

To Precinct Delegates, Owltown and Choestoe

The current revaluation of real estate properties for tax purposes has highlighted the growing crisis faced by residents of Union County, Georgia.

This crisis began with the Union County Sole Commissioner's open-door policy which has evolved into a race to make the county more accommodating for newcomers. While managed growth can be good for our County, growth does not currently appear to be accomplished in a planned manner to ensure adequate infrastructure and resources to meet the needs of lifelong residents much less the newcomers and the wealth they bring with them. Growth must be evaluated for both positive and negative impacts on the multi-generation residents who have paid over the years for the county to have achieved its attraction today.

The unchecked thirst for housing and property by people moving into the County have driven housing demands, real estate prices and property and sales taxes to unprecedented and unjustifiable levels; and there appears to be more to come. Additionally, growth places unwarranted hardships and burdens on multi-generation residents as they have out of necessity developed their own means of affordable housing for their families.

In the Commissioner's monthly meetings, citizens have frequently requested he consider the implementation of impact fees to offset the financial burdens placed upon county services, infrastructure, and natural resources. Additionally, commentators have challenged the commissioner to develop an official long-range plan to address the multiple needs created by the growth of the County including domestic water, sewerage, sanitation and refuse removal, fire protection, roads and bridges, traffic control, schools, and public safety. The Union County Commissioner appears to deny the existence of these issues and the need to publicly address them.

Even in his monthly meetings, Commissioner Paris only accepts questions and comments from residents after he has adjourned the meeting while turning off his recorder eliminating their input from public record. You will see nothing in the minutes of his meetings about these issues. I plan to bring, and video record the question-and-answer section of the Commissioners next public meeting Thursday, July 15, 2021, at 6pm, Union County Courthouse, to establish time-stamped documentation of citizens' concerns. In the future we must demand that the Commissioner include a "for the good of the order" agenda item on his official meeting agenda and that citizens may sign up in advance for a limited number of slots of a specified amount of time to speak on issues of import to the county.

Union County Commissioner appears to be enjoying the attractiveness and expansion of the county and the revenues that his open-door policy has created for Union County residents. The mind set appears to be, "we have an abundance of money, let's find ways to spend" regardless of need. His wish list of improvements continues to grow, he continues to buy land and develop facilities. In doing this however, he overlooks the basic and ever-expanding needs including natural resources, County infrastructure, and the maximization and maintenance of existing facilities and resources. Are we using our current facilities to the greatest benefit of citizens? Spontaneous growth will NOT meet the needs of the current Union County residents, nor will it serve newcomers.

I personally invite you to attend Union County Commissioners public meeting. When citizens fail to voice their opinions in a constructive and respectful manner, nothing great can be achieved.

Regards,

Wesley Hopgood