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Residents express concerns about YMCA

By Eric Miller
Editor

SPARTA—Concerns about the YMCA under construction in Caroline County drew questions from residents who met with county Supervisors Jeff Sili and Jeff Black on Nov. 21.

The two supervisors had a constituents meeting in the Bowling Green Voting District. Sili told the gathering of more than 100 in Salem Baptist Church that the YMCA was scheduled to open this fall, but probably will open in February 2014.

“The last third of the roof is still not on yet, and that’s over the pools,” Sili said of the facility under construction in Ladysmith. “Realistically, it will probably be February when it opens.”

During a September meeting of the Caroline County Board of Supervisors, Sili asked Barney Reiley, CEO of the Rappahannock Area YMCA, “Where do we stand on construction?” Reiley told Sili that he anticipated being in the building by late fall, “between Thanksgiving and Christmas.” He assured the board that the YMCA would open in 2013.

In 2011, it was announced that the 42,000-square-foot, \$5 million facility would open in the fall of 2012. It is supposed to have a gym, an indoor pool, a fitness center and exercise rooms. Membership fees are based on a member’s income. Construction problems have delayed the opening. One problem occurred when concrete was poured when the outdoor temperature was too cold, which resulted in walls having to be torn down so concrete could be poured when the temperature was right.

In 2011, the Board of Supervisors entered into an agreement with the Rappahannock Area YMCA to give the organization \$5 million to build a Caroline YMCA. The county accomplished this with a secured loan from SunTrust Bank. The collateral for this debt is the Bowling Green Elementary School, which recently underwent a \$10 million expansion and renovation. Apart from this gift and the loan that made it possible to make the gift, there are 10 interest-only payments on the SunTrust loan. The payments of \$103,100 are due twice a year.

The most recent payment was made in August, and another one is due in February, Sili told the gathering. County funds helped make the August payment.

A published letter to the editor by Sili predicts that county taxpayers could wind up paying \$8 million for the YMCA building.

While answering questions from his constituents, Sili explained, “We (the county) don’t own the building. The YMCA owns it. We gave them a gift of \$5 million.”

Sili noted that King George County provided a \$4 million gift for the \$6.2 million YMCA there.

Caroline County must also pay for maintenance of the YMCA building, Sili said. He echoed a comment from a constituent who said, “That’s a gift that keeps on giving.”

Sili raised more eyebrows when he noted, “We also gave them the property and then we built the building.”

Each time the YMCA comes up at supervisor meetings, “my vote down the line—starting in 2010—has been no, no, no,” Sili told the group.

A constituent raised his hand and asked Sili, “How many people have the ability to pay for all of this? I can’t keep paying these taxes. I will have to leave.”