

From the desk of Commissioner, Bill Kendall
Commissioner Commends Grand Jury for Endorsing His Road Reform Policies

I commend the Grand Jury for endorsing the reforms that have been put in place in Towns County during '06. The Presentments of the Dec. 11th. Grand Jury made recommendations to reform road maintenance practices which evolved over many years by Ordinaries, Commissioners, etc. Approximately 6 week after taking office I saw a need to put into place road reforms in Towns County and I placed a moratorium on the County taking on or considering roads built by developers unless they were built by or exceed Ga. Department of Transportation specifications.

This is a perfect time to tell you about the County's new Web Site that we began developing upon my taking office. It will be available soon at townscountyga.com where you can read the News Articles published earlier in '06. stating the changes being made in road maintenance and specifications in Towns County, as well as other things of interest concerning our County. The Web Site will continually be updated.

The only recommendation that has not been or is not in the process of being implemented is the following, which I will not do.

I strongly disagree with Grand Jury Foreman, Mr. Ralph Nichols and the jury's recommendation #7 that the County negotiate with property owners to acquire 60' of road right of way for the following reasons.

1. I feel there is no need for 60' ROW for secondary county roads
2. The cost to the taxpayer would be astronomical.
3. There are approximately 200 miles of roads we have recently added to the State (LARP) Local Assistance Road Program that have only prescriptive ROW's. A prescriptive ROW is what the County has maintained from ditch to ditch and has the right only to maintain and use for transportation. The property owners maintain all other rights to their property, such as allowing underground or overhead utilities, etc., crossing their property.
4. Acquiring 60' ROW as recommended by the Jury would involve taking the prime property with road frontage from individuals at a very conservative price of approximately \$30,000.00 per acre. It would require 7.2 acres of property for every mile of 60' ROW. \$30,000 per acre times 7.2 acres per mile of ROW equals \$216,000 per mile times 200 miles equals (\$43,200,000.00) Forty Three Million Two Hundred Thousand Dollars.

It would cost 56 mills of property tax or 5.6 mills tax increase per year for 10 years. The present County tax is 4.73 mills. This would be a 118% county property tax increase over the next 10 years for the purchase of 60' ROW's. The tax Digest will increase so will the price of the land for these ROW's.

5. I made a commitment (which I will keep) to the citizens that I would protect private property rights and take their property through Eminent Domain **only** as a last resort for the public good. This 60' ROW acquisition recommended by the Jury does not meet this test.

We will have more public hearings when the Planning Commission and Road Board present their final recommendations for approval. Foreman Nichols and Jury members will be invited to this meeting to present their rational for making this 60' ROW acquisition recommendation.