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Member
North Carolina Press Association

Kings Mountain Herald

Vol. 107 No. 50

Thursday, December 14, 1995

Kings Mountain, N.C. • 28086 • 50¢

KM cited for noncompliance of gas rules

Hager edges Bridges 4-3 for Mayor pro-tem

The changing of the guard at City Hall Tuesday was marked by a split vote of the new Council in its choice of a mayor pro tem.

Ward I Councilman Phil Hager was elected 4-3 over Councilwoman Norma Bridges.

Councilman Dean Spears nominated Hager and new Councilman Jerry Mullinax nominated Bridges.

Mullinax said it was traditional in Kings Mountain for the top votegetter to be honored as mayor pro tem but Spears said that in the present form of government that the at-large candidate would always be the top votegetter and the ward member would never get a shot at it.

"Some of us talked about this before the meeting and agreed that we can't go by tradition," said Spears.

Spears and Hager joined Councilmen Rick Murphrey and Ralph Grindstaff in voting for Hager.

Councilman Jerry White joined Bridges and Mullinax in voting for Bridges.

In other actions of a long meeting, the board was unanimous, welcoming Mullinax as the new member of the board and bidding farewell to outgoing Ward II Councilman Jim Guyton.

Guyton was presented a gold watch and a plaque by the mayor and then shook hands with all board members. It was an emotional moment for Guyton, who thanked his supporters and pledged to continue his activity and interest in city government by attending all meetings.

He said he prided himself by always responding to calls by his constituents within 48 hours and in making himself available to everyone, not only the residents of his ward.

See Hager, 12-A

The North Carolina Utilities Commission has cited the City of Kings Mountain for eight instances of noncompliance in the operation of its natural gas system and is blaming a majority of the problems on the lack of personnel.

The city has 30 days to respond.

"I am concerned that if actions are not taken soon that the city may face itself with a Show Cause Order similar to 15 years ago," said James D. Anderson, Director of the Pipeline Safety Section, in a letter to Mayor Scott Neisler December 5.

Anderson commended Utility Director Jimmy Maney and John Clemmer for managing the system by transporting gas and providing

service to the citizens but said the problem is lack of operating personnel to safely operate the natural gas system.

Maney, in a memorandum to the mayor and City Council December 11, asked for at least two more people and funding for equipment and contract labor.

He said the the inspector's concerns can be addressed by hiring more people, contracting the repair of the Class II leaks reported in the 1994 and 1995 leak surveys, contracting the replacement of 50 valves now and budgeting for the replacement of the remainder in budget years ahead, contract replacement of mains and services that do not meet compliance and

update cathodic protection.

"Our equipment is worn out and we need to purchase trucks, a trencher, air compressors and a computer and plotter that will run the Autocad mapping," he said.

Maney said that in the last two years over \$3 million has been transferred out of the gas and electric fund and probably more than \$10 million over the past three or four more years without any money being appropriated.

"Zero money was budgeted for capital outlay requests in the 1994-95 budget," he said.

"We must maintain the goose that lays the golden eggs, the gas

See State, 12-A

It's official you can talk

It's official. You can speak for three minutes at City Council meetings without being on the agenda.

City Council took the action Tuesday night on a motion by Councilman Dean Spears who stipulated that Mayor Scott Neisler, the presiding officer, "control the meeting," and time the speakers.

The mayor concurred, saying that if speakers want more than three minutes they will be placed on the agenda for a 15 minute presentation.

Councilman Phil Hager interjected that if speakers speak to a specific issue they may not get immediate answers at the meeting because Council may need to study the issues.



Councilwoman Norma Bridges, new Council member Jerry Mullinax, Councilman and new Mayor Pro Tem Phil Hager and Mayor Scott Neisler, left to right, take the oath of office during swearing-in ceremonies Tuesday night at City Hall.

City and Transco to settle due bill

The City of Kings Mountain may soon settle with its gas supplier a historic imbalance that goes back about 10 years but it will either have to take the natural gas or a reduction of about half the cash city officials says it's owed.

Utilities Director Jimmy Maney, just back from Atlanta for a conference with officials of Williams Energy, which now owns Transcontinental Gas Corporation, says the market dictates the worth of gas.

He said the suppliers have entered into a "good faith negotiation" to reach a final reconciliation with Kings Mountain or 153,000 mcfs once valued at \$300,000 and now valued at \$107,933. Maney said that receipt points had been reconciled to 107,933 units and the dollar value became less.

"The least you can expect is \$1.60 per unit and the most \$1.75," he told the board.

City Council Tuesday authorized City Manager Gary Hicks and Maney to settle the matter speedily but Councilman Ralph Grindstaff asked the city attorney to also confer with representatives of both Transco and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission concerning the language of the paper work.

"Stall some more if you have to," said Grindstaff.

But Maney said if the city waits to make the settlement they it could lose out and her cautioned that the city is locked in on firm gas contracts.

"The city can't take that much gas on a short period," said Maney.

"This is the first time since 1993 that we have been offered a settlement and we don't need to gamble and wait," he said.

"It's a no win situation but I feel like a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," said Councilman Phil Hager.

"We had better take the money while we can."

Maney said Kings Mountain is one of few cities that Transco owes.

"It's the other way around, larger cities owe Transco," he said.

Gas increase on next bill

The next gas bill you receive will have an extra bite.

Residents' bills will jump by 6.2 percent because of higher transportation costs to the city and that means about \$4.08 per month more from the pocketbook of the average user of 115 cubic feet of gas.

The increased cost of firm transportation will include:

A 4.9 percent increase to small commercial users.

A 6.1 percent increase to schools.

A 4.7 increase to public housing.

A 1.6 percent increase to large commercial users.

Those users not on a fixed rate, including interruptible customers, won't see an increase but City of Kings Mountain Utility Director Jimmy Maney said that a portion of the industrial rate has a built-in demand charge.

But Maney warned that Kings Mountain residents could see a dramatic change in rates across the boards from a rate study being prepared by gas consultants and expected to be ready for City Council consideration in about 60-90 days.

Maney said that citizens could see a reduction in the rate if the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission turns down Transcontinental Pipeline Corporation's request for the fixed gas tariff of 17.8 percent increase it has been charging suppliers like Kings Mountain.

City Council unanimously voted to pass on the increased costs Tuesday night after tabling the matter since October.

Mayor Scott Neisler recommended that the city pass on to customers the fixed rate and institute a flex rate, meaning that when costs go up to the city that they must be passed on immediately to the customer.

Some KM test scores improve

Test scores of students at Parker Street School made a slight difference on the system-wide results on the 1995 Student Performance Summary, the state report card.

"It's still worthwhile to continue the alternative school," said new board chairman Ronnie Hawkins.

Director of Testing Jean Thrift agreed, saying that some of the students refused to take the end of course tests and the difference in test scores is about two points at one grade level at the Middle school.

Thrift reviewed results from the state report card for the system and the individual schools at Monday's Board of Education meeting and said the system shows progress in the second year of its Performance Based Accountability Plan.

Writing scores of students in grades 4, 6 and 8 are up from last year but still below the state scores.

Thrift said reading students in grades 3-8 were improved and math scores are up at Kings Mountain Middle School due to remediation.

At Kings Mountain High School on the six required state CORE courses the Kings Mountain statistics rank just below state figures.

Scores of Science students on multiple choice tests were higher than the state.

Kings Mountain High has tripled the number of students taking physics this year, she said. The report by Thrift represented a mix bag of numbers but she said that Kings Mountain ranks third in math and fourth in reading among the 10 other schools of similar size

in a North Carolina cluster group.

This means that Kings Mountain has moved from eighth to fifth place in state standings. North Carolina requires testing of 95 percent of students at end of grades. Board member Billy Houze asked if school administrators can project when Kings Mountain will make gains on state test scores.

Supt. Dr. Bob McRae, Thrift and Dr. Jane King agreed that Kings Mountain Schools have lofty goals

See Test, 11-A

KMDS has \$1 million fund balance

Plaque to honor chairmen

Wall plaques which list the 44 names of former chairmen and members of the Kings Mountain Board of Education from 1906-1993 have been unveiled in the Board Room of the Kings Mountain District Schools and were hung Tuesday.

Mrs. George Houser, chairman of the project which was initiated

by families of former board members, said she was quite proud of the work of the committee.

The listing begins with the name of W. L. Plonk, first chairman, in 1906 and ends with the name of Priscilla Mauney who served from 1988-1993. Additional plaques will be engraved with the names of current board members.

Kings Mountain District Schools ended fiscal year 1994-95 with a fund balance of over \$1 million.

This represents 24 percent of expenditures for the year, according to report of Vince Quinn of the auditing firm of Dixon & Odum, to the Kings Mountain Board of Education Monday night. He termed the fund balance "adequate" and said the annual audit was clean and revealed no major problems with the finance department's handling of the school year's \$21.6 million budget.

"The problems we found were immaterial, however we had to list them," he said.

Quinn was referring to the compliance section of the lengthy documents in which all state and federal projects receiving state and financial assistance were audited by testing one or more.

There were no incidents of non-compliance, he said.

The audit examined the records of 25 certified teachers paid from the State Public School Fund and

See Audit, 11-A



Supt. Dr. Bob McRae holds a plaque which lists the names of 44 former Board of Education members and chairmen as Mrs. George Houser, chairman of the committee which coordinated the project, and Board Chairman Ronnie Hawkins, right, look on.

Kings Mountain People

Thomasson KM lawyer 42 years

The Dean of Cleveland County lawyers, George B. Thomasson, has been practicing law in his hometown of Kings Mountain for 42 years.

The former solicitor and judge of Kings Mountain Records Court has seen changes not only in his hometown but in the legal profession and never looks back at a time when he passed the bar in the nation's capitol in 1952 and toyed with the idea of beginning his practice in the big city.

Thomasson became the judge on the bench of Kings Mountain Records Court in 1962 when Jack White was elected to the North Carolina Senate. He had formerly served as solicitor and recalled that every Monday at the old City Hall (now the Police Department) a complete docket of misdemeanor cases was cleared in three hours time.

"Of course we sent our felony cases on to the county

seat but our docket was never clogged like the court system is today," he said.

Thomasson said he is approached by people everyday he sentenced to 30 days or costs for various offenses and they remind him of the time they stood before him.

After all these years he has forgotten most of the incidents but he does remember the vagrants who came before his bench and begged for 30 days in jail so they could get three good meals a day and a place to sleep.

"Sadly, we still have the homeless," he says.

Because his roots were deep in Kings Mountain George opened his first and only law practice in August 1953 after working with the Office of Ordinance Research for the US Government at Duke University after finishing Duke Law School in 1951.

See Thomasson, 10-A



GEORGE B. THOMASSON