



BOE members (from left) Fleming El-Amin and Ken Raymond listen as Stuart Russell speaks.

BOE

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Raymond declined, saying, "That meeting has yet to be set."

El-Amin thanked attendees for their presence.

"Thank you everybody for showing up this afternoon - we appreciate and respect your time," he stated. "Please come back."

Assistant County Attorney Lonnie Albright recommended that the board discuss the interim position in closed session because it is a personnel issue. Raymond hinted to his intentions of appointing Deputy Director of Elections Lamar Joyner to the interim post, stating that he and Joyner had discussed the possibility prior to the meeting. Joyner indicated that he was up for the task. Many of the citizens present at the meeting expressed frustration at not being allowed to speak.

"People went to some trouble to attend that meeting and it turned out to be a nothing of a meeting because there was no chance for the public to speak, to voice any opinions," declared Anne Wilson, a local concerned resident.

In its petition to dismiss Coffman, the board, which is home to two Republicans and one Democrat, cited "egregious transgressions" that Coffman had allegedly made, saying that he either "purposely misled" Secretary Stuart Russell or "recklessly responded to important requests of his." The petition also alluded to Coffman's "controversial history," specifically an incident in 2008 in which he called an African American temporary employee a "crack ho," for which he reportedly attended sensitivity training, and his "disrespect" towards Board Chair Ken Raymond and the Civitas Institute, a right wing conservative organization. Coffman's mishandling of a recount in three Tobaccoville precincts following the 2013 General Election Village Council candidates was also called into question in the nine-page petition.

Wilson, who was arrested along with her husband during Moral Mondays protests at the NC Legislature in June, admitted that the Tobaccoville count was a cause for concern, however, as a newcomer to the board, she believes that Raymond acted rashly in firing Coffman.

"He is too early in this position to be firing anybody," she said. "I was not a fan of Rob Coffman's. I don't think we were of the same political ilk, but I know that Rob knew this busi-



Anne Wilson was one of those on hand to show her concern.

ness inside and out."

City native Constance Bradley, a retired mental health nurse, believes Coffman's actions over four years ago should not have in any way predated the actions of the current board.

"To me it just doesn't make no sense," she declared. "All the stuff they had, they went over it before, and now it's back up again, and all at once, it's just so important."

Bradley, an active member of the Forsyth County Democratic party, believes

that the board had ulterior motives for ousting Coffman.

"I think the Republicans just want him off because I think they've got somebody else that they want to put in so they can keep knocking us (progressives) down like they always do," she said. "... You shouldn't hold stuff against him after he's already been treated."

Kim Strach, executive director of the State Board of Elections, confirmed the local board's decision on Jan. 17, however North Carolina law requires a 15 day window in which to "consider Ms. Strach's decision," Raymond explained.

Rev. Paul Lowe, chair of the Democratic Party's Fifth Congressional District, said he believes the board's actions were politically motivated.

"I'm not sure he should have been terminated," said Lowe, the pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church. "There may have been a need for some kind of reprimand, but not termination."

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Sit-in Anniversary Events

North Carolina A&T State University will mark the 54th anniversary of the Greensboro Four's historic sit-in tomorrow (Friday, Jan. 31), beginning at 6:30 a.m. with the presentation of the Human Rights Medal to former Congresswoman Eva Clayton in Alumni-Foundation Events Center. The celebration will move to the February One Monument (pictured here) at 9 a.m., where a wreath will be laid and the two surviving members of the Greensboro Four - Joseph McNeil and Jibreel Khazan - will speak.

Crime

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"We're not satisfied with this," he stated. "We still have work to do, of course, in the areas of murders and homicides. One homicide is too many."

Rountree attributes the overall downward trend to "the hard work of the women and men of the Winston-Salem Police Department." In the coming year, the department will continue its proven method of employing "proactive policing," he said.

"Our plan is to continue working with the community, working with our community partners, on the initiatives that we have to make this city safe," Rountree stated. "... We tried to be more visible, we try to work in the community more."

Although preliminary statistics point to a positive trend citywide, Marva Reid of the East/Northeast Winston Neighborhood Association said that is not the case in her community.

"The numbers don't reflect the real crime that goes on in the Northeast area, because so much of it goes unreported," she explained. "The residents feel like nothing's going to be done about it, and that's sad."



Marva Reid with Chief Rountree at a East/Northeast community meeting last year.

Reid, a longtime community organizer and neighborhood watch captain, said she used to encourage her neighbors to report crimes that occurred in the area to the police, but she no longer does so because she says the risk of perpetrators discovering who reported them is too high. As a community leader, Reid said she is regularly approached by community members who have been victimized but do not report the incidents.

"They feel like, 'Why bother?'" she related. "They just pray and hope that it won't happen again."

Reid said a persistent lack of trust between members of the predominantly black and brown community and the police is partially to blame for the underreporting of crime

she has witnessed. "The people still don't trust the police department," she declared. "That is the bottom line."

The troubles her community faces predate Rountree, whom Reid says has been "very responsive" to the community's needs.

"He does an outstanding job as the chief," she said of Rountree, who took office last summer. "He does the best that he can."

Rountree says his department is working to address crime in all areas of the city. A Street Crime Unit was added in November and will continue to work strategically to reduce and prevent crimes of all sorts, including homicides, the chief said.

"These kinds of things are things that law enforcement can't predict, but

what we can do is try to have our people in the right place at the right time," he explained. "... We're trying to increase police presence as best as we can. We're trying to enhance our deployments."

Dottie Jordan, chief of the Southeast Community Neighborhood Association, said she has seen a significant decrease in crime in her neighborhood over the course of the last year. Break-ins and drug activity were once an issue in the neighborhood, but thanks to the work of the WSPD, those issues have been quashed and residents are now able to turn their attention to lesser concerns: getting speed bumps installed to deter speeding in the neighborhood, said Jordan, a native of Louisville, Ky.

"Our crime is down because we get a report every time we have a community meeting," noted Jordan, a retiree and great-grandmother of 17. "It has gone down quite a bit, and I have to give a shout-out to the policemen in our community because they do patrol our community."

The statistics detailed during the press conference last week were based on preliminary results; final statistics are slated to be released in the coming weeks, Rountree said.

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