

Gillsville leaders plan Neighborhood Watch effort

By SHERRY LEWIS

Gillsville residents plan to form a Neighborhood Watch group due to an increase in crime.

"After the issues with theft, crime, and break-ins there is an interest in a Neighborhood Watch Program," council member Larry Poole said at the October council meeting.

City residents reached out on social media and there was a lot of favorable response. Poole said he talked to the sheriff's department and they are willing to help get the program started.

Two of the benefits of the program are the Neighborhood Watch signs and an instant response phone line in case any suspicious activity is spotted. While this will not be a city run program, Poole said he would like to see the council support it.

In other business the council approved an offer by realtor Cindy Segars to take over the Christmas in Gillsville program this year. She will hire a professional Santa Claus, furnish additional decorations and take care of running the event from beginning to end. The council agreed they would work with Mrs. Segars to come up with a date. The event will be free to the public.

In other business the council:

- heard from Hal Chitwood, operations manager of the Bureau Veritas Group. He addressed the council about the building inspector needs in the city.

- discussed the success of the Pottery Festival.

- discussed possible annexation of property on Herbert Segars Road.

- were presented with a new city map that was prepared by the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission following the updated census data.

- discussed the Church Street project.

- rolled the ad valorem tax from 4.929 mills to 0. There is no city tax in Gillsville.

4-H Archery orientation set

The Banks County 4-H Archery mandatory orientation will be held on Monday, Oct. 18, at 6 p.m. at the Banks County Annex Building in Homer. For more information, contact UGA Extension Banks County, 706-677-6230.

Lady Leopards in 'Sweet 16'



The Lady Leopards cruised into the Sweet Sixteen with wins against CSK High School. Game 1 was a 15-0 win and Game 2 was a 18-0 win. The Leopards will host the next round next week. The time and dates will be announced when they are set. The team won the region championship for the third year in a row. See additional coverage on page 12A.

Lula purchases property for downtown parking

By SHERRY LEWIS

The Lula City Council has approved the purchase of 1.6 acres located at 5960 Athens Street and Hwy. 51. The council intends to develop additional downtown parking and add other amenities.

The council will have a conceptual design plan developed to best utilize the property. Leaders say there will also be time for public input.

City Manager Dennis Bergin explained the original asking price of the property was in excess of \$116,000, but after evaluation, Mayor Jim Grier and council members were able to reach an agreement with the seller at a cost of \$46,000. The purchase and the improvement to the property will be paid for with Special Local Option Sales Tax funds (SPLOST).

In a work session on Mon-

day, the mayor and council: •discussed the roof replacement at city hall. Bergin said he is waiting on one additional bid before presenting the information to the city council.

- heard from Bergin on the city finances 14 weeks into the fiscal year. The general fund and the water and sewer fund budgets should be at a balance of 73 percent, and both are at 76 percent. Bergin also said the SPLOST funds are exceeding expectations.

- discussed replacing the second waste water treatment tank while they are amending the budget to pay for the replacement of the first tank.

- Bergin updated the council on sewer line "I." There is one bid, and it looks as if the project may begin in December and could be completed within six months.

- were reminded that vot-

ing will be at Lula City Hall in the council chamber; the renovations are complete. Early voting began on October 12 and will continue until October 29. Polls are open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and include two Saturdays, October 16 and October 23.

- let citizens know that the city will be trimming and removing trees.

- discussed speed limits and encouraged everyone to slow down especially in subdivisions. The city will begin to use portable radar signs.

- recognized everyone who worked to make the Lula Fall Festival a great success.

noted that the city will have a public input meeting to discuss future park development. The meetings will be held on Thursday, October 14, at 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at the Depot.

Homer officials discuss DOT's round-about proposal

By SHERRY LEWIS

At the Homer Council meeting on Tuesday, leaders had an opportunity to look at a map of a round-about proposed by the Georgia Department of Transportation. For many years, citizens have asked for help to ease traffic issues that plague the city when citizens travel to work and school.

The DOT has proposed that a round-about be built at the Hwy. 98, Hwy. 164, Athens and Evans Street intersections in front of Dollar General and Golden Pantry.

At first glance, several council members had issues with the current proposal, and they agreed to ask GOT officials to meet with them to address some concerns.

So far, no property owners have been contacted about obtaining right of way for the project. As discussed earlier this year, the city does not have money to fund the project, but city council members are willing to see what type of funding is available.

In other business at the meeting, the council voted to revise the permit fee schedule in regards to pole barns. An issue came to light when a citizen obtained a permit to build a 20,000 square foot pole barn at a cost of \$5,000. The council looked at the Banks County fee schedule and revised that permit fee to \$1,600, so the citizen will receive a \$3,400 refund.

On Tuesday evening, the council voted on the following fee schedule for pole barns which can fall into two zoning categories. The first is residential accessory structure and the base cost for a pole barn of 350 square feet or less will be \$150, with an additional eight cents per square foot cost for larger barns.

In the second zoning, agricultural, a pole barn permit will cost \$150 for a building up to 10,000 square feet, and \$250 for a larger pole barn.

Subcontractors will be required to get permits for

electrical and water lines.

In other business the council:

- discussed buying a ¼ to ½ acre of property for a second well. The geologist determined the best location for the well would be 50 feet from the city property line. So far, officials have been unable to reach an agreement with the property owner. The council will discuss this at the next work session to try to come up with a solution.

- discussed soil erosion which occurred during the recent heavy rain. The council will get bids to repair the damage.

- heard from councilman Jerry Payne who told the council about the Georgia Mountain's Work Source Program who will offer a four-week welding program starting October 18, in Lavonia.

- reappointed Rick Billingslea and John Pittard to the Downtown Development Authority until August 2025.

Spec buildings, massage therapy business get 'no' votes from BOC

By ANGELA GARY

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The Banks County Board of Commissioners denied requests Tuesday night for spec warehouses to be built in the county and for a massage therapy business to open at Banks Crossing.

The vote was unanimous from the BOC to deny the request from James Dudley to rezone 11.7 acres on Harmony Church Road and Hwy. 441 for three spec warehouses. Dudley asked to rezone the property from ARR (agriculture, rural, residential) to C2 (commercial) for the project.

Dudley planned to build three 12,000 square foot spec warehouses on the property. He said that he does not have buyers yet for the buildings.

Three nearby property owners spoke on their concerns with the project, including run-off from the development and increasing traffic on the roads.

In other zoning-related business at the meeting Tuesday, the BOC denied in a 4-1 vote, a conditional use request from Shuxuan Dong to operate a massage therapy practice at 309 Steven B. Tanger Blvd. Dong, who said she owns two other massage therapy businesses in Georgia, said she would be the only massage therapist working at the business at Banks Crossing. She said she would also offer retail sales at the business of essential oils and other massage related items.

Commissioner Keith Gardiner voted against the motion to deny the request. Voting to deny the request were chairman Charles Turk and commissioners Sammy Reece, Danny Maxwell and Bo Garrison.

In other business at the meeting, the BOC:

- accepted a \$34,601 public safety equipment grant which will be used to purchase extrication tools.

- approved a \$235,197 bid, which was the low bid, to Striker Corp. for cardiac monitors. The county received a FEMA grant for this purchase.

- approved the annual youth hunt on Nov. 26-27 on county property. Applications, for youth ages 10 to 16, are available at the county 4-H office. Youth must have a hunter education certificate and a valid hunters license to participate. Those who participate must also have an adult age 18 or older attend the hunt with them. For more information on the hunt, call Benji Ward, 706-599-6186. This is the 34th year this youth hunt has been offered in the county.

- approved a waterline extension project on Lynn Drive, which will be extending the a three-inch line 650 feet.

- approved two change orders for the Windmill Park project, including tapping onto the Homer water system to provide water to the bathroom and concession stand.

- reappointed Brian Mathis to the planning commission and named Sam Moon to fill the term of Jack Stewart.

- agreed to issue a citation to Zach Lurie of Maximum Powersports of Georgia for not getting a county business license, as county leaders said he had been instructed to do. Commissioner Bo Garrison stated, "We've given him every opportunity to step up."

- met in closed session for 40 minutes to discuss personal and potential litigation.

Baldwin to upgrade fire training center

By SHARON HOGAN

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Baldwin leaders took the first step Monday night to update the city's fire training center.

At the monthly meeting on Monday, October 11, the Baldwin City Council approved spending an amount not to exceed \$23,000 to upgrade the city's fire training facility.

The upgrades will include extending the concrete pad, purchasing and installing a 500-gallon LP gas tank to include piping and valves, and installing a car fire prop area.

Assistant fire chief Shawn Benfield said the upgrades will be an asset to the city since the only fire training facility around with the same level of training services is in Dawson County.

The fire department will be able to offer this facility to other agencies for their training purposes.

Benfield said the city would be able to offer a lot of training to its firefighters without having to send them outside the city. Funding for the project will come out of public safety/speed zone funds.

In other business at the meeting on Monday, the council was reminded of the following upcoming events: Georgia Mountain Cruisers Cruise-In set for 4-7 p.m. on Saturday, October 16, at Baldwin City Hall. Proceeds from the event will go to the family of the late Linda Parker; First Annual Runway 5K set for 8:30 a.m. on Saturday, October 23; Currahee Fall Crawl Jeep Ride set for Saturday, October 23; and Fourth Annual Baldwin Fall Festival set for 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, October 23, at the Farmers Market Park on Airport Rd. The festival will include a hayride along Park Ave. and Airport Rd. Residents in this area are being encouraged to decorate for the event and the winner of the decorating contest will receive a \$50 gift card. Two vendor spots are still left to be filled for the fall festival. Contact city hall for information on any of the upcoming events.

Homer Christmas Festival to be Dec. 11

The town of Homer will host a "Gingerbread Christmas" which will include a parade and Christmas tree lighting on Saturday, December 11, from 3 p.m. to

6 p.m.

Organizers say the event will also include photos with Santa, cookie and ornament decorating, inflatables, free hot dogs and gingerbread

cookies, craft vendors, live Nativity, and entertainment. For parade or vendor information, call 705-677-3510 or email tking@townof-homerga.com

