

HardisonInk.com

**4-1 vote shows county working with Cedar Key;
5-cent local gas tax hike endorsed;
Plea for road paving denied**



Cedar Key Mayor Heath Davis explains why he believes the county should consent to the request for certain parts of the unincorporated part of Levy County to be annexed into the city limits of Cedar Key.

By Jeff M. Hardison © March 22, 2017 at 10:07 p.m.

BRONSON -- The Levy County Commission on Tuesday (March 21) showed the majority (by a 4-1 vote) wants to work with the city of Cedar Key; and the majority wants to go forward with a 5-cent gasoline tax hike; and they do not want to encourage urban sprawl by paving a subdivision where there is only one house that is finished being built so far.

• **Working With Cedar Key**

Cedar Key Mayor Heath Davis (Seat 1 on the Cedar Key City Council) found a 4-1 vote of approval of his request for the County Commission to consent as a property owner to some annexation of county property into the city limits.

There has not been a vote by the 68 City of Cedar Key voters in regard to these 211 parcels yet, but the county is one of those property owners, and Mayor Davis clearly and politely explained the request from the city's leaders.

The vote by the County Commission on Tuesday is not an endorsement to show that it favors the proposed annexation, nor is it a sign that the commissioners dislike the plan. It is more like a 4-1 vote to show the county wants to work with the city, when looking at the issue from the perspective presented by Mayor Davis.

The area sought for annexation is Sections 19, 20, 21, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 21, Township 15 South, Range 13 East, and Section 5, Township 5 South, Range 13 East in Levy County.

The property owners would pay the additional city-imposed ad valorem property tax in addition to the same county ad valorem property tax that everyone in the unincorporated area pays.

HardisonInk.com

At the current city property tax rate, that would generate about another \$119,000 for the city. It would not take any ad valorem property tax from the county.

County Commissioner Lilly Rooks, the lone dissenting voter in the 4-1 decision to agree to the request from the city, said the previous County Commission chose neither to endorse nor detract from people wanting to annex from the county into the city. She said she sees this action as an endorsement.

Commission Chairman John Meeks said he saw the verbiage in the request as being a bit threatening because it noted that if the county chose not to allow the sought-after annexation, then the city might not provide fire or first responder services.

Mayor Davis reminded Chairman Meeks that the residents of Cedar Key are residents of Levy County too. They pay all of the county taxes except for the county special assessment for fire service.

The mayor took his explanation to another stage. He told Meeks that right now a county resident who “sees a snake” calls Cedar Key Police Chief Virgil Sandlin rather than calling the Levy County Sheriff’s Office dispatch.

That would be the proper method, because they are county residents, Davis said, so that a deputy would be sought for assistance first in that instance. However, since people know the police chief, they call him.

This annexation simply legitimizes this type of activity and it gives the people in that part of Cedar Key that remains unincorporated the opportunity to become officially part of the city.

County Commissioner Mike Joyner made the motion and County Commissioner Matt Brooks seconded the motion to grant the request of the Cedar Key City Commission to consent to annexation.

Voting in favor were Joyner, Brooks, Chairman Meeks and County Commissioner Rock Meeks. County Commissioner Rooks voted “No” on the motion.

It will be some period of time before the city sends a note to the property owners in the unincorporated area to ask if they want to annex into the city. The property owners ultimately will vote to accept or reject the proposal to be annexed into the city limits.

~

• **5-Cent Local Gas Tax Hike Endorsed**

In another matter on Tuesday, County Coordinator Wilbur Dean asked if the County Commission wanted him to continue seeking an increase in optional added local gasoline tax.

After a lengthy discussion, four county commissioners told Dean they endorsed the county seeking to increase gasoline sales taxes by 5-cents-per gallon in Levy County. County Commissioner Lilly Rooks did not comment on the issue.

There was no vote by the County Commission, but four of the commissioners indicated they want Dean to move forward with the process so that people who buy gasoline will pay 5-cents more per-gallon for gasoline to help pay for roadwork in Levy County.

County Commissioner Mike Joyner said he believes this tax will help fund the road department so that the county does not have to take money from the general revenue fund for roadwork.

Joyner said he likes the addition of 5-cents in tax added to each gallon of gasoline sold in Levy County. This way, he said, everybody pays. This is in contrast with what he

HardisonInk.com

sees as a minority of people who pay ad valorem property taxes.

Joyner went on to add that even the drug dealers buy gasoline, and so they would have to pay their fair share to improve roads.

Later in the meeting, Levy County Sheriff Bobby McCallum said he likes the idea that Joyner mentioned, however, by increasing the cost of gasoline, those drug dealers and drug buyers will have to steal more from homes they are burglarizing to pay for their gasoline as they deliver drugs.

Also later that day, Linda Cooper, a Levy County resident, said she sees this increase in gasoline costs as affecting the “soccer moms” who need to take their children to games and other activities, and she sees the working people who have to drive far to work as having an increased expense. Another interest impacted by local option gasoline tax increases are small business owners who use gasoline-powered vehicles.

The County Commission can adopt the added 5-cents-per-gallon local option gasoline tax on its own -- without the people voting on it.

~

• Plea For Road Paving Denied

Before the time when the County Commission told the county coordinator to continue seeking a 5-cent-per-gallon local gas tax increase to generate more revenue for roadwork, a property owner asked for roads in the subdivision where he owns property to be paved.

Chad Munn said he owns property in the Cedar Key Plantation subdivision.

There is only one house built in the subdivision, he said. There are three lots with houses that are about one-third finished, he added.

Munn said there is about a mile of unpaved road in the subdivision. The cost to pave the roads is about \$225,000, he said.

He said during the past 20 years, people bought property there and the value of the property went down. He said the people from outside of Florida bought the property for a retirement homes or vacation home, or build a home and sell it for a profit.

Commissioner Mike Joyner asked Munn if any developer promised that the dirt roads would be paved when the people bought the lots. Munn said that promise was not made to anyone.

Joyner said there are places in Levy County where people have lived on dirt roads for 10, 20 and more years. They have houses, he said, and he sees those roads as being paved first.

Commissioner Lilly Rooks held up two sheets of paper with lists of roads scheduled for paving. The roads in Cedar Key Plantation subdivision were not on the list.

No county commissioner endorsed the idea to grant the request, even after Munn said the property owners would accept a special assessment as a means for them to pay for the roads next to their property to be paved.