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Judge orders stay in Hoschton race

By Alex Buffington
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A Jackson County judge has issued a stay in a controversial election in Hoschton. James Lawson, a candidate for Hoschton City Council, filed an appeal with the Superior Court of Jackson County, challenging the Jackson County Board of Elections' decision to disqualify him from the March 24 race.

Judge Joe Booth signed an order Feb. 28 issuing a

stay of the elections board's decision. A court hearing is set March 11 at 2 p.m.

Judge Booth's decision will impact early voting in the race, which opened Monday, March 2. Lawson's name will remain on the ballot and voters in Hoschton will be able to cast a vote for him until the court hearing is held March 11, according to Jackson County elections officials.

The decision calls into question the legal stand-

ing of Raphael Mayberry as a city council member. Mayberry, who is Lawson's opponent in the race, has already been sworn in as a member of the Hoschton City Council.

Hoschton mayor pro tem Adam Ledbetter is standing by the city's decision, defending the action in a social media post.

EARLY BACKGROUND

Faced with a potential recall, former Hoschton mayor Theresa Kenerly and

mayor pro tem Jim Cleveland resigned their posts late in 2019.

The remaining city council members at that time — Hope Weeks and newly-elected members Shanton Astin and Ledbetter — were forced to go to court to allow the council to continue functioning with a three-member council.

Kenerly's and Cleveland's resignations also forced a special election to fill those vacated seats.

Lawson and Mayberry qualified to run for Cleveland's old seat. Meanwhile, Weeks and Shannon Sell qualified to run for the mayor's position.

Because Weeks qualified for mayor, she was forced to resign her seat on the Hoschton City Council. (Her old seat will be filled in a May 19 election.)

That left only two council members remaining, making the council essentially non-functional until the

March 24 election.

LAWSON APPEALS, CITY SWEARS IN MAYBERRY

The county elections board voted 3-1 at a Feb. 12 hearing to uphold a challenge alleging that Lawson does not live in the city and cannot run for office.

Lawson filed a petition for judicial review in the Superior Court of Jackson County on Feb. 24. Lawson

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Early voting open

Early voting opened Monday, March 2, for the March 24 election.

Voters can cast their ballots in the Presidential Preference Primary for both parties and a tax break question for senior citizens in Jackson County.

The City of Hoschton is also holding a special election to fill an unexpired city council and mayor seat.

Shannon Sell and Hope Weeks are facing off in the race for mayor. See their responses to the MainStreet Newspapers candidate questionnaire in related story.

James Lawson and Raphael Mayberry are seeking the empty city council seat (see related story for more details).

Early voting is being held at the county elections office at 441 Gordon St., Jefferson, on the following dates:

- March 2-6 from 7 a.m.-5 p.m.
- March 7 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
- March 9-13 from 7 a.m.-5 p.m.
- March 14 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
- March 16-20 from 7 a.m.-5 p.m.

See Voting, page 3A

Hoschton seeks applicants for planning and zoning board

Hoschton is seeking members for its planning and zoning board.

Four seats are open on the city's five-member board.

Those seats were held by Jan Gailey, Tracy Carswell and Ray Vaughn, whose terms expired December, 2019, and Gene Latham, who resigned. Latham's term expires in December.

James Lawson is the only current active planning and zoning board member.

Two applications have been submitted so far to fill the four seats.

"A planning and zoning commission is a local elected or appointed government board charged with recommending to the local town or city council the boundaries of the various original zoning districts and appropriate regulations to be enforced therein and any proposed amendments thereto," town leaders state.

For more information, contact city hall at 706-654-3034 or email info@cityofhoschton.com.

An application can be found on the City of Hoschton Facebook page. Those interested in applying can email the application to info@cityofhoschton.com or apply in person at City Hall, 79 City Sq., Hoschton.

"You must live within the city limits to apply," town leaders state.

Meet the candidates for Hoschton mayor



Shannon Sell

Why are you running for office? What are your main platform points?

My family has been here since the 1800s, and my roots are deep. I love this little town where I was blessed to be raised. I would really like for our current and future residents to share my same passion for our city, now and for generations to come. I am not a fan of career politicians nor government intrusion into our lives; therefore I have been hesitant to get involved and run for mayor. However, after recent events, I saw the need for quality leadership in Hoschton. Many residents and business owners requested that I seek office, not only to stabilize our current situation but

also to have an educated, experienced, level-headed and responsible approach to the government of our city. I have accepted this challenge and shall put forth my very best effort to serve the citizens of Hoschton honorably.

I will work diligently to try to heal and unite our city so that we move forward instead of look backward. I will treat citizens' tax dollars with the respect so rightly deserved. I will strive for less government and more accountability from that government. With input from our citizens and help from county and state offices, I will work to manage the future growth of Hoschton

See Sell, page 2A



Hope Weeks

Why are you running for this office? What are your main platform points?

I am running for mayor because our city needs experienced and knowledgeable leadership during a period of rapid growth and citizen needs. I believe I possess these attributes and can lead the city in the right direction to balance the needs of our citizens and local businesses with the expected unprecedented growth in our area.

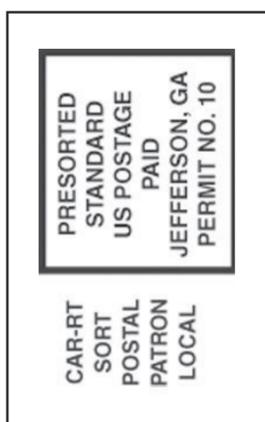
The rapid growth will be a manageable challenge if we properly plan, prepare and execute the agreed upon actions and modify our direction as situations warrant. We must be flexible during a time of many uncertainties and be able to

shift our direction quickly. As mayor, my top priority will be the sustainability of our city's finances. In conjunction with that, I will focus on the following items:

- Development – I will work with citizens and current business owners to find a balance that allows our community to maintain its small-town feel while welcoming growth. I will not support any industrial development near existing residential areas. I will work to provide our citizens with a vibrant, walkable downtown which may include a park, sidewalks, and golf cart paths along with other affordable amenities. I envision a grocery store, more restaurants, and local family

See Weeks, page 2A

MAILING LABEL



No virus here yet, but local response gearing up

By Mike Buffington
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A meeting of Jackson County's key public agencies could be held in the coming weeks to discuss preliminary planning for a potential pandemic involving the Coronavirus known as COVID-19.

Jackson County Emergency Management Agency director Bryan Bullock said that he is trying to set up a meeting with representatives of Piedmont Athens Regional Medical Center and local emergency officials (fire, EMS, police, sheriff, schools, hospitals, county and city officials) to discuss the impact the virus might have on the community.

Piedmont Athens Regional hosts the regional health-

care coalition of which Jackson County is a member and would be one of the key players in the event of a viral pandemic.

Meanwhile, a conference call with CDC officials and area medical personnel is slated for Thursday, March 5 to discuss Coronavirus response planning.

A SPREADING CONCERN

Although only two known cases of the virus have been detected in Georgia as of this writing, the COVID-19 virus has slowly been working its way across the country. Cases are now confirmed in Washington state, California, Texas, Chicago, New York, Georgia, Florida and Rhode Island and six

See Coronavirus, page 3A

Hospital: Debunking Coronavirus myths

By Dr. Supriya Mannepalli
Northeast Georgia Health Systems

There have been an overwhelming number of reports on social media, the news and television about Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Here are some of the currently known details and most common misconceptions regarding the new disease.

MYTH #1

Wearing a face mask will protect me from getting the COVID-19 infection.

FACT: It is important for everyone to remember that the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) does not recommend face masks for the general public who are well as a protection from COVID-19 or other respiratory diseases. Certain models of professional, tight-fitting respirators – such as N95 respirators – can protect

See Hospital, page 3A