

Cleveland County Government Gone Wild\$\$\$ Spending Money Like Drunken Sailors!!! Give Drunken Sailors a Bad Name!!! All the while thousands of Citizens are out of work, can't pay their rent or house payments and depend on extended Unemployment payments!!! Report and facts compiled by Robert A. Williams

State agencies rate Cleveland County as a "Dying County." People are leaving Cleveland County faster than people are coming to Cleveland County. More deaths than births, but mainly jobs are elsewhere and workers are leaving and taking their families with them. And never looking back. But that is just a footnote to the real problems. Problems before the COVID 19 that is blamed for everything from the family cow going dry, to the "Check Engine" light coming on in the family car, to YOU not winning the Powerball lottery.

Some of the more tangible, but basic problems can be shown by some statistics."

- Over 20,000 county residents are on Food Stamps
- 9,000 workers have been identified as being under-employed

and are entering the "Accelerate Cleveland" Program run by Cleveland Community College. They run five or six classes per year with 10 or so in a class. At that rate it will take 150 years to catch up-assuming they can wait that long for the educational skills they never received at Cleveland County Schools or Cleveland Community College in the first place.

- Cleveland County Schools are turning out 500 graduates per year who can't read, write or do math proficiently. Over 20 times more than CCC can run through the Accelerate Cleveland Program. Therefore, more Food Stamp and remedial education needs than less.

Cleveland County Schools is Broke. All four High Schools are over 50 years old and there is no plan to replace them. Any of them. Or pay for them even if there were plans to replace them. There is not even enough money in the till to maintain them in a condition that is safe for human habitation. Both Burns and Crest High Schools have serious mold problems that has shut down various section of the schools. Mold problems caused by condensate drain piping from the HVAC system not being properly insulated, causing the pipes to "sweat" and the condensate water dripping down on the ceiling tiles where the wet conditions provide ideal environments for growing mold. Which, in turn, may have more health consequences for the children and teachers than the COVID 19, influenza, mumps and measles combined.

Cleveland County is Broke!! To build the overpriced new North Shelby School, Cleveland County had to finance over \$30 million at rates relatively similar to credit cards and pawn shops. For collateral on the loans, the county signed over the deeds for not only North Shelby School, but James Love School and the new Health Department Building. But don't believe me. Call County Manager Brian Epley and ask him. Better yet, make a public records request and read the loan contract for yourself. Like I did.

The City of Shelby is Broke!!! Of the \$30,000,000 Cleveland

County borrowed to finance the new North Shelby School, the County Commissioners quietly GAVE the City of Shelby \$11,5000,000 to extend water and sewer lines to supply the Clearwater Paper Expansion project. This was roughly half of the \$23,000,000 cost of the water/sewer extension. Apparently, Shelby could not come up with the initial money without county help. But, over time the City of Shelby will recoup the entire \$23,000,000 in water and sewer service sales. The County taxpayers will never recoup their \$11,500,000 contribution to the City of Shelby. The deal also allowed the City of Shelby to annex the Clearwater Expansion. Adding to their tax base and subtracting from the County Water tax base. Which also minimized the opportunity for any economic development in the county outside Shelby and Kings Mountain.

Folks, all of the above is the GOOD NEWS!!! Sit down and hold your temper for the rest of this article.

Let's examine what is going on in Shelby and Cleveland County to show which direction the City of Shelby and Cleveland County government is heading in these hard times caused by COVID 19 and all the related layoff's, closings and social distancing. And whether or not Shelby and the County have learned any lessons.

TOMORROW, Cleveland Community College is having a Board of Trustees Meeting and the public is NOT invited!!! Several interesting things are on the agenda:

1. Cleveland Community College is building a \$2,000,000 plus baseball field to support the new college baseball team that CCC recruited from outside Cleveland County. Florida to my understanding. Scholarships and all. CCC apparently not caring that as soon as these baseball players get their education benefits and sports exposure, they will be gone from Cleveland County forever. Playing on Pro teams or finding good jobs somewhere else because such jobs don't exist in Cleveland County. Eerily similar to the American Legion World Series,

Baseball, Inc scam Eddie Holbrook has run on Cleveland County, draining \$5,000,000 plus from County Taxpayers in the process. And still counting

Also note that I have contacted a source familiar with sports facilities and learned that a basic baseball field can be built for around \$200,000. Why the CCC BoTs are spending 10 times that much on a baseball field on a land locked campus raised my suspicions. More checking on the CCC baseball field paperwork included a Construction Manual (bid specifications) that was 719 total pages and many architectural drawings that were in great detail. Probably too much detail as the excessive Construction Manual-bid specifications called for such things as Start-up manuals, Operating Manuals, Shutdown Manual and more. I wondered how one can write a manual on how to start up, operate and shut down a baseball field. Such a manual might be appropriate for large, expensive and complex machinery-but certainly not for a baseball field. This Construction Manual-bid specification were developed by Cleveland Community College. My guess is somebody with very little construction and bidding experience "googled" "Construction-Manuals-Bid-Specifications" and everything that they found from Nuclear Plants and rocket ships to playground sand boxes was downloaded and thrown together. It will be a "hoot" to see how construction firms handle such an excessive 719-page document plus all the rest for a baseball field. Even a fancy baseball field with all the bells and whistles. I predict very few will respond to such nonsense at any price. 10 times more than necessary or even 1,000 times more than necessary. Except for one, maybe, with inside knowledge that nobody at CCC will actually expect that such outrageous requirements will be enforced. Then CCC might get that \$200,000 baseball field and pay \$2,000,000 or more. And brag about how stupid they are.

2. Also, on the CCC BoT agenda for tomorrow is the new Advanced Technology Center with a \$15,000,000 plus price tag.

This ATC started its life as an Advanced Manufacturing Center (AMC) that other Community Colleges were starting as an economic development tool to support their local manufacturing businesses. It was like the "latest fad" and CCC wanted one too. The only thing is, Cleveland County is already surrounded by Counties that already have AMCs that are closer driving distances for some county residents than CCC. Also, the fact that local manufacturing businesses do not exist in sufficient numbers and size to justify an AMC at CCC. But since Speaker of the House Tim Moore raised money for an AMC at CCC, the BoTs had to build something. So, their new ATC will house mostly new classrooms, although there are major numbers of vacant classrooms already in existence at CCC. Remember folks, I wrote of this discovery last year. And made another trip to explore CCC looking for empty classrooms-which confirmed my initial discovery. So far, the CCC BoTs have spent over \$750,000 on Roger Hollands Architectural work for the ATC and little else.

Now it is the County Commissioners turn under my magnifying glass.

This past Tuesday the Commissioner's Meeting also had some doozies on the agenda!!

1. EMS wants nine (9) new ambulances at close to \$170,000 a pop. Over \$1,500,000 in all. Note that I have previously written about complaints about the old EMS Director from Iredell County who allegedly was messing with a County Commissioner's daughter there and let go. Only to land the job in Cleveland County. Where he allegedly overspent the budget by \$4,000,000 on all the wrong stuff. Including more philandering as I am told. Now, the new EMS Director Tommy Mc Neilly is trying to straighten out the mess the old Director made due to no Commissioner oversight and accountability.

McNeilly's request stated that ALL the ambulances presently in the EMS fleet are basically old and worn out. Maintenance is

high and breakdowns are frequent. On first brush, replacing all the ambulances with new and saving the best of the old for reserves is in general a good idea.

But, remember, the County is Broke and times are hard. So, where is the financial guru-the County Manager in figuring this out. Maybe with some obvious ideas like purchasing a couple of ambulances at a time over a few years until the fleet is in good order while advancing financial responsibility in the in between time.

But NOOOO! Financial responsibility has left the County. The agenda item information was to order nine new ambulances and finance them over three years at interest rates such that the interest is about the cost of half an ambulance cost.

Of course, the County paying out \$75,000 to Eddie Holbrook was about the cost of half an ambulance. The County paying out \$150,000 to the Fair for half the inflated cost of a new fence is almost all the cost of an ambulance. Paying our \$350,000 for the Shooting Range every year is worth more than two ambulances. Two more if you Count the Earle Scruggs Center. Two more for the LeGrand Center. That is more than 8 ambulances that could have been paid for from the wasted spending on just those items mentioned above. All of the needed EMS ambulances plus much more could be bought free and clear with just a little of that \$4,000,000 wasted at EMS prior to Tommy McNeilly because of the County's lack of oversight and accountability.

OK folks, this article is getting long enough and you should have gotten the message by now. Of course, I have not even mentioned the financial mess at Cleveland County Schools.

I will cover that in another article. And soon. The School Board majority is at play in the 2020 Elections and our full attention should be focused of that.

Stay tuned!!!