

The Erwin Record

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Lady Devil basketball team takes second in district. See page 1-B.

Ambulance talks continue

Officials discuss how to start local service

By Kendal Groner
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On Thursday, Feb. 15, Town of Erwin, Town of Unicoi and Unicoi County officials gathered in a work session to discuss plans to create a county-wide ambulance service due to dissatisfaction with the county's ambulance service provided by MedicOne.

The Town of Erwin has been receiving ambulance services through an agreement with Unicoi County, who holds the contract with MedicOne. Inadequate staffing, long wait times and

simply not enough ambulances have become a common occurrence since the county contracted with MedicOne for their services, according to local officials.

The county's four-year contract with MedicOne took effect in April of 2015, and includes a \$132,000 subsidy. In an attempt to address some of the issues with the service, MedicOne hired Jimmy Erwin, MedicOne's Operations Manager in February of 2017.

"There's really not been that much of an issue everyday, but when multiple calls come in, such as two emergency calls, there's a small wait time,"

Erwin said. "There are occasions that arise, and there will be two or three emergency calls within five minutes."

Erwin said that while there is nothing in the contract specifically about wait times, they are required to have two ambulances running 24 hours a day, and an additional ambulance for times of peak call volume.

"The wording in the contract was weak," Erwin added.

The biggest issue impacting the quality of the services is the lack of personnel, according to Erwin. However, he did say MedicOne has managed to attract one full-time and one

part-time employee with a \$5,000 sign-on bonus, which he says has tremendously helped the staffing after those individuals went through training the first week of February.

Still, county and city leaders feel the service isn't meeting the needs of the area, and with the help of \$440,000 from Community Development Block Grant funds to purchase ambulances, the Town of Erwin is spearheading the task of creating its own service.

During the meeting last week, one option was discussed at length, which would create an interlocal agreement

Please see AMBULANCE, Page 7-A

"We've had countless days where we've had one ambulance in this county. It's time to step up and do something to protect the people of this county ... they deserve more."

— Unicoi Volunteer Fire Department Chief Robert Adams

TOWN OF ERWIN

Silo demolition begins



On Tuesday, Feb. 20, the silo at the former Morgan Insulation property slowly began crumbling to the ground. The Town of Erwin accepted a bid from D.H. Griffith, a local company, for the demolition of the silo. A hydraulic crushing machine that used a watering system to subdue dust was hauled in on Monday in preparation for the demolition. The demolition was funded through a TVA Invest Prep grant, and will render the 15 acre property shovel ready in preparation for any future site development. (Erwin Record Staff Photo by Kendal Groner)

FIRST TENNESSEE DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

Land use plan to highlight local assets

Citizens invited to attend meetings, provide input

By Kendal Groner
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On Tuesday, Feb. 13, the First Tennessee Development District (FTDD) held an informal work session with local officials and representatives from Unicoi County to discuss a joint comprehensive land use plan for the entire county.

Comprehensive land use plans are intended to guide the future decisions of a community and address public policy issues related to issues such as transportation, utilities, land use, recreation and housing. The final copy of the plan will be ready by mid-June.

"A land use plan generally spans about 20 years, and we've been gathering information from stakeholders in the community," said Rhonda Sawyer, community planner with the FTDD. "We're writing this plan for the citizens and municipalities of Unicoi County, and we want as much participation as possible."

Please see PLAN, Page 6-A

TOWN OF UNICOI

Bullen raises questions about open records policy

By Kendal Groner
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During the Monday, Feb. 19, meeting of the Town of Unicoi Board of Mayor and Aldermen, the town's open records policy, personnel policy, and the benefits package for the new city recorder were some of the items discussed at length during the meeting.

Alderwoman Kathy Bullen led the discussion on the current open records policy for the Town of Unicoi, and referred to it as "sloppy" and in need of being cleaned up. After speaking with representatives from the Office of Open Records Council (OORC) in Nashville, Bullen said she learned that the town's

open record policy did not meet state statutes because it does not include the name and contact information for the Public Records Request Coordinator (PRRC).

She was concerned with the way the policy itself was written, which included wording of Unicoi County throughout the majority of the policy as opposed to the Town of Unicoi. Towards the end of the policy, she said it referenced the OORC, yet did not give any explanation as to what the OORC was.

"There's also a statement that there is a response form that the custodian of the public records, PRRC, had filled out," Bullen stated. "Our policy does not have those things attached, and that's an open records council form. If the mayor

believes that the aldermen are required to fill out an open records request, it either needs to say that all aldermen are expected to fill out an open records request, or leave it alone."

Bullen said it could be a stumbling block for the aldermen to gather information in a timely manner, hampering the aldermen to fulfill their responsibilities as public officials. She said she did not believe it should be necessary for an alderman to fill out an open records policy request every time they needed to request information.

"I feel like even though I am an alderman, I need to abide by the rules that the citizens abide by," said Alderman Jeff Linville. "I requested a document and I filled out the re-

quest."

Bullen said that since July 1, there have been six requests, two from Alderman Roger Cooper, one from herself, one from City Recorder Michael Borders, and two from citizens.

Town Attorney Lois Shults-Davis said that the open records policy that was adopted matches with the state statute pretty well, but that she recalled a resolution in a previous meeting that made revisions to the policy including the additions of the missing PRRC forms.

Mayor Johnny Lynch suggested the policy be looked at while the board attends their annual strategic planning retreat on March 22-25.

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A resolution to amend the cur-

rent personnel policy for Town of Unicoi employees was also discussed during Monday's meeting. The resolution would officially dictate that the December 2015 policy be followed with an added change to the payroll schedule.

As opposed to payroll being issued on the first and third Mondays of each month, payroll would be issued bi-weekly every other Friday, which is the payroll schedule the town has been operating under.

"We will get back to 26 pays a year, and that will work better for everyone," said Interim City Recorder Larry Rea.

Linville made motion to adopt the resolution, and the motion was seconded by Vice Mayor Doug Hop-

Please see POLICY, Page 6-A

Obituaries 2-A
Viewpoint 4-A
Sports 1-B

Community 3-B
Heritage 5-B
Classifieds 6-B

This Week's Weather

Thursday 77° 58°

Friday 75° 56°

Saturday 72° 58°

Sunday 67° 48°



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