

CLIFTONDALE COMMUNITY CLUB, INC.

January 14, 2008

Draft Minutes

The Cliftondale Community Club, Inc. met January 14, 2008 at the Cliftondale Community Center. About 51 members and guests were present, including Senator Kasim Reed and Representative Sharon Beasley-Teague.

President Ben Dye opened the meeting, and Tommie Steagall provided the invocation.

Police Officer R. Hamilton of the Fulton County Police Department provided the December crime statistics for the Cliftondale area. There were 26 burglaries, 3 motor vehicle thefts, and 3 motor vehicle break-ins. Officer Hamilton said the Department is working with other jurisdictions to reduce the surge in burglaries. The best vigilance remains watchful neighbors and their calls when something suspicious is seen. In answer to a question, he said most burglaries occur between 10 am and 2 pm.

Mr. Dye introduced guest speaker State Senator Kasim Reed, thanking him for coming on the opening day of the legislative session. Senator Reed explained that he wanted to have a conversation about South Fulton's situation given the vote to remain unincorporated, and what he sees for us down the road.

Senator Reed said that he supported the Joint Legislative Study Committee on Fulton County as a way to deal with the many complaints about the County's governance, which have given rise to a threat to split the County. A north-south split would leave the southern county with the financial obligations of Grady Hospital and MARTA. He believes that the Committee's work will lead to changes that can keep the County intact.

The Committee's recommendations include that the County remain intact and the Board of Commissioners be reduced from 7 members to 5 (2 at-large and 3 district commissioners). Senator Reed himself had supported a "new 7" plan (an at-large full-time chair and 6 district commissioners). The "new 7" concept would enhance rather than reduce South Fulton's representation.

Regarding South Fulton, Senator Reed said that he would oppose any legislative moves to annex parts of South Fulton into the existing cities. He wants South Fulton not to have any property tax increases in 2008. He hopes that 2009 will also not require a tax increase, but that decision will have to be based on examining the County's books. He noted that Representative Roger Bruce and Senator Virgil Fludd, who both represent areas in South Fulton, have introduced a bill to give South Fulton the proportion of County sales tax that it would have as an incorporated city. (The sales tax is currently divided among the County's incorporated cities proportional to their populations.)

Senator Reed then opened the floor to questions.

Question: What is the likelihood of the "new 7" plan prevailing?

Answer: Senator Reed notes that either the status quo or the "new 7" would be a win for South Fulton. He thinks one of these options can prevail. He will attempt to have the bill handled as "local legislation," because the entire legislature will almost always pass local legislation supported by the affected local legislators. If necessary, he will call on community support expressed through a mail and email campaign. The Joint Legislative Study Committee's Minority Report, which supports the "new 7", will be posted on the web.

Question: What is the situation with regards to further annexations?

Answer: Senator Reed believes the best protection against annexations is to legalize forming townships in Georgia. A township has government powers limited to zoning and overlays, and its boundaries are defined and not subject to annexation. A township would require only about a one-half mill increase in property taxes.

Three township bills are supposed to be introduced in this legislative session. They will probably be local bills, and Senator Reed will see that the final bill is tweaked to be appropriate for South Fulton.

He envisions one township that includes all of unincorporated South Fulton. That size would provide the critical financial mass to operate the township. South Fulton residents would have the opportunity to vote on accepting or denying a township.

Comment from the audience: Cliftondale would support a township if it would stop annexation, if we could maintain the Cliftondale Overlay within the township, and if it enabled us to control our development.

Comment from the audience: A density requirement for creating a township, as contained in one of the three proposed bills, could disqualify South Fulton. Senator Reed responded that he did not support that bill.

Question: How do the Commissioners feel about a South Fulton township?

Answer: Senator Reed said it would relieve the Commissioners of having to deal with South Fulton rezoning.

Question: Related to the issue of juvenile crime and justice, how can we get the County to increase funding for youth programs in Parks and Recreation, rather than just locking young people up? Can Senator Reed help Southern Bridges to fund such programs? (Southern Bridges, Inc. is the organization that is managing Cliftondale Park and Recreation Center for the County.)

Answer: Senator Reed said that he can request targeted grants to be placed in the budget, a move that can only be made during the legislative session. He will also talk to Fulton County about more support for this particular program rather than for parks in general.

He also noted that the State is putting money into education for juvenile delinquents. He also is following the situation of the closed Larmore youth detention center, which now belongs to the state. If the center (located on Stonewall Tell Road near Highway 29) is reopened, it will have to be provided with more law enforcement. In the past, Larmore escapees have fled into the nearby neighborhoods, to the dismay of residents.

Question: What will the legislature do to fund needed mental health facilities?

Answer: Senator Reed said the Governor does not place a high priority on mental health, and we cannot expect support for such measures.

Mr. Dye thanked Senator Reed for his insight into current issues.

Mr. Dye introduced Representative Sharon Beasley-Teague, who spoke briefly. On the issue of crime, Ms. Beasley-Teague stated that if we are to be safe, we must make up our minds to pay for the required police protection and related services. She also referred to HR 900, a plan to eliminate property taxes for schools and replace them with a sales tax on goods and services. She said the change would hurt our schools and she will not support it.

Mr. Dye thanked Ms. Beasley-Teague for her visit.

Mr. Dye introduced Ron Coleman, a Cliftondale resident appointed to the Code Enforcement Board upon the recommendation of Commissioner Lynne Riley.

Bruce Moody provided a summary of recent school news.

- On June 1 the Superintendent of Fulton County schools will be leaving his post. Also leaving will be Patrick Burke, who has served as the demographer for school planning.

- The new Westlake High School is slated to open for the August 2008 term. The old Westlake school will be used as a ninth grade academy to relieve Creekside High School.

- There will be another round of school redistricting in the next 6-7 months, with the middle and elementary grades most affected.

- The County will soon begin securing funding, based on SPLOST revenues, to build the new West Stubbs and Derrick Road schools in Cliftondale.

Mr. Moody closed by emphasizing the importance of attending School Board and PTSA meetings to demonstrate that South Fulton parents and residents care about their schools.

The meeting was adjourned.

Gayle Lesser, Secretary

Note: Because the Club's minutes are now posted on the web, they are no longer read at the meeting. Paper copies are provided for attendees who do not have access to a computer. At this meeting the Treasurer's report was dispensed with in the interests of time. Treasurer Greg Wachsler provided a written report showing a beginning balance of \$3,511.82; deposits of \$45.44 (memberships and interest); payouts of \$65.00 (Christmas social expenses); and an ending balance of \$3,492.26.