

THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

"News from Next Door"

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Town debates utility deposit charges

BY PETER WILLIAMS
News Editor

Hertford Town Council members debated last Tuesday what to do, if anything, about the utility deposits that some new customers have to pay to get utilities turned on.

As it stands, new utility customers pay a deposit of up to \$450 when they get their electric, water, sewer

service turned on. That's lower than it has been and no deposit is required for homeowners or those who can provide a letter of credit from another utility that shows the customer has paid their bill on time for the last 12 months.

The deposits are designed to protect the town and other customers from unpaid debt when a customer leaves still owing money.

Last year the town wrote off \$27,000 of unpaid utility debt because it was uncollectible.

Councilman Archie Aples said some customers still have trouble getting that much money up front. He threw out one suggestion. Let customers pay one third of the deposit for three straight months.

As it stands, a customer will get their deposit money

back in terms of a credit to their bill after 12 months of on-time payments.

Councilman Quentin Jackson asked to have the special meeting on both the iPads and the utility issue. He and Councilman Frank Norman arrived at the meeting after Aples made his pitch.

"The \$450 (deposit) is high, but we're not doing any favors (dividing it in

three installments)," said Councilman Sid Eley.

Sara Winslow asked if the meeting was supposed to be for public comment, why wasn't their more notice given. No notice was published in the paper.

Jackson admitted that he wanted to get a discussion started and there can be other meetings.

"I am new at this," Jackson said.

Mayor Horace Reid said much of the utility issue would be resolved if the town could get more new utility customers to spread the debt load around. While the town owns the electrical utility infrastructure, it has debt on loans it took out to expand the water and sewer plants during a period of anticipated growth 10 years

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Snow snarls school schedule

BY PETER WILLIAMS
News Editor

Perquimans County Superintendent Matthew Cheeseman doesn't take closing schools for weather lightly.

He takes it seriously. But he recognizes that as of last Friday, the school system has only had two full days of schools in 2018.

"There was a full day on Jan. 2, and then we were out Jan. 3, Jan. 4, Jan. 5, Jan. 8, Jan. 9 and Jan. 10. Then we came back with a two-hour delay. We had a full day on Jan. 12 and then a holiday."

The day after Martin Luther King Jr. holiday there was a two-hour fog delay and the following day there was snow.

"The decision to close schools based on the weather is one of the most scrutinized decisions out there. What worries me the most is bus driver's time on the road and coming back in the evening and student drivers. You'll be putting a 16, 17 or 18-year-old behind the wheel. I'd rather be wrong in everybody's face than have one fatality."

He also worries about students who live near their school and walk. They may have to walk in the road because the sidewalk is covered in snow and/or ice.

Cheeseman said he's OK with negative feedback from parents, but he hasn't heard it, at least not directly.

"There has been no push-



STAFF PHOTO BY PETER WILLIAMS

Snow piles on top of the sign at Hertford Grammar School last week and classes were canceled once again.

back directly communicated to me, but what people may talk about on Facebook, I don't know," Cheeseman said.

Despite losing two more days last week, Cheeseman said as it stands now there won't have to be any more changes to the calendar to make up for those two days.

While some roads may have been fine last week, Cheeseman said there were serious issues in the Snug Harbor area and heavy ice in Woodville.

Even in the town of Hert-

ford, there was heavy ice. He said some residents helped out by using their own tractors to clean areas not only around Hertford Grammar School but some of the side streets that buses would have to use.

The state requires students have 1,025 hours of instruction and employees have 215 working days a year. Cheeseman can comply with that provided there aren't any more weather events.

So for now, high school started testing on Tuesday. There

will be a heavy testing window until the end of the month.

Cheeseman applauds teachers for being understanding.

"I think our teachers have done a remarkable job of staying patient."

If there are other weather incidents, Cheeseman said the board of education's policy is to first turn early release days into full days. After that there are teacher workdays and the Christmas and Easter breaks. The option of doing Saturday school is the last on the list.

U.S. 17 study includes new route

BY PETER WILLIAMS
News Editor

The N.C. Department of Transportation is studying the option of changing the route of U.S. 17 north of Hertford as part of a plan to turn the four-lane road into an interstate.

The studies are in their very early stages, said Angela Welch, the director of the Area Regional Planning Organization.

One option would be to upgrade US 17 to interstate standards along the current route to create that part of I-87. A second idea would be to create a new road from around Wiggins Road in Winfall to the area near Victory Baptist Church on the Pasquotank County side.

Welch said there would be plenty of time for public comment on the plan once further studies are done. The final draft of the study is expected to be complete in early 2018.

"A feasibility study doesn't determine much, because it's just a study," she said.

"This is just a preliminary document."

If and when the process moves further along, it will involve a merger team that will include both state and federal officials. At that point there will be environmental studies and historic preservation issues will be addressed.

"There is going to be a lot of going back and forth once the merger team is created," she said.

One reason the alternate route may be attractive is it can bypass the existing homes built along that section of US 17. Upgrading the existing road may require the demolition of existing homes and businesses and/or creating new access roads.

"If you stayed on the current US 17 there would have to be service roads and some of those would go right through people's property," Welch said.

Welch said she is unaware of any future public meetings on the project for now.

More may be known in January 2019 when the state releases the new transportation plan. That will include a guideline of when funding might be available, she said.

The DOT study looked at an 80-mile stretch of U.S. 17 through seven counties. From south to north it goes from Williamston in Martin County to Camden County.

Perquimans County officials and

See ROUTE, 2

Perquimans man to get life in prison

BY WILLIAM F. WEST
The Daily Advance

CAMDEN — A Perquimans County man was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole last week after a Camden County jury found him guilty of first-degree murder in the 2015 shooting death of an Elizabeth City teen.

Superior Court Judge Jerry Tillett sentenced Kamani Ames to the life prison term after a nine-man, three-woman jury found Ames responsible for the murder of Unique Graham at Camden Causeway Park in September 2015.

Ames received the same sentence as Nahcier Brunson, another Perquimans County man who pleaded guilty in Graham's



AMES

he believes the jury's guilty verdict against Ames sent two important messages.

"First, the citizens of Camden County will not tolerate criminal activity in their community and are prepared to dispense justice to whomever commits crime in their

slaying last September.

Ames' court-appointed attorney, John Bramble of Washington, advised Tillett his client intends to appeal the verdict. Bramble could not immediately be reached for comment. District Attorney Andrew Womble said in an email Friday evening

he believes the jury's guilty verdict against Ames sent two important messages.

"First, the citizens of Camden County will not tolerate criminal activity in their community and are prepared to dispense justice to whomever commits crime in their

county," Womble said. "Second, the District Attorney's Office is prepared to prosecute the individuals who commit these crimes involving serious injury and death to the fullest extent of the law."

The Rev. Anthony Harrison, a cousin of Graham's who delivered the eulogy at his funeral, said immediately after the trial that both the jury's verdict and Tillett's sentence were fair.

"My family feels that justice has been served," Harrison said. "We do not hate. We do forgive because we are a family that does have Christian values."

Harrison said the wait for a guilty verdict, while long, was worthwhile. He said

See PRISON, 2

Navy to release wind study findings

BY JOHN HAWLEY
The Daily Advance

About a year ago, state lawmakers called for shutting down the Amazon Wind Farm US East over concerns it would cause too much interference with a vital, U.S. Navy long-range ra-

dar receiver in Chesapeake. Were their fears justified or not? The Navy should soon know.

The Navy's analysis of the wind farm's first year of operations should be done by this spring, according to Katisha Draughn-Fraguada, a public affairs officer for Naval Support Activity Hampton Roads, which includes the Forces Surveillance Support Center. That

Hertford to buy new iPad computers

BY PETER WILLIAMS
News Editor

Hertford councilmen that want one will get a new iPad this year.

Newly elected Councilman Quentin Jackson asked to have the issue on the agenda last week and he argued that he needs an iPad Pro with 256 megabytes of memory to do his job.

Town members have been issued 16-gig iPads in the past but they aren't Wi-Fi compatible.

The iPad Pro will cost the town \$992.76.

Mayor Pro Tem Archie Aples said he simply wanted to have an iPad with Wi-Fi so he could use it while at-

tending meetings with outside boards and agencies.

Town Manager Brandon Shoaf offered some suggestions, but said it was all up to the board to decide what they wanted to do.

The Town can buy the basic iPad with a smaller 9.7 inch screen and 32-gigabytes of memory for \$349.99. It would have Wi-Fi capabilities. In the end three of the councilmen, Aples, Sid Eley and Frank Norman said the basic model was fine with them.

Mayor Reid made it clear he was fine with what he already had.

"As far as I'm concerned, this little fella is all I need," he said holding up his old iPad.

Aples said the Wi-Fi issue, not the

higher level 256 gig Pro model that was the issue for him.

Aples said he's attended other meetings with other local officials and he's sitting at the same table and because the town's iPad didn't have Wi-Fi he couldn't use his while other county and town officials could use theirs.

He said Hertford wouldn't grow unless it changes some attitudes.

"If we don't, we'll be stuck in the 1970s" he said.

Jackson said he went to college to study computers, and argued that he needed the larger iPad and the additional memory.

See IPADS, 2



See WIND, 2