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begin this week.

Of course, the timeline on completion of the new Police Headquarters will depend heavily on weather as

well as contractor availability, but again, city officials are hoping to open the building by midsummer.



Detainees working on the new Blairsville Police Department building on March 4, as Blairsville Assistant Police Chief Shawn Dyer watches on.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

In other Blairsville Police news, 14-year-old Jacob McCann joined the mayor and council on March 5 to make a special flag presentation to Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter.

The flag presented to Chief Baxter that evening is crafted from wood with a blue stripe in the middle representing law enforcement.

Jacob and his father David have been making the flags as a way for the young man to make a little money, and after Baxter became the new Police Chief, Jacob came up with the idea to present him with one.

Moving forward, Jacob – who is the son of Blairsville City Clerk Kaye McCann – will be attending area festivals hoping to sell his hand-crafted flags, which he makes in a variety, including traditional red, white and blue.

Also in the meeting, City Clerk McCann explained that a recent audit of local records turned up about \$135,000 in TAVT taxes, or vehicle taxes, that were mistakenly distributed to the county instead of the city.

The distribution error occurred between April 2015 and December 2018, with

correct collections being distributed to the city starting January 2019.

After some discussion in which councilmembers determined that the city has benefited greatly in its relationship with the county over the years, like being included in SPLOST referendums, the council decided unanimously to forgive the entirety of the \$135,000 paid to the county in error.

The council also voted to pay off an old USDA loan from 1996 with an outstanding balance of \$910,537. The loan featured the highest interest rate of any other city loan, and paying the balance off early will save the city about \$437,000 in interest.

Subsequent to approving the loan payoff, the council voted to cash in three Certificates of Deposit tied to the loan as debt reserve in the amount of \$115,668, which will be returned to the Water-Sewer Fund.

In other business, the council voted to do away with a recently adopted rotation schedule regarding liaison positions held by each of the councilmembers.

Every January, the council decides which department – i.e.

sewer, Downtown Development Authority, Municipal Airport, etc. – each councilmember will serve as a liaison to throughout the year.

Those positions have already been decided by councilmembers for the remainder of the year, though the council adopted a rotation schedule in February that was to decide based on council seats moving forward.

However, following a discussion regarding adding mayor pro tempore to that rotation schedule, the council voted 4-1, with Buddy Moore serving as the lone NO vote, to do away with the rotation schedule.

Essentially, Councilmembers Moore and Rhonda Mahan argued that, by adding the position of mayor pro tem to the rotation schedule, it's conceivable that a newly elected councilmember with zero experience conducting city business could end up having to run the city should something happen to the mayor.

Moore has served as mayor pro tem for many years, though any councilmember can be nominated for the position, with the council as a whole voting to decide who among them receives the designation.