

Baxter...from Page 1A

and hopefully we can prevent another tragedy," said Jason Henson, one of the pilots, during the Public Comments portion of the meeting.

Henson was referring to the Dec. 19 plane crash off Kings Road that occurred less than one-half nautical mile from the airport, resulting in the deaths of Robert Atkinson, Michelle Seay and Renea Greiner, and the serious injury of Brittany Thomas Whitener, who is currently undergoing physical rehabilitation at the Shepherd Center in Atlanta.

A preliminary crash report that should have been available by now via the National Transportation Safety Board has been postponed due to the government shutdown.

Mayor Conley responded to Henson's concerns by saying that he didn't know whether a PAPI system "would have prevented a tragedy or not," but that officials with the Georgia Department of Transportation Aviation Program were coming up for a meeting on Jan. 18 to discuss many topics, including the installation of a PAPI system as soon as possible.

PAPI systems assist pilots by giving them visual guidance at runways, and according to the Federal Aviation Administration, "these systems



Chief Michael Baxter swearing in his new assistant chief, Shawn Dyer, on Jan. 8. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

have an effective visual range of at least three miles during the day and up to 20 miles at night."

The Blairsville Airport used to have a PAPI system back when the runway was only 3,800 feet, but it was taken out years ago to extend the runway to 5,004 feet and was never replaced.

Blairsville Airport Manager John Hamler said that both GDOT and FAA officials had reached out to express "concern and condolences about the tragedy that we had

out here."

Furthermore, Hamler said that, at the time of the initial investigation of the crash, officials with the FAA and NTSB arrived at the airport to speak with him. During that conversation, an FAA official told Hamler he wanted to look at the airport's PAPI system.

"And I said, 'Sir, we don't have a PAPI,' and he said, 'Well, according to our records, you do,'" said Hamler in the Jan. 8 meeting.

Added Hamler, "We had the wiring put in. I have the

pictures of the wiring and the conduit, and it's in our vault, but it was never installed. And that was a shock to the FAA man that we did not have that."

Runway lights have long been in use at the Blairsville Municipal Airport and have allowed pilots to safely land and take off at night for years.

However, night flights in and out of the Blairsville Airport have been put on hold, as federal officials alerted the city in December that it was not equipped to handle nighttime traffic.

Officials have cautioned that it's still too early to say what caused the Dec. 19 crash and have advised the public that it's best not to jump to conclusions.

Of course, this is of little comfort to those who have lost loved ones or who are suffering because of the crash, especially since federal investigators have said it could take as long as two years for a finalized report to be released.

The upcoming meeting between the city and GDOT officials at the Blairsville Airport on Jan. 18 does not meet

the requirements of an open meeting, though information concerning the meeting will be available afterward.

In other airport news, Hamler told the council that the U.S. Forest Service was looking into renting space for several planes, as well as office space in the old terminal building.

Also, Air Methods has expressed an interest in taking out an extended lease for a couple of spots in Bill Elliott's former hanger for the medical helicopter based out of Union General Hospital.

Right now, Air Methods is renting a spot in the hangar on a monthly basis, and it would use the hangar space to work on the helicopter and keep it out of the rain when it's not safe to fly.

There is also discussion between Air Methods and Union General to lease the city's old Jet A fuel tank, which would bring in fuel sales to the city and provide a tank at the hospital to allow for quicker fill-ups and response times between life flights.

As a regular order of business for the first meeting

of the new year, the council assigned its Department Liaisons on Jan. 8.

Each councilmember acts as a liaison responsible for staying in touch with the various city departments to keep the council apprised of the needs of each department.

Moore traded posts with Councilwoman Betty Easter, so Moore is now the liaison to the airport and Easter to the water and sewer plants.

Tony Dyer maintained his post as the streets liaison and picked up the seat on the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority previously held by Rhonda Mahan.

Mahan maintained her spot as the police liaison, and Mary Ruth Cook agreed to continue her duties as liaison to the Union County Historical Society.

Councilman Moore retained his position as mayor pro tem, to take charge at City Hall should anything befall Mayor Conley, and both Kaye McCann and David Barrett were appointed once more to their respective positions as city clerk and city attorney.

Friends of Union County Library (FOUCL):

Advocating for Libraries, Literacy, and Lifelong Learning



FOUCL is in the process of renewing memberships and adding new members for 2019. All members and those interested in becoming members are encouraged to attend our quarterly membership meeting in the library's Community Room on Wednesday, January 16, beginning at 2 PM.

Through monies raised by dues, twice-a-year bake sales, and our first Everything Christmas Sale, we are proud to have been able to provide about 6% of the funds spent by the Union County Public

Library in 2018.

Here are some of the ways FOUCL-raised money was used in the past year:

For Libraries - We provided small gifts of recognition for the library staff during National Library Worker's Day in April and at Christmas and we hosted a North Georgia Friends Conference with Georgia's State Librarian Julie Walker as our guest speaker - other Friends' group leaders in the area joined us to share ideas on a variety of Friends of the Library topics

For Literacy - We funded a variety of programs and services, such as the Children's Summer Reading Program and Mountain Regional Puppet Company; we purchased books, magazines, and news-

papers for the library; we supported the Ferst Foundation (a nonprofit children's literacy program which provides free monthly books to registered children from birth to age 5); and we gave books to families during storytimes at the library in celebration of Dr. Seuss' birthday and Christmas

Lifelong Learning - We sponsored free-to-the-public programs: Care of Books, Genealogy, Fossils, and an Adult Summer Reading Program

We encourage you to join us as we continue to search for new ways to fulfill our bylaws: "The purposes of the organization shall include but shall not be limited to helping to foster interest in the library and to further its service to the community." NJan16,21/4CA

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 Who is Tom Taylor?
 Tom has been in the insurance business 36 years since his medical retirement from the US Army as a LTC. He has numerous awards, such as LUTCF, LILLI AIA, Lifeleaders of GA & SC, Instructor for new agents. His awards for the Army include Silver Star, Bronze Stars, Meritorious Service Medals, Army Commendation Medals, Combat Infantry Badge, Airborne Wings, Air Crew Wings, Air Medal, Meritorious Unit Award, Good Conduct Medal, Reservest National Guard Achievement Medal and National Defense Medal recipient.

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