City Council to vote on raising hotel-motel tax

BY MEGAN REED
mreed@gainesvilletimes.com

On Tuesday, the Gainesville City Council will vote on an increase to the city's hotel-motel tax that would fund capital improvements at Lake Lanier Olympic Park, which the city hopes to take over. Councilmembers will also look at the status of other capital projects for an annual plan submitted to the state.

Hotel-motel tax increase to fund Olympic Park improvements

To fund improvements at Lake Lanier Olympic Park, which the city is hoping to acquire, the Council will vote Tuesday on a 2 percent

■ Please see TAX, 5A

Gainesville City Council
When: 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 19
Where: Public Safety Complex, 701 Queen City Parkway

3-16-19

TAX

■ Continued from 1A

increase for the city's hotel-motel tax.

The city jointly operates the park with Hall County but wants to completely take over operations, with the county stepping back from its role.

If council members approve the change, Hall's legislative delegation will introduce it for approval in the Georgia General Assembly. Then, if the bill is approved at the state level, the Council will vote again to implement the new tax.

Officials want to increase the hotel-motel tax from 6 to 8 percent. The city has made between $800,000 and $900,000 annually from the tax for the past few years.

Plans for improvements at the park include new restrooms, a pavilion and repairs to the boathouse, which flooded earlier this year because of heavy rains.

The nonprofit Gainesville-Hall '96 has developed a master plan for the venue and overseen recent park updates.

The park on Clarks Bridge Road will also have to be annexed from the county into the city, which will require the legislature's approval.

State Reps. Dubnik, Dunahoo and Hawkins, R-Gainesville, all told The Times earlier in March that they supported the idea.

Parks Director Melvin Cooper said at Thursday's Council work session that the parks department had funding for the park in the upcoming fiscal year but would need to adjust the budget after the first year.

The parks department's budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2020, starting in July, includes about $353,000 for the park. The city has been splitting the cost with the county, with each paying about $150,000 each year.

Annual update to capital improvements plan

The city is required to conduct a public hearing before submitting its annual update of the Capital Improvements Element Plan, which outlines plans for spending impact fee dollars, to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

Impact fees are one-time fees charged to developers for new construction projects that are then used to fund improvements for services including police, the fire department and parks.

The city took in almost $900,000 in impact fees last year, according to Special Projects Manager Jessica Tullar.

The plan lists capital projects, their estimated costs and their status. For example, the relocation of Fire Station No. 2 is in the design stages, and the Park Hill Drive area has been chosen as the new location. That will cost about $4.6 million. Meanwhile, improvements at Desota Park have been finished since the last annual update to the plan. Those cost about $225,000.

The full plan is part of the agenda documents for Thursday's work session and Tuesday's meeting. Agendas are available on the city website.

3-16-19

Gold on the Greenway rocks town

AUSTIN STEELE | The Times

Attendees listen to the Allen Nivens Band perform during Gold on the Greenway, an event raising money for cancer research, on Saturday, March 16.

Event raises money, awareness for childhood cancer research

BY LAYNE SALIBA
lsaliba@gainesvilletimes.com

Gold on the Greenway, benefiting childhood cancer research, came back for its second year with the sounds of a Dave Matthews Band tribute band at the Midtown Greenway Park on Saturday, March 16.

The band was joined by the The Ryan Casper Band and The Allen Nivens Band for live music while food vendors like Hop's Kitchen, Johnny's Barbecue, Carniceria Tapatia and Frozen Frenzee filled guests' stomachs nearby.

The Tap It beer truck kept the drinks flowing as the night went on, too.

The event is hosted in support of the many children in the area fighting cancer. Proceeds from ticket sales and vendors at the event went back to the Rally Foundation for Childhood Cancer Research.

Last year, the event raised nearly $400,000 and funded three research grants completely on its own. This year, they hoped to raise even more money and fund more researchers' work.

"We have two kids ourselves, and when you hear about somebody who has to go through that, it gives you a lot of perspective," said Jess Grogan, who was at the event with his wife as their sons played nearby. "It just kind of pulls your heartstrings a little bit."

Grogan works with Molly Johnson, whose son, Riley, 8, was diagnosed with leukemia in 2016. Johnson helped start the Gold on the Greenway event with the help of other families in the area whose children are fighting cancer.

"I didn't know any of this about Molly until somewhat recently," Grogan said. "It's just one of those things where you know stuff like this happens, and there's all kind of tragic stuff

■ Please see GOLD, 5C

3-17-19

Photos by AUSTIN STEELE I The Times

Ronny Gillum, 3, plays with a plastic flowery as it spins with the wind during Gold on the Greenway, an event raising money for cancer research, on Saturday, March 16.

Attendees check in during Gold on the Greenway, an event raising money for cancer research, on Saturday, March 16.

GOLD

■ Continued from 1C

like this that goes on, but when you have a personal connection to it and you can put a name to a face, it makes a huge difference."

Grogan's wife, Manuela Proni, felt the same way.

"It's sad to say, but it's different when you actually know somebody," Proni said. "When you know somebody and their story, it's tough not to join."

Robert Meyers stood toward the back of the park with his 1-year-old son, Henry, in his arms. They joined the event this year because Henry was diagnosed with leukemia in August 2018.

Meyers was happy to see so many people at the event and was encouraged by the support he's seen from the community, which in turn helps raise more funds for cancer research.

"Rally's mission is to raise money for research of children's cancer and that means a lot to us, obviously," Meyers said. "So anything we can do to support it and get people out here to support it . . It doesn't seem like there's a lot of support for childhood cancer, so we're glad we can be bringing awareness."

Dawn and Chris Chapman were happy to do their part in bringing awareness to childhood cancer, too.

Their daughter, Olivia, needed to find a volunteer opportunity for school, so they chose Gold on the Greenway since it means something a little extra to their family. Their other daughter, Chloe, has Down syndrome and was there with them as they sat on the steps, looking out over the crowd on the lawn.

"Everybody, it seems like, knows somebody affected by cancer," Dawn Chapman said. "And kids with Down syndrome are really prone to certain cancers ... Luckily we've never had to deal with that, but this was something good that I thought let's do it. It's a good cause."

3-17-19

Job Fair

Wednesday, March 20

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10 am - 2 pm

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3/19/19

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHALLENGE LOG - WEEK 9

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Signature:_____

	Goal	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
EXERCISE:								
Walking/Hiking								
Weightlifting								
Cardio								
Outdoor Activity								
Sports								
Yoga								
Other								
NUTRITION:								
Water Consumption								
Increased Vegetable Consumption								
Increased Fruit Consumption								
Avoided or Decreased Sugar Consumption								
Avoided or Decreased Caffeine Consumption								
Family meal together								
WELLNESS/STRESS REDUCTION:								
Avoided or Decreased Tobacco Usage								
Avoided or Decreased Alcohol Usage								
Replace 30 minutes of electronic activity (phone, television, computer) with electronics free activity								
Reading for pleasure								
Relaxation/Meditation								
Volunteering								
Spiritual								
CHECKUPS:								
Get a physical								
Get a mammogram								
Get an eye exam								
Get a dental check up								
Get a colonoscopy								
Get a hearing test								
PROTECT MY FUTURE SELF:								
Make appointment with accountant								
Make appointment with financial planner								
Make appointment with insurance expert								
Make appointment with banking expert								
Give Back								

Make sure to mail in your Challenge form at the end of every week to be entered for the prizes. You can email them to contests@gainesvilletimes.com, drop them off Mon-Fri 8-5 at our front desk, or you can mail them to: Healthy Lifestyles Challenge 345 Green St Nw, Gainesville, Ga 30501.

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3-17-19

Job Fair

Wednesday, March 20

10:00 am - 2:00 pm

Gainesville Civic Center

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Aotem Staffing
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Lanier Technical College
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Marel Inc.
Mars Wrigley Confectionery
Massey Services Inc
McDonalds
Modern Woodmen of America
MP Equipment
Northeast Georgia Health System
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On-Track Staffing
Panera Bread
Pilgrim's
PrideStaff
ProCare Rx
RNC Industries, Inc.
Spherion Staffing
Stark Pro Heating & Air
The Davis Companies
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3-20-19

GAINESVILLE

Council approves hotel-motel tax hike

BY MEGAN REED
mreed@gainesvilletimes.com

The Gainesville City Council unanimously voted Tuesday to increase the city's hotel-motel tax from 6 to 8 percent, with the hopes of funding some capital improvements at Lake Lanier Olympic Park.

The city and Hall County jointly operate the park, but the city hopes to take over operational control, a move that will need to be approved by the state legislature. The legislature will also need to approve the annexation of the park on Clarks Bridge Road in to the city.

Councilman Sam Couvillon phoned in to Tuesday's meeting.

Now that the Council has approved the hotel-motel tax increase, the legislation for it can be introduced in the Georgia General Assembly. Gainesville's delegation in the House of Representatives — Reps. Matt Dubnik, Lee Hawkins and Emory Dunahoo — told The Times earlier in March that they supported the idea.

Hawkins

Dunahoo

Dubnik

How the tax is used

Gainesville has made about $800,000 to $900,000 from the hotel-motel tax annually for the past few years. The tax is added to charges for accommodations at hotels and motels in the city, and funds from the tax are used to promote tourism, conventions and trade shows.

Some funds from the tax are transferred to pay for general capital improvements, and the city has transferred $210,000 from the tax for that purpose in the current fiscal year. The city also transferred $158,335 for debts to pay for an expansion at the Main Street parking deck.

The majority of the funds are used for the Gainesville Convention and Visitors Bureau, the city's tourism office.

Recent uses for funds from the tax include new signage entering the city and at some city parks and signage for the Highlands to Islands Trail.

The last hotel-motel tax increase in the city was in 2001, when the rate went from 5 to 6 percent.

Park improvements

The nonprofit Gainesville-Hall '96 has developed a master plan and begun renovations at the park, which was built as a rowing venue for the 1996 Olympics.

Officials say the tax increase would support operations of the park and pay for some renovations, including new restrooms, a

■ Please see TAX, 7A

3-20-19

TAX

■ Continued from 1A

pavilion and repairs to the boathouse, which flooded in this year's heavy rains.

Robyn Lynch, the venue's executive director, told The Times earlier in March that about 250,000 people visit the venue annually.

If the city takes over the park, Gainesville-Hall '96 will stay on for fundraising and programming and as an advisory group to the city's parks and recreation department.

The parks department's budget proposal for the next fiscal year, which starts in July, has about $353,000 set aside for the park. The city and county have been contributing about $150,000 each annually for the park's operations.

Community and economic development department

During Tuesday's meeting, City Manager Bryan Lackey also announced that the city's community development department would be renamed the community and economic development department and will focus more on business recruitment.

The change involves two title changes. Community Development Director Rusty Ligon will be the community and economic development director, while Planning Manager Matt Tate will be the department's deputy director.

Tate will continue to oversee zoning items and the Planning and Appeals Board.

Lackey said the city has a positive relationship with the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce but wants an economic development contact on the city level. Ligon can be a contact point for developers and help recruit businesses for some empty land in the city, including the land on the southern end of the Jesse Jewell Parkway pedestrian bridge and the former Hall County Jail site in midtown.

"(The department will be) addressing some of the empty storefronts downtown, having someone recruit that, having someone to really recruit and foster the type of development we want on our corridors, so it's not haphazard," Lackey said.

Lackey said the restructuring will also help developers take advantage of the city's two tax allocation districts, which cover midtown and downtown, along with another for the west part of the city. Developers can apply to benefit from the TAD — when a property is developed, its value and therefore its taxes will go up, but the developers can use the extra money they're paying to fund improvements at the property.

Lakeview Academy promotes Simpson interim head of school

Lakeview Academy announced Tuesday that John Simpson has been named interim head of school for the 2019-2020 school year.

Simpson

Simpson is currently Lakeview's co-assistant head of school, where he has supported Head of School John Kennedy.

Kennedy recently announced he would be stepping down at the end of the 2018-19 school year after serving for nine years.

Simpson has been at the academy for 14 years and served in a variety of roles, including admission and external relations director, dean of students and as a coach.

"During his tenure at Lakeview, Mr. Simpson has demonstrated the ideal leadership qualities to guide the school during this time of transition," said Clay Eubanks, chair of the Lakeview Board of Trustees. "The members of the board are extremely thankful to Mr. Simpson for performing this role and are proud to have him in this leadership position."

A Gainesville native, Simpson is a 1996 graduate of Gainesville High School and has a master's degree in education from the University of North Georgia. He is chairman of the Gainesville Parks and Recreation board as well as a pastor at Lanier Christian Church and was recently named the Gainesville Jaycees' Young Man of the Year.

Lakeview has engaged search firm Carney Sandoe and Associates to guide its pursuit of the next head of school. According to Eubanks, Simpson has informed the search committee that he will not be a candidate for the permanent head of school.

The school hopes to select a permanent head by the end of 2019, with the aim of installing the candidate by the start of the 2020 school year.

Compiled from Lakeview Academy press release.

3-26-19

Job fair attracts 70-plus employers

SCOTT ROGERS | The Times

Micah Thomas, of WorkSource Georgia Mountains, helps job seekers prepare applications inside their mobile training unit Wednesday, March 20, 2019, at the Gainesville Civic Center during the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce job fair.

Local companies, businesses and organizations sought candidates

BY KELSEY RICHARDSON
krichardson@gainesvilletimes.com

People lined up at the Gainesville Civic Center, eagerly awaiting the chance to meet their next potential boss or apply on-site for a position during the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce's annual job fair and career expo on Wednesday, March 20.

More than 70 different local companies, businesses and organizations — a majority of which were hiring — welcomed a consistent flow of people to their booths.

Whether attendees were already employed and looking at their options, or unemployed and needing a job, the event gave them a direction.

"I saw the people that were listed and I thought it would be interesting to come out and see what information I can gather, and possibly get a job," Samantha Collins said. "So far, I'm really impressed with Foundation Food Group and VDL (Industries)."

As their sixth year at the job fair, the King's Hawaiin staff shared not only their "aloha spirit," but the joys of the company's sweet fluffy rolls.

"If your mom was baking bread at home and you walked in the door and smelled it, that's what it's like to come into work everyday," Dave Phillips, King's Hawaiin human resources manager said. "Seriously, why it's a great place to work is because the culture of the company is wonderful. It starts with the owner of the company and goes all the way down to the workers on the lines."

Phillips said King's Hawaiin is currently seeking to fill manufacturing supervisors, machine operators and entry level positions.

Many other employers had an array of jobs open including Chattahoochee Country Club, Lanier Village Estates, Gainco, Pilgrim's Pride Corporation and Zebra Technologies Corporation.

Marco Valeriano and Latanya Sheppard said there's more than meets the eye when working at McDonald's.

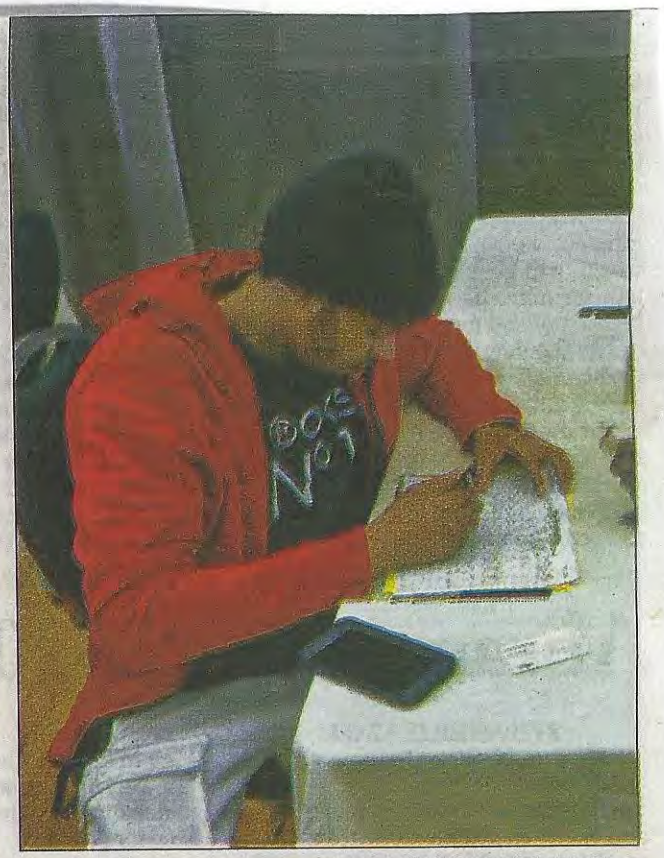
The two worked their way up the ladder at the fast-food business since they were 16, and now Valeriano is the director of operations and Sheppard serves as the area supervisor at four different McDonald's locations in Hall County.

"People think McDonald's they automatically assume it's flipping burgers. There are so many other layers to McDonald's other than burgers,"

■ Please see FAIR, 12A

3-21-19

Companies in need of employees take part in the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce job fair Wednesday, March 20, at the Gainesville Civic Center.



Photos by **SCOTT ROGERS** I The Times

Renardo Hawkins fills out an application Wednesday, March 20, during the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce job fair at the Gainesville Civic Center.

3-21-19

FAIR

■ **Continued from 1A**

Sheppard said. "We're running multimillion-dollar businesses. It takes a special person to do that."

Valeriano and Sheppard said McDonald's offers a great opportunity for young people looking for a starter job because of its incentives.

The company provides tuition assistance for those seeking a college degree, free English programs for those learning it as a second language and a no-cost high school completion program.

CSS Image Group, a company that specializes in installing architectural cladding, sought out people to apply for installer, crew leader, project manager and other positions.

Grant Wood, the company's floor manager, said CSS Image Group will take those with no experience in the industry and train them.

"It's a safe work environment, but we do try to have a good time while we're getting the job done," Wood said. "It's family oriented in the way we work together and how the other employees know each other."

Parked outside of the Civic Center, the Career Coach from WorkSource Georgia Mountains packed itself with people seeking assistance with their resumes.

Micah Thomas, who works at WorkSource, buzzed around the van's computers helping around 19 people with their resumes within the first hour of the event.

Amanda Lewis, lead organizer of the job fair, said overall most employers seemed happy with the attendance, many of which collected a list of names for interviews.

"I think we had a great turnout," Lewis said. "We've had a steady flow of people since we opened the doors."

From gold to silver at LCKC

Sunday, March 24, marks the 25th anniversary of the Lanier Canoe and Kayak Club.

Founded in 1994 ahead of the 1996 Olympics, the group was created at a meeting of the '96 Roundtable at the Longstreet Room of the Gainesville Civic Center, according to Roger Nott, who attended the meeting. Only eight paddling enthusiasts were there, but they created a group that would help shape the future of sports and recreation on Lake Lanier.

"I suggested the name 'Lanier Canoe Club,' but in the end we voted to call it the Lanier Canoe and Kayak Club and have Gary Gaines as our first president," wrote Nott. "In attendance were: Gary Gaines, Roger Nott, Steve Gilliam, Forte Rabb, Ray Santa, Nick and Peggy Miller, and Tom Sieswerda."

Compiled from information submitted by Jim O'Dell.

3-24-19

Gainesville Spring Chicken Festival

When: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, April 27

Where: Longwood Park, 20 Pearl Nix Parkway NW, Gainesville

More info: www.gainesville.org/spring-

3

EDITORIAL

Pride in progress

Work to be done, but community's growth is something to celebrate

Today's edition of The Times includes our annual Progress sections, which provide a look at some of the many things happening in the area as we continue to grow and change.

While you will find a lot of information in these special sections, they are in reality just an abbreviated snapshot summarizing just a few of the many things happening around us, as there is far more activity in the area than can be captured on these few pages.

Each year as we work on these stories, we find ourselves contemplating the meaning of the word "progress," and how it relates to the ever-changing landscape of a dynamic, growing area like that in which we live.

For some, addressing the challenges of growth in a proactive manner represents progress. For others, improving overall "quality of life" fits the definition. For some, a reduction in the rate of growth and a slowing of the pace of change would best represent the concept of progress. And there are always those convinced that we aren't making progress fast enough, no matter what is going on around us.

Positive growth, proactive change, improved quality of life are all evident in the stories we've collected for our special edition. Below are just some of the many things you'll find in the Progress sections included in today's paper:

■ New software being implemented by the sheriff's office will allow those buying homes in the county to get an idea about criminal activity in the area in which they are interested before they buy.

■ The hospital in Braselton is only 4 years old, but already is undergoing expansions in several areas, including adding more acute care beds, enlarging the emergency room, adding an ambulatory surgery center and more post-partum beds for new mothers.

■ Widening of I-985 from Mundy Mill south is expected to start in 2022-23.

■ The county school system is planning a major upgrade to the Early College at Jones facility near Chicopee Mill, as enrollment is surging and the program continues to be highly popular for dual enrollment students.

■ The anxiously awaited residency program at Northeast Georgia Hospital will start in July.

■ Oakwood expects to see 18 rental "cottages" marketed toward UNG students ready by August for the fall semester.

■ The Gainesville school system is investing some $240,000 in security upgrades at all of its schools.

■ The Georgia Poultry Lab off Ga. 365 in North Hall has a diorama three years in the making that includes moving trains, illuminated lights and busy scenes capturing elements of the poultry industry.

■ Construction should begin this year on the inland port, which will serve as a cargo connection via rail to the Port of Savannah.

As Hall County and the North Georgia area continue to grow and develop, there are certain areas that demand constant, ongoing attention if we are to avoid problems found in other growing communities.

Nationwide, having the infrastructure in place to handle necessary public services is a concern that has been ignored too long, and certainly that is an area we must constantly address if we are going to continue to move forward as a community. Water, sewer, roads and bridges require a lot of money, and a lot of time, but adding to existing infrastructure and maintaining that in existence are hallmarks of areas that see positive growth.

Intelligent land use planning is an area vital to the quality of life most expect in an area such as ours. Planning and zoning policies that provide for a variety of land uses without overburdening regulation help to allow for an economic diversification of community.

Exceptional public education is an arena most would agree is essential to long-term progress in any area, and we are fortunate to have exceptional schools in both the county and Gainesville city systems, as well as post-secondary options. With growth comes the expensive challenge of building and maintaining facilities, which is an ongoing issue in areas such as ours.

Parks, recreation and leisure time activities also contribute to the elusive "quality of life" expectations in progressive areas of growth. In that regard we are blessed with access to an incredible lake and the river systems that feed it; vast undeveloped acreage and scenic beauty; and taxpayer supported parks that offer a wide assortment of amenities and activities, with more on the way.

Another measure of a progressive community is the manner in which it handles the needs of those who live there from a social services standpoint, and in that regard Gainesville and Hall County have a spectacular track record. A host of nonprofits, church and spiritual groups, and government services are available for local residents in need, and while demand in some areas may outpace availability, the effort to address social problems is evident.

Sometimes when living in an area such as ours it is easy to forget that the problems and challenges inherent in a growing vital area are problems that many communities across the nation would gladly accept. We take for granted a booming business economy, low unemployment, affluent residential growth, efficient government services and strong local schools, when there are areas elsewhere where none of those things exist.

As we work collectively to address the realities of growth and change, there are many counties in Georgia facing ongoing, demoralizing, constant decline, with no prospects for any sort of "progress" any time soon.

So join us as we count our blessings as a community and revel in some of the many progressive things happening on a daily basis in the area we call home. It's Progress Sunday in The Times.

3-24-19

What does "progress" mean to you?

What's your idea of progress from a community standpoint? How would you define the term? Look for this editorial on Facebook and give us your ideas in the comment section.