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The Hickory Riverwalk parking lot gate is sealed with padlocks and marked with a "trail closed" sign on Oct. 14. The pedestrian bridge has been closed since Hurricane Helene came through on Sept. 27.

Hickory's Riverwalk bridge closed indefinitely

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Hickory's Riverwalk bridge is closed until further notice due to damage caused by Hurricane Helene, according to a press release from the city of Hickory.

The bridge trailhead and parking lot at 1580 Old Lenoir Road NW will also remain closed, the press release said.

The Riverwalk section that goes over the water is closed due to damage caused Sept. 27

by the remnants of the hurricane, the press release said. A section of handrailing was damaged by debris and must be replaced, the city said. "At this time, the reopening date is unknown," the press release said.

Other parts of the Riverwalk trail, including sections that are elevated over land and the paved greenway within Rotary-Geitner Park, are open, the press release said.

Helene-related weekly unemployment claims surge

RICHARD CRAVER

Winston-Salem Journal

North Carolina experienced the first phase of an expected Hurricane Helene-related surge in new weekly state unemployment claims the first week of October.

The U.S. Labor Department reported a total of 11,474 new claims were filed for the week that ended Oct. 5. That's up from 2,941 in the previous report, or by 290%.

The Labor report doesn't provide a regional breakdown by state, but it's highly likely the bulk of the new claims are from North Carolinians whose employment was directly or indirectly affected by Helene-related damage.

The new filings are likely to push the number of North Carolinians receiving state unemployment benefits to more than 30,000. There were 18,333 North Carolinians receiving benefits for the week that ended Sept. 28.

North Carolina was fifth in the nation in the number of new unemployment claim filings, up significantly from the 15th to 18th range since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared over in March 2023.

Other states with severe Helene-related damage also experienced an uptick in new claims.

Florida's new claims jumped 69.4% to 9,377, while Georgia's was up by 17.4% to 4,675, South Carolina's by 83% to 2,504 and Tennessee's by 72.5% to 4,367.

State of emergency programs

Residents in four northwest N.C. counties – Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga and Wilkes – have been declared eligible for federal disaster unemployment assistance benefits.

The eligibility is a byproduct of the Biden administration's declaration of a state of emergency in N.C. from the devastating rainfall and flooding caused by the remnants of Helene.

The disaster unemployment assistance covers individuals who are unemployed as a direct result of Helene. Business owners and self-employed individuals affected by the storm also may qualify for benefits.

Benefits have been made retroactive to Sept. 29 and may last for up to 26 weeks.

There are 23 other counties, along with the Cherokee Indians of N.C., that have been approved: Alexander, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania and Yancey.

Eligible individuals have until Dec. 2 to file an application for disaster unemployment assistance at des.nc.gov or the DUA Hotline.

at 919-629-3857.

Individuals must first apply for state unemployment benefits. For those determined to be ineligible for or have exhausted regular state benefits, they may be eligible to make a federal disaster unemployment assistance claim.

Eligibility is determined weekly, and individuals must continue to be out of work as a direct result of the disaster each week to get unemployment benefits.

Those eligible include:

- No longer have the job that provided their primary source of income;
- Are unable to reach their place of unemployment;
- Cannot work because of an injury caused by the storm;
- Were unable to begin employment or self-employment due to the storm; and
- Have become the major supplier of household income due to a storm-related death of the previous major supplier of household income.

Documentation required includes: name and address of all employers you worked with within the last 24 months; county of residence; county of employment; mailing address and ZIP code; valid telephone number; Social Security number or Alien Registration number; proof of employment and income if you're self-employed, a farmer or a commercial fisher.

All required documentation must be submitted within 21 days from the day the application is filed.

DES said it will work with people who cannot provide all documentation to ensure that their unemployment benefits are not delayed.

U.S. Labor also announced the approval of up to \$10 million in initial emergency grant funding to North Carolina to support disaster-relief jobs and training services in the 25 counties.

The National Dislocated Worker Grant – supported by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 – allows the N.C. Division of Workforce Solutions to provide people with temporary disaster-relief jobs for cleanup and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to address immediate basic needs for those displaced by Helene.

The funding also enables the state to provide training and services to individuals in the affected communities.

The N.C. Commerce Department's Employment and Training Administration oversees National Dislocated Worker Grants, which expand the service capacity of dislocated worker programs at the state and local levels by providing funding assistance in response to large, unexpected economic events that lead to significant job losses.

REGION / STATE

Mooresville chief blasts plea for ex-officer

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In September, a former Mooresville police officer was sentenced to nine years of probation for three felony counts of indecent liberties with a child. On Sept. 30, the Mooresville police chief called the plea deal outrageous.

In a press conference, the Mooresville Police Department and town of Mooresville expressed frustration with the plea deal struck by a special prosecutor on the case. Matthew Edward Beebe, 38, of Sherrills Ford, pleaded guilty on Sept. 24 to charges that stemmed from both Catawba and Iredell counties.

"This is the most outrageous prosecution I have witnessed in almost four decades in this profession," Mooresville Police Chief Ron Campurciani said. "This man committed despicable acts on a minor."

At the same time, this predator continued to lead his double life

and put on his public face to serve as a police officer with the town of Mooresville," Beebe was originally facing two felony counts of indecent liberties with a child and two felony counts of statutory sex offense with a child in Iredell County.

He was also charged with felony statutory sex offense with a child by an adult, felony sex act by a substituted parent or guardian and felony indecent liberties with a child in Catawba County. The accusations involved a 12-year-old child.

The remaining charges were dismissed with prejudice through the plea agreement. That means the remaining charges cannot be brought against Beebe again in the future.

Campurciani said that the MPD had been in contact with Special Prosecutor Donna Rainwater and expected Beebe to serve time in jail. He said the department received an email the day before the plea deal from Rainwater that Beebe wouldn't serve any time in prison.

Campurciani dismissed any suggestion that the police department in Mooresville or law enforcement in Catawba County had taken any actions to diminish the special prosecutor's case.

Beebe was fired from the Mooresville Police Department in August of 2023 and arrested initially on four counts of third-degree sexual exploitation of a minor due to child pornography found on his personal phone, Campurciani said in 2023.

He had been with the department



BEN GIBSON, RECORD & LANDMARK

Mooresville Police Chief Ron Campurciani speaks at a press conference addressing the sentencing of Matthew Beebe in Mooresville on Sept. 30.

for 11 years.

The police chief said the victim wasn't happy with the decision either. He said the decision undermines public trust in the police and justice system.

"The men and women that make up the Mooresville Police Department work so hard every day to serve this community," Campurciani said. "They are very much aware that there is a distrust of the police. That is why we treat everyone fairly with dignity and respect."

We hold our officers accountable if they do not treat everyone with those same values. The ones that don't buy into this philosophy learn very early on that there is no safe place for them to land at the MPD. A decision like this widens the gap of distrust for the police and the whole criminal justice system."

Mayor Chris Carney and several members of the town board of commissioners were at the press conference and expressed displeasure with the plea deal.

"You're talking about predators of children, and you can't even get them jail time? How are you willing to look any citizen in the face and say this is how our justice system works?" Carney said.

He said the police department expected maximum sentences for Beebe.

"We're furious about this. And we should be furious about this. Every parent should be furious about this," Carney said. "And we should be demanding justice."

Beebe is required to register as a sex offender for 30 years as part of the plea. Beebe was forced to permanently surrender his law enforcement certification. Beebe is

also not allowed to have any form of contact with the victim. Beebe is required to complete a sex offender evaluation and treatment, Catawba County Superior Court Judge Gregory Hayes said.

What did Beebe do?

The crimes happened between July 2018 and August 2019. Rainwater said during the plea hearing on Sept. 24.

Beebe was in a relationship with the victim's mother during the time the offenses happened. He was 32 at the time and the victim was 12 when the abuse began. Beebe lived in Catawba County and the victim and her mother lived in Iredell. Beebe committed the crimes in both locations, Rainwater said.

The victim told her mother that Beebe had kissed her and touched her breasts in 2019. When confronted, Beebe said he was drunk and kissed the victim. The mother and Beebe stopped seeing each other for a time, but later continue the relationship.

The victim discussed the crimes with a therapist in 2021 after her mother and Beebe started seeing each other again. In July of 2023, she told her mother that Beebe had touched the inside and outside of her vagina. She later came forward to the police. The victim told police that there were multiple occasions when Beebe had touched her, Rainwater said.

According to the Mooresville Police Department, the victim made a report about sexual misconduct on July 28, 2023. Beebe was placed on paid administrative leave within an hour of the report, Campurciani said in 2023.

NC begins process to create sports wagering facilities

RICHARD CRAVER

Winston-Salem Journal

North Carolina has moved a step closer to having permanent locations for sports wagering with the N.C. State Lottery Commission outlining requirements for operating such facilities.

The compliance certification process for what is known as a place of public accommodation covers the eight licensed sportsbooks offering mobile sports wagering in N.C. since March 11.

The sportsbooks are: Betfair Interactive; BetMGM; Crown NC Gaming; FGB Enterprises Opco; Hillside (North Carolina); Penn Sports Interactive doing business as ESPN Bet; Tribal Casino Gaming Enterprise, an enterprise of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians; and Underdog Sports Wagering.

The likely sites for the permanent facilities are with professional sports franchises that have chosen official sports betting partners:

- Carolina Hurricanes and PNC Arena with Fanatics Betting and Gaming;

- Carolina Panthers with Fan Duel;

- Charlotte Hornets with bet365;

- Charlotte Motor Speedway and Richard Childress Racing with BetMGM;

- McConnell Golf, owner and operator of Greensboro's Sedgefield Country Club with Underdog Sports;

- NASCAR with DraftKings;

- Quail Hollow Club and the Truist Championship with ESPN Bet.

The commission also approved new guidance on wagering on esports and received an update on pari-mutuel horse racing.

The permanent location requirements for sportsbooks would include an evaluation of current operations in the state, both mobile and in-person, as well as its compliance history in other states.

Any sportsbook that has been fined, sanctioned, suspended or entered into a settlement agreement with a government entity or regulator in other states would have to show it has cured, addressed or resolved the conduct.

Each sportsbook application for a permanent facility would have its own timeline and there is no specific deadline or timeline for a decision.

The commission's approved electronic sports guidance describes the Gaming Compliance and Sports Betting Division's current approach to regulating wagering on electronic sports.

A petition for eSport events or wagers form provides a pathway to request the addition of esport events to the state's sports wagering catalog.

That form can be found on the commission's website, along with the updated petition for new events or wagers form for traditional sporting event requests.

The commission also received an update on staff's progress to implement pari-mutuel horse race wagering via pari-mutuel online and mobile wagering operations.

However, no projected launch date exists at this time. The commission reported that the rulemaking process is underway and includes proposed rules for authorized pari-mutuel wagering.

Legal mobile sports wagering in N.C. experienced a modest uptick during August. Account holders wagered \$370.48 million on sports events, according to reports from the eight licensed sports wagering operators to the commission.

The August update did not include what was spent on paid and promotional revenue.

Wagering was up 8.8% from \$340.37 million in July, which represents the lowest monthly total since legalized betting debuted in North Carolina on March 11.

The highest monthly total has been \$659.3 million from March 11 through March 31, which ben-

efited from March Madness of the NCAA men's and women's tournaments.

Sports wagering experts and economists have pointed to September for providing the first significant showing of the state's full wagering potential. Industry analysts project that overall monthly betting totals should peak with the 12-team college football playoffs in January, the Super Bowl in February and March Madness.

In terms of winnings, account holders gained \$333.7 million during August, compared with \$295.4 million in July and a peak of \$590.7 million during March 11. The total so far is \$2.57 billion.

For the promotional wagering revenue, operators initially offered enticements of up to \$200 worth of free bets for as little as a first wager of \$5. Those enticements have dropped substantially from \$20.6 million for the period of March 11-31.

The N.C. Revenue Department is responsible for collecting the tax proceeds from sports wagering revenue. The eight operators made a combined \$33.7 million in gross wagering revenue in August, compared with \$42.2 million in July and \$40.3 million in June.

Gross wagering revenue is defined as what the operators received from sports wagers, less the amounts paid as winnings before any deductions for expenses, fees or taxes. State law places an 18% tax on the operators' gross wagering revenue, which would be \$6.1 million in August, compared with \$7.6 million in July and \$7.25 million for June. The total so far is \$63.2 million.

By comparison, legislative analysis of House Bill 347, which authorized sports wagering, projected about \$40 million initially in annual tax revenue and more than \$100 million by 2029.

Bets are not allowed on youth sports but can be made on professional sports, college sports, electronic sports, certain amateur sports or any sports events approved by the commission.