

Prevailing Wage Reforms Likely to Impact Local Projects

By JEREMIAH SHELOR
The Exponent Telegram

The reforms to prevailing wage being discussed in the **West Virginia Legislature** would likely impact the cost of major Harrison County projects on the horizon, County Administrator **Willie Parker** said.

But exactly how much impact the reforms would have for county taxpayers has yet to be determined, Parker said.

Last week, the **West Virginia Senate** passed a compromise bill that would change how the state's prevailing wage is calculated. Under the bill, the responsibility of calculating the prevailing wage would shift from the **Division of Labor to WorkForce West Virginia** and economists from both **Marshall University** and **West Virginia University**.

The bill would also set a \$500,000 threshold for projects subject to the prevailing wage.

The **Harrison County Commission** is targeting the spring to go out to bid on a roughly \$7.5 million 911 center to be constructed on the Quarry property in Summit Park.

The commission has also mulled the possibility of completely overhauling the county's old jail annex to turn it into a state-of-the-art judicial complex. That project's cost is estimated at roughly \$20 million.

Parker said the current prevailing wage reform could very well lead to lower costs for those projects, but by exactly how much won't be known until the new wage calculations are made, he said.

"It depends on how they do that. I'm assuming that it would be lower,"

"I would hope that, on any of our projects, that labor and companies, government, or whatever, whenever they sit down can work out numbers that would be agreeable to both sides."

— **Ron Watson, Harrison County Commission**

Parker said. "It would be a lower cost to the taxpayer."

The timing of the compromise bill raises questions for the county as it prepares to put out a call for bids on the 911 center in the coming months, Parker said.

"If you have a project that's getting ready to go out to bid, how long are they going to take to calculate the rates?" Parker asked. "Will this delay any projects? I don't know."

Parker said the county may have to "wait in neutral for a little bit" as the prevailing wage bill makes its way through the Legislature to see how the legislation could affect various projects.

Commission President **Ron Watson** said the county will follow whatever current state law requires regarding prevailing wage.

When it comes to major projects, either public or private, Watson said he believes in striking a balance that's fair to all parties.

"I would hope that, on any of our projects, that labor and companies, government, or whatever, whenever they



sit down can work out numbers that would be agreeable to both sides," Watson said.

Regardless of what happens with the prevailing wage, Commissioner **Bernie Fazzini** said he hopes to engage with union labor for the county's major construction projects.

"If I have my way, those bids, whether

they're prevailing wage or not, those bids will go out as a union contract," Fazzini said. "Most of the jobs I've been on, if it was a union job, I saw a better quality of work than for a non-union job."

Jeremiah Shelor can be reached at 304-626-1409 or by email at jshelor@theet.com.

Merrill Lynch welcomes Lyle Smith and Josh Cross our newest Financial Advisors