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County hires company, buys equipment to keep eye on emissions, noise

By Shane Scoggins on Wednesday, January 15, 2020

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Let's go Lions!

Gailey picks up state honor



FBLA clubs win at region

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Let's go Lions! CARNESVILLE – Luna Duncan (front) and Taliya Thomas cheer during half-time of the Franklin County Lady Lions game Saturday night against Stephens County. The two young cheerleaders were part of a group who attended a workshop held by varsity basketball players. (Photo by Scoggins)

Monitoring GRP

County hires company, buys equipment to keep eye on emissions, noise

CARNESVILLE – Franklin County Commissioners will pay more than \$16,000 – and possibly near \$30,000 – to monitor noise and air quality around a power plant near Carnesville. Commissioners announced Tuesday that the county has contracted with environmental testing company GeoBerra to study noise levels and air quality around the Georgia Renewable Power GRP plant on Highway 198 near Carnesville. The GRP plant burns chipped-up waste wood, "clean" construction waste

Commissioners split on firing county clerk

CARNESVILLE – Franklin County will soon begin looking for a new county clerk. Commissioners voted Tuesday not to reappoint Clerk Elaine Evans. Elections Supervisor Gina Kiefer was named in term clerk until a permanent replacement can be hired. The commissioners' decision came after Commissioner Jason McCosson made a motion to keep Evans and restructure the county clerk position. Commissioner Eddie Wester exceeded the mo-

Effort to raise tax exemption won't include schools

CARNESVILLE – The Franklin County School System will not be joining an effort to raise a property tax exemption for senior citizens. At least not this year. Franklin County School Superintendent Chris Fierer informed Tax Commissioner Bobby Martin that he would not be recommending the board raise the homestead exemption for senior citizens. "We would love to be able to raise the exemption, but we can't afford to do it," Fierer said. "We are willing to look at raising it next year after we have a balanced budget." The school system is currently dealing with a budget deficit. In December, Martin attempted a board meeting to ask the school board to consider increasing the exemption. "I've had people come in my office and ask why they are having to pay school taxes and explain to them that in our county we can't exempt the elderly from school tax because the burden would be too great on the remaining taxpayers." Martin said, "We don't have enough commercial property in the county to be able to do that like they can in other counties." Martin went on to say that one thing that can be done is lightening the load by doubling the exemption for anyone who is 65 or older on Jan. 1. If the board decided to move forward with the increased exemption, there would be 1,361 exemptions in Franklin County. The exemption value would be \$1,100,384 and would impact the digest by \$271,450.67. It would save seniors \$18.

Hero deputies honored



CARNESVILLE – Franklin County Sheriff's Deputy Mack Fortson (left) and Deputy Hayden Frey (second from left) were recently honored for helping to save the life of a shooting victim. Fortson and Frey received a lifesaving award for their actions on a shooting call Oct. 11 in Martin. The victim was shot and bleeding badly. The deputies used pressure and tourniquets to help slow down the bleeding until EMS could arrive and transport the victim to the hospital. Lt. Tyler Coker and Sheriff Steve Thomas (right) presented the awards.

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monitor noise and air quality around a power plant near Carnesville.

Commissioners announced Tuesday that the county has contracted with environmental testing company GeoHydra to study noise levels and air quality around the Georgia Renewable Power (GRP) plant on Highway 198 near Carnesville.

The GRP plant burns chipped-up waste wood, “clean” construction waste and railroad ties to generate electricity.

Neighbors of the GRP plant have complained for months about noise, smoke and soot and other environmental concerns caused by the plant.

The county will pay \$16,625 for a noise study and air quality monitoring.

The noise study will set up equipment in five locations on one day for 10 hours, County Manager Elizabeth Thomas said.

If the county wants to do a more extensive, week-long study, it will cost another \$10,000-\$12,000, Thomas said.

GeoHydra is waiting for “two or three days of good weather” to do the air quality study, Thomas said.

Franklin County Commission Chairman Thomas Bridges said that the county is paying for the studies in order to find out what is being emitted from the plant.

Should the county take the plant to court, it will have “sound data,” he said.

The studies were just part of the discussion Tuesday about the plant.

Commissioners voted to pay \$2,371.42 for its own air quality monitoring equipment.

Commissioner Jason Macomson said the equipment will allow county officials to do ongoing monitoring by riding the area around the plant.

The equipment will gather readings on particulates, nitrous oxide, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide and other

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pollutants.

Any concerning findings can be turned over to the state's Environmental Protection Division, Macomson said.

The monitoring of the plant is a portion of efforts commissioners outlined in a resolution passed Tuesday.

The resolution, which outlines commissioners' actions up until Tuesday, commits the county to:

- 1) gather noise and air quality data to determine if GRP is complying with mandates set by the county in a Notice of Violation Dec. 18. If the plant is not complying, the county will take them to Magistrate Court;
- 2) help neighbors "obtain testing of air and water quality through EPD and will commit to pursue funding for the extension of county water infrastructure within the Double Churches Community to provide availability of public water resources to the community;"
- 3) assist citizens who want to appeal their property values "to adjust for any diminution in value based on the operation of the GRP plant."

Tami Black and Sheilah Baker, neighbors of the plant who were on the agenda to speak to commissioners, asked about property tax relief.

Members of the community around the plant petitioned commissioners last year to forgive the property taxes of those affected by the plant.

Bridges said that appealing the assessed value of the properties is the correct procedure to reduce tax bills.

County Attorney Dale "Bubba" Samuels said that there are a limited number of ways in state tax law to reduce the amount of taxes owed.

The appeals process is the correct way to do that, Samuels said. Commissioners have no ability to update values, he said, because state law requires values be uniform.

Black read minutes from a 2015 meeting in which GRP officials pledged to give \$100,000 to the county each year.

Black said the county should get that money and use it to pay the taxes of the plant’s neighbors.

Baker also asked the county to pay for the testing of wells in the area.

During a meeting in December, plant officials said they would look into paying to test wells.

Bridges asked Thomas to check with the plant to see if it was willing to pay for testing of wells.



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