

## My Experience with the Scotland County Commissioners Board

By Matthew Bourne II

The role of a county commissioner is a difficult and often thankless one. Yet, it is necessary and can be rewarding. When local taxes are raised or when public wants are not met, citizens may refer county commissioners in a negative way. However, I had the opportunity to interview a county commissioner and attend a county commissioner's meeting in Scotland County, where I live, and I can tell you it is not easy work.

In an interview with Mr. Whit Gibson, Scotland County Commissioner, explained the role of a county commissioner is to use tax money collected in order to help fund schools, police department, government assistance for low or no-income families, or to provide goods and services to its citizens. They must also help zone the county, which means assigning certain parts of the county for different reasons and purposes. For instance, approximately eight acres of land was rezoned and designated for residential agriculture (local farming). During the meeting, an agency reported they used county appropriated funds to repair eleven family homes that were in dire need.

Also, Mr. Gibson explained in the interview that the county commissioners provided approximately \$320,000 to the public library, which is about 77% of the funding the library requires to operate. The benefit of the money given to the library was discussed during the meeting in a report given by Leon Gyles, who oversees the library. He explained that every \$1 spent on the library provides \$4 of benefit to the community by allowing people to read books and watch DVDs without having to purchase them. Later on in the interview, I asked Mr. Gibson what involvement, if any, did the county commissioners have with 4-H. He explained that while most of the funding does come from outside sources like state and federal funding and grants, the county provides about 10% of the funding needed by the local 4-H branch.

Finally, Mr. Gibson explained that while a lot of money is collected from local taxes, it is unfortunately necessary in order to make sure that the county is a better and safer one. He jokingly added, "Whenever you hear mommy and daddy fussing about taxes going up, the reason is that more money is needed for things like increases in school necessities and new police cars to replace damaged or older ones".

It is an important job that county commissioners have. They help make our local communities better places to live in many different ways. I am glad that I had the opportunity to attend the meeting and speak with Mr. Gibson. I now have a better idea of how our local government works and how difficult the choices are that the county commissioners have to make. I am thankful for everything that Mr. Gibson and all county commissioners do. Thank you all and keep up the great work.