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\$7 BILLION LOSS
Western NC farms, including in Burke County, hit by Helene.



GENERAL ELECTION
Burke voters to also weigh in on sales tax issue.



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County OKs \$13M for EMS, shelter

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Burke County commissioners on Tuesday night approved contracts for the county's new EMS headquarters and animal shelter.

The Burke County Board of Commissioners approved a bid of \$13.5 million by Beam Construction Company Inc. for the construction of both facilities. Beam Construction Company was the lowest responsible bidder, according to county officials. The cost of the EMS headquarters is \$6.1 million and the cost of the shelter is \$7.3 million, according to the county.

The contract includes three alternate bids for emergency radio responder (\$130,000), FireLite fire alarm (\$0) and stone flooring (\$28,000) for both buildings, according to the bid.

Burke County Manager Brian Epley said the money for the buildings is coming from a one-time allocation of federal grant dollars. He said no local property tax or sales tax dollars will be used to pay for the facilities. He said the facilities will not require more operational costs or additional staff.

The county purchased 4.25 acres at 102 Drexel Road in early 2023 for the EMS headquarters. The money came from the state for the EMS base, Epley said.

Epley said EMS base No. 1, which the new headquarters will replace, is on the UNC Health Blue Ridge Hospital property and the lease expired in 2023. He said the hospital has been working with



This rendering shows the design of the proposed Burke County Animal Shelter.

the county, knowing it is building a new base.

He said bringing training and administration, as well as being an EMS deployment base, under one roof will be beneficial and productive for the county and EMS. He said the location of the new base correlates well with the calls for service volume and population density of the Morganton area.

The county already owned land for the animal shelter, which is adjacent to the 911 center on Kirksey Road in Morganton.

Epley said the current animal shelter only has 16 dog kennels and not enough space for cats.

He added that it is a lot of work for staff to keep the building in adequate shape for inspections and to meet all of requirements of the N.C. Department of Agriculture. "So we're really looking forward to being able to offer the community a little better place to do business," Epley said. "And we think both of these will be long-term solutions to these critical departments."

A groundbreaking on the two facilities was canceled due to Hurricane Helene but has been rescheduled for 3 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 8, at 636 Kirksey Drive, Morganton, which is the site of the new animal shelter.

Operation Green Light

The board also approved a resolution from Veterans Services in support of Operation Green Light from Nov. 4-11 in support of military veterans.

Residents and businesses are asked to change at least one light bulb to a green bulb to show support for veterans. Veterans Day is Nov. 11.

Forever heroes

Commissioners recognized and applauded county employees, including emergency services and responders, 911 telecommunications, as well as volunteers who worked throughout Hurricane

Helene and its aftermath.

Burke County Attorney J.R. Simpson told commissioners about his up-close and personal experience with a swift-water rescue team during Helene. He said rescuers were able to rescue his 94-year-old disabled mother, get her in a boat, keep her calm the entire way and deliver her to her family, who was waiting for her on dry land.

"They're forever heroes to the Simpson family," he said.

The board approved Burke County receiving and allocating \$3 million in total from FEMA and the state for Helene recovery costs.

Morganton hotel for sale for \$4.6 million

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A hotel in Morganton is up for sale again.

The Quality Inn just off Interstate 40 Exit 105 is on the market for \$4.6 million. The owner of the property, located at 2400 S. Sterling St., is Hospitality Legends LLC, which is based in Greensboro and was formed in 2022, according to county and state records.

The property is listed with Marcus & Millichap real estate, which touches the tourism industry in Burke

County and the area's state parks, state schools and hospital as selling points for the property.

The 85,329-square-foot property has 133 rooms and sits on 5.34 acres and includes a swimming pool and restaurant. The property is tax valued at \$3.4 million, according to property records.

The hotel was built in 1968 by Southview Motel Corporation, which was formed in 1967 by three Morganton residents at the time. The corporation was

created by Jack B. Kirksey, Harry Riddle and Harry Wilson, according to state and county records.

The hotel had a restaurant when it was the Holiday Inn. The hotel was renovated in 1996, according to land records.

Southview Motel Corporation sold the property in 2009 to Ami Kishan Inc. and it became Quality Inn, according to land records.

It was sold to Hospitality Legends LLC in January 2023 for \$4.2 million, land records show.

Valdese pastor killed in Caldwell County crash

FROM STAFF REPORTS

A Valdese pastor was killed when his golf cart was hit by a car in Caldwell County on Saturday. The pastor's wife was critically injured, according to the N.C. State Highway Patrol.

The driver of the vehicle that hit the golf cart, Cody Lyndon Pennell, 33, of Morganton, was with driving while impaired, N.C. State Highway Patrol Trooper Christopher Casey said.

Roy Shane Epps, 58, of Granite Falls, died from his injuries, Casey said. Epps

was a pastor at Lakeview Baptist Church in Valdese, according to the church's website.

On Saturday shortly after 3 p.m., the N.C. State Highway Patrol investigated a fatal collision in Caldwell County on Hickory Nut Ridge Road near Baton Church Road. A golf cart driven by Epps tried to turn left from a private driveway and pulled into the path of an eastbound 2018 Chevrolet Malibu driven by Pennell, Casey said.

Epps was taken in a helicopter to Atrium Health

Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem. Epps died at the hospital, Casey said.

Epps' wife Julie Safford Epps, 57, was a passenger in the golf cart. Julie Epps was taken to Atrium Health Carolinas Medical Center with life-threatening injuries, Casey said. Pennell was not injured, Casey said.

Additional charges against Pennell are pending the completion of an investigation and consultation with the Caldwell County District Attorney's Office.

THE NEWS HERALD

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