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THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2025

‘Our wheels keep rolling, and we never get nothing done’

BY BETSY SMITH
EDITOR

The Williamstown Council held a special meeting Tuesday, April 15, largely consisting of updates and discussions of ongoing issues.

After adopting and approving the Municipal Aid Co-op Program without incident, Council heard Mayor Mark Christopher announce two grants were received in the last week.

Superintendent of the electric department, Joe McComas, secured a \$1.52 million grant (the city’s responsibility is \$284,000), and the city got a \$10,000 Interact for Health grant to cover expenses for Marigold Day in the fall.

GRANT/DEBT UPDATE

Christopher said Mark Miller, wastewater superintendent, and Tim Beach, water treatment plant superintendent, joined him in meeting with a company that could assist in hiring an engineer and getting grant funding “for the water and wastewater facilities” from which a lot of the city’s debt comes.

He also announced he’d written a letter to Kentucky Infrastructure Authority (KIA) asking for forgiveness of loans amounting to roughly \$12 million for the sewer and water departments.

Christopher said KIA has forgiven debts in other instances and figured it was “worth a shot.”

In his letter he said he provided many examples of need in the water and wastewater departments, telling KIA “Unfortunately we’re not in a position to acquire those



Betsy Smith

The fuel dock at Williamstown Marina is awaiting rebuilding.

things” because of outstanding debts. Getting rid of even half that amount would help the city afford to deal with necessary repairs and issues like the zebra mussel problem, he said.

Expressing frustration at the lack of action in eradicating zebra mussels from Williamstown Lake and the water treatment plant, Councilmember Dave Henson circled back to the possible hiring of an engineer, something that was urged at a previous Council meeting.

“It’s been over a year now and we really ... have done nothing,” he said.

The mayor countered that Beach “had an action plan that the council turned down.”

Henson shot back, “He had a plan to put a chemical in the water that was going to cost \$4,000 that may or may not work, which by the way it did not work. So, that’s not a plan ... that was for a one-off issue.”

Christopher and Henson continued their back and forth, with Henson urging action and Christopher maintaining money to fix things was not in existence even if a project was engineered.

“I’m saying I’m in the process of trying to apply for a grant.”

“I’ve been hearing about grants for a year now, and I don’t see any,” Henson replied.

Councilmember Kim Crupper said the deadline for a 2024 KIA grant was missed and asked if any 2025 KIA grant submission had been made. Christopher said it was done last fall; Crupper asked that a copy be supplied to councilmembers the next day.

At that point, former Williamstown Fire Chief Les Whalen chimed in from the audience. “You’re missing out on millions of dollars” by not having anybody on top of grant writing; somebody needs to

take charge.

Christopher said he had had a lack of information or guidance beyond the Kentucky League of Cities telling him to try and get grants. He was not informed about the necessity of creating a project profile, for example.

Whalen proceeded to take the mayor to task, saying grants should have been a priority from his first day on the job; from the top down the city needs to put “more legwork” into securing grants.

DISCUSSION TO ESTABLISH FINANCE COMMITTEE

Christopher asked Council whether they thought a finance committee should be created, mentioning that other municipalities were surprised Williamstown doesn’t have one.

The ensuing discussion made it clear councilmembers did not regard the idea of a finance commission helpful and considered themselves responsible for finances.

Responding, Christopher explained, “This would be a good set of eyes that would be able to create better spending habits and focus on our debt and focus on putting the city in a place of financial stability.”

The words “better spending habits” sent the discussion off the tracks.

Councilmember Gina Austin Smith asked, “What have we not done well with spending?”

Christopher said the majority of the city’s funds are tied up in debt. He would like to see money set aside for “future needs and goals.”

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Mayor’s motion to stop removal proceedings denied

BY BETSY SMITH
EDITOR

On Thursday, April 17, a motion for emergency relief filed by Mayor Mark Christopher against the members of the Williamstown City Council was heard by Judge James R. Schrand, circuit judge for the 54th Judicial Circuit, in the circuit courtroom of the Grant County Judicial Center.

The mayor was seeking an injunction to stop removal proceedings instigated by the Williamstown City Council at the April 1 meeting via a resolution made during executive session.

Christopher’s lawyer questioned the legality of several actions taken by Council at meetings on March 18 and April 1.

At the March 18 special meeting, after a closed session, a motion was made to hire attorney Luke Morgan to represent the Williamstown

City Council. The action was not on the agenda.

During the April 1 special meeting, Council came out of closed session with a resolution issuing charges of willful neglect against Christopher and setting a public hearing on the matter for April 21. The action was not on the agenda. Also in question was whether they came out of the closed session with a signed resolution to present to the mayor.

Another issue was whether or not an actual vote was taken to remove the mayor from the March 18 closed session. (No actions or votes may be conducted in closed session according to statute.)

Christopher’s attorney said a vote to remove him occurred. Morgan disagreed, saying Christopher asked if they wanted him to leave, and the council members each replied, “Yes.”

In the end the mayor voluntarily left the closed session as well as the one on April 1.

Plaintiff’s counsel wanted to call the members of the city council to testify as “evidence that it actually happened.

Judge Schrand said, “They did what they did. Do we need to have them say what they did?” adding he thought everyone agreed on what was done.

In the end, only Christopher took the stand.

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Betsy Smith

The first and second place crafts make the final turn in the 4th Annual Cardboard-Duct Tape Boat Regatta at Williamstown Lake. In the first place boat are Ryan Deaton, Landen Donaldson and Cameron Martin.

Williamstown’s cardboard and duct tape navy sets sail

BY BETSY SMITH
EDITOR

In his role as admiral of the Williamstown High School fleet, Jacob Cheesman kicked off the 4th Annual Cardboard-Duct Tape Boat Regatta at Williamstown Lake with a brief speech on Thursday, April 17.

Cheesman revealed the race’s catchy new slogan: The most exciting 10 minutes inside the city limits!

The undertaking, a class project, requires teams of three to engineer and construct a seaworthy craft solely of cardboard and duct



Betsy Smith

The mariners leave the boat ramp at the start of the 4th Annual Cardboard-Duct Tape Boat Regatta.

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