

Presiding commissioner lodges more complaints

• Newspaper publisher accused of taking part in 'typical Crawford County conspiracies'

BY AMY ENGLAND
THREE RIVERS PUBLISHING

In his ongoing battle against what he calls "typical Crawford County conspiracies," Presiding Commissioner Ed Worley has continued his denunciation of County Clerk Connie Smith, Assessor Kerry Summers, former commissioner Neil Swyers and Three Rivers Publishing owner Rob Viehman.

At the commission meeting held on Monday, Worley presented a list of 14 statements against Smith to be entered into the minutes for the day and played two audiotapes from past meetings to document accusations he's made against the county officials and local newspapers. The first was from Nov. 26, 2007 and, although difficult to make out, it sounded like Worley in a one-sided conversation while Smith and Viehman talked about local river areas. After playing a portion of the recording, Worley said, "This was the publisher having a discussion while we were trying to conduct business. I wonder if that's the respect he shows the people of Crawford County."

Smith asked, "Do I owe you an apology for talking to Rob Viehman at that meeting?" but Worley responded, "It doesn't matter to me."

After learning of Worley's complaint, Viehman said, "I think I was 'interrupting' his telephone conversation. Who's running the commission meetings? Ed Worley. If anyone is allowing these disruptions to happen, it's him. If he thinks it's a problem,

he should stop it. And why is he worrying about what I was doing in 2007?"

Viehman added that he can't remember if he was in the courthouse that day on newspaper business or for a private matter, but he knows he and Smith were not talking while the commission was conducting any real business.

"The taxpayers should be happy to know that their presiding commissioner is addressing such ridiculous topics like a conversation I had with Connie Smith in 2007," Viehman added, "instead of concentrating on something important, like how to stop illegally overcharging residents on their property taxes, which the county has been doing for the past six years."

Worley played only a snippet from the second recording, dated Oct. 31, 2005. In it, Worley could be heard asking for minutes where the commission voted to move the collector and assessor and the reason for making the assessor project manager in that move. Although he stopped the tape after that, he then said he'd asked for those minutes four times in 20 minutes and never did see them.

When Smith asked him what he wanted from it, he responded, "I want to show people I'm not the liar I'm made out to be. I can play a tape recording of Neil (Swyers) saying he (Worley) knows there aren't any or he wouldn't be asking." He went on to allege that Swyers had orchestrated an "under-the-table" deal in that situation.

The statements Worley wrote out to be entered into the minutes for the day included a number of times that he asserted Smith did not keep minutes appropriately, according to his inter-

pretation of Missouri Statute 51.120 which reads in part, "Every clerk of a county commission shall keep an accurate record of the orders, rules, and proceedings of the county commission..." He listed dates from 2005 and 2006 where minutes don't contain particulars that he believes should be in them and referenced his tape recordings as proof.

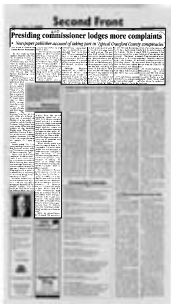
After his presentation, Smith asked, "Ed, would you

prefer I'm not in these meetings?" to which Worley responded, "Yes." Smith then said, "This is a personal attack on me again. I know what you want, but I'm not going anywhere. You got rid of Neil Swyers; you got rid of Ed Mitchell. And now it's my turn."

Although Missouri Statute 610.020, titled Governmental Bodies and Records, reads, in part, "A journal or minutes of open and closed meetings shall be taken and retained by the public governmental body, including, but not limited to, a record of any votes taken at such meeting. The minutes shall include the date, time, place, members present, members absent and a record of any votes taken," Worley said he believes anything important should be in the minutes, including key items of discussion. However, he admitted sometimes things are important to one person but not another.

Worley has argued for better ethics in county government for much of his tenure as presiding commissioner. He said his accusations have been made for two reasons: "I'd like to see some accountability in government. Nothing's ever done about it. It just gives people the freedom to do what they please." He also feels he has been called a liar too many times. He said

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Swyers and Summers have both called him a liar and that Smith has insinuated so.

Although Worley said the idea that his accusations are politically-motivated is "pure hogwash," Smith believes that is the case since

she will be up for reelection in 2010. In response to his latest set of accusations, she said, "I am not part of a conspiracy. I am not unethical. I make mistakes, but I try to correct them. I'd just like to know what he wants from me."

Smith and Summers are Republicans, as were Swyers and Mitchell when they served as county commissioners. Worley is a Democrat. Both Smith and Worley are up for reelection next year.

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