

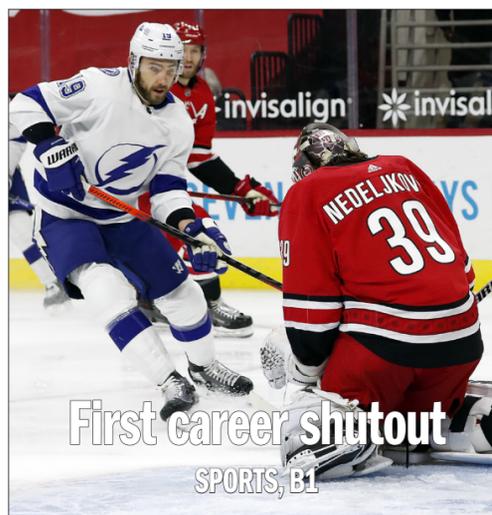
Rocky Mount TELEGRAM

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SCAN ME

Census delay likely to postpone city elections

BY AMELIA HARPER
Staff Writer

The Rocky Mount City Council elections likely will not be held this year.

Nash County Elections Director John Kearney said Monday during a meeting of the Nash County Board of Elections that due to delays in the release of 2020 U.S. Census data, this year's election in Rocky Mount likely will be postponed.

"It is anticipated that the 2020 census data will not be available until September, so that means that none of

the towns or council members or anyone else is going to be able to get that data to work on redistricting," he said. "The main issue here is the City of Rocky Mount because it has wards."

The State Board of Elections already has posted a statement to that effect regarding elections that would normally be held this year across the state.

"The U.S. Census Bureau delayed its field operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic and asked Congress for authority to delay the release of census data by

120 days," the statement said. "This would delay the release of data used by North Carolina for redistricting legislative and congressional seats and local offices elected by district. This would compress the timeline for redistricting. If changes are needed to the districts of municipal offices elected by district and the census data is not released in time, elections for these offices scheduled to take place in the fall of 2021 could be postponed until 2022."

Because of this, Kear-

ney said he is "99.9 percent sure that the City of Rocky Mount elections will not be held until the primary election of 2022."

"I can't do filing before the redistricting is done and the City of Rocky Mount cannot address redistricting until the census data is released," Kearney said. "The normal filing period for most municipalities in the county (begins) July 1, but the filing period for the City of Rocky Mount elections normally begins on July 26, well before the time that the census data will be

released."

Kearney said in a later interview it is possible that the City Council could decide to proceed with the elections with the current wards. However, that decision would likely open up the likelihood of a slew of lawsuits, he said.

Four City Council seats are up for election this year: the Ward 2 seat occupied by Reuben Blackwell; the Ward 3 seat held by Richard Joyner; the Ward 6 seat occupied by W.B. Bullock and the Ward 7 seat held by Chris Miller.

Blackwell and Joyner already have announced their plans to seek re-election while Miller has said she will not run again. Bullock has told the Telegram he will announce his plans in March.

These City Council members will retain their seats on the board until after the next election, whenever that is held.

This is not the first time that the City of Rocky Mount has had to delay elections, Kearney said.

See CENSUS, A5



FILE PHOTO/ROCKY MOUNT TELEGRAM

Traffic flows on Interstate 95 north approaching the interchange with U.S. 64.

Bridge work to begin on Interstate 95

BY WILLIAM F. WEST
Staff Writer

Motorists using Interstate 95 need to slow down a bit and drive with extra care when approaching the bridges across the railroad line south of the interchange with U.S. 64.

That is because crews are set to start at 7 p.m. today rehabilitating both of the I-95 crossings over the rail line, with the work anticipated to be complete by Friday.

State Transportation Department spokesman Andrew Barksdale said motorists are going to have to decrease their speed from 70 mph to 60 mph and be ready for at least one lane on each of the two-lane bridges to be closed while work is in progress.

Barksdale said the crews are going to mill down the concrete driving surface of the roadway approaching the bridges and also make repairs to any part of the concrete driving surface

of the bridges where that surface has deteriorated.

Specifically, Barksdale said the crews, where they see repairs are needed on the surface of the bridges, are going to put down what is called polyester polymer concrete.

The two bridges also have what are called expansion joints that contract with the temperature.

Barksdale said the crews are going to replace those expansion joints with polyester polymer concrete and a protective silicone sealant.

Barksdale also said crews at a yet-to-be-announced time are going to be doing the same work on the I-95 bridges over Stoney Creek on the north side of the interchange with U.S. 64.

The bridge work is part of a \$60.5 million project to design and construct a new four-lane overpass and interchange for Sunset Avenue at I-95. Presently, Sunset is a two-lane

overpass on the part of I-95 on the south side of the I-95 interchange with U.S. 64 and north of the I-95 bridges over the rail line. There is no link between the Sunset corridor and the Maine-to-Miami expressway.

State plans also call for widening Sunset from just west of Halifax Road to Old Carriage Road and widening Eastern Avenue from Old Carriage and past Nash Community College into the commercial east side of Nashville.

Barksdale had said crews were expected to begin turning dirt on the project this past October, but he said the project was rescheduled to allow more time for the acquisition of right-of-way and new easements.

An easement is the right, by agreement, of one to make lawful and beneficial use of the land of another.

Barksdale said what mainly hap-

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Nash opens coronavirus call center Operators available

BY AMELIA HARPER
Staff Writer

Nash County has opened a new COVID-19 Call Center to help residents learn more about vaccines, testing and other information related to COVID services offered by the county.

The call center, which has been in development for several weeks, opened to the public on Monday with live operators on call. By late afternoon of opening day, the center had received over 170 calls, mostly from people 65 years and older wanting to join the vaccination waiting list.

The hotline began as an automated message, but now trained operators man the lines from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Mondays through Fridays unless county offices are closed. Residents can

call the new center using the county's COVID-19 hotline at 252-462-2079.

Assistant County Manager Stacie Shatzer has been working to bring this information source to residents, according to a press release from the county.

"The COVID call center was a vision of Zee Lamb, county manager, and weeks of work have made it a reality for our citizens," Shatzer said. "We are so glad to offer this service to residents who just want to speak to someone, a human being, and get their questions addressed or the assistance they need to get ready to be vaccinated."

Shatzer also credited the many people behind the scenes responsible for ensuring the call center's success.

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City reaches settlement in police brutality suit

BY WILLIAM F. WEST
Staff Writer

A lawsuit a Rocky Mount man who is a Vietnam veteran filed in federal court approximately 11 months ago claiming a police officer assaulted him and wrongly arrested him has been dismissed as a result of a settlement.

Moments before the close of the open session of Monday's City Council regular meeting, City Attorney Jep Rose told the online viewing audience the city's insurance carrier, which is Travelers Indemnity Co., paid \$250,000 to the man, Harold Cox.

"That was the amount of the settlement of the claim,"

Rose said.

"The city will reimburse Travelers the balance of its \$100,000 deductible after deducting defense costs or the city will pay Travelers somewhere in the neighborhood of the \$55,000," Rose said.

Generally, a deductible is the initial amount of an insured expense the insured is required to pay before an insurance reimbursement is made for a claim.

The Telegram in March reported Cox filed suit claiming officer Michael Lamm body-slammed him to the ground on Sept. 7, 2018, and shattered his hip after he requested assistance from

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