

Transcribed Section of June 2 Candidate Forum

Ann Hollifield: “Mr. Norris, you are the chairman of the board of the North Georgia Bank, which finances many of development projects that are going on in the county that come before the Board (of Commissioners) for approval votes. I and numerous other citizens have on multiple occasions asked you directly to recuse yourself on some of those votes since you are chairman of the bank that is in fact financing and therefore has a financial interest in those projects. You said to me that you would know...you refused to recuse yourself and you said to me that you would know a conflict of interest if you saw one. So if you don’t believe, Sir, that being chairman of the board of the bank that is financing the project you are voting on is not a conflict of interest, would you please give us an example of what would be a conflict of interest that you would recuse yourself from.”

Commissioner Don Norris: “I would be glad to. I am no longer chairman of the board of North Georgia Bank. If a rezone comes before the board, and the bank has a financial interest in the rezone, I would recuse myself. What happens in many cases is, when the rezone comes before the board, the bank has no financial obligation. Later on, it sometimes, it may acquire an interest in that. But, again, too, I don’t make loans.”

Esther Porter: “Is your question concerning if I had, would I recuse myself. Well, I own a company, and of course, when I am elected, and the county does business with us. And, at the time of my election, they would no longer...and I would take myself away from any voting or concern if, for any reason, I was involved with that.”

Hollifield: “But your business also depends on developers. You sell to developers. Would you refuse to sell to a project that is approved? In other words, you can vote for projects knowing that business will come to you later. Would you recuse yourself if that is a possibility or decline to

sell to those in order to make sure there is no appearance of a conflict of interest?”

Porter: “If it was a customer of mine, yes, but I sell very little in Oconee County. But I would if it was a customer of mine.”

Mike Maxey: “I’ve been serving on the Planning Commission since October of 2004, when I was appointed to the Planning Commission. I’ll say this in all honesty. In not one instance, since I have been on the Planning Commission, have I voted on a project that I knew, at the time it was presented to the Planning Commission, that I was involved in. Not a single time. Not even not one. Now, bear in mind, after the fact, if they approach me prior to coming to the Planning Commission, and say ‘we need some budget numbers from this site work, if we need to get some idea how much it is going to cost to do this site work on this project, we’re going to get you sub plans later for bid,’ as soon as that happens and it comes to the Planning Commission I will recuse. There is a record that I have recused before. And I can name three or four right now that I have recused from, either that pertained to family members, and projects that I knew I was associated with. That is one thing that you never have to worry about with Mike Maxes, that is integrity. You can make fun of how I talk, how I look and I dress. But you start talking about integrity, what you need to do is talk to people I do business with. I see several in this room. That goes back to I’ll tell you right quick. I’m honest. I’m straightforward. I’m going to do like I say I’m going to do. But integrity is not the issue you are going to have to worry about with Mike. OK?”

Second of all, if something comes before the Planning Commission and I don’t know nothing about, I’m going to vote my conscience on it. That is what we are asked to do. Three months later, if a project manager, if a general contractor, whatever the case may be, comes to me and asks me to put a bid on a project. They don’t say: ‘Mike, here, the project is yours. But if you want to submit a bid...’ I’m going to submit the bid. But not one single time, Ladies and Gentlemen, have I ever sat

on the Planning Commission and sit there, knowing that I have an inside track on a project.”

Commissioner Margaret Hale: “I just want to interject. It is a tough, ethical thing to evaluate. The only time I have done that is we own some property on Mars Hill Road and we sold it to a church, and the church came before the Board (of Commissioners) to ask for a rezone. I went to our county attorney and I said ‘I’m not comfortable sitting and listening to this even though I have no...I did profit from the sale of my home, that was several years earlier. But I just don’t feel comfortable doing this. I’m going to recuse myself.’ So it is something you have to be very conscious of as a commissioner in any dealings that you do with other people.”

Commissioner Jim Luke: “Russ, I wasn’t addressed on that, but I want to answer to that just a little bit too, because Margaret kind of hit on...I may be an offender too. I own a hardware business, and probably every project that gets approved in this county of any construction magnitude, somebody ends up in my store to buy a pipe fitting or a piece of wire or something. I don’t sell materials. My average ticket runs just under eleven dollars. And I can tell you, I wouldn’t compromise my integrity over that kind of sale. But I will say, and it something the public probably doesn’t know, when I was elected four years ago, my single largest customer in Oconee County was Oconee County government. And we have not done one single ticket to Oconee County government since then. That doesn’t speak necessarily to Jim Luke but to the ethics of the way this government handles its business as a group and as a rule. I don’t think you have to worry about our side on the ethical issues. It is pretty solid. And if I need to give up those customers I guess I’ll have to do that for those pipe fittings. That hits close to home with me. I value, I’m a little like Mike Maxey, I value my ethics. You folks understand, when you are in the hardware business, it would be hard to run a government without somebody who sells something to that government who might get elected to it at some point. If you know anybody at all, it would be difficult.”

Russ Page: Does anybody that hasn't answered that question yet want to speak?

Commissioner Chuck Horton: "I was just going to say I don't own anything."

Maxey: I want to say one more thing. I kind of feel like that was pointed to me a little bit. I can take my licks with the best of them. But I will shoot. Only thing I want to do is serve this county, Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to serve the county. If it puts me in a situation where my business is influencing, or it has that assumption, that my business is influencing, I'm willing to sacrifice that. I'm willing to sacrifice that to serve this county. But my ducks are in a row. My ethics are iron. Like I said, I want to serve on the county commission board, and you are welcome to come to my office, industrial drive, here in the industrial park. Come by any time you want to. I'll show you how much revenue I generate from this county versus what I do overall. I tell you what. I'd go broke if I had to depend on Oconee County business. That is a situation I don't want to be in. So, anybody that wants to stop by my office, I'll be glad to share that with you. But I am more willing to serve than I am to profit from this county. That's all there is to say. Thank you."