

AHC Receives Backing for Tax Break

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VERONA — The Augusta County Board of Supervisors on Wednesday voted to back Augusta Hospital Corp. in its efforts to get a substantial tax break from the state.

The board, by a 5-2 margin, supported AHC's request that 59 acres of land at the medical center site in Fishersville be exempt from property taxes.

Charles W. Curry, North River District, and A. Ray Hull, Beverley Manor District, voted against backing the request, saying the General Assembly should make the decision without a recommendation from the county.

The supervisors also approved a lease agreement with the Diamond Club, a Stuarts Draft organization working to construct and operate a baseball field on land between the Draft fire department and Stuart Avenue.

Curry cast the lone dissenting vote, expressing concern that locating a ball field in what used to be a stormwater reten-

tion field may contribute to the town's drainage problem.

AHC's original request was for 91 acres of tax-exempt land, but the supervisors asked the corporation to remove part of the tract — the portion that borders Route 642. That road is unimproved, and the board did not want the hospital developing the land along the route.

The original request would

have deprived the county of about \$523,000 a year in real estate and personal property taxes. The figure under the amended proposal would about \$429,000.

Curry said he worried about the "message we would be sending to the General Assembly."

He said the county generally complains to the state each year about its lack of funds, so it

would be unwise to officially stand behind the request.

Curry suggested, and Hull agreed, that the county should refrain from issuing an opinion but should leave the matter totally up to the state to decide.

Curry's concerns about the Diamond Club request centered around filling a drainage field with 9,000 cubic yards of dirt.

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Stuarts Draft has had drainage and flooding problems for years, he noted, and removing a potential holding facility could just add to the problem.

South River Supervisor John W. Swett said that County Engineer Jeff Gentry looked at the field and said it was not a major holding area because it was too flat.

County Administrator Patrick J. Coffield added that work to a drainage pond near Windmill Square has helped the Draft's drainage, and that using the field for recreation should not create substantial flooding problems.

In other business, the board of supervisors:

— Approved a system for the election of school boards in the