

Kettle Creek battle anniversary sees moderate turnout
... Page 14

W-W Tigers Baseball team wins first game of the season
... Page 12

Kindergarten registration to begin in March
... Page 3

The News-Reporter - Serving Wilkes County
 BLACK HISTORY MONTH
 75¢ per copy sales tax included
 www.news-reporter.com
 Vol. CIV, No. 7 Washington, Georgia • Publication No. 287-530 • 1 Section, 14 Pages • February 17, 2022

City Councilman Nathaniel Cullars indicted by Grand Jury

By MICHAEL BOWEN
Editor and Publisher

According to true bills release by Wilkes County Clerk of Superior Court Gena Gramaud, the February Grand Jury has indicted Washington City Councilman Nathaniel Cullars.

The indictment comes in wake of an incident from October of 2021. On October 6, according to a complaint filed by Mayor William deGolian, Cullars allegedly battered the mayor during a disagreement over what deGolian deemed a preliminary economic development meeting. During the alleged battery, security camera footage shows Cullars brushing deGolian into a chair in the main

hallway of City Hall. Later, the camera records Cullars taking his index fingers and pushing deGolian backwards. According to camera footage and deGolian's complaint, the exchange continued until Sheriff's Deputy Gene Amos intervened when he happened upon the scene. Cullars was subsequently charged with two counts of simple battery and warrants were sworn out for his arrest. He turned himself in and was arrested at 10:02 a.m. on October 19. He was then released on \$3,200 bond.

Cullars is currently being charged with two counts of simple battery as well as additional charges of two counts of malpractice, misfeasance, or malfeasance

in office. Cullars declined to comment on the indictment when interviewed by this newspaper.

District Attorney Bill Doupe explained that the next steps in the case will be an arraignment and then a trial. Wilkes County criminal trials are currently set for the week of May 2, according

to the calendar on the DA's website. Regarding the case, Doupe emphasized that suspects are presumed innocent until proven guilty, and stated he is confident that justice will be served. "Anybody, prior to trial, they are presumed innocent, and it will be the burden upon the state to prove

them guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. These are charges, and a trial will be where a jury of Wilkes County people will sit there and they will listen to the evidence and apply the law, and I am sure will return a verdict that speaks the truth and is just," Doupe said.

City Council votes to rename Lexington Avenue

At their meeting Monday, February 14, the Washington City Council voted to rename Lexington Avenue to Martin Luther King Avenue.

The vote stemmed from a motion by City Councilman Nathaniel Cullars. Cullars voiced his opinion that every town has a street named after Martin Luther King and that Washington should be no exception. He then moved to change Lexington Avenue to Martin Luther King Avenue and set the date for a public hearing for February 23 at the Edward B. Pope Conference Center at 6:30 p.m. Resistance met the motion initially. Councilman Charles Wagner asked for clarification on what section of road would be affected, to which Cullars specified the section of road starting at North Mercer Street and ending at the city limits. Councilman Matthew Denard questioned the process for renaming a state highway. City Attorney Adam Nelson explained that state law allows a city to rename part of a state highway but requires a different procedure to do so. "It is not the same as when you name another existing subdivision, or somewhere, and you're a city," Nelson said. Regarding the Department of Transportation, Nelson stated that only communications with the agency would clarify the process for approval. Nelson added that there is the possibility of renaming the road but allowing residents to retain their present addresses. He cited Ninth Street in the city of Augusta as an example, which was renamed James Brown Boulevard. "The city of Augusta has a portion of Ninth



Councilman Nathaniel Cullars

Street that they refer to as James Brown Boulevard, but everything on Ninth Street is actually addressed to Ninth Street. ... Part of that process of communication with the DOT would include that," Nelson said. Councilman Larry Hill then spoke in support of proceeding with the process, as did Mayor William deGolian. The motion passed unanimously. The council also approved a rezoning request. The request is

for a 28.3-acre land track that was donated by Dr. Rahul Garg to the City of Washington in December of 2021. The property, according to Economic Development Director Janet Parker, is located on Ashley Drive behind the VFW Post. According to Building Official and Code Enforcement Director Jimmy Toto, the land was originally zoned C2, which is for commercial

Continued on page 3

Registrars address registrations and voting machine issues

Voter registration, ballot machine issues, and signage were among the topics considered by the Wilkes County Board of Registrars.

Voter registration is still in progress, according to Registrar Gyvonne Pinkston, and the list of registered voters is undergoing updates and purges as new citizens move to Wilkes County and as others move out. Pinkston stated that April 25 is the last day to register to vote in the upcoming general election on May 24. She added that applications requesting absentee ballots will be accepted starting March 7.

The board also addressed the posting of signage and the voting machine message. Referencing the most recent mayoral election, Pinkston asked about the proper protocol for posting signs and posters. She stated that two voters in that election had become agitated with the wording on a notice regarding the number of candidates on the election ballot. Elections Superintendent Thomas Charping clarified that the notice in question was intended to notify voters of a warning message from the voting machine

that reads, "this ballot is under voted." Charping stated that the reading is false, and votes cast despite the message will still count. "Reverend Hill brought it to my attention that it wasn't in his last election that way, and I told Reverend Hill that we were in an old system that did not come up with this banner across the top of the screen as you are voting that you have undervoted. And it is like you are forced to vote for another candidate. It is not that way, it is not intended to be that way, but it intimidates the voter in that way," Charping said. The board then discussed the matter and resolved to better inform the public before the next election. Regarding signage, they agreed to post signed notices that communicate more clearly with voters.

Upcoming training schedules and sessions were another topic of discussion. After considering some of the training dates, the board ultimately determined to work on constructing a calendar to be addressed at a later meeting.

The next meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Registrars will be March 10 at 4 p.m.

Airport Commission receives update on present state of airport projects

The Wilkes County Airport Commission met February 10 to discuss the present state of the Wilkes County Airport.

After the commission's approval of the previous meeting's minutes as presented, Airport Commission Chairman Harris Blackmon revealed the amount of revenue that the airport is generating in taxes. According to a report retrieved from the tax office by Commission member George Brooks, the revenue in taxes for 2021 is \$13,641.90.

Airport manager Kenzie Butler reported fuel sales being 1,068 gallons of 100 low lead fuel and 68 gallons of Jet A fuel. "When the King Air left, the jet fuel sales left with it," Butler said. "We had nowhere to house the new one," he added.

Blackmon then revealed that plans are being made to build a new road to access the airport. He also stated that the installation of

a new fuel farm and additional hangars are also in progress. Blackmon then asked for an update from Lead Edge Design Group president Phil Eberly.

Eberly revealed that the group is presently designing the road and is waiting on the completion of a survey, which will be completed when the land is cleared of timber.

Eberly then addressed the fuel farm. He explained that fuel farms are very hard to get, and that Wilkes County's fuel farm will consist of two new above ground fuel tanks, one for Jet A and the other for AV fuel. Funding for the project, according to Eberly, will only come from the FAA upon the completion of the FAA's safety requirements in their funding criteria. Eberly said the project has already been bid and a grant has been written. Contracts have also been written and signed by the contractor.

Eberly said that the contracts have been passed to county authorities for their signature before proceeding further. After acquiring all of the necessary signatures, Eberly said the next step would be a pre-construction conference and ordering the fuel tanks. Eberly estimates the arrival of the fuel tanks to be approximately six months after the order is placed. "The construction of that project is pretty easy," Project Manager Amanda Rostin stated. "It's kind of like Lego pieces. Once the actual equipment comes in, it just kind of gets plugged in." Eberly added that several weeks before the tanks arrival, the concrete pads for the tanks will be constructed.

Elaborating on the fuel tanks, Eberly said that the installation places Wilkes County in an optimal position to receive air traffic during the week of

Continued on page 2

County Commission considers equipment sales and more at meeting

Wilkes County's tax release application, surplus equipment sales, and recognition of Greg Rogers and Jeff Hackney were some of the topics addressed by the Board of Commissioners at their regular meeting February 10.

Having completed half of the tax release application process, County Attorney Charles LeGette asked the commission to further postpone the application's submission to the next meeting. The commissioners complied and tabled the matter.

The commissioners also authorized the dispersion and sale of surplus equipment and scrap metal. A list of the surplus items to be sold was also approved. EMS director Blake Thompson presented his report to the commission. Thompson's opening remarks regarded the late Jeff Hackney. According to Thompson, Hackney was one of the first paramedics he served with upon moving to Wilkes County. He said that Hackney will be sorely missed. "They (The Hackney family) have done a lot for Wilkes County," Thompson said. The commissioners agreed that the service of the late Jeff Hackney and the late Greg Rogers should be recognized and indicated that letters of recognition would be prepared.

Thompson then reported the

number of fatal wrecks in Wilkes County as being unusually high so far this year. Fatal road wrecks, according to Thompson, have been averaging 40-42 per year in Wilkes County. Last year there were roughly 58 wreck fatalities. So far this year, there have been 18 fatal vehicle accidents.

Commission Chairman Sam Moore also provided an update on redistricting. According to Moore, changes to local districts should be relatively smooth and swift. Congressional changes however he expects to take a little more time. "We do have congressional changes in our district that is going to take a little time, but I think our local stuff will be pretty simple," Moore said.

County Clerk Karen Burton reported that the tax distribution is increasing gradually. The December tax distribution was reported as follows:

Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax is \$140,717.48
 Local Option Sales Tax is \$91,466.79
 And TSPLOST is \$111,945.54.

Moore also stated that the County meeting to address sludge dumping will be February 18. Additional details will be published by this newspaper as they become available.

The next regular meeting of the Wilkes County Commissioners will be March 10 at 6 p.m.