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Tax Rates Lower Due To Revaluations

Mars Hill

By HASSIE PONDER
Staff Writer

Due to higher valuation of property, the Mars Hill Town Board dropped the tax rate from 70 cents per \$100 last year to 55 cents for the 1988-1989 fiscal year.

On Friday, June 24, the board met to discuss and approve the budget.

The total anticipated in general funds is \$426,754. This includes \$74,567 for administration with a

four percent raise for town employees; \$106,822 for the police department; and \$10,800 going to the upkeep of Mars Hill Recreational Park.

"There are so many teams playing ball in the park, it is important that we keep it up," Town Manager Darryl Boone said. "We have to upkeep the tennis courts, ball field, concession stand and pay the employees who work over there."

The total anticipated revenues for the water and sewer fund is \$303,600. This amount includes \$200,000 for water and sewage charges.

From federal and state grants the board anticipates \$179,123 for the sewer account. This includes \$160,102 from a federal grant and \$19,021 from state funds.

The water account will receive \$186,000 from federal money and \$186,000 from the state.

Hot Springs

By STEVE FERGUSON
Interim Editor

Marshall approved a \$576,079 interim budget Thursday including a decrease in the property tax rate, lowering it to 60 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

Last year's budget of \$311,660 included an 85 cents per \$100 of assessed value property tax rate.

The 85 percent increase is in-

cluded in more than \$222,072 in a contingency fund for water and sewer repairs, said town clerk Linda Dodson. Related to that figure, the town is waiting for word from the Environmental Development Agency on a grant to build a wastewater treatment plant. Depending on the amount of the grant from the EDA and other sources, money may need to be

taken from the contingency fund, Dodson said.

Other expenditures include: \$80,000 for the police department; \$65,000 for town administration; \$55,507 for interest and fees; \$55,500 to supplement the \$180,500 water and sewer fund.

Final approval of the budget is expected Monday.

Marshall

By HASSIE PONDER
Staff Writer

The \$185,798 Hot Springs budget includes \$26,000 for the police department, \$4,960 to promote tourism and a raise for town employees.

That reflects a six percent increase over last year's budget. Town officials say part of the increase is due to raising sewer operations to meet state standards.

The Hot Springs Town Board

also set the new tax rate at 60 cents per \$100 valuation, down from 85 cents last year.

"That means some people will pay more and some people will pay less," said Mayor Kenny Ramsey.

Like every other town budget in Madison County, this reflects the sharp increase in property valuations.

"We are hoping that next year the tax rate will go down," said Ramsey, "if the beer and wine

vote goes through." The additional tax revenue will offset the need for property tax money, he said.

The beer and wine vote is scheduled for July 19.

Other income for the town includes an expected \$47,700 in sales tax and \$17,000 in franchise taxes. The water and sewer fund will pay for itself at a cost of \$39,000.

The town also proposed to put the policeman on salary with no overtime pay. He will still be required to fill out a time card.



Squad boss Lewis Sheffey oversees work on a fire line.

Drought, Lightning Spark Three Fires

By STEVE FERGUSON
Interim Editor

Three lightning-related fires have happened in the Madison County area in a week's time, the largest burning 14 acres in the Pisgah National Forest.

More than 100 firefighters, most from out of state, were called in to fight the Pisgah blaze which began June 25 and took four days to contain. U.S. Forest Service trucks hauled water from Highway 25-70 near the Tennessee line more than five miles into the Shut-In Creek area. Most of the fire was ground fire and few trees were lost.

"We've been washing down this mountain for days," said squad boss Lewis Sheffey of Sugar Grove, Va. "We had it contained with a fire line all the way around it, and then we had

a 'flopover' in which a burning tree falls across the fire line."

"We discovered the fire Sunday," said Hot Springs District Ranger Thurman Harp. "But it had been smoldering for several days before that."

Two other fires, covering about one acre each, were also reported. Sunday afternoon, firefighters fought a blaze above the Murray Branch picnic area, and another was fought in Harmon Den just across the Haywood County line on Monday. Even smaller fires take several days to contain.

"They don't sound very large, but the work is quite involved, even in a fire like that," Harp said. "It's actually abnormal to have a fire this time of year," Harp said. "Spring and fall are our busy seasons

because both times have a lot of dead vegetation on the ground that is easy to burn.

"It's so dry now that lightning can cause a small fire in humus (decaying forest floor vegetation) that can smolder for days before it becomes a fire," he said.

Recent showers may have done more harm than good because they didn't wet the forest floor enough to protect it and they were accompanied by lightning. "By sundown the day we discovered the big fire," Harp said, "we got a shower which helped us slightly but that lightning started another fire."

"We'll have to watch this for several days," said Sheffey. Firefighters remained in the area through the Fourth of July weekend.

Pilot Walks Away From Spring Creek Crash

By HASSIE PONDER
Staff Writer

A long holiday weekend nearly ended in tragedy when a Cessna single-engine plane crashed in Spring Creek on Friday.

All the plane's occupants were unhurt except for minor scrapes. Pilot Brenda Von Tuneln, 26, of

Clemson, S.C., and her sister and brother, were going to visit their grandparents in Illinois when the plane's engine stalled.

The Asheville Regional Airport control tower was alerted of a plane in distress shortly after 12:30 p.m., said Eddie Fox, emergency services director for Madison County. Then,

they lost the radar signal.

"The pilot circled about 3 times before she spotted a place to land," said Fox. "The plane clipped a utility pole tearing off the plane's right wing. It then barely missed the trailer of James Fisher before it skidded some 780 feet to stop in a gully."

Car, Tractor-Trailer Collide Killing Four In Weaverville

From Staff Reports

Four people were killed and two injured Saturday morning in Weaverville when their car collided with a tractor-trailer.

The four Buncombe County residents, Grady James Sharp, 64, his son Larry Joe Sharp, 37, Paul Glance

Lusk, 76, and Lula Belle Lusk, 49, were killed on the Highway 25-70 interchange with Highway 19-23 in Weaverville. Dorothy Sharp, 60, and Shea Burrell, 19, were injured. Sharp and Burrell were both listed in stable condition late Tuesday.

The truck driver, Robert McKinley

Reece, 22, of Alexander, was unhurt. Dorothy Sharp was driving toward Weaverville and attempted to make a left-hand turn in front of the approaching truck, according to the N.C. Highway Patrol. Troopers estimated the car was traveling at 10 m.p.h. and the truck at 45 m.p.h.



Paramedics assist one of the accident victims. RANDY COX PHOTOS

Weaverville Grant Short Of \$120,000 Request

By STEVE FERGUSON
Interim Editor

Weaverville was denied a \$120,000 request to extend a waterline for the new North Buncombe Elementary School because of the town's moratorium on new water hookups outside its boundaries.

"I thought we were on the verge of getting it," said Town Manager Charlie Horne. "It's a much better investment for the community."

Horne was referring to Weaverville's request to allow the route of the school's water line to allow other homes to tap into the system. The county would have to add about 1,000 feet in the line to meet the town's request.

The Buncombe County Commissioners did grant \$50,000 which the Weaverville Town Council will use to

replace a sewer line on Gill Branch Road.

"That's the one element in our water system that could go bad at any time," said town attorney Bill Barnes. The board agreed to add the money to this year's water and sewer budget, and also agreed to use pipe larger than the current eight-inch line on Gill Branch.

"\$50,000 is better than nothing," said Mayor Reese Lasher.

Horne said other sources were being sought to supplement the Gill Branch grant. The total cost will be \$120,000 for the sewer line installation, he said.

"The best we could be able to begin the project is October," Horne said, but that would be only if funds were not required for the sewer line.

September."

A study is being conducted to determine whether the town has enough water to end the 14-year-old moratorium, but results aren't expected until September. The county's decision was based on the fact that funds had to be granted by the end of June. Buncombe was unwilling to do that because of the moratorium, and Weaverville was unwilling to change the ban until the study is released.

The town council also accepted a \$77,500 bid to buy a rescue-pumper truck for the fire department through Carolina Truck in Enka. Mayor Reece and Sheriff were notified about the town's bid but did not submit a bid.

Horne also announced the purchase of a new fire engine for the Weaverville fire department.

Scientists Disagree On Dying Trees

By HASSIE PONDER
Staff Writer

White pine and oak trees are dying in the higher elevations of Madison County and experts are unsure about what they can do to stop the trend.

Most of the problem is occurring in the western part of the county in the higher areas of the Pisgah National Forest. Similar destruction has occurred in many of the higher elevations of the Southern Appalachians — along the parkway, the the national forests, and in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

"There are several factors that can affect the dying trees," said Russell Blevins, Madison County district conservationist. "More than likely it's a combination of stress, insects and the acid rain."

However, since this area has been experiencing an unusual amount of dry weather over the past few years, that, too, can be blamed for part of the deterioration, Blevins said.

"The drought is really causing serious problems with the trees," said Tony Webb of the U.S. Forest Service. "Because pollutants are some cause of the trees dying, the drought adds to it. Without the rain, the pollutants can not be flushed out of the atmosphere."

With more industries moving to neighboring counties, the pollution problem doesn't look to improve.

Although scientists have been doing research on the cause of the deterioration of the trees, no conclusion has been made, according to The Raleigh News and Observer.

Garrett Spaffers, a member of the N.C. Environmental Management Commission, said he suspects drought is the primary culprit. Rainfall this year is about half of normal in the mountains near Asheville, he said, and prolonged dry spells have occurred here nearly every year since 1980.

The other scientists blame air pollution as the primary factor, blaming

"The air pollutin is very much elevated," said Robert I. Bruck, a plant pathologist who is part of a team of N.C. State University researchers who have been studying the tree deaths for about five years.

Although studies haven't conclusively proved that pollution is killing the trees, Bruck said the circumstantial evidence is compelling. In weather stations on high peaks, he said, researchers have consistently measured ozone levels two to three times higher than in nearby valleys, and acid fogs 100 to 1,000 times more acidic than normal rainfall.

High-altitude forests have survived in the Southern Appalachians for

thousands of years without succumbing to weather extremes, he said, and there is no reason to believe that air pollutants previously reached the levels scientists have measured here recently.

"This ecosystem has been just like this since the recession of the last ice age," Bruck said. "It has always been cold up here. There has always been ice up here. There have always been clouds."

"While I agree that the drought is definitely hurting things, it's just the straw that broke the camel's back."

Other areas are worried about the loss of scenery which could cut their tourist dollars, such as Grandfather Mountain and Mount Mitchell.

