

Kendall faces Atlanta media over salaries

By David Seckinger
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Commissioner Bill Kendall addressed sexual assault and child abuse, the homestead exemption increase, salary standards for elected officials, and a dangerous dog ordinance at the regular monthly meeting held on March 19. Among those in attendance was Atlanta based WSB-TV investigative reporter & anchor Richard Belcher, who was there to cover the salary standards.

The meeting opened with Jan Rogers and Don Berry of S.A.F.E handing Kendall proclamations to sign, designating the month

of March to be Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Child Abuse Prevention Month. Rogers said S.A.F.E. could not operate successfully without the support of the community and Towns County.

Kendall then gave a report on the proposed Homestead Exemption \$10,000 increase. He said Representative Stephen Allison and Senator Jim Butterworth have gotten the bill into place to be voted on. Kendall said the City of Hiawassee and the Towns County Board of Education have already given their sup-

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port, and Mayor Andrea Gibby will present the homestead exemption to the Young Harris City Council during their next meeting.

He said if the bill goes through, Towns County citizens will get to vote on the matter in November. However, even if the vote passes, the homestead exemption will not be covered in the 2009 tax digest because the vote came too late in the year. If the vote is approved, Kendall said the exemption will begin Jan. 1, 2010.

Next on the agenda, county attorney Rob Kiker read the Ordinance Adopting Salary Standards for Elected County Officials. This ordinance was adopted after a

county audit recently discovered the previous Sheriff's Office, previous Probate Judge, and current Clerk of Court have been receiving salaries above state recommendations. The new ordinance will adopt the minimum base salary, cost of living increases, and longevity increases as set forth in the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (OCGA) State Law for elected constitutional officials in Towns County.

Last on the agenda was the first reading of the Dangerous Dog and Rabies Ordinance. Towns County resident Gale Eaton, who was attacked by a number of pit bull / boxer mix bulldogs on Feb. 13, attended

the meeting and spoke to the crowd. She called her experience “terrifying” and urged the county to include heavy penalties for dog owners whose animals bite. Eaton said she has thousands of dollar’s worth of doctor bills without a legal right to stand on because there was no county ordinance in place when she was attacked.

Eaton wanted to thank the people of Towns County, Hiawassee Mayor Barbara Mathis, and Kendall for their support. She said Kendall gave her his word that he would make the dangerous dog ordinance a priority, and he kept his word.

Kiker read the lengthy ordinance, which he said was stricter than Georgia Law. The ordinance defined terms including aggressive dog, potentially dangerous dog, and dangerous dog.

In addition, the ordinance stated the requirements for possession of a dangerous dog, including proper enclosure, a warning sign, a small registration fee, an insurance policy of at least \$25,000, and a surety bond of at least \$25,000.

Eaton said liability insurance is important because the owner of the dogs that attacked her cannot afford her doctor bills.

Towns County citizen John Case asked how much enforcing the new ordinance would cost the county. Kendall said they would only have to pay Cheryl Shook, of the Humane Society’s Mountain Shelter, part time to cover it. Citizen Jim Hicks said he and detainees have built four adequate dog pens, which only cost the county \$480 for materials. Maintenance of any kept animals

would be done by the employees of the transfer station.

In spite of the steps taken to implement the ordinance, there were a number of questions from citizens about its effectiveness.

For example, dogs will still be allowed to roam free on public property, which motivated Hiawassee City Councilwoman Joan Crothers to ask

Kendall: “So this is not a leash law in any shape or form?”

Kendall answered that the county is not ready to have a leash law, and surrounding counties also do not have leash laws.

The county plans to adopt the dangerous dog ordinance during the second reading on April 19.