

Grover talks money

\$63,000 'deficit' in last year's budget not as bad as it looks

By EMILY WEAVER
Editor

GROVER — A \$63,000 deficit will be appearing on Grover's budget audit from last year, but Mayor Robert Sides told the council that it is not as bad as it looks.

The true deficit is only about \$3,900, he said.

He explained that over \$50,000 of the "deficit" was actually from improvements the town made to the cemetery last year. The money for the project did not come from the budget and, there-

fore, was not included in the general fund of the 2007-08 budget. Around \$27,000 was raised through donations for the project.

Even though a previous cost estimate for the cemetery improvements was used as a fundraising guide, a new estimate six months later showed that the project would cost nearly \$10,000 more due to soaring material costs in a weakening economy. Afraid of what the estimate would be if the town waited six more months to

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MARRIAGE

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sister, Mary Lou Nichols of Shelby. Margaret and Knox worked together at Minette Mills in Grover. She retired after 43 years in the bedspread department and Knox retired after 38 years in the printing department. They started housekeeping with Margaret's parents and then moved to Minette Mill village houses. They moved into their present home on Mulberry Road 35 years ago.

Their relationship with God and the church have kept their marriage strong.

Active in Bethany Baptist Church of Grover, church friends spoil them. As the senior members of the church, the Neelys have formed a close knit friendship with the congregation. On Mr. Neely's recent 90th birthday, the congregation surprised him with a birthday supper. "They told us to come to a fundraiser and when we arrived they started singing happy birthday and also cut a cake," said Mr. Neely. The congregation also presented

them with love gifts. Couples also took them out to dinner at a local restaurant.

Although he doesn't practice his woodworking hobby now, Knox is well known for the beautiful picnic tables, bird houses and swings he has fashioned over the years. He volunteered for at least a dozen years with the Grover Rescue Squad.

The Neelys are always in their pew on Sunday and church members take them to night events since Knox doesn't drive at night now.

The couple has two children: Mike and Kay Neely of Kings Mountain and Vickie and Craig Hoke of Columbus, Ms. Their five grandchildren and three great grandchildren are their pride and joy.

Knox Neely celebrated birthday 90 on Feb. 3 and Margaret Neely will celebrate birthday 90 on May 3.

What is their advice to newlywed couples?

Learn to give and take, don't argue (just give in), never go to sleep angry, and most importantly go to church and pray.

VOTE

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conomic development that will come once this final acceptance of alcohol sales is allowed. For opponents of liquor-by-the-drink, the cost of such an allowance equals the prospects of more sin, suffering, crime and deaths associated with alcohol. For the City of Kings Mountain, the price tag for holding this election will total at least \$50,000.

The board of directors for the county's Board of Elections met last Wednesday to set the date of the referendum and to talk logistics. Meloni Wray, deputy director of the BoE, said that in her figures, the estimated cost of the election would be \$56,500 under the assumption that they would have four polling sites as usual.

But they might be able to shave off a few thousand dollars if they had one mega polling site, she added.

"Toward the end of last week, I received a phone call from (Rev.) Chip (Sloan), pastor of First Baptist Church, which is the Kings Mountain number three's polling site. He informed me that the board of deacons voted to basically kick us out," director of the BoE Debra Blanton told the board. "It is going to go before the parishioners tonight (Feb. 4). In my communication with the state board, (director) Mr. (Gary) Bartlett informed me or made the suggestion that if they kick us out for this then we don't go back, we find another permanent polling site. It came a flash to me that this might be a good opportunity to have a one polling site."

Blanton said that, at the advice of some counsel, she contacted Second Baptist Church, which is the KM district one polling site, and Boyce Memorial ARP Church, the KM district two polling site, to inform them that they would not be holding the mixed beverage election at their sites. "Rev. (James) Lockridge (of Second Baptist) thanked me for that," she said.

Rev. Lockridge and Keith Miller, a former councilman and deacon at First Baptist Church, had worked on collecting names to remove from the petition after it was turned into the board in Jan. Their collection efforts were thwarted after the petition was offi-

cially certified by the state on Jan. 22.

Blanton suggested that they have one mega polling site for this election in the gymnasium of the Kings Mountain Family YMCA, which used to be the site for KM district two. She said that the space inside the gym should be enough to accommodate a crowd, which she predicts to be around 50 percent of the registered voters (which total 6,600). She anticipated that parking would not be a problem and that they should have enough electrical outlets inside for their set-up.

"I'm also suggesting that we make use of the electronic poll book. Now this is something that we have not tried in the past. It is available," she told the board.

The electronic poll book, which she said is manufactured in Matthews, was used in several counties through last year's primary or general election. Blanton hopes that since this election will involve multiple counties (Cleveland and Gaston), they may be able to try out the new equipment for little to no cost.

She said that they will not be buying the electronic poll book equipment for this election. In the worse case scenario, she added, they will have to rent the equipment. "The best case scenario is if they could use us as a pilot to say as far as their advertising tool 'yes we have used this in (a) multi-county election.' I think that's a plus on our side," she said.

With the electronic poll book, all of the registered voters from Gaston and Cleveland counties could be programmed into one system, cutting down the time a voter would have to spend at the polls and the BoE's time for canvassing.

"If we have four stations then every voter can choose which line is shorter," Blanton said.

Precinct officials will have to undergo a few days of training in how to use the electronic equipment to aid the voters on May 5.

The board voted to pursue the use of electronic poll books and to use the Kings Mountain YMCA's gymnasium for the mega polling site of this election, contingent upon whether or not it is approved by the YMCA's board of directors.

Signatures certified

Blanton read a letter from the state board of elections to the board on Wednesday, which verified the total count of petition signatures at 2,450. Only 2,212 names were needed to call for an election.

She said that the state certified 2,199 signatures from Cleveland County, 176 names from Gaston County and 75 signatures, which came under scrutiny for incorrect dates of birth or addresses.

"They did some additional research on some of the petition signatures," Blanton said.

Wray said that some of the signers provided addresses different from the ones given when they registered to vote. Others were off on their dates of birth.

"I have looked at all of the ones that were not approved to see if I could find them," said a representative of the state BoE in an email read to the board by Blanton. "There were a total of 3,509 (names) on the spreadsheet with 1,528 of those not approved. Of the 1,528, I found 75 of those people in the system... Some of the ones I found had a different date of birth that was off like one number so it could have been misread or mistyped."

The state determined that those names were valid.

"There has been quite a few people who have written letters to us requesting that their names be removed from the petition. However, this was the information from the state board: 'the petition is now certified.' This was as of January 22, when they certified the petition. 'There cannot be further deletions,'" Blanton told the board.

Fifty-one people, who requested their names be removed, were not granted removal because Blanton said that the requests came into the office after the official state certification on Jan. 22. "We removed six," she said. "Six were here prior to Jan. 22."

Scott Neisler, representing Citizens for Progress, was present at last Wednesday's meeting. He thanked the board for their work and was grateful for the option of having a petition.

"This is an election process that not many people in the world have," he said. "I think most people signed this petition because they felt like they needed the right to vote."

HISTORY

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kids with no money had a meal of white beans, yellow cornbread and powdered milk. There were a number of "friendly fights" with kids walking from City Street to the all-white Central School. "We all became friends and some are here today," he said. Winter was the hard time at school because the classroom was heated by a coal heater. There was no gymnasium but Davidson students played basketball on an outside court, red clay scraped by city crews. They wanted a football team but there was no money so they formed their own team. Some of those former players went on to college and played ball.

Curry read from Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech where he called for the nation to "rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed where sons

of slaves will sit down at the table of brotherly love."

"We learn from the past but we don't need to live in it," said Thompson, the keynote speaker back from a mission trip to Jamaica and departs Aug. 16 for a mission trip to Kenya, Africa. "God has showed me so much to celebrate and be thankful for in this great land," said Thompson, Moderator of the Ebenezer Association of 8,000 members and pastor of St. Peter Baptist Church of Grover, he helped build houses in Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina and his church paid to dig wells in Africa in a project spearheaded by local missionary Moses Neuman. Thompson spoke recently on cultural diversity at the YMCA of America meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. "This is a national celebration today and not because of the accomplishments of one group of people," he said.

"We reflect today on the lives or our forefathers, their tremendous amount of hard work, prayer, courage, love and determination, said Abernathy. All of us can be instrumental in providing world peace through love, both individually and collectively."

Abernathy added that although Blacks have been in America as far back as Colonial times, it was not until the 20th century that they gained a respectable presence in the history books. Americans have recognized Black History annually since 1926, first as Negro History Week and then as Negro History Month, she said.

Special music was presented by the Senior Chorus, under the direction of Carol Davis. Silver Strutters, under the direction of Margaret Leach, presented dance selections as featured entertainment.

TRAILS

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the wording."

Construction of the \$97,000 trailhead is set to begin this week. Brutko anticipates that within a few months, the park - and phase one of this multi-part project - should be complete.

The trailhead, located on Battleground Avenue, will feature about 44 parking spaces with the possibility for more in the future, restrooms with office space, a map kiosk, a bike rack, a covered shelter with picnic tables, a drop-off loop, and treecanopied picnic tables.

After the trailhead is complete, construction will begin on phase two - the first part of the trail. "Hopefully, by this summer, we'll be able to use the trailhead and the whole first phase," Brutko said.

The first phase of the trail includes a fitness/mountain trail, a loop path, and a gravel crossing nestled between old rails that once led trains through Kings Mountain. Just as in Robert Frost's poem, two roads will diverge in this wood at the trailhead. One challenging path will lead the adventurous biker, hiker, walker or runner up a mountain. The fitness trail will not be a complete loop due to the steep terrain. But stairs may be added at a later date to make it complete.

The other path will start off down an old, abandoned railway to an intersection, where one can choose to go left - to a more level-looped trail; right - to loop back to the park or back to the fitness trail; or back down the railway. In this first phase, Brutko said that there will be 1.03 miles of asphalt and .58 miles of gravel paths.

The first phase will be a gateway to the main trail that will eventually connect to Boulders Access at Crowder's Mountain State Park. The main trail is anticipated to be about seven miles long. Boulders Access

will connect to Kings Mountain National Military Park and to South Carolina State Park.

Brutko said that GTI has enough money for construction of the trailhead and the first phase of the trail.

She said that they are getting bids on construction of the first part of the trail now. So far, the Eaglewood Company has come in as the lowest bidder with experience on greenway construction.

Eaglewood will be constructing the trailhead park. Martin Marietta has agreed to provide all of the gravel for the Gateway Trail.

"As soon as we get the cement poured for the restrooms and the picnic shelter, we'll be able to start those two structures," Brutko said. "The City of Kings Mountain will be building the restrooms and the Home Builders Association of Cleveland County, with volunteer help, will be building the picnic shelter."

Plans for the Gateway Trails were designed by Haiden-Stanziale, a planning/civil engineering firm out of Charlotte, which created the greenway's master plan. Haiden-Stanziale is also overseeing construction of the trails.

The path to creating this trail has been long and cumbersome at times. Challenges came in the forms of contracts, grant writing, land easements, fundraising, organizing, seeking support and hiring. The seeds were planted and now rewards sprout from each challenge.

Kings Mountain Gateway Trails is a part of the Carolina Thread Trail project, which plans to connect trails and sites throughout North and South Carolina into one massive network of trails.

Brutko said that one day the Gateway Trails of Kings Mountain will connect to South Mountain, the Broad River Greenway, Shelby and Moss Lake through bike-ways and hike-ways.

LEADER

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tain and Gold streets.

"(We need) someone that will work with events and fundraising for downtown, someone who will help initiate our master plan," she said.

A master plan has already been made, which addresses issues such as parking, beautification, traffic patterns and economic development.

Brutko said that the board was looking for someone who can take that plan and help put it into action.

The new executive director will also work with signage, parking, building facades and grants.

"We want to revamp our grant program to give more grants more often to our businesses downtown," Brutko said.

Beautification efforts will also need to be a priority on the executive director's to-do list. Brutko said that they need to work with the railway for beautification, put plants in some of the empty planters downtown and consider hiring a maintenance worker to water the plants.

"We want our businesses downtown to be more aware of what we're doing for them and how we can all work to-

gether during events and things like that to get more people in these buildings and in these businesses," she said.

Brutko was optimistic on Monday that the board may have found its new leader. She anticipates that they will be hiring someone within the next few weeks.

Although some of the empty buildings downtown seem to stand as ghostly remnants of a vibrant past, several

businesses have made them home recently.

Brutko said that 18 new businesses came to the downtown area last year. Ten small businesses also set up shop in the outskirts of town in 2008. Five more businesses are considering or getting ready to come to KM. About two of the 28 businesses came and left within about a year, Brutko added. Those were The Grapevine and i-Scream for Ice Cream.

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