

## Government Watch - County Commission

### *A look at what is happening in Bradley County*

by Ashley Murphy

The agendas were full and many items were up for discussion in the Bradley County Commission meetings. The following are highlights from those meetings during the month of October.

A request was made during a Finance Committee meeting by County Attorney Joe Byrd for a budget amendment in the County Attorney's office. The amendment was to add \$20,000 to the already budgeted \$4,776.98 to hire additional support staff for Byrd's role as Delinquent Tax Attorney. During the Commission meeting on October 5th, Byrd withdrew his amendment request, saying that his current assistant will attempt to do her regular duties, as well as the additional delinquent tax work. A motion was put on the floor by Commissioner Howard Thompson to allow the amended amount of \$24,776.98 to be put into the Delinquent Tax budget. The motion died when Commissioner Lisa Stanbery made a sub-motion and it passed 9 in favor, 4 opposed, and 1 pass. The sub-motion was to allow

only the \$4,776.98 be spent.

A resolution was placed on the agenda by Commissioner Ed Elkins to put the County Commissioners on the same payment schedule as all other County employees. The Commissioners will now be paid for their services every two weeks, instead of once a month. Due to the way the payroll machines are set up to operate, this change helps the accounting and payroll department, and the machines won't need to keep being changed at the end of every month. The motion to approve the resolution passed with Commissioner Howard Thompson voting no.

A resolution was placed on the agenda by Commissioner Connie Wilson to appoint a representative for mediation, to which Chairman Louie Alford was nominated. The resolution and nomination held a 2nd by Commissioner Ed Elkins. After several minutes of discussion, Commissioner Mark Hall made a sub-motion to only allow the mediation part, but to vote on the mediator at a later date. The motion failed with a tie of 7-7. Wilson's original motion passed with 8 'yes' votes and

6 'no' votes.

Commissioner Ed Elkins placed a resolution on the agenda authorizing the Bradley County Commission Finance Committee to work in concert with the Bradley County Fire Board to develop a comprehensive long range plan to finance any potential expansion of the Bradley County Fire and Rescue Department. Several oppositions arose to this resolution and Commissioner Jim Smith formed a motion to table any further discussion until after the Fire Board Retreat scheduled for October 31. The motion failed and the Commission returned to the original motion, which also failed for the lack of 8 'in favor' votes.

Before the meeting adjourned, Sheriff Tim Gobble approached the podium to ask the Commission to reconsider the Sheriff's Department HCI grant application that was denied. After discussion, the application stood denied and Commissioner Howard Thompson made a motion to disband the HCI Committee. The motion died for lack of a second.

During the October 12th meeting, Elisha Hodge from

the Office of Open Records Counsel in Nashville, TN came to give a presentation on the Tennessee Open Meetings Law. Hodge provided a web address for any further information, <http://state.tn.us/comptroller/open-records>. After being directed to the page, click on 'Laws' on the left side of the screen and then 'Open Meetings Act.' Or if you would like a copy of the presentation that was given to the Bradley County Commission, simply e-mail Elisha Hodge to the address that was given on the website.

Commissioner Lisa Stanbery provided the Commission with a list of the HCI funding recommendations. That list includes: Bradley Cleveland Services, Bradley County EMS, Bradley County Public Water Fund, Cleveland/Bradley County Greenway, Habitat for Humanity, North Lee Elementary School, Prospect Elementary School, The Caring Place, and Tri-State Therapeutic Riding Center. The total amount of the recommendations is \$190,840.

Commissioner Howard Thompson stated during the

October 19th meeting that Sheriff Tim Gobble had called him personally to say that the technicalities with the trustees at Tri-State and the Road Department had been worked out and that the trustees would resume their work immediately.

Commissioner Ed Elkins commented on the federal withholding on the Commissioner's payroll checks since they have gone biweekly. This started a negative discussion, which resulted in a motion being put on the floor by Commissioner Jim Smith to change the Commission payroll back to monthly. However, the motion was out of order, because the Commission had voted on the agenda and no additional motions were allowed to be brought forward unless they were from a committee or on the agenda already.

A motion by Commissioner Lisa Stanbery to approve the HCI recommendation list passed with 11 'yes' votes and a pass by Commissioner Roy Smith.

Also placed on the agenda was a motion by Commissioner Howard Thompson to fund the water project on

Samples Chapel Road. The request to replace water lines in the area was denied by the Finance Committee and Thompson thought that the issue should be revisited by the Commission as a whole. The project cost estimate is \$59,000. According to statements, Ocoee Utilities has agreed to pay \$29,500, Samples Baptist Church has agreed to \$20,000, and that would leave \$9,500 for the HCI Committee to pay out of the Bradley County Public Water Fund. The motion passed with Commissioner Ed Elkins voting no. Commissioners Ben Atchley and Michael Plumley were absent.

The Bradley County Commission meetings and committee meetings are open to the public each month. Commission meetings are held in the Bradley County Courthouse.

Their voting sessions are on the 1st Monday at 7pm and the 3rd Monday at 10am. Commission work sessions are on the 2nd Monday at 12pm and on the 4th Monday at 7pm. Committees meet as needed.

## Government Watch - City Council

### *A look at what is happening in the City of Cleveland*

by Tonya Brantley

It was a very busy month for the Cleveland City Council during the month of October. Several lengthy discussions took place in which important decisions were made. The following are highlights from those meetings.

During their September 28th regular meeting, resident Linda Moore addressed the council with questions regarding Director of Cleveland City Schools, Dr. Rick Denning's pay raise, questions regarding nepotism in the school system and how money the city school system receives from the city is spent. Moore said, "I want to know where the money goes. I have a right." In regards to Denning's raise, she asked if he was the only one to receive one and if he was the highest paid city employee. Teachers who were eligible received a step increase in salary and Denning isn't the highest paid employee, that would be City

Manager, Janice Casteel making \$136,104.54 according to 2008 records. Moore was informed her questions about expenditures can be found in the budget and in monthly reports listing each expenditure. According to Casteel, a nepotism policy has been adopted by the city, however it does not apply to schools or to Cleveland Utilities. The TN State School Board Association says schools can adopt a nepotism policy if they so choose.

Many council members were not pleased with the City School Board's bid process for choosing a contractor for the science wing at Cleveland High School and had concerns about a conflict of interest with Gene Bishop, a member of the Selection Committee and former D.F. Chase Construction employee. Proposals for the science wing were reviewed by a 5 person selection committee to narrow the pool of bidders from 17 down to 5 firms scored on qualifications, experience

and project approach. Several council members didn't understand why all bids couldn't be allowed to get the best price. The council had several questions and requested the school board to reconsider the bid process and adjourned the session to September 30th and invited school board members to attend to answer some of the concerns.

Several contractors that submitted bids were in attendance at the Sept. 30th meeting, however no representatives from the school board were. Councilwoman Bambi Hines said, "This irritates me, we commend the school board in their fair decision to choose an architect, now everything is thrown out the window. The whole process stinks. Then, they don't even come to our meeting." A motion was made by Councilman Bill Robertson seconded by Richard Banks to suspend all funding for the new science wing until questions about the bid process have

been answered. The meeting was again adjourned to October 8th.

It was standing room only at the Oct. 8th meeting. The entire City Board of Education attended to answer questions submitted by the council. Several attorneys, contractors and residents also attended. During the meeting, discussion got heated when school board member and chairman of the Selection Committee, Steve Morgan began to answer questions about his wife's employment by the school system and the confidentiality in scoring the selection process. Councilman George Poe wanted Morgan to answer questions about his wife's employment. Attorney for the school board, Chuck Cagle asked Poe if anyone else was upset about this besides him. Local businessman Allan Jones interrupted to address the question saying, "I'm the biggest individual tax payer in this city. I'm very upset because Denning hired

Mr. Morgan's wife." Jones then questioned Morgan's blindness and proceeded to criticize school board member Dawn Robinson's husband who received an award for the systems internet page. Jones was upset because the site did not include information on the wrestling or soccer teams. Jones said, "We gave your husband an award for a great website. I disagree with that, because I've got a pair of 25 year olds ma'am that can work circles around him on the internet."

Morgan responded by saying nobody looked at his wife's personnel records to see her credentials. He said, "Nobody has called me or any of us. If it's alright with you, leave my family out of it."

By the end of the meeting, all questions were answered with a recommendation from the council that the school board reconsider the selection process at their next meeting. With that, the adjourned ses-

session was finally adjourned. The school board's decision and the outcome of the selection process can be read on page 4 of this issue.

At the Oct. 12th regular meeting, Councilman Bill Estes made a motion to ban concealed weapons in city parks. State law allowing guns in parks became effective Sept. 1st, and gave cities and counties the option of opting out. There were questions from council members on how to police the ban and whether Estes would consider tabling the motion until citizens can have an input. Banks stated, "A lot of people want to be heard before we take away their rights." After the discussion, Estes decided to withdraw his motion.

The Cleveland City Council meetings are open to the public each month at the Municipal Building on Church St. on the 2nd and 4th Monday with the work session at 2pm and the voting session at 4pm.