

Commission hears from spokesman from WV Center on Budget & Policy

Mineral Trust Fund could benefit Gilmer County

*By Dendra Miller,
News Editor*

At the regular meeting of the Gilmer County Commission on Tue., June 5 the first order of business was opening the bids for the work that will make area polling places ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant.

The county was awarded a grant to make these necessary upgrades. A wheelchair ramp is needed at the Knights of Pythias building on Kanawha Drive and at the Tanner Community Building. The Rosedale Community Church will be receiving a removeable ramp to use when the need arises.

Daniel Loftis of L and L Contracting, a local general contracting company, was the only one to submit a bid and was, therefore, given the work. His company has also done the work on the old jail and courthouse roof and is known by the commission to be a reputable contractor.

Get cash at the Court House

More information on the ATM machine the commissioners want to put in the courthouse was brought forward. According to the law, the county cannot own the ATM, but they can contract with someone to provide that service in the court house.

Neither United, nor Calhoun Bank was interested in placing an ATM at the court house because of the low amount of traffic it would see and the fact that they would have to pay people to come up daily and service the machine.

Commissioners feel the ATM is necessary because court house offices do not accept credit cards and often times folks have to go down into town to get cash and then come back to complete their business.

The gentlemen agreed to post a notice to accept bids for the ATM service and will make a decision at the next meeting as to who they will contract with.

Holt House needs Help

The Historical Society made the commission aware of some problems they were experiencing at the Holt House. Jack Heater, from the Gilmer County Health Department, was doing a water sample that day to learn more about the rust colored water that was coming through the lines.

In addition to the water, one of two central air units is down. This is a matter of immediate concern because the Holt House is a hub for Folk Festival happenings, especially for the Belles. Commissioners agreed to get a hold of Dave Peters to look at the cooling system.

'Future Fund' for WV

After some other business and a short recess, the commission continued their meeting by hearing from Paul Miller. Mr. Miller was in Gilmer County representing the WV Center on Budget and Policy, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization whose goal is to support informed public dialog and policy in West Virginia.

Mr. Miller spoke about the Mineral Trust Fund bill that is gaining steam in Charleston. The idea behind the bill is that West Virginia experiences times of "boom and bust" because of our dependence on natural extraction businesses. Forming a trust fund could permanently benefit the state and ease monetary strains during the "bust" periods.

The organization's website, www.wvpolicy.org, calls West Virginia "one of the least economically diverse states in the nation" noting that it "relies heavily on its natural resources for revenue. Funds from these resources fluctuate and, one day, will be gone.

"As the Marcellus 'Gold Rush' comes to WV, it is time for policy makers to consider establishing a permanent mineral trust fund in WV, similar to what six other states have done."

OTHER STATES THAT HAVE SET UP MINERAL TRUST FUNDS INCLUDE NORTH DAKOTA, ALABAMA, NEW MEXICO, WYOMING AND ALASKA.

WEST VIRGINIA SENATE PRESIDENT JEFF KESSLER IS LEADING THE CHARGE TO INSTITUTE THIS TRUST FUND IN SENATE BILL 182, CALLED THE FUTURE FUND. THE BILL WOULD TAKE A PORTION OF INCOME FROM

SEVERANCE TAXES AND PUT IT INTO AN INTEREST BEARING ACCOUNT. IN TIME THE PRINCIPAL INVESTMENT WOULD INCREASE, BUT ONLY THE INTEREST ACCRUED WOULD BE WITHDRAWN FOR USE IN PROJECTS AROUND THE STATE, SUCH AS INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS.

MR. MILLER ENCOURAGED TAX PAYERS AND CITIZENS TO CONTACT THEIR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES AND LET THEM KNOW IF THEY WERE IN SUPPORT OF THIS IDEA. "THE DISCUSSION NEEDS INPUT FROM LOCAL EDAs (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION) TOO," SAID MILLER.

COMMISSION PRESIDENT BRIAN KENNEDY AGREED THAT IT SOUNDED LIKE A GOOD PLAN, BUT ASKED HOW MONEY WOULD BE DISTRIBUTED. WOULD A COUNTY THAT COLLECTED MORE SEVERACE TAXES GET MORE RETURN THAN ONE THAT HAD COLLECTED LESS IN MINERAL INCOME?

MR. MILLER ADMITTED THAT THIS WAS A LEGITIMATE QUESTION AND THAT IT WAS ONE HE DID NOT HAVE AN ANSWER TO AT THAT TIME. A COLLEAGUE WHO HAD COME WITH MR. MILLER EXPRESSED THAT THE MAIN ARGUMENT AGAINST THE TRUST FUND WAS THAT WV NEEDS ALL THE MONEY FROM SEVERANCE TAXES RIGHT NOW.

IN CLOSING

THE MEETING WRAPPED UP A SHORT TIME LATER WITH THE PRESENTATION OF THE SERVICE PLAQUES TO DAVE HESS AND ED WIANT, WHO WORKED FOR THE COUNTY FOR 30 AND 21 YEARS RESPECTIVELY BEFORE RETIRING LAST WEEK.

THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE HELD ON MON., JUNE 18 AT 9:00 A.M. AT THE GILMER COUNTY COURT HOUSE.

AT THAT TIME BIDS WILL BE OPENED FOR THE ATM CONTRACT AND WORK TO BE DONE ON THE OLD POOR

FARM FRONT PORCH.