

Shop at home at Christmas Candlelight Shopping Tue.

Next Tuesday's annual Christmas Candlelight Shopping event will have the usual sales, refreshments, giveaways, and Downtown Dollars, and if everything works out, there will be snow. "It's going to 'snow' at Candlelight Shopping!" said Tourism Director Ashley Barnett.

"We're going to have the trial run of our new snow machines next Tuesday night at 6 p.m., then all during December, it'll snow hourly each Friday and Saturday night." The Washington Downtown Development Authority's annual Christmas

Candlelight Shopping from 6-9 p.m. on Tuesday will feature Beta Sigma Phi's photos with Santa at the Verizon store, and special sales by downtown merchants. "Stores open that night will extend from Fievet Pharmacy all the way to Cost Cutters," said Pam Eaton,

"and they will be marked by luminaries Tuesday night."

As they did last year, the Wilkes County 4-H Dairy Show Team will man a booth by the Chamber of Commerce offering pictures taken with a Christmas calf, and Gym Frogs will perform in the

center of The Square at 6 p.m.

Shops stay open until 9 p.m., and the sponsoring Downtown Development Authority will be awarding prizes in Downtown Dollars in \$100, \$50, and \$25 amounts. Also during Candlelight Shopping, the Wills Memorial Hospital

Auxiliary "Christmas Tree of Love" will be lit on The Square in honor of and in memory of loved ones.

"Come see how easy it is to shop Washington-Wilkes first," Barnett said, "and see what all our wonderful downtown merchants have."

The News-Reporter

Serving Wilkes County since 1896

www.news-reporter.com

Vol. LXXXVIII, No. 47 Washington, Georgia • Publication No. 387-580 • 2 Sections, 16 Pages • November 19, 2009

Wilkes County will petition court to collect 2009 taxes prior to new digest's approval

Wilkes County Tax Commissioner Mary Hubbard sent a request to the Board of Commissioners that it petition the courts for permission to proceed with the sale of motor vehicle tags and to collect local timber taxes prior to the approval of the new tax digest. She got more than she wanted when the commissioners voted to seek clearance to issue temporary tax bills "across the board" and thus allow Wilkes County taxpayers

to pay all their property taxes before the end of the year.

Due to a large number of revaluation corrections and the time required to enter them into the tax database, the state's approval of the digest has been delayed probably until the spring of 2010. Waiting on that approval would preclude taxpayers from paying their 2009 taxes in 2009 even if they want to.

Monday night, the Wilkes County Board of Education voted to join the County in its request and attorneys have drawn up the appropriate petition. A public hearing on the petition will be held on Thursday, December 3, at 1:30 p.m. in the courthouse.

Commissioners expressed their concern over the additional work that the expanded request would place on Hubbard but decided to go ahead with

the petition based on the number of taxpayers that had complained about the possibility that they would not be allowed to pay in 2009. "She did not create the delay, but unfortunately she is the one who has to suffer the consequences," County Attorney Charles LeGette explained.

An advertisement announcing the points of the petition and the details of the public hearing is planned for publication in this newspaper's November 26 edition.

The commissioners also voted to raise the county's hotel/motel tax from five percent to six percent effective January 1, 2010. Commissioner Ed Geddings reported that the increase would bring Wilkes County more in line with surrounding counties. The tax, he explained, is paid by visitors staying in accommodations within the county and not generally by Wilkes County residents.

The increase will account for an increase in \$7-8,000 per year making the total around \$30,000 a year in revenue that must be used in the county's marketing efforts.

All commissioners, including Div-

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Board of Education to join county in petition for interim 2009 tax collection

By KIP BURKE
news editor

Faced with having several months with no income, the Wilkes County Board of Education joined with Wilkes County Commissioners in filing suit to collect taxes while the tax digest is being finished.

In their regular November meeting Monday night, the board approved Superintendent Dr. Rosemary Caddell's recommendation that the school system join the county in a "Petition for Interim Collection of Taxes Pending Approval of 2009 Tax Digest," which was to be filed Tuesday.

In discussion, board Chairman Ricky Callaway, Vice Chairman Andrew Jackson, and members Kay Fennell, Bob

Guin, and Steve Albertson, considered the fact that such a filing had been done in the past, that it was the only way to avoid extensive borrowing to pay the system's bills, and that the state of Georgia says that the system has to do everything possible to collect taxes or state funding may be cut off.

"We don't know when the digest will be approved," said Callaway. "It's likely to be the second or third quarter next year before we have a digest, so we're backed up against the wall."

The Wilkes County Commission voted to file its petition last week.

In other action, Dr. Caddell reported that the state had approved waivers for class size and for an instructional extension of 20 days. The waiver for instructional extension would pull sum-

mer school back into the school year. Instead of allowing students in grades one through eight to fail, then go to school in the summer, the waiver would allow summer school to start after the CRCT results are back.

The board reluctantly approved a state-required final payment of \$100,000 to McKnight Construction. "They haven't finished their work, but this payment is required by the state to get a state payment," she said. "I don't like having to pay them, but we're going to need that state payment of \$670,000 saying the new complex is substantially complete. We have bills to pay."

The board approved the payment 4-1, with Bob Guin voting in opposition.

The board did approve a further payment of \$112,899 to Two State Construction for construction on the new field house, which is on schedule and expected to be complete December 16.

The board also voted on the final reading of Policy KG for use of school facilities, and of Policy IFBG on internet acceptable use. Both passed, with Albertson voting in opposition to the internet policy.

The board tentatively set different meeting dates for January and February 2010, when holidays conflict with the usual third Monday meeting times. Board members agreed that meetings on January 25 and February 22 will work if approved.

Stimulus funds will be used to purchase a 24-passenger special needs bus from Bluebird. The 2009 wheelchair-adapted bus was bid at \$61,837, and the board approved the purchase.

At the end of a meeting that dealt with one funding shortfall after another, Superintendent Caddell reflected on what might happen when stimulus funds run out next year. "In some systems, dozens of teacher jobs will be lost, but I think we can avoid that. We're going to try to keep all our teachers and maintain quality instruction, no matter what."

Rayle Volunteer Fire Department responds to chimney, roof fire

Bad weather last week contributed to chimney damage and a possible fire, a homeowner said, but quick action by the Rayle Volunteer Fire Department kept the home from danger.

It was around 3:45 a.m. Wednesday, November 11, Cassandra Evans said, and "the wind was blowing and it was raining hard." Hearing a noise, Evans said she checked the house to find a smoke-filled room. "I immediately closed the door to seal it off from the rest of the house, dialed Wilkes County 911, and the Rayle Fire Department responded quickly."

Rayle Fire Chief Brent Sherrer said the wind had toppled over the metal chimney from a wood-burning stove, causing sparks to fly and a tarp to catch fire. "If it hadn't been raining hard, it would have burned the house down," Sherrer said. "We told her not to use the stove until it is fixed."

Rayle firefighters made sure the fire was out both in the chimney and on the roof, and that the stove was extinguished. "Thanks to my neighbor Rodney Shedd, who is a fireman and was the first on the scene, it could have been a lot worse," Evans said. "Thanks to Brent Sherrer and Jake Buff, and former Oglethorpe County fireman Royzell Pitts who also assisted," she said. "This experience has taught me that even though our fire department may be small in numbers, we have the right team to get the job done."



Couple hit in crosswalk

As Washington Rescue and Wilkes EMS personnel help one victim on the pavement, others comfort driver Michelle White, of Wilkes County, after she hit a man and woman in the crosswalk at West Robert Toombs Avenue and Spring Street last Thursday. White was turning left onto Robert Toombs, the police report said, when she failed to observe Charles and Elizabeth Wagner walking in the crosswalk. The car struck Mr. Wagner who then tumbled into his wife. Both were transported to Wills Memorial Hospital, treated and released. No charges were filed against the driver.



Buddy Lindsey shows off some of the coats that will be given away Friday, November 20, at God's Marketplace from 9 a.m. to noon.

Coats, hats, gloves to be given out at God's Marketplace Friday 9 to 12

Donated coats, sweaters, hats, and gloves will be given out to those in need of warm clothing Friday at God's Marketplace from 9 a.m. to noon.

For weeks now, the winter clothing drive has been collecting donations of warm outerwear to give out. Donations are still being accepted at the Washington Bi-Lo store and the First United Methodist Church through today. Dona-

tions carried to the Methodist Church should be left in Wesley Hall, the old fellowship hall.

The donated outerwear will be distributed Friday, November 20. One set of outerwear per family member will be distributed free of charge. The Wilkes County Unit of the Salvation Army, God's Marketplace, and the local Bi-Lo store are sponsoring the drive.

City council retreat hears status reports on ongoing city projects, 2010 city budget

By KIP BURKE
news editor

The Washington City Council met in retreat Friday and heard updates on all ongoing city projects including the Rusher Street revitalization and hopes for a hotel at the Pope Center, and agreed to try leveled utility billing on a limited basis.

Mayor Willie Burns, councilmen Pamela Eaton, Maceo Mahoney, Nathaniel Cullars, Ed Pope, and Ames Barnett were joined by City Clerk Debbie Danner, City Engineer Corky Welch, City Attorney Barry Fleming, City Administrator Mike Eskew, and Main Street Director David Jenkins in working through an extensive agenda.

Councilmen-elect Marion Tutt Jr. and Kimberly Rainey were also present and took active parts in some discussions.

Work is progressing on the condemnation and clearing stage of the Rusher Street revitalization project, David Jenkins said. "Rusher Street is on track, the city is clearing lots, the condemnation cases will be in court next week," he said. "Then as soon as the cases are clear, the engineer can put the infrastructure work out for bids. The first homes could be completed by Christmas 2010."

Another part of the redevelopment, the drive to get a hotel built adjacent to The Pope Center, got a full report. Ed Wall of Stern AG, which is helping find financing for the project, said that the newly formed Urban Redevelopment Authority will issue some \$5.8 million in revenue bonds. An intergovernmental contract with the City of Washington will guarantee the debt, he said. The authority will have to sell either 6.7 percent taxable debt, or 4.75 percent tax-exempt debt.

As Wall discussed the numbers of a potential hotel deal, councilmen asked why the hotel deal couldn't wait for more stable economic times. "Country Inn and Suites wouldn't offer to build here if they did not think it would make money," Wall said.

"What's the rush?" said Councilman Barnett. "I'm against doing it now - we've got to build \$6 million in water plants, and our hotels aren't making a profit."

The upgrades coming for the city's two water plants was the topic of City Engineer Corky Welch's report. The first plant bids are due in December with a contract expected to be awarded in the January 2010 council meeting, he said.

David Moore of OMI discussed the



At Friday's city council retreat, council members heard about progress in the area formerly called the "Bus Stop," which has been cleared by city crews as part of the ongoing Rusher Street revitalization program.

status of the company's contract to run the city water plants. He did not see any change in operating costs for the coming year, and saw only a small inflation-based increase the year after. Councilmen discussed adding two years to the contract.

In other items, the council voted to put the proposed city budget up for public review at a hearing set for Monday, December 7, at 6 p.m. Copies of the proposed 2010 budget will be made available for public review beginning Monday, November 30, during regular business hours of the city's business office, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

With the council's approval, City Clerk Debbie Danner will begin a trial run of leveled utility billing software. Although leveled billing is designed to help utility customers budget for season-

ally high utility costs, council members discussed how the payment plan would both positively and negatively affect different utility customers. Danner said that she would start out with a small group of customers during the trial run and track their results carefully before expanding availability.

The council discussed allowing the use of credit cards to pay utility bills, but Danner said credit card companies' fees, and the fact that the city can't charge fees, make it hard for the city to offer it. The council asked Danner to continue to research other options.

Outgoing District 1 Councilman Mahoney, who was defeated in the November 3 election, said his goodbyes. "It's been great working with you all, and I look forward to seeing what you accomplish in the future. I've enjoyed serving with you."

Local complete count committee needs volunteers, to meet today

Meeting today at 4 p.m. in the Commissioners' board room of the courthouse, the Wilkes County Complete Count Committee still needs volunteers for a public awareness campaign aimed at getting the most complete local census count possible in 2010.

Along with new volunteers, the Complete Count committee will explore ways to help ensure a complete count. "We are looking for volunteers who can help serve on our local committee," Ashley Barnett, chairman of the Wilkes Complete Count Committee, said. "It is very important you get in-

volvement with the Census. Every person must be counted. If you can help with the 2010 Census, please contact me at tourism@washingtonwilkes.org or 706-678-2013."

The Wilkes County Complete Count Committee is made of local people who may be able to locate "hard-to-reach" groups for the 2010 Census, Barnett said. "We are spreading the word to everybody in Wilkes County that being counted in the U.S. Census is important to each person living here, because it means more dollars and more jobs coming to Wilkes County."