



SATURDAY/SUNDAY,  
JANUARY 23/24, 2021

# Newton Citizen

Covington, Georgia



www.rockdalenewtoncitizen.com

\$1.00 ©2021 SCNI Vol. 67, No. 6

## 3 commissioners stall fire station bond, seek funding for parks, aquatic center

By Alice Queen  
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COVINGTON — Three members of Newton County's Public Facilities Authority sent a signal Tuesday night that bonding for a planned new fire station in eastern Newton County will be contingent on funding for special projects they want in their districts. Membership on the authority is made up of the five district commissioners.

The move by District 2 Commissioner Demond Mason, District 3 Commissioner Alana Sanders and District 4 Commissioner J.C. Henderson angered District 1 Commissioner Stan Edwards, whose district would be served by the new Fire Station 4 on Big Woods Road, where the county has already purchased property.

"So we're going to hold District 1 hostage — unbelievable!" said Edwards. "That blows me away."

Edwards went a step further Wednesday, calling the actions of Mason, Sanders and Henderson "blackmail."

"They didn't get what they want, so the citizens of District 5 and District 1 are not going to get their fire station," he said.

Mason, Sanders and Henderson voted to table a \$4.9 million fire station bond resolution for 30 days — the same amount of time County Manager Lloyd Kerr said

it would take him to explore funding options for an estimated \$42 million in projects requested by the three commissioners. Those projects include renovation of the former Cousins Middle School to include a Black history museum and a park in Nelson Heights (District 4), development of a park off Fairview Road (District 3) and construction of an aquatic center (District 2).

SEE BOND, A5



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## Newton to continue remote learning through Jan. 29

From staff reports

COVINGTON — The Newton County School System will continue all-virtual learning for students through Jan. 29 due to the ongoing spread of COVID-19 in the community.



Samantha Fuhrey

In a message sent to parents on Jan. 20, Superintendent Samantha Fuhrey said school system officials had reviewed the weekly COVID-19 data for the community and determined that the rate of transmission had not decreased to an acceptable level. The school system is looking at the data each Wednesday to decide whether or not students will continue with remote learning through the ensuing school week.

"After consulting with local medical professionals representing both the Gwinnett/Newton/Rockdale Health Department and Piedmont Newton Hospital, the decision has been made to continue in a remote learning setting for an additional week," wrote Fuhrey. "All students will utilize online learning or pre-developed work assignments through Friday, Jan. 29, 2021. Students currently served in-person, as well as those who signed up to transition from remote to in-person for the second semester, will now report to school on Monday, Feb. 1, 2021."

Fuhrey said the decision was made in the best interest of the health and safety of students and staff.

"Our hope is that this short-term solution will aid in the reduction of the transmission of the virus in our schools and community," she said. "We want to assure you that this is, indeed, just a short-term solution."

Fuhrey also sought to quell rumors that the school system intends to transition to an all-virtual format.

"This is simply not true," she said. "We will continue to monitor the numbers on a weekly basis and collaborate with our local medical professionals in order to make the best decision possible for our students and staff."

While remote learning is in process, parents of regular in-person students may obtain free breakfast and lunch

SEE LEARNING, A5



Staff Photo: Heather Middleton

A patient receives his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccination Wednesday at a Piedmont clinic in Henry County.

## COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Georgia awaits more doses

By Beau Evans

Capitol Beat News Service

ATLANTA — Georgia officials overseeing the state's COVID-19 vaccine program are awaiting word from the new Biden administration on whether more doses will head their way amid an early shortage.

Pharmacies and health clinics had given out more than 550,000 doses to Georgia nursing homes, hospitals and people at least 65-years-old as of Thursday, marking roughly half of the vaccines Georgia has received so far, said state Public Health Commissioner Dr. Kathleen Toomey.

That's far short of the 2 million Georgians now eligible for the vaccine who will need two doses each.

Gov. Brian Kemp said officials will move "as quickly as we can" to distribute vaccines if Georgia's current allotment of 120,000 doses per week increases with the new president.

"I can't control the supply we're getting," Kemp said at a news con-



Staff Photo: Heather Middleton

A Piedmont nurse readies the COVID-19 vaccine by first diluting it, then drawing doses into a hypodermic needle.

ference Thursday. "But if we get more ... we will do everything in our power to empower not only the government, but also private-sector partners to get this vaccine in people's arms."

Locally, Dr. Williams Norris Little, chief medical officer at Piedmont Newton, told the Newton Board of Commissioners Tuesday that the hospital has been able to vaccinate "large numbers of our front-line workers in terms of health care staff at the hospital."

Piedmont is also rolling out vaccination clinics and working with the Department of Health to vaccinate those in priority groups, he said.

Piedmont currently has vaccination clinics in Conyers and McDonough. Patients with a Piedmont physician are being contacted as appointments become available. More information on Piedmont's vaccination program can be found at [www.piedmont.org/covid-19/vaccine](http://www.piedmont.org/covid-19/vaccine).

Additional information on vaccinations is available at these websites: <https://dph.georgia.gov/locations/covid-vaccination-site> and <https://dph.georgia.gov/>

SEE ROLLOUT, A2

## Concerns about proposed Rockdale County beekeeping ordinance eased by changes

By Larry Stanford

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CONYERS — Following changes to a proposed beekeeping ordinance that were agreeable to those on both sides of the issue, the Rockdale County Planning Commission unanimously approved a motion recommending the Board of Commissioners (BOC) approve the ordinance. The action came at the commission meeting on Jan. 14.

Tanner G. Barr, a planner in the Rockdale County Planning and Development department, said while the ordinance was developed to "help the county better

promote beekeeping as a viable economic opportunity for residents and even industry leaders looking to expand operations east of Atlanta," the state of Georgia "blocks jurisdictions from prohibiting beekeeping outright and does not offer any regulations regarding where beekeeping activities are allowed, leaving the door open for residents to maintain hives virtually anywhere."

The proposed ordinance would restrict honeybee hives to parcels zoned W-P, A-R, and R-1 that are 15,000 sq. ft. or larger in land area. It also placed other restrictions on beekeeping for the protection of

the public in general.

But the ordinance met with opposition from members of the East Metro Beekeepers who live in Rockdale County. David Shipp wrote in a letter to the Citizen that "This ordinance has wording that restricts beekeeping to only AR and R1 zoning, but the restrictions in those zones would kill the bees... East Metro Beekeepers and various other groups will be fighting this anti-environmental ordinance. As beekeepers, we believe in being good neighbors and certain restrictions on hives is understandable."

Barr heard the concerns of the beekeepers and worked with them

to update the ordinance and make it more agreeable to all involved. Barr advised the Planning Commission about the updates.

"One of the biggest components that was opposed was zoning restrictions," Barr said. "In this ordinance before you tonight, we have eliminated those zoning restrictions, and instead, are relying on square footage restrictions. The minimum square footage requirement is 10,000 square feet, which is around 1/4 acre. From that point, every additional 5,000 square feet, there can be two more hives."

SEE BEES, A5

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