

PARK

From 1A

Patriots Park at the gazebo. The beach blast was held there this summer.

While the club wants to spend between \$50,000 and \$100,000, it is asking the city to pay for architectural plans. That will run around \$20,000.

Some council members expressed concern about spending that amount during a lean budget year.

"How is that going to

effect our city budget," asked councilman Clavon Kelly.

Councilman Jim Guyton echoed that concern, saying the budget is already tight and will get tighter.

The council did agree to look at estimates from several area architects. They will vote on the matter during the September council meeting scheduled for Tuesday night.

The Rotary Club is eager for the council to reach a decision because it must

have the project completed by February 2005 to mark the club's centennial.

Though plans have not been drawn up, possible projects include building a dance area, splash fountain, small playground and entrance and walkway. Other civic groups would be offered an opportunity to complete some of these projects.

Mayor Rick Murphrey was in favor of the improvements, calling it a positive project for the city.

GAS

From 1A

Heath advised the city to purchase at least 25 percent of its natural gas for the winter now. This strategy is based on the fact that gas prices are usually higher in the winter than the fall.

According to Heath, two of its municipal customers paid about the same amount as Kings Mountain did for gas last year but the price was more evenly distributed across the season.

"They didn't see the spikes you saw," Heath said. "While there are no guarantees that purchasing gas in September will save money it does reduce the risk of spikes, city manager Phil Ponder said.

Council members gave Ponder the okay to meet with Heath within a week to make the 25 percent purchase.

In other utility related business, council advised

Ponder to continue using the city policy adopted in 1989 which holds homeowners responsible for installing their own storm drainage pipes. During the recent rainy season, the city has received multiple requests for work to be done on private property.

In a memo to council members, Ponder wrote that the city has deviated from this practice in the past by using city crews and prison labor to maintain some drainage ways on private property.

"If you do work for one, you have to do it for all," he wrote. "Since we do not currently have the money or manpower to do for all, we should leave private drainage issues to the private property owners."

Ponder also told the council that he did not believe the city should intervene in drainage disputes between private property owners. He called this a civil matter.

Councilman Jim Guyton

chastised the city for charging an elderly widow to mow her overgrown grass while the city does not always follow its own rules about grass height on its property.

Guyton questioned whether grass growing in city right of ways and between the street and sidewalk are the city's responsibility or homeowners.

According to Ponder, most homeowners choose to cut the grass which adjoins their property so their lawn will look uniform. When homeowners refuse to do so on a large scale this means the city is forced to take responsibility for that which is costly.

Councilman Howard Shipp said he had received numerous complaints about residents playing ball in the streets and erecting basketball goals over roadways.

Ponder said he would direct public works to remove the goals.

ALAN

From 4A

put the string loop around his wrist and stuck his arm out the window.

What transpired next was something that had to be seen to be believed. In about the same time as it takes to blink your eyes the parachute filled with air, deployed, and jerked Lewis out of the car. It was as if he suddenly vanished.

However, a quick glimpse out the rear window revealed Lewis rolling along the roadside like a rag doll wrapped in a parachute. Oh, Lewis was not hurt but after turning around and rushing to his son who lay prostrate on the ground, Mr. Wilson began beating poor Lewis for his mischief.

One last old time car flashback: Back before the federal government got involved in the car making industry and mandated things such as collapsible steering columns and such, dashboards were generally painted metal rather than the plushly padded, air bag equipped type we see today. Now in the mid 1960s, my mammy had a Ford Falcon that had just such a dashboard - metallic blue, cold steel.

The hardness of this steel was tested out one sunny day by my sister Sherry. Mom had just driven us to the drugstore for refreshments and Sherry, then called Skeen-Dawg, had selected a large cherry smash drink. She being quite young then, stood up in the back seat for the ride home. Sweats belts were an option in a Falcon. For some reason or another as we approached home, my mother slammed on the brakes which instantly catapulted Skeener across the back of the front seat and headlong into the dashboard. As she made this brief but memorable flight, a veritable deluge of cherry smash soaked us up front. But the cherry smash was not all that was red for poor Skinaloo had cut a large gash over her eye on the edge of the cold hard dashboard, the scar of which remains today.

Yes, Virginia, there was a time before mommy vans and SUVs. There was a time when summer meant scorching your hind end on a hot vinyl car seat and winter meant wearing an overcoat in your car because the heater was just a puff of hot air a lot like this column. Goodbye.

ANDIE

From 4A

Now that danger has passed, I'll have to paint over the message. Maybe it's time for another one, like "Happy Autumn."

Isabel has left me with some questions. According to my husband, he must be one of those budding meteorologist, the hurricane started as a thunderstorm off the coast of west Africa. That sounds real smart but when I asked him why Isabel decided to become a hurricane all he could tell me was "she ran into some hot air and that fueled the hurricane."

Don't all thunderstorms "run into hot air" at some point in their careers. I'm convinced there is some sinister motivational speaker program for weather phenomena. Some cloud version of Tony Robbins encourages weather to "be more than a simple storm. Make your life have meaning, make the humans notice you."

I guess Isabel paid close attention and went out seeking the "opportunity" of some hot air. Blustered up, she soared across the Atlantic to wreak havoc. Sure enough, we took notice and even gave her a name. Fortunately, her name won't go down in our memories like Hugo did.

Community College System regulates private business, correspondence, trade and technical schools and requires them to have a license and a bond. Call (919) 733-7051 or look at <http://www.ncccs.cc.nc.us/> to check out a particular school. If the school is not licensed or bonded, don't enroll. If you signed a contract with a school that is not licensed and bonded, you are entitled to a refund.

If you've experienced problems with a career or trade school or want to find out if we have complaints about a particular school, contact my Consumer Protection Division at (919) 716-6000.

(Roy Cooper is Attorney General for North Carolina).

COOPER

From 4A

If a school official makes promises that don't appear in the school's written documents, ask to get them in writing.

If you take out a loan to cover school costs, be sure you read the agreement and understand the terms of repayment before you sign. Keep in mind that you will be responsible for paying off the loan whether or not you complete the program.

Ask for names and phone numbers of the school's licensing and accrediting organizations. Check with these organizations to make sure the school is up-to-date on its license and accreditation.

The North Carolina

CITY

From 1A

ects including the fire station, playground, police department and senior center.

He called this use of the general fund "perfectly legitimate."

State funding freezes also had some effect on the fund.

Another reason for the low fund balance is Kings Mountain's tax rate. It is lower than comparable municipalities, Ponder said.

Ponder rated the electric fund in good condition.

The gas fund received a fair rating. Revenues are sufficient to maintain the system but not enough to accommodate growth in the

service area.

In other business, local advocates for the poor continue to take issue with a utility bill collection program the city implemented in July 2002. Utility deposits are based on the debt history at specific locations. This means if past owners or renters have not paid their bills, current occupants pay a higher deposit for service.

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