

MEETING SUMMARY
Board of County Commissioners
Special Meeting
November 30, 1999

Members absent were Commissioners Harrison and O'Dell.

1. Chairman Nicholson called this meeting discuss an additional homestead exemption for persons 65 and older. Even though word was received, there is no option for Okaloosa to adopt an ordinance in favor of this matter now. Voters passed this measure, but thru the process the rules were changed concerning the limitations on income. It reads adjusted gross income and this creates difficulty determining income since people can have money in tax shelters, bonds, etc. and with the adjustments, their income goes way down. Mr. Nicholson feels this is not what the voters meant and the new exemptions will have an effect on county budget.
2. Mr. Sansom expressed his support for the exemption and regrets there is so much confusion surrounding the matter. He asked John Dowd if there was any possibility this exemption could still be allowed this year and was answered no. Board approved scheduling a workshop in February 2000 and a public hearing in March 2000 to consider the additional exemption and adoption of an ordinance and will move the efforts forward and eliminate further delays if approved. 3 ayes.
3. Mr. Nicholson recognized visitors:
 - a. Elaine McEwen, Fort Walton resident, referenced articles in the newspaper based on her letters and interviews. She mentioned that based on her belief that she would not have taxes due, she refinanced her home. And, she found she still has taxes. Discussion followed and Mr. Nicholson spoke to clarify that even if the county does pass the ordinance, she will (as will others) still have any city and school taxes due each year (that is, unless they act to adopt an ordinance).

Mrs. Riggs interjected that she believes the intent of the voters was to protect people on "limited" incomes, but the wording was changed when the statute was written and it is unclear as to meaning of income. Already the senate and house are having problems with the wording and she believes that the wording of the statute will be changed.

 - b. Mr. Steve Czonstka, Niceville commended the Board for going ahead with the meeting as scheduled and for taking positive action to determine what the impact on the budget will be.
 - c. Bob Besset, Shalimar, interpreted that the counties determine whether or not the exemption should be allowed and asked what the State has to do with it? Board replied that it was an amendment to the state constitution which allows for an additional exemption and when the statute (196.075) was written the terminology "adjusted gross income" was used. Mr. Besset indicated that all should be entitled; there should be no problem. Discussion followed concerning Commissioners' belief that voters allowed this because of their desire to give relief to people on limited incomes and to take care of people who are having problems making ends meet.
 - d. Wes Poole said if this is a state issue, let the state take care of settling it.
4. Mr. Holley reported Russell Industries, which was located in at the Industrial Park in Crestview, has gone out of business. He asked for direction on whether to waive first rights on the property as negotiations are being discussed with another company. Board approved waiving first rights. 3 ayes