

Franklin Forum

Your View

Tax increases – again???

Last year Franklin County had the largest property tax increase in many years. Taxes increased when the County Commissioners (and Board of Education) did not reduce the millage rate to compensate for the skyrocketing assessments. They held the millage rates, and they greatly increased taxes.

Tax Commissioner Bobby Martin has recognized the impact of the large tax increase. He is seeking some relief for the elderly in the form of an increased elderly homestead exemption.

Rather than managing the county budget to reduce this huge tax increase, the commissioners are proposing another multi-million-dollar tax increase through T-SPLOST.

Recently, Mayor Moore made two important observations to the Industrial Building Authority (IBA). First, there should be a commitment to lower the millage if T-SPLOST is approved.

Second, we should consider the effects of higher sales tax on our local businesses when evaluating T-SPLOST. Higher sales tax puts Franklin County businesses at a competitive disadvantage. It encourages people to shop elsewhere.

Mayor Moore recommended a two-mill reduction in property taxes if T-SPLOST is approved. This is a necessary concept. Taxes have already been raised too much this year.

Is two-mills the right amount?

I believe that there should be a firm commitment to at least dollar-for-dollar property tax reduction to offset the T-SPLOST burden on the taxpayers.

In fact, I believe that the millage reduction should be more. It should also reduce the huge property tax increase we have already suffered this year.

The commitment to offsetting the T-SPLOST tax increase (if approved) needs to be clear and officially documented (perhaps, as part of the resolution on T-SPLOST).

Franklin County citizens need to know, and deserve to know, how big a tax increase or decrease is being proposed before voting.

Some have stated that the sales tax is a fairer, better way to tax than the property tax.

This may be true. A change in how Franklin County taxes may be a good idea. But another tax increase is a BAD idea.

Thank you, Mayor Moore, for pointing out the risk to local merchants if county sales tax is increased.

And thank you for pointing out the need to offset this proposed tax increase.

Commissioners, how will you

respond? What commitments to managing the budget and controlling total taxes will you make?

Bruce Scranton

Noise, pollution makes GRP bad neighbor

GRP-Franklin, a.k.a. Biomass Franklin located at 3465 Georgia Highway 198, is approximately 3,100 feet from my property.

This plant was a well-kept secret. To quote Biomass Magazine on April 24, 2019, by Ron Kotrba in an article titled "The Twin Sisters of Franklin and Madison Counties:" "The U.S. added 68 MW of biomass power last year, according to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission but Georgia Renewable Power LLC is about to flip the switch on two biomass plants in the Peach State that will nearly double this figure. The company has been relatively quiet about its achievements. While GRP's name has appeared in a smattering of press releases issued by project partners and subcontractors, the company itself has issued little information to the press in the way of official releases or announcements – it doesn't even have a functioning website. But don't be fooled by GRP's stealth mode, as the biomass power startup is making big strides in decarbonizing the grid." What an understatement regarding "little information."

NONE of the residents knew anything about the deceitful planning of this plant.

In early 2018, I received a telephone call from one of the GRP personnel asking if I would like to tour the facility.

He stressed, "We want to be a good neighbor." Two of my neighbors and I visited the facility which was in the infancy stage.

We asked questions! Will there be any noise or pollution? The answer was emphatically "NO"... not even 15 feet away.

I feel betrayed, violated and disappointed because this simply was not true! The noise at times is unbearable.

I feel hurt and defeated by our elected officials for allowing this monstrosity to be built in our once quiet, peaceful and serene residential area.

I/we have to live with the anguish and emotional trauma of a noisy plant that has "secretly" been permitted to burn construction and demolition materials and railroad ties that are known to be harmful to our health and environment polluting our air and water. EPD issued the Air Quality permit amendment on April 18, 2019.

So many lives have been traumatized. Several neighbors have reported being awakened in the night by the noise. Others have re-

ported their children cannot sleep because of the noise. None of these should be subjected to this if GRP truly wants to be a GOOD NEIGHBOR.

The plant is also reported as being involved in very disreputable and dishonest dealings as reported in the news. This further enforces my distrust in this company.

Others residents are complaining of breathing problems such as COPD, asthma, coughing, terrible tastes in their mouths from the toxic fumes emanating from this plant.

How many cases are needed to open the eyes of the GRP and the EPD/EPA?

The American Lung Association sent a letter to senators/representatives dated Sept. 13, 2016 stating: "The undersigned public health, medical and nursing organizations urge you to oppose policies that would encourage or expand the use of biomass for electricity production. Biomass is far from 'clean.' Burning biomass creates air pollution that causes a sweeping array of health harms, from asthma attacks to cancer to heart attacks, resulting in emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and premature deaths."

Please note this pollution can travel for miles and could be in your neighborhood. Would a GOOD NEIGHBOR want to subject residents to these serious health concerns?

This plant was seen as an economic boost to our county but instead it has become a big burden. It's like an elephant that won't go away.

My peaceful place I call home has been ripped away. It is a terrible injustice not to be able to enjoy my once peaceful, quiet and serene property.

As I was told per telephone conversation with our county manager on Sept. 9, 2019, "The noise will get better but it will never be quiet and peaceful as before."

In other words, I have been lied to and cheated out of my future hopes and plans for my life while some people apparently made big profits!

I am appealing to our state representatives and senators to please ban the burning of railroad ties and other toxic materials in Franklin and Madison counties as our county commissioners are now in the process of enacting.

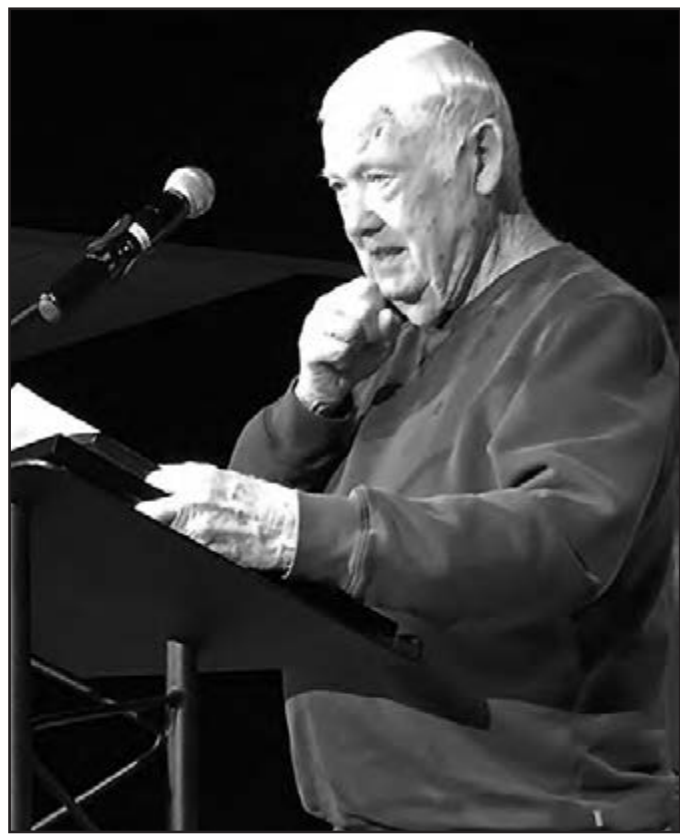
Some measures desperately need to be taken regarding the noise, air and water pollution.

A statewide ban should be considered.

Special thanks go to our Franklin County Commissioners Eddie Wester and Dr. Jason Macomson for all their efforts and hard work in supporting the residents of our community.

Linda Abbs

Our View



Ralph Owens accepts the Lavonia Chamber of Commerce's Good Citizen of the Year Award.

Honors for The Mayor

Franklin County Commission Chairman Thomas Bridges watched as Ralph Owens and Courtney Umbehant walked into the commissioners' meeting room Monday night.

"Mayor, come on up," Bridges told Owens as commissioners readied to honor the now-retired Lavonia office holder.

"This is the mayor," Owens said, motioning to Umbehant.

Yes, Umbehant is now the mayor of Lavonia but for an entire generation of Franklin County citizens and leaders, Owens will always be "The Mayor," whether he holds the office or not.

Until Dec. 31, Owens served the city of Lavonia for 30 years in the top office.

During that time, the city changed tremendously, with new services, new buildings, new businesses and renovations that brought new life to existing structures and institutions.

Franklin County changed as well. Owens had a hand in that too as a member and chairman of the Industrial Building Authority.

But all of those accomplishments are not the most amazing thing about Owens' tenure.

The fact that he had the stamina and the desire to serve his community for that long is awe inspiring.

Service is something that can wear you down, political service especially.

Think about it: for every problem solved, there's another one around the corner; for every election won, there's another one on the way.

Any person who volunteers to run for public office deserves praise, whether we agree with them or not.

For someone to stay in it for as long as The Mayor did and do it so well is amazing.

We wish Owens well in his political retirement.

But let there be no doubt, for many, he will always be "The Mayor."

— Shane Scoggins

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in memorium
Denise Matthews
Editor emeritus

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CONTINUING OBJECTIVES FOR FRANKLIN COUNTY

The *Franklin County Citizen Leader* will advocate for these issues in opinion columns and editorials and do stories on each issue.

Our priorities:
1) A museum of Franklin County history;
2) Passage of a special purpose local option sales

tax to be used solely for the improvement of roads in Franklin County (T-SPLOST);

3) County-wide animal control enforcement;
4) Improved interchanges on state highways in Royston, Lavonia and Franklin Springs.

The *Franklin County Citizen Leader* is published with pride for the people of Franklin and adjoining counties by Community Newspapers Inc. of Athens. We believe that strong newspapers build strong communities. Newspapers get things done.

Our primary goal is to publish distinguished and profitable community-oriented newspapers. This mission will be accomplished through the teamwork of professionals dedicated to truth, integrity, loyalty, quality and hard work.