

Jennifer. Ever Asst

My name is connie Bailey Kitts, 2268 Virginia Ave., Bluefield, Va.

I have a list of questions to submit for the record, that I'd like to see answered by the next board meeting. Tonight I will summarize these questions:

1. **The county is in desperate need of funding for substance abuse issues spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic.** Health and recovery issues are clearly within ARPA relief directed at counties. However, after emerging from closed meetings on August 3, you approved a proposal to spend 27% of the ARPA funds for this fiscal year on water lines to support Pure Salmon fish farm, and offered nothing to mitigate substance abuse. Your rationale was that the fish farm would bring in 200 jobs, even though those now applying are being told they will not be hired for 2 years. **Why have you allocated 27% of your ARPA funds for this fiscal year to support a foreign owned fish farm, crowding out spending on community needs that fall squarely within ARPA's mandate?**
2. **This Salmon fish farm wants to draw 400,000 gallons of water a day from the Clinch River and then discharge 350,000 gallons into the Richlands wastewater treatment plant** (which needs funding for modifications to handle this), using PSA water lines that will be paid for from our federal American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds.

**What confidence does the BOS & IDA have that the fish farm won't negatively impact rivers, streams and aquifers?** Where will the tons of waste generated be discharged? What are the environmental threats to the ecosystem and downstream recreation, fishing, mussel and other activities that rely on the Clinch River? Does the project involve large waste pools?

3. And during the construction phase, spread over an area described as being the size of 28 football fields, with clay soil and hilly terrain, what about run off? Do you have a local Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Plan in place that will protect the homes and families who live by the intended site?
4. **The salmon fish farm is suppose to be supported by \$300 million coming from private investors.** Who exactly is Pure Salmon? On their Website, very difficult for the average lay person to understand, it appears they are only a company of investors, venture capitalists, primarily from Southeast asia, who want to put their money into fish farms (all of which have been overseas from what I see) , with the expectation it will give them a good return. **How much have they actually raised for this project? You yourselves said 3 years ago that financing was a problem, and the stock price of even market leader Atlantic Sapphire has dropped significantly. So if the funds don't materialize, are Tazewell and Russel and Buchanan Counties prepared to fill in the gap?**

**What if the project fails and becomes another Bluestone?** Will county taxpayers be on the hook to repay loans to the Tobacco Commission and other agencies?

5. **Because you are using VCEDA, VDOT, Tobacco Commission money, all of which came from our taxes, then I think we deserve to see how you're doing due diligence. Especially with regards to the plan to change from tilapia to salmon. How are you doing so?**

That was even pointed out in a Facebook comment on the Bluefield Daily Telegraph article in 2018 when someone said "Please check with Tazewell County to see what their hold up is. Projected 400 jobs--that's three shifts with over 100 workers on 3 shifts--Really? Someone please do due diligence on this proposal"

The 2013 plan to raise tilapia, at a \$135 million project investment, changed 6 years later to a plan to raise salmon requiring now \$300 million investment. **A Virginia Tech aquaculture scientist compares the difference between tilapia and salmon to the difference between raising a beef cow and a dairy cow. Everything is different, he said.** Salmon requires different water temperature, different water quality, a different environmental system, different recirculation systems. The eggs-they need to be outsourced and certified. Salmon require very different food, they have different growth rates, marketing projections, operating plans and systems are all different, financing different and on and on. ..

**So who is drawing up the new salmon facility plan, operation and business plan, and showing it to these investors? Who is showing it to you?** For whoever is reworking all of this, what's their track record in the past? How are you doing due diligence? What is your formula for calculating the tax revenue you've forecasted?

What are the obligations of the loans you got from VCEDA or the VDOT or the Tobacco Commission? What is Pure Salmon obliged to do in exchange for all the money, and by when and how will you hold their feet to the fire? If the Project fails will County taxpayers be on the hook to repay loans?

6. **According to what you've told the BDTelegraph, AquaMaof is the company providing the fish-farm technology for Pure Salmon. However, last year AquaMaof was sued for \$25 million by Aquatech Fisheries for "many failures and defects" in Aquamaof's execution of the project and massive fish deaths. What gives the BOS and your IDA confidence that AquaMaof is competent to build and manage a project that is far larger than anything it has ever attempted?**
7. Are you sure this is not going to be more negative than positive?  
I was talking with a friend, over on the WV side, who had been on a Board that got bamboozled by a certain proposal. Her reflection on it all was that we too often trust a company instead of common sense. She said she felt like "Who am I to ask a dumb

question?" She said "We trust the wrong sources" and we don't ask for things to be laid out clearly.

But the bottom line is that it's everyday grassroots people who have to live with the results. It's easy for people with money to take over small towns. In the case of Pure Salmon's negotiations with the Town of Richlands about for example, water use, well, water is something that affects everyone and if the water is not right, it will impact everyone.

8. **Why do you continue to talk about what has been identified as Pure Salmon fish farm in executive sessions when that company has publicly announced its intent.** The way you explained it, .... You go into executive session because you think if word gets out you'll lose your negotiating advantage. Well you're still having closed sessions to talk about what Pure Salmon wants and it's already been announced.
9. **This is water over the bridge, but If THE BOS and the IDA were convinced that inland fish farming was a good industry for this region, why wasn't Virginia market leader Blue Ridge Aquaculture ever invited to compete for all the money you've given Pure Salmon?** And What about the company from Germany that had an interest in 2018? Why not let Pure Salmon face a little competition and prove they can do the best for us? As it is, Pure Salmon is beginning to resemble the tailors making the emperor's new clothes.
10. One of the striking things about JLARC report was that it contrasted the stakeholder involvement of Dept of Commerce projects with the lack of stakeholder involvement with VCEDA projects. **Have you ever evaluated your projects to consider that maybe stakeholder involvement was the missing element?**

Which brings me back to the beginning, an appeal for ARPA funds to go into recovery. Why not set up a subcommittee comprised of grassroots citizens to work with the County Planning commission to look at what recovery system would work best here? William White is a Brit who has thought and written a lot about recovery in the UK and here. He says, "Recovery is contagious. But recovery is contagious only through interpersonal connection—only in the context of community." If you're serious about helping this County's problems, allow grassroot stakeholder involvement in recovery efforts.

*is what we  
abuse*

*please*