

County Commission won't buy old Colonial building

By **ED HOWELL**
Eagle News Editor

The Walker County Commission, after a weekend to mull it over, voted Monday to stop negotiations to purchase the old Colonial Bank building.

"The more we looked at it, the less everyone was interested in it," Chairman Bruce Hamrick said as the commission reversed direction on a proposal seriously discussed only three days earlier.

The commission had discussed the idea of a \$230,000 purchase at a work session on Fri-

day and looked at the building. Water had been found in the basement, which gave commissioners some concern, but they still thought the building offered some good space and was in a good location.

In August, Hamrick had discussed buying the building to turn over to the Reappraisal Office, which is running out of room. The office will also deal with annual reappraisals by 2007, which will require hiring more people.

However, county Revenue Commissioner Jerry Guthrie said he was concerned about

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was a little more than I was expecting to hear."

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splitting his operation into two offices separated by several blocks and about how it would affect his computer system. He said it would be difficult for real estate and title workers to go back and forth to two separate sites, as well as for Guthrie to oversee operations at both sites.

Hamrick said Friday that with the Revenue Office growing and still needing more space, the solution would be to send the Treasurer's Office, the Veterans Affairs Office and the Board of Registrar's Office to the old Colonial Bank building. The Revenue Office would have taken over the office space for the three offices, as they all are on the same floor of the Walker County Courthouse.

However, Hamrick said county Treasurer Annette Burton had expressed concerns about moving further from the courthouse, and county officials began to realize they would be paying more than what it would be worth to move a few smaller offices.

Larry J. Uptain, president of Colonial Bank in Walker County, wrote to the commission in a Dec. 7 letter about financing the purchase.

"(W)e agree to provide financing of the \$230,000 for a term of 15 years at a rate of 5.50 percent, resulting in a monthly payment of \$1,888.66. An annual payment at the rate of 5.55 percent would be \$21,981.67. All rates are tax free. A document-

tation fee of \$250 applies to both options," he said in the letter.

As to the financing, Hamrick said Friday if a loan for the full amount was not taken, the county would only have \$60,000 on hand to make a down payment for the building.

Hamrick said during Monday's commission meeting, the last scheduled for the year, that he had told Uptain the commission had cooled over the idea. Uptain had wanted to sell the building by Dec. 31, Hamrick said.

"It was too big an expense to move a couple of departments," Hamrick said. "It's a really good buy. But it is like someone once told me, that no matter how a good a buy it might be, if you don't need it, don't buy it."

He said Uptain will now pursue other interested buyers.

Uptain, according to Hamrick, had reported the flooding had not happened before and that something likely went wrong to the pump, with the recent excessive rains adding to the problem. Commissioners indicated the basement situation did not ease their concerns.

"The water didn't help the situation," Hamrick said.

Hamrick indicated the commission and the Revenue Office are back to square one, as available land and buildings are scarce in downtown Jasper.

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