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Did city manager resign or was he forced out?

BY ANDIE L. BRYMER
Staff Writer

A former Kings Mountain City Council member publicly accused Mayor Rick Murphrey Tuesday night of being the reason City Manager Phil Ponder has found another job.

Former councilman Gene White spoke during the public comment phase of Tuesday night's council meeting.

Reading from a prepared statement, White said "The person directly responsible is Rick Murphrey along with acquiescence from Carl DeVane, Howard Shipp and Rick Moore. Every

council member, city employee, city attorney and most of the citizens of Kings Mountain know why Mr. Ponder is leaving. The bottom line problem here is that Rick Murphrey does not recognize the city manager as anything other than a person who is expected to do anything he is told to do and to be willing to accept the blame."

White also said that a "rogue" council member was threatening to terminate some city employees' jobs.

Immediately after White's remarks, councilman Howard Shipp said he never pressured Ponder to leave.

"I have had nothing to do with Mr. Ponder leaving. He's sitting right there, ask him," Shipp said.

In an interview prior to the meeting, Shipp made similar comments.

"If he wants to leave, that is his prerogative. I hate to see him go. I never put any pressure on him. I never asked him to leave. If somebody else did, I'm unaware," Shipp said.

Former councilman Jim Guyton also spoke during the public comment period.

"How can a mayor run a city like his is," Guyton asked.

He went on to say water lines
See Manager, 5A



Phil Ponder listens to City Council at Tuesday's meeting
JOSEPH BRYMER / HERALD

Council to keep spousal insurance

BY ANDIE L. BRYMER
Staff Writer

Kings Mountain City Council members kept spousal insurance coverage Tuesday night by a three to four vote.

Council member Jerry Mullinax proposed the measure which received a second from council member Kay Hambright.

According to Mullinax, the city could save \$9,020 during the two-year term if the insurance is cut.

"It's simply out of line when we've got to cut expenses," Mullinax said.

Currently, council members' insurance is covered by the city. Council members' spouses may purchase the insurance for \$44 a month with the city supplementing the remainder of the bill.

Other part-time employees, including those working for the police and fire departments, do not receive insurance.

"They're out there risking (their life) everyday," Mullinax said.

Council member Brenda Ross voted to terminate the insurance. Council members Carl DeVane, Houston Corn, Rick Moore and Howard Shipp voted to continue the coverage.

City staff were not able to locate any official action taken by council establishing the benefits, however, the practice dates to at least 1979, according to Mullinax.

In other business, Mullinax asked that a
See Council, 5A



Former City Councilman Gene White addressed Council Tuesday night concerning the departure of Phil Ponder as City Manager.
JOSEPH BRYMER / HERALD

City estimates \$2.2 million savings in self-insurance plan

BY ANDIE L. BRYMER
Staff Writer

City officials estimate a \$2.2 million savings from 2002 to 2007 by partially funding employees' health insurance.

City Risk Manager Ray Wilson presented a report during the Tuesday night council meeting. To date, the city has saved \$669,103, Wilson said.

The city switched to the program when rates began to steadily climb.

In other business, the council approved a consent agenda which included the following items: appropriation of a \$47,250 FEMA grant for the Kings Mountain Fire Department; setting Feb. 23 as the date for a

voluntary contiguous annexation petition for Tommy Hall; approving a request by Brothers In Christ Outreach Ministry to hold a fishing tournament at Moss Lake; adopting a resolution approving extension of sewer lines to Cleveland County Industrial Park; adopting a resolution accepting water improvements for Farmview Subdivision; approving a budget amending for Bill Marcellino's Downtown Customer Incentive Grant approved by the council in 2002; approving a \$1,505 budget amendment for reimbursement of subdivision review fees to Tommy Hall; approving a \$3,500 budget amendment for a survey of Westover area south of U.S. 74 for potential CDBG projects;
See City, 2A

School Board to work to keep Gaston students

BY ANDIE L. BRYMER
Staff Writer

Who will occupy the open seat on the merged Cleveland County Board of Education and where will students living in the Gaston County portion of Kings Mountain attend school? Those two questions are yet to be answered.

The new board met last Wednesday. They voted to do work toward keeping the Gaston County students in Cleveland County Schools. Superintendent Gene Moore is meeting this week with Gaston Superintendent Ed Saddler to talk about the situation.

Former Kings Mountain District Schools board member Mike Smith is also working to have the school district lines redrawn so that Kings Mountain's Gaston County residents can officially become part of the Cleveland County School system. He asked Kings Mountain City Council during their Tuesday meeting to pass a resolution of support.

He told the council that property values in the Gaston County portion of Kings Mountain would plummet if the students are bused to Gaston County.

Taxes were another part of his address.

"Those of us who live in the Gaston County section of Kings Mountain are not going to want our local tax dollars going to support schools that we are not a part of. The city will no longer be able to furnish resource officers, DARE offi-

cers, or crossing guards to schools that we are not part of," Smith said, reading from a prepared statement.

Smith lives in the Gaston County portion of Kings Mountain.

Last week, the new board also talked about who will replace the seat left open by Dr. Larry Allen. Allen had to vacate the seat when he accepted a job as superintendent of the former Kings Mountain District Schools.

According to merged board member Shearra Miller, Terry McLain is interested in the seat. Board member Mary Evans said Curtis Pressley also is interested.

McLain was initially appointed to the board and then was elected serving approximately two years.

Pressley has not held an elected office but is active in politics, serving as president of the Young Democrats of Cleveland County, third vice-president of the Cleveland County Democrat Party and first vice-president of the African-American Caucus of Cleveland County. He is also chair of the Kings Mountain YMCA and vice-president of the county YMCA executive board.

Both men are African-American. Currently there are two African-Americans on the nine-member board.

While there has been some speculation that former KMDS board member Jerry Z. Blanton will run for the seat, he has not returned calls from The Herald.

See Students, 2A

No major problems from first ice storm

BY ANDIE L. BRYMER
Staff Writer

While snow and ice kept Kings Mountain students home from school Monday and Tuesday, no electric outages were reported.

Despite the merger of the three school systems, the new board decided last week to use separate inclement weather schedules until the end of this school year. Cleveland County and Shelby City students also had a few days off due to the weather.

Kings Mountain Electric Director Nick Hendricks attributed tree trimming and routine maintenance to keeping the lights on in town.

Workers were on standby, preparing for worst, Hendricks said.

"We were set to go, hoping for the best, bracing for the worst," Hendricks said. "Our hopes came as true. The ice spared us."

City crews used slag - a mixture of salt and sand - to make streets passable and Tuesday used plows to clear

ice and snow, according to Mayor Rick Murphrey.

There were no weather-related fires, according to Kings Mountain Fire Department Inspector Joey Davis.

Kings Mountain police reported one major accident on Interstate 85 Tuesday morning. The tractor-trailer wreck blocked both northbound lanes and one southbound lane.

There were at least eight minor accidents in town on Tuesday. No injuries were reported.



Amber Frady, with the help of Todd Frady, gets a ride on a makeshift sled Monday in front of Frady's Florist on East King Street.
GARY STEWART / HERALD

KM doctor found dead in Gastonia

A Kings Mountain physician died Sunday. Dr. Pam SherGill, 46, was found dead in her car in a parking lot on West Franklin Avenue in Gastonia.

She was the owner the SherGill Clinic and previously served as chief of staff of Kings Mountain Hospital. She served as director of BB&T Bank.

A native of Pathankut, India, she graduated from GND University.

The funeral will be conducted Saturday in Charlotte. Visitation is Friday at Harris Funeral Home.