

Inside this week



Tigers win only home wrestling match

....Page 10

State record Shoal Bass caught

.....Page 10

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Councilman Andy Anderson, accompanied by his wife Jan, takes his oath of office



Councilman Larry Hill, surrounded by friends and family, takes his oath of office

City Council adopts proposals and makes appointments at first 2022 meeting

By MICHAEL BOWEN
Editor and Publisher

Appointments, adoptions, and announcements encompassed the January 10 meeting of the Washington City Council.

Andy Anderson's succession of Councilman Pee Wee Armour as a District Two representative was the first business item. He was sworn in by probate judge Thomas Charping and promptly took his seat. District One councilman Larry Hill was sworn in at an earlier ceremony.

After an executive session, the council reappointed Barry Fleming as the city attorney and appointed Douglas Kidd to succeed Michael Horgan as municipal court judge.

The council also approved a list of recommended appointments to various city boards, commissions, and authorities as presented by Mayor William deGolian. The appointments included the nomination of Councilman Larry Hill and Andy Anderson to the 911 commission and Kathy Agan and Councilman Charles Wagner to the Animal Shelter. Ernest Brown and Karla Scarzafava were appointed to the Downtown Development Authority. Councilman Nathaniel Cullars was appointed to the Health Department Commission. Ed Anderson was appointed to the Historic Preservation Commission.

Sharikia Smith was appointed as the housing authority's tenant and Thomas Denard is to continue to serve. Amy Johnston was reappointed to the Parks and Recreation Commission and Mark Waters was reappointed to the Planning Commission. The mayor deferred the appointment of a nominee to the Urban Redevelopment Authority. According to deGolian, there is extensive discussion amongst URA members about the "make-up" of the board, and no consensus has yet been reached for the selection of a nominee. No changes were made to the Zoning Appeals Board or the Cemetery Committee.

The 2023 SPLOST Ballot initiatives, which are Fire and Rescue, water and sewer infrastructure, and street maintenance, was also adopted.

Mayor deGolian took a moment during the meeting to announce the 240 anniversary of the City of Washington's founding. The anniversary was in 2020, but due to the pandemic, no recognition of the event was possible. To recognize the event, deGolian is planning to appoint a panel to coordinate a commemorative festival. He invited anyone interested to volunteer.

City Administrator Jerry deBin announced the city's new Community Development Director as being Errol Newark. Originally from British Guiana in South America,



Councilman Pee Wee Armour shakes hands with Andy Anderson as he takes his new seat as a District two councilman.

Newark served in the army of his home country before moving to the United States and graduating from the University of Georgia with a bachelor and master's degree in sociology. He was previously employed with Fulton County and, according to deBin, has extensive experience in housing development and grant writing.

The new Employee Policy and Procedures Manual was approved.

deBin then brought a proposal before the council to replace the old water meters in District One. According to the City Administrator, the city produces more drinking water than what their customers are billed for. The approximate difference is almost 300,000 gallons of water. deBin explained that numerous experts have been consulted. Aged water meters were among the identified issues. Over time, water meters are known to slow down and under-read a customer's water consumption. Accordingly, deBin recommended the purchase of new electronic water meters. The new meters would allow one employee to read all of the meters in one day, instead of taking two employees thirty days to read the old meters. The estimated cost is 178-180,00

dollars to purchase the new meters. The funds will be taken from the city's ARP funds. The proposal was approved.

The City also voted to provide a twenty-five percent financial match for a FEMA grant that the Water Department is applying for. The grant will cover the installation of two back-up generators that will have the capacity to keep the city's water infrastructure operating in the event of a power outage. As part of the grant, the recipient must pay twenty-five percent of the total cost, which amounts to \$61,000. The councilmen agreed that the money should also come from the ARP funds. FEMA will provide the rest of the necessary funds, according to deBin.

Among the councilman action items, Councilman Nathaniel Cullars addressed sewer fees for houses in the city that use a septic system. According to deBin, four residents in total are known to be paying for city sewer services but are actually using a septic system; however, a city public notice from 1976 stated that the sewer bill would apply to everyone, including those who were not connected yet and those who refused to be

connected to the sewer system at all. Cullars stated that several customers had paid the \$50 fee in 1976 but had not been connected. He proposed that the council connect those homes to the city's sewer system for free, adding that the city owes compensation to those customers for the services that they were paying for, but not receiving. Councilman Hill agreed that something should be done. Wagner protested that refunding sewer bills to those who are paying for the service, but are not connected, could be a dangerous misstep for the city. He contended that such action would disenfranchise the citizens that are connected and are paying for sewer services. Wagner further stated that if the city chose to refund the sewer bills, that he would file a class action lawsuit against the city. Adam Nelson, who was filling in for Barry Fleming, read section 27 from the city charter. The section stated that the city reserves the right to compel residents to use city services, such as sewer. Cullars declared that he does not think citizens should be paying for services that they are not receiving. Councilman Maceo Mahoney agreed, adding that there was no minority representation on the council in 1976. deBin interjected that if the city has done something wrong, the city has already proven that they are willing to compensate for it. He then proposed that if someone has paid the connect fee in 1976, but not been connected, that the city connect the home to the city sewer system for free. After extensive debate, the council decided to table the matter until more information is available and solutions formed.

Mahoney was next on the agenda. His first topic was utility relief. Insisting that the council is procrastinating in providing such aid to the citizens and businesses of Washington, Mahoney moved to allocate \$100,000 to utility relief. Hill seconded the motion. deGolian asked Mahoney to clarify how the payout would work. Mahoney explained that he would divide the \$100,000 by the total number of citizens in the city and distribute the funds accordingly. He further elaborated that it would be done by account and not by usage. Denard asked how many residential citizen

Continued on page 12



MARTIN LUTHER KING'S DAY

UCAP encourages community participation in upcoming MLK day parade

The United Community Awareness Program (UCAP) will be sponsoring the MLK parade on Monday, January 17. The parade will begin at 1p.m. Lineup for participants will be noon, and the assembling area will be where Graham Street enters onto Whitehall Street. Small groups may line up at old the Laundromat next to Wynn's residence. The parade will move down Whitehall Street, turn right onto Robert Toombs Avenue,

then motor around the square and finish behind the Wilkes County Courthouse.

UCAP requests the participation of the Community in this event. Groups, cars, and floats are among the available categories for participants. Contact the UCAP members Adrienne Williams, 706-990-9876, Loretta Fanning, 706-717-0200, and President Chenault 706-318-0306 for further information.

Memory Lane Cruisers donate to WFD and Wilkes EMS



Memory Lane Cruisers held its first meeting of the new year at the Library on Monday, January 3. The club made donations to EMS, TJ and Friends, and the Washington Fire Department. Club president Barry Holloway (center) presents Matt Howard (far left) and Ryan Burton (Far Right) of the Washington Fire Department, as well as Dan Wright of Wilkes EMS their respective donation checks.