



Submitted photo

Shown here are, in the front row (L-R), Armani McCray, Dejon Moring, Gianni Roberts, Zachary Cook, Chaunsae Imez-Williams and April Winn, School Counselor. In the back row (L-R) are Lakeisha Hill, Assistant Principal, Marquise Williams, Jordan Lowry, Ricardo Reid and Steven Brown.

## Main Street Academy students participate in No Tobacco Program

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Main Street Academy has teamed with Insight's No'Bacco program. The program is designed to increase awareness of the negative effects of nicotine and tobacco use among teens. A benefit of this program is that it promotes student leadership. The program is conducted in a club format and is student directed. Students involved in the program received a \$50 Visa Gift Card, if they had perfect attendance during a certain time period.

## City Council OKs raises for firefighters and police officers

BY TODD LUCK  
THE CHRONICLE

The Winston-Salem City Council passed raises for police officers and firefighters on Tuesday, Jan. 19, and now looks toward the budget process to address pay disparities for other city workers.

Winston-Salem is behind other Triad cities and other large North Carolina cities in police and fire pay. The new plan is designed to stop the loss of trained officers and firefighters who are leaving the city for other towns and cities that pay more.

"I think this is a huge step in the right direction to make sure that we, number one, are being competitive with new police officers and firefighters and, number two, making sure we're bridging the gap for our veteran police officers and firefighters," said City Council Member James Taylor, who chairs the Public Safety Committee.

The plan will raise the minimum pay for sworn police officers and certified firefighters by 7.5 percent starting in February. Those paid below that will have their salaries adjusted to meet the new minimum. There will also be a 2 percent annual supplemental raise in February for those with at least one year of tenure. Pending approval in future budgets, the supplement would reoccur annually in January. This is in addition to normal merit raises in July.

Though it will narrow the gap, the plan will still leave police and fire pay below that of departments in other cities. It will also cause compression between new employees and those with years of tenure. The plan was described as a temporary measure in committee meetings and does not take the place of restructuring police and fire pay plans to



Besse



Adams



Taylor

make them more competitive with other cities, which is needed for the long term.

It also doesn't address the disparities in the pay of other city workers. During the finance committee meeting on Jan 11, City Human Resources Director Carmen Caruth said a survey of positions in the general pay plan found 68 percent were below the surveyed cities in hiring salaries and about 74 percent were behind in actual salaries.

"We do have disparities in the other ranks," she told the committee.

Caruth said a proposal will be brought to the finance committee to begin to address those disparities during the budget process, including a recommendation to raise the minimum wage from \$10.10.

The police and fire raises are covered by an increase in city revenues from sources like property taxes. Addressing disparities in the general pay plan would require looking at other revenue sources or taxes.

City Council members Dan Besse and Denise Adams both said they've been getting emails from non-sworn police employees, like those who handle communications and records, who were not included in the raises.

Adams said that she personally had no problem raising taxes to help close city wage gaps.

"When we tout that we are the lowest tax-paying city for a city our size in North Carolina, I'm not proud of that, not when we are failing to pay our employees and duly com-

pensate them," said Adams, a member of the finance committee.

Adams said benefits should also be examined, like a 401(k). Except for police officers, Winston-Salem does not contribute to an employee's 401(k), which is a common practice for cities and towns.

Besse said when police officers packed the City Council room and spoke before the council on their pay issue last year, that helped the council take action.

"It was also very helpful that the police officers came and presented their case directly, that was a godsend for good policy in Winston-Salem because that gave us an opening to push reform through," he said.

Besse, who chairs the public works committee, also said the pay for other city workers needs to be dealt with.

"We need to look again at other employee categories where we are clearly below market and work over time to adjust those as well," said Besse.

But he also cautioned that the City Council can only do "as much as we have the budget for and as much as the taxpayer and voters will support." He said closing wage gaps would probably take priority over adding benefits and that, if needed, he might consider raising taxes.

A draft of the budget is scheduled to be presented to the finance committee in March and approved by the City Council in June for implementation in July.