

Wise group seeks co. help with upgrades

By LUCI WELDON
Assistant Editor

The Warren County Training School/North Warren High School (WCTS/NWHS) and Friends Alumni Association, Inc. is asking the county to apply for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds on its behalf for use in providing a sewer system to the Wise area and in making housing improvements.

The alumni association is working in partnership with the Wise-Paschall Ruritan Club on these community projects, Alumni Association President Thomas A. Harris said.

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Alumni association members outlined project plans as they appeared before the Warren County Board of Commissioners during its recent work session.

"We would use the funds for infrastructure and revitalization, such as housing and public improvements," Harris said in a telephone interview.

He said that having an adequate sewer system is one of the most pressing needs in the Wise area, adding that most residents in the area have septic tanks for their homes.

Harris said that having a sewer system in place is especially important as the alumni association plans to renovate the old high school building on the WCTS/NWHS campus for use as a civic empowerment center providing a number of services related to education, health and

the cultural arts. The center would be known as the Julius Rosenwald Community Service & Empowerment Center, named after the Chicago philanthropist who provided funding for the construction of schools to improve the educational opportunities of African-Americans.

Six part-time teachers work from October-April with the school's Saturday Academy, designed to help students improve their academic skills. The Empowerment Center would employ between 30 and 50 people, Harris said.

The school campus is included within the area that the alumni association and Ruritan Club would like to be served by the sewer system. However, Harris said that any CDBG funding that might be received would be used for the community, not the campus.

"We have done a tremendous amount of work on the campus with our own funds," he said.

Warren County Director of Public Works Macon Robertson said that he recommended that the group conduct a community survey to determine how many area residents would be willing to become part of the county sewer system. Factors such as population density and number of people interested in signing up would determine whether such a project would be warranted.

Harris said that a community interest survey conducted from September into early October indicated a 75 percent approval rating for the alumni association and Ruritan Club's planned sewer system and improvements to existing housing.

"We had a town hall meeting in early October with 75 to 80

people there," he said. "There were no naysayers."

Harris said that the housing improvements and sewer system would cover the Hwy. 1 corridor in the Wise area to I-85 and to the Weldon Rd. area between Wise and Norlina.

At the recent work session, the county board was told that cost estimates would range from \$1.7-\$3 million depending on the route of the sewer system.

Harris said that the alumni association and Ruritan Club are seeking additional grants for these projects as well.

The funding that the group are seeking is given through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and awarded to units of local government to carry out community development activities. The state develops funding priorities and criteria for selecting projects.