transaction. It goes like this. The county has a piece of property valued at \$266,000. The County will give this property to the City of Shelby to build a "shell building" on in the name of economic development for half price. Then let Shelby handle everything in building the shell building for resale. Nothing was said about where any profit on the transaction would go. I was sitting there on the front row wondering why the County does not build an industrial complex in Fallston? Or, anywhere besides Shelby. That \$133,000 in tax-dollars that will be given away was partly mine and yours. What do you think about that?

The last agenda item was in regard to a revised Animal Services Ordinance. Basically, the County Manager Brian Epley will take control of Animal Services instead of somebody in the Health Department. I suspect this is another switch-aroo coming out regarding the Wyant and Lockridge fiasco.

Lastly, in the consent agenda already talked about, was an entry for setting a date for a public hearing regarding the Commissioners taking over the Health Department Board. Similar to what they did at the DSS. I added it here since it appears linked to changes at the Health Department in defense of the Federal Lawsuit mentioned above.

All in all, since there were no questions or discussion about anything and every vote was unanimous, this was a record short

meeting. But it was not over yet.

Then the Commissioner's reports came up and everybody told a little something about something or another. Mostly chit-chat and lies about just how well Cleveland County is doing.

Then, Commissioner Johnny Hutchins says Cleveland County is in the best shape financially than it has ever been while he was a county commissioner. Then the meeting was adjourned.

Since I was sitting on the front row directly in front of Johnny Hutchins, I jumped to my feet and asked Johnny, "If the county is doing so well financially, why are the commissioners raising the Sales Tax?" Johnny said, "we are not raising the sales tax. We are allowing the people to decide whether or not to raise the sales tax." I immediately rejected this answer as "talking points" and asked, I want to know who asked for this sales tax increase, what will it be spent on and such other pertinent questions which Johnny Hutchins nor anybody else had answers for. Then Brian Epley comes over to rescue Johnny by calling Johnny to some sort of secret meeting.

The County Communications Officer, Janet Hart, perhaps at Epley's instruction also comes over asking me to send her a request for the information that I was asking for. Which I will do, knowing full well that Janet Hart will likely NOT provide the information I was asking for before the 2019 Election Referendum time has already passed. Or, just as likely "say" that she provided me the information I requested, when, in fact, she did not. She has a history of doing that.

Folks, my recommendation is to vote AGAINST the sales tax increase that will be on a referendum as part of the 2019 Election ballot. Send the Commissioners the message that us taxpayers will NOT be buying a pig in a poke under such half-baked circumstances. Especially for a tax that will be collected on forever. And, in the 2020 elections, get rid of Susan Allen, Ronnie Whetstine and Johnny Hutchins as county

commissioners. This is the second time they have pulled this sales tax increase stuff on us in just the past couple of years. We overwhelmingly voted against the tax increase the first time. Let's overwhelmingly vote AGAINST it this second time around. Who needs Republican so-called leaders who want to raise our taxes all the time, yet never fail in spending our money on wasteful and unnecessary projects? Like the \$150,000 wasted on the new fence for the Fair. Or the \$Millions wasted by the School Board and the Community College Board of Trustees.