

Sales tax committee organizes, plans for future

(KAIR)--The initial meeting of the recently formed Atchison County Sales Tax Committee happened Wednesday, May 2, serving as an organizational session for the new group.

The committee is tasked with examining the usage of the countywide sales tax used to fund solid waste and joint communications in the county.

The sales tax, approved by voters in 1993, has long been a point of contention between city and county government, with the entities questioning the benefits gained from the collections.

The committee is comprised of city and county representation. Appointed to serve county interests are Effingham City Council member Kirk Wohlgemuth, ag-producer Jay Armstrong, of Muscotah, and insurance agent Steve Caplinger, of Monrovia.

City representation includes City of Atchison Utilities Director Mike Stec, former County Commission Jeff Schuele, and small business owner Mike Zuzolo.

Atchison County Commission Chairman Eric Noll and Atchison City Commissioner Shawn Rizza were named to serve as ex-officio, non-voting members, while Solid Waste Manager Staci Joice also serves in a non-voting capacity.

During the organizational meeting it was decided that Noll and Rizza will serve as co-chairs of the Committee, which will meet on the third Tuesday of each month, beginning in June.

Brainstorming discussion followed organization, with a variety of ideas on how to proceed addressed.

That discussion was noted by Atchison County Sheriff Jack Laurie, who told the committee the changes in joint communications since the time the sales tax was approved, such as the addition of internet, must be considered by the committee going forward. "We're kind of getting the cart in front of the horse here. We don't even know the budgets yet, we don't even know the capital improvement projects coming up" Laurie stated. "These are things you guys may not even have to worry about. Don't you think you ought to look into things that you need to worry about? We have a lot of other ways of utilizing this money within communications."

Ultimately the group agreed that looking forward, instead of looking backwards, must be the goal in order to put to rest the long time disagreements, and to see better usage of the tax proceeds.

Armstrong said the committee's work comes down to figuring out how the funds generated by the sales tax will fund services offered by local government. "What I hear people saying isn't any different for any challenge of any local government in America," Armstrong stated. "You've got a budget, you've got services, and you've got to find money, and if you can't find the money, then you've got to cut services. And that's all we're really talking about."

The next meeting of the committee will be the evening of June 19 at 6:00 in the County Commission room at the Atchison County Courthouse.

Many Signals Communications