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Knighton rejects call for increasing local tax rates

BY SEAN JACKSON
Staff Writer

Edenton Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton plans to fend off a recommendation to raise taxes to fix up a town-owned building.

Knighton told the Town Council last week that N.C. Local Government Commission staff has suggested a 1 cent property-tax hike to fund repairs to the building rented by the Northeast Partnership. Four feet of flood-water surged into the waterfront building during Hurricane Isabel, causing \$225,000 in damage.

Added to the town's plight is the Federal Emergency Management Agency's refusal to reimburse the town for the repair costs — and a \$500,000 deductible in the town's flood insurance policy. But Knighton



Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton says she'll keep pressing FEMA to reimburse Edenton for funds needed to repair hurricane damage to the Northeast Partnership building rather than support a recommendation from the NC Local Government Commission staff to raise local taxes to pay for the work. The Partnership building is owned by the Town of Edenton. (Staff photo by Sean Jackson)

hopes to reverse both decisions.

Councilman Jerry Parks said the current setback with FEMA is just the latest in a string of disappointments since the hurricane ripped through the area.

"I think enough is enough, personally," Parks said.

And Parks was not the only councilor to voice frustration during the Jan. 13 council meeting.

"There are a lot of people that don't understand what this town has gone through with FEMA," Councilman Steve Biggs said.

With FEMA withholding reimbursement, a decision that Knighton has appealed, LGC staff recommended a 1-cent tax increase to finance the repairs. Knighton said refinancing existing debt and borrowing additional dollars would prevent a

tax hike. She said it is "prudent fiscal policy to try to extend the debt" rather than increase tax rates.

But the LGC staff did not like that plan, she added.

"I don't care what they like," Parks said. "Desperate times call for desperate measures."

According to Knighton, times weren't so desperate for area governments after Hurricane Floyd flooded the region in 1999. She said FEMA reimbursed local governments for damages to public buildings after Floyd.

"We're being treated differently now," she said.

Partnership staff has been using temporary offices in Williamston since the hurricane flooded the Water Street location on Sept. 18. The town paid for extensive renovations to the building prior to the Part-

nership leasing it in 1997.

While town officials seek reimbursement from FEMA, council approved a contractor to begin repairs to the building. A.R. Chesson was awarded the contract, with a low bid of \$119,843.

Knighton said A.R. Chesson officials have indicated work could start around the end of the month. Repairs will take about 60 days, she said. Until then, the Partnership will continue to work out of Williamston — and Edenton won't receive rent payments.

Biggs, the economic development director for Bertie County, said some Partnership officials are tired of commuting between Williamston and Edenton.

"I can tell you," Biggs said, "they are ready to get back in (their former offices in Edenton)."

Campaign for arts is launched

BY ANGELA PEREZ
Staff Writer

Last week, North Carolina's first Statewide Awareness Campaign for the Arts was launched at the Chowan Arts Council in Edenton. Local citizens spoke in a public meeting sponsored by Arts North Carolina, a non-profit advocacy group, to discuss the role that the arts has played in their lives. Similar forums are to be carried out in towns and cities across North Carolina and each session will be videotaped. These discussions and stories are to be presented at Arts Day 2004 in Raleigh on May 11-12, 2004.

"It was amazing and so gratifying to me," said Sue Clark, director of the Chowan Arts Council, "to see how the arts and how the Arts Council has touched so many people. And there was such an amazing diversity of people speaking." Clark was particularly impressed at how many people had "day" jobs that are not necessarily related to their artistic pursuits. Included among the speakers at the forum was a businessman who is also a poet and a grant writer who is a potter.

The meeting was one of the first events to be held at the council since it suffered extreme damages caused by Hurricane Isabel. "Since Isabel and all of the damages that occurred and all of the problems we encountered, I had become very discouraged," said Clark. "But after this meeting, I got affirmation of the role that we play, that the arts play, in the community. The arts really mean a lot to this region."

The video recordings made at all of the regional meetings, including CAC, will ultimately be used to create a video and other communication tools for advocating the arts in NC.

HONORING DR. KING'S LEGACY



The Community Choir, led by Loretta Glen, honored Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with inspirational songs that touched all of those in attendance. (Photo by Angela Perez)

Community holds tribute service

BY ANGELA PEREZ
Staff Writer

Chowan County residents observed Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Monday at Swain Auditorium with an afternoon of inspirational song, prayer, and speeches.

The honored guest speaker was Dr. Lindsey Lee White, a cardiologist in Chowan County. White, who was born in Pasquotank County and work-

ed as a laborer during his undergraduate years at UNC-Chapel Hill, stressed to the youth in attendance, "If you dream it, you can do it."

White noted his struggles as he worked his way through medical school at Wake Forest University.

"I want to say to the young people out there," said White, "who haven't yet reached their desired level of achievement — look at me. Look at me."

Roland Vaughan, Town of

Edenton Mayor, and Louis Belfield, Chairman of the Chowan County Board of Commissioners, welcomed the audience, expressing their gratefulness to the community for rallying together after Hurricane Isabel.

Various community leaders, including Lois Jordan-Cooper, Ruth Frinks, and Glorious Elliott, urged those in attendance to remember not only King's achievements but to remember one another.

James Norfleet Slade, an

African-American physician who has been practicing in Edenton since 1965, was honored with a Community Service award.

Slade, who officially retired on December 31, 2003, was unable to attend. His sister, Ruth Spencer, received the award for him.

The birthday celebration closed with a reception held at the Chowan Arts Council.

Cotton Mill chimney is latest casualty of Hurricane Isabel

BY SEAN JACKSON
Staff Writer

Hurricane Isabel is the storm that keeps on giving. Unfortunately, her gifts keep ringing up losses throughout Edenton.

The high-rising chimney at the old Edenton Cotton Mill is the latest residual casualty. A designer for the mill's renovation team told the Town Council last week that a portion of the cylindrical smokestack will have to be torn down.

"It's now structurally unstable," Steve Schuster said during the Jan. 12 council meeting. "We've got to take most of

it down before it falls down." Schuster said crews are already working to dismantle portions of the facility that will not be included in renovations.

"It's just another loss to the storm," Schuster added.

An undetermined portion of the chimney was removed in the past. No decision has been made regarding how much of the existing chimney will have to be removed, Schuster said.

In addition, Schuster also outlined a minor shift in design plans. A decrease in commercial space will increase residential areas. Three por-

tions of the building previously targeted for commercial development will now be used for 10 additional residences.

Plans to establish a health club at the site have also been scrapped, Schuster said. The area's market wouldn't support an additional club, he said.

But the revised plans do include saving several concrete structures behind the mill. Schuster said the National Parks Service had requested those structures not be removed. Keeping them will preserve the property's historical features, Schuster said the parks service has indicated.

Councilors continued their

praise for the renovation of the old mill, which closed as a tex-



Designers for the Edenton Cotton Mill plan on removing an undetermined portion of the mill's chimney.

11 charged as fake I.D. scam eyed

From Staff Reports

Alert examiners at Driver License offices in Elizabeth City and Edenton provided information that led to the arrest of 11 individuals using fraudulent identification to obtain North Carolina driver licenses.

The arrests, which occurred Monday Jan. 12, came after examiners notified inspectors with the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) License and Theft Bureau of suspicious activity at the driver license offices.

"I commend both the examiners and inspectors for their quick action in preventing fake ID's from being used to obtain a North Carolina driver's license," said N. C. Division of Motor Vehicles Commissioner George Tatum. "This represents our commitment to keep our state's highways safe by upholding the integrity of the driver license application process."

Nine of those arrested appeared to have paid fees ranging from \$900 to \$1400 to two individuals who transported them from New Jersey to North Carolina to obtain the licenses.

The 11 individuals were charged with obtaining property under false pretense, a class H felony, which can carry prison terms of up to 30 months upon conviction.

The individuals are in the Pasquotank County jail, under bonds ranging from \$500 to \$50,000.

The Pasquotank County Sheriff's Department, the Edenton Police Department, and the State Bureau of Investigation cooperated in the investigation, which is continuing.

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