

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

RANDOLPH COUNTY COMMISSION SS:

At a special session of the Randolph County Commission in and for the aforesaid County and State, at the James F. Cain Court House Annex, on the 22nd day of June, 2022 at 9:00 a.m.

PRESENT: Randolph County Commission President, Chris See and Commissioners Chris Siler and David Kesling

Meeting called to order by Commissioner See

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Harvey Taylor appeared before the Commission. He said the last time he was here about this the Commission passed and voted 3-0 to do a pool/splash pad. He said if they are going to rescind their votes then they have to do what they have to do. He said this was a passed deal. He said when David Kesling was running for office he promised people that this would be a pool for the public. He said he was president of Tygarts Valley Little League for 14 years and they did not have anything, no electric or anything. He said they worked with the County and worked with the public and have raised over \$700,000.00. He said go look at that place today, they host State Tournaments and everything there now. He said if you want something you work for it. He said don't go call people pigs or kids pigs. He said that is uncalled for. He said it is sad that an organization that is as great as the Otters would let their coach do that. He said if anyone did that when he was over the Tygarts Valley Little League they would have hit the bricks. He said that is just uncalled for. He said if you all passed to do this pool and splash pad you should do this. He said what the Otters are saying on Facebook is a shame. He said there should be no other donations given to them.

Missy Anello appeared before the Commission. She said she has been a resident for 55 years. She said we all need the pool, yes we have the College and yes we have the YMCA. She said when she was on the wellness program at the College and the only time you could use the pool was when the Otters or other swim teams were not using it. She said no matter how early or how late you went they were always there. She said there is a facebook post going around by Mr. Jarod Varner and it is about the sun bathers and the splash pad pigs. She said she lost all respect for that man and he shouldn't be around kids. We don't need a competition pool. She said they have been using these other pools for years and can continue to do that. She said kids or adults with disabilities can use the splash pad and it would feel really good to them. She said David Kesling is not corrupt and he stands by his word and that means a lot to a lot of people. She said vote no to a competition pool.

Dan Hill appeared before the Commission. He said he is the general contractor for the pool.

Richard DeBias appeared before the Commission and said he would like to talk to Chris See after the meeting, if possible. Chris See said yes he will be here.

Ellen Shepherd appeared before the Commission. She thanked the Commission for taking the time to hear her and taking the initiative to put a pool and splash pad in the County. She said she does have two kids on the Otters and are involved in many community sports. She said she used to be a teacher in the County but now teaches in Upshur County. She said she sees the pool in Upshur County as an asset to the students in Upshur County. She said all the students last summer got passes to the pool thru the Board of Education and this year any kid that attends summer school their whole family got a pass for the pool. She said it is the heart of the community. She said when she looks at the pools around us, they are all competition size. She said it is not to take away from the public. She said as people have pointed out we have a place to swim and practice but we are trying to keep the Elks pool open. She said she doesn't know what has changed from when it was shut down but it was shut down because it wasn't being used enough and there were too many bad weather days and the financial means to keep it open wasn't there. She said she would like to see a written estimate of how much the competition size pool

would have cost. She said she asked for it last August and was told they think it would be this much or that much but never anything in writing. She said if they knew how much more it would be they could have helped raise the funds for it or if it was too much then they would have said thank you for looking into it. She said then she would feel like they did their due diligence as Commissioners. She said right now it feels like it has turned into a personal battle and that is not okay. She said she would really appreciate it if they took the time to truly investigate those options. She said they have been trying to do this since last August. It is not something new they are just bringing up. She said there were emails sent to the Commission by several people that were never answered. She said the Commission gets paid more than a first year teacher does and they can't even respond to emails. She said we elect you and if we don't feel like the person that was elected is representing your means and isn't representing what you need then you seek out someone else to run against them. She said she knows that the Commission has not taken the time to look into or explain to her why the competition pool is out of the question. She said she is asking for an open conversation with facts and data and points to prove to her that they are making the best decision with the money they are investing taxpayer wise. She said she doesn't want to feel like this community is settling for crumbs because that is all we can get.

Craig Fortney appeared before the Commission. He said his wife took their kids to the splash pad in Parsons and he appreciates everyone's efforts to get something local here, it has been a long time since anyone has done that. He said he is completely in support of using Hotel/Motel tax funds for the project and understands that those funds can be used basically for whatever the Commission decides. He said they encourage that to be used for an investment in the community. He said allowing for a competition pool would bring people in to put more money into the Hotel/Motel tax funds and would help with the costs of a competition size pool. He said it would take a lot of time to do that though. He said he does not have a child in the Otters and again wanted to thank the Commission for making this happen.

Jarod Varner appeared before the Commission. He said the comment on Facebook was posted back in July 2021 and he apologized for the bad terminology used. He said he was not calling any kids that or anybody involved in Otters that. He was talking about the trash that he was told was at the splash pad in Weston and Parsons. He said he has coached kids for many, many years and he would never do that, the same kids that would go to the splash pad may be the same kids that will eventually swim with the Otters. He said he grew up swimming at the Elks pool and was a lifeguard at the Elks for four years. He said due to COVID in 2020 they could not use the D&E pool for the Otters practices. He said if they had an outdoor pool they could have. He said last year they had no home meets so they had to travel to all 10 meets that were away. He said it would be nice to have an outdoor facility like Buckhannon, Philippi and Grafton. He said it is sad that they have it and we are the biggest County in the State and we don't have one. He said he doesn't want the next generation of kids in Randolph County to have to go thru that. He said he currently coaches the Otters and they have anywhere from 60-70 kids on the team every year. He said he hated it when the Elks pool closed and he would like to see the pool and splash pad be successful. He said he had a petition with 399 signatures on it that they got in person over the last five days. He said he could have gotten more if they had not moved the meeting up by two weeks. He said if you look at the signatures there are signatures on there of people who are not involved in the Otters in any way and are just regular tax payers of the County. He said the petition represents the citizens of Randolph County that would like the Commission to at least look into getting a competition size pool. He said they have been told that was done but have never seen anything in writing to that effect. He said they would like to see if inflation costs go down by next summer and see what the cost for everything is then and then decide. He said they are not trying to run the show. He read some quotes from newspaper articles regarding the pool. He went over the schedule of the Otters for training and competitions.

Kelli Monk appeared before the Commission. She said she has one child in the Otters and wants to echo all the previous comments that Ms. Shepherd and Mr. Varner said. She said she doesn't feel that a pool is a government responsibility however when it started being discussed and meetings being held they all kind of got involved. She said they have attended 3 or 4 meetings and they have sent emails and get no response. She said the pool should accommodate everyone. She said there is a competition pool in nearly every County around us. She said Pocahontas County has 3 pools. She said in November an amendment is on the ballot to eliminate property taxes and as you know 135 million of that statewide

typically goes to County Commissions. She said so there may be a funding problem in the future. She said with a competition pool money would be brought in when people come for meets.

Bob McCutchin appeared before the Commission. He said he was speaking as a fitness enthusiast. He came to Elkins in 1996 to teach at Davis and Elkins College. He said he was disappointed when he got here to find out there wasn't an outdoor fitness facility. He said he thinks having an outdoor competition pool would raise the profile for Elkins and draw more people in to the area. He said it is a great resource for fitness. He said he is in favor of a competition pool and they should do it now while they are working on it instead of waiting until later and trying to change it.

John Schmidt appeared before the Commission. He said he wanted to speak as an individual, father, grandfather and swim coach today. He said as an individual he does like to swim in an outdoor pool and to keep track of how far he swims. He asked questions of the contractors about removing the walls, etc. He said a lot of fathers could not be here today because of the timing on the meeting but a number of them had expressed interest to him in seeing a pool that their kids could swim in either as recreational swimmers or competitive swimmers to make this community better so he is glad everyone is in favor of supporting this pool. He said as a swim coach he used to raise 2-3 thousand dollars a year to offset costs each year. He said travel swimming is expensive. He said he would like to see the pool to be made a little bit bigger to accommodate everyone. He said he thinks the splash pad is a great addition and those kids could become our future swimmers. He said they have state champions in swimming almost every year for a number of years. He said the Otters will support, he will support and the Sheriff and himself already committed \$1,000.00 each at the meeting at the 4-H. He said he is good at fundraising and they are as a group and they can get the money to make this pool a little bit bigger. He said they know the City of Elkins won't build it and he is glad he doesn't live in the City limits. He said as they said before D & E could pull the rug out from under them anytime. He said someone offered to pay D & E ten years worth of fees for the Otters to use the pool and D & E wouldn't take it. He said that worries him and he doesn't know if D & E is afraid of getting locked in or what, but it's a shame. He said he is here to support the pool and he would love to see it regulation size and he would love to see a splash pad so that all the kids in this community can enjoy it. He said he is there to work with them.

Judy Ritchie appeared before the Commission. She said she has no children but she is very community oriented. She said she has heard some really confusing comments today. She said she has heard how the pool didn't make it before at the Elks, which was a private pool and at that time you had to have a membership, and she was raised poor and did not swim at the Elks pool. She said if a pool is only open a short time because of the weather she doesn't see where an outdoor pool would be an asset to the swim team because they would have to move back inside anyway. She said they keep talking about raising money but she is assuming they haven't come to the Commission and said here is x amount of dollars we have raised to go towards the competition pool. She said she has personally committed \$1,000.00 towards the pool and she is also great at fundraising. She said she feels they need to take responsibility to start their own project if they want to ask these gentlemen to jump on board. She said she is disappointed that they are back here rehashing something that she thought a decision had already been made on. She said she wants to talk about the Have's and Have Nots. She said the "have's" have a place to practice and place to compete. She said they have had an opportunity to learn to swim and several of the "have's" have pools on their own property to enjoy and relax in. She said the "have nots" have nowhere locally to swim and many cannot afford a YMCA membership. She said the "have nots" mostly do not have a swimming pool in their back yard and they have no chance to even learn to swim. She said they have to know how to swim to join a swim team. She said she sees this pool as a plus that we could increase the amount of people to be on the swim team and could enjoy that. She said she is asking the Commission to approve the bid today and move forward with the decision. She said this may make her one of Mr. Varner's splash pad pigs, but when she can see Moms with young kids enjoying that splash pad, this pig will be happy.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/ACTION

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF BID FOR POOL/SPLASH PAD PROJECT

Commissioner Kesling moved to accept the bid for the pool/splash pad project, as presented, in the amount of 2.1 million dollars. All yes – Motion passed unanimously

ADJOURN THE MEETING:

Commissioner Kesling moved to adjourn the meeting. All yes – Motion passed unanimously.

Attest: _____