

COLUMBUS MATTERS



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Meaningful News & Stories

COLUMBUSMATTERS.NET

Obfuscate, A Fun Word to Say but Sad Thing to Experience

by Will Sanders

Do you have the feeling the crime rate in Columbus is going down or up? On what basis do you have that feeling? When is the last time you saw the crime statistics for Columbus? Worth noting is that, on July 6, 2018, The Dispatch ran a story titled “Statistics don’t support claims of rising crime” using data obtained directly from CPD.

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) is an incident-based reporting system used by law enforcement agencies in the United States for collecting and reporting data on crimes. The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program is a component of the NIBRS program. The state of Mississippi coordinates the gathering and validation of crime statistics that ultimately can be accessed through a databased managed by the Federal Bureau of Investigations.

The truth is that, back in 2013, the Columbus Police Department (“CPD”) stopped remitting its crime statistics. The story is that the crime statistic reporting stopped because the person that used to do that left the department in 2013. (It should be noted, early on ABC suggested as a “simple solution” to cross train employees so that more than one person knows how to perform a task. www.abettercolumbus.net/simplesolutions.) In February 2022, when the city was asked whether it was still sending crime statistics to the FBI a response was received “Yes, transferring over to NIBRS from UCR.” A funny thing with words is they can be used to inform or to obfuscate. One definition of obfuscate is to render obscure, unclear, or unintelligible.

Mississippi NIBRS, when contacted to explain where in the accreditation process CPD currently stands, responded the CPD has yet to begin the accreditation process, a direct

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Planner without a Plan

A Special Report from A Better Columbus

The “interim” city planner (interim about six years), George Irby, wants one million dollars “to clean up Columbus,” has no plan, and the City Council voted in their February 15 meeting to do it. (The mayor broke the 3-3 tie.) Irby wants the city to get in the business of purchasing property and maintaining it. Have you heard or seen the City’s track record of purchasing property and maintaining it? Many times, they pay too much up front, pay too much to rehabilitate, and then sell it for a loss. Think maybe it would be tempting for a connected private citizen to front run the transactions and “buy up” these properties then sell to the City? Think this has a big potential for fraud?

Under the Interim City Planner’s watch, blighted property has only increased. Is it time to get a credentialed city planner? Public Works is supposed to do the demolition, but it’s not keeping up with blighted properties because they do not properly maintain their equipment. Some have noted when public works does the demolition the project takes three days because the workers take the time to harvest the copper, wood, and other materials while the project should not take a full day for demolition, haul off, and leveling. Why would anyone think the “interim” city planner can “clean up Columbus” after having persistent blighted properties on his own street. Through the insistence of neighbors, some of those properties have been cleaned up by the city or owners.

Real World Examples:

About two years ago, a couple named Leslie and Will, were taking a walk on 15th Steet in their neighborhood, saw a group of what looked like family and friends, sitting on their



This dilapidated home is located in one of Columbus’ “Gateways” (a high-traffic, high visibility area) and was reported on SeeClickFix in June 2020.

porch. Leslie approached while calling out, “your flowers, plants, and pots are beautiful!” A woman emerged from the group, flattered, and shared the different plants’ names and pointed to her mother’s house, just two houses away, that was also tidy and filled with potted plants.

“You’ve done a lot, your place looks nice, and it’s a shame your living across from this,” Will said, waiving toward a blighted property with the roof caved in, a dirty couch on the porch, and a booze bottle on the railing. The group freely shared their frustrations, happy to have someone listen, and said “there’s a pool back there!” Shocked, the couple thought of the public safety issues that go with standing water-like mosquitos and the sad potential of someone drowning. The neighbors told stories of the once nice house and the well-to-do person who used to live there.

It left the couple heartbroken and disgusted because their neighbors had given up on things ever getting better. Leslie vowed we’ll get the problem resolved. Will shared how he researched what other cities had done to eliminate blight, reduce crime, and that he had presented those concepts to the prior city administration. The couple insisted positive change could come with persistence and shared

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Columbus Matters

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Letters to the Editor

Columbus Matters is accepting letters to the editor.

You can submit your comments ideas and criticisms to our website, columbusmatters.net or you can mail your letters to our address,
 1215 Main Street, Ste B
 Columbus, MS 39701

We want to hear from you!

**Want to learn more about
 A Better Columbus (ABC)?**

**Check out our website:
www.ABetterColumbus.net**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Concerned About Claims Docket Control

The city's website presents the following policy: The City Council approves the Claims Docket at the bi-monthly council meeting which occurs on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month. Therefore, once the docket receives Council approval, check payments are mailed the following day (Wednesday after approval) for invoices received by the 2nd and 4th Monday of the month.

In the past, it was obvious that most council members did not see the docket until just before the meeting started when it was handed to them. Recently, members of the council have stated during the meeting that they were not able to pull-up the docket on-line before the meeting. Yet, most voted to accept the docket without hesitation.

A popular account from a few years ago, recalls

contradiction of the city's representation. NIBRS's website includes a list of law enforcement agencies that are certified or in testing. Columbus is not on the list. Now all are left to wonder what the statement "transferring over to NIBRS..." was intended to mean or make obscure. Why would the city intentionally mislead or was it just another honest mistake, like saying the city was financially sound and there would be no tax increase? Does the City of Columbus have a code of ethics for its employees and contractors?

Data is important for evaluating all kind of things. When data is missing or incorrect many analysts will use proxy data, or a close substitute to what is expected. Because of the lack of direct data most will consider that what is not provided may likely be worse than the proxy data. When industry and people are evaluating areas to choose for relocation, crime may be a measurement point in the consideration. If a municipality does

a concerned citizen who made it a point to attend the meetings decided to look at the docket for himself. He noticed that there was an expense for \$120,000 for electrical work. He contacted the electrical contractor and inquired as to what work they had done for the city. He was told that they had not done anything for the city.

At the council meeting, this citizen asked for what the large expense was incurred. Without hesitation, the former mayor just stated that it was a mistake and struck the amount from the docket. None of the council members followed-up on it or questioned why it was there. Had this citizen not asked about this and the docket been approved without correction, a check would have been written to this company the next day per the policy stated in the opening citation.

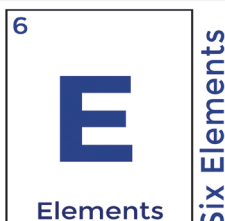
While this may truly have been "just a mistake", it makes it very clear how city funds could easily be siphoned off without any notice. There is no telling how many "mistakes" went unnoticed over those years. Should the media have been watching closer back in those days? What if Columbus citizens were not paying attention? Thanks Columbus Matters for standing in the gap and bringing back investigative reporting to Columbus.

- John Locke

not readily disclose its crime statistics, many may presume the worst and find a more transparent, perceived safer, place to relocate.

In a WCBI interview published January 8, 2021, the Police Chief stated, "The mayor and the city council has wholeheartedly supported the police department with all the resources that we need." The Chief went on to say, "They are supplying us with the resources that we need, as far as equipment and as far as officers." At this point when the Chief is bemoaning his lack of resources while not long over a year ago he sang a different tune one must wonder how involved in the Columbus political machinations the Chief is involved. Was the Chief trying to obfuscate for the prior administration for political purposes? Is the Chief trying to undermine the new administration? Were expectations higher that the Chief would be a man of integrity? The answer appears clear to some that have been paying attention.

The Chief may not have been in charge in 2013 when CPD stopped reporting its crime statistics. The Chief may not have known the CPD stopped reporting. All is not well at CPD and part of that may be an issue with struggling to tell the full truth. Perhaps the CPD should open its own investigation into why things are not as represented.



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Planner Without a Plan

Continued from Page 1

their enthusiasm to reduce blight in the city and offered to take this project on. The neighbors remained skeptical the blighted properties would get address.

When the couple told city employees about the dilapidated property, with a concrete pool that had no fence, and a person squatting on the long-abandoned property, they were surprised when the city employees in the planning, building, and code enforcement told them they already knew, saying “Everyone knows about the property. The Columbus Municipal School District (CMSD) owns it.” In fact, the property existed in the deplorable condition on the same street the city planner resides and would pass on the way to the municipal complex. But the CMSD didn’t know the dilapidated property was in its real estate portfolio.

It was hard to understand why the City did not want to enforce its codes--it would be a win-win for all involved. It appeared some city employees thought they were “helping” CMSD. Eventually, after the couple notified CMSD of its new-found liability, CMSD voted to demolish the property at a cost of \$7,000. But that wasn’t the end of it.

On the same street and just a few houses from the CMSD property, was a partially burned house with no doors, windows, and possibly people squatting there too. When the couple shared their concerns about the blighted, unsecured property, a code enforcement city employee responded that the property had been demolished—only it hadn’t! Who checks to see if work is completed? When it was brought to the city’s attention that the house was still standing, they started work “the next day” and now the property is a clean lot. Then, there was another property a few blocks away, on the same street, across from the Interim City Planner.

When inquiring about that property, the code enforcement staff said that they were waiting on the fire department to burn the property, but the fire department said that was not accurate as that property failed qualification for a training burn. Another time, concerned citizens inquired of the code enforcement status of a property that the owners represented work was in progress. City staff assured the concerned citizen that there was a permit and work was being done. In reality, no work was being done and the building permit was over a year expired.

The couple met with their City Councilman who encouraged them to report the properties on “SeeClickFix” (the City’s app for citizen interaction.) The couple not only agreed but told him they would do the heavy-lifting, start with their neighborhood, and would be willing to map Ward 5 as an example (for the entire City.) After reporting about 30 homes, and no response from their Councilperson, they reached out to over half a dozen city employees, who showed little enthusiasm. So, the couple abandoned their aggressive project and took another route.

16th Section Safety Net:

The couple were especially concerned so many of the dilapidated, unsecured, properties identified were on 16th Section land. 16th Section Land is owned by the state and was set aside for the school district (to build public schools.) Franklin Square, Camelia Place, and many other properties in the Uptown Neighborhood on northside. If the property taxes are not paid for several years, the property would revert back to the state, and the state would return it to the school district (like the property on the 15th St). When the property goes back to the school district, it loses its special provisions and essentially becomes worthless. CMSD then must maintain these properties (mowing

Continued on Page 10

SeeClickFix

HOME > ISSUES > CODE ENFORCEMENT

✓ Acknowledged by: City of Columbus

Code Enforcement

1401 4th Ave N Columbus, MS, 39701, USA



Issue ID: 8190571
Submitted To: City of Columbus
Category: Code Enforcement
Viewed: 33 times
Neighborhood: Columbus
Reported: on 07/14/2020

<https://seeclickfix.com/issues/8190571>

✓ Acknowledged by: City of Columbus

Vacant property with overgrown yard

1104 3rd Ave N Columbus, MS, 39701, USA



Issue ID: 7999805
Submitted To: City of Columbus
Category: Code Enforcement
Viewed: 85 times
Neighborhood: Columbus
Reported: on 06/13/2020

<https://seeclickfix.com/issues/7999805>

Abandoned and Unsecured Home

1226 6th Ave N Columbus, MS, 39701, USA



Issue ID: 8000571
Submitted To: City of Columbus
Category: Code Enforcement
Viewed: 193 times
Neighborhood: Columbus
Reported: on 06/13/2020

<https://seeclickfix.com/issues/8000571>

help

Columbus Matters grow!

Columbus Matters is still looking for citizen journalists, photographers and editors for our next edition. We also need a grant writer. If you are willing to help, contact us at columbusmatters.net.

Let the Sunshine In

A Special Report from A Better Columbus

Citizens, sometimes speaking through the media, pressed the government to pass public records laws for the public's benefit. Open Records and Meeting Laws, called "Sunshine Laws," govern our rights to access public records. They are also referred to as "FOIA" named after the federal law, the Freedom of Information Act. In 2005, the former American Society of News Editors (now the News Leaders Association) created "Sunshine Week" as a national initiative to raise awareness and acknowledge the importance of these laws that protect our right to know whether our public servants are indeed serving the public rather than self. Sunshine Week for 2022 was quietly celebrated March 13-19.

Sunshine Week coincides with the birth week of President James Madison, considered the Founding Father of Sunshine Laws. **"A popular Government without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance. And a people who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives,"** Madison professed.

The Co-founder of the Kentucky Open Governance Coalition says, "The right of the public to be informed transcends any public agency inconvenience, embarrassment, or loss of "efficiency." Tom Hood, Executive Director of the Ethics Commission, echoes similar words, saying, "All documents relating to government business are public records," and he goes on to say, "just about everything in City Hall is public record."

Mississippi (law) states that any person may request public records and that the reason for wanting the document is irrelevant. In fact, the law says the caretaker (of the documents) may not inquire the reason.

Some Experiences with Public Records Requests in Columbus:

- The City of Columbus has a policy of delivering public records in seven days-but often does not.
- Some in the City answer public records requests with half-truths and misleading information that requires the requester to read between the lines.
- A request from over a year ago to the City Council and City Attorney regarding budget violations identified by the financial statement

auditor has gone unanswered, except with an empty, arrogant, essentially non-response from the city attorney.

- A request regarding travel expenses last fall met a response of "we can't find the documents."
- When we asked about some Mississippi Municipal League documents. The city records did not reflect everyone that attended or their expenses. They have been "looking" for those documents "and are going to send them."
- We requested the Information Technology ("IT") contract that presumably was entered after the October 2021 resignation of the IT employees. Although the City has still not sent a contract on the matter, our requests may have prompted the city attorney to propose the city council approve an essentially back-dated contract

Conclusion: Citizens do not give public employees the right to decide what is good for them to know (or not.) People must insist on being informed. These documents are the People's Records--City Hall merely holds them in trust. We must keep a watchful eye, and let it be known, we are unwilling to tolerate bureaucratic inertia or surrender our rights.

THANK
you!

Because of your generosity, ABC's Second Annual Auction was a success!

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Bliss Yoga | Kountry Kitchen |
| Café on Main | Lucent Medi Spa |
| Elm Lake Golf Course | Proffitt's Porch |
| Forty Plus & Fit | Purple Elephant |
| Gene Reid, LLC | Whimsi Woo Pottery |
| Gon Thai | White Horse Guest House |
| Greenaway Pool & Spa | Zachary's |
| Guns with Grady | All Volunteers &
Participants who Chipped
in to Support ABC's Efforts |
| Gypsy Tan | |
| Hopkins Inn | |
| Hotel Eastin | |
| Huck's Place | |

*at time of printing

A
BETTER
COLUMBUS

Columbus citizens and The Bank of Vernon donated money, through a Go Fund Me account last year, to place a stone marker near the USAF training jet along Highway 45 N in Columbus.



Columbus Marble Works absorbed some of the cost and then installed the stone for free. Former City Council member, Bill Gavin, made the motion to allow the memorial to be placed on city property and it was unanimously approved.

Friends of Scot Ames placed flowers and a can of his favorite beverage by the marker on the first anniversary of the pilots' deaths.



OUR PERSPECTIVE

Synergies and Opportunities

Well done Columbus Lowndes Chamber of Commerce (the “Chamber”)! The Chamber recently announced the hiring of Cathryn Borer as its new director. Cathryn is the wife of Air Force Lt. Colonel Luke Borer, stationed at Columbus Air Force Base (“CAFB”). The hiring of CAFB family members in the public institutions and businesses of Columbus is a great way to benefit both the hiring entity and the CAFB.

The talent pool at CAFB is immense. Many of those stationed at CAFB represent the brightest minds of men and women in the US military and many times those bright minds have more bright minds in their households. The history of relationships with CAFB and Columbus, especially Mississippi University for Women (“MUW”) is the stuff of legends. Given the relatively young age of most of those in pilot training and the similar age profile of MUW students the historic association is natural. There are quite a few former MUW students that went on to marry and raise a family with former CAFB student pilots. Those relationships and the resultant ties to Columbus create synergies, both potential and realized, for the city and the base.

CAFB is a city unto itself. CAFB must maintain its infrastructure of roads, drainage, and other matters most of us take for granted until those things are

in disrepair, just like Columbus. Like Columbus, CAFB also has a police force, fire department, and, yes, even accounting and administration departments. All those departments at CAFB have personnel that oversee the day-to-day operations and strategic planning.

CAFB recently hosted the Wings Over Columbus 2022 airshow, a two-day event with over 60,000 in attendance. Day one of the airshow reportedly had about 40,000 attend with 20,000 the next day. While CAFB recognized there were some logistical issues on the first day, those issues were mostly resolved the following day. Most of the issues seem to originate with underestimating the size of the crowd that wanted to participate. Having too much enthusiasm from the public is one of the best problems imaginable! Those in attendance, at the event, got to see first-hand how well the Air Force maintains CAFB and how well disciplined and responsive the service members are, including the CAFB police.

The point of pointing out these things is to encourage the CAFB surrounding employers, particularly the City of Columbus, to first consider hiring from the CAFB families and personnel that are cycling out of the Air Force. The opportunities to hire experienced, technically astute, individuals should not be missed. There are quite a few roles open, or should be, in the city. The fresh perspectives of these human resources could be invaluable to the future of the area.

Pick It Up! Possum Town

A Special Report from A Better Columbus

“Pick It Up! Possum Town” (PIUPT), a citizen-led litter initiative, kicked off April 2nd. Volunteers across the city spent Saturday morning working to make Columbus a clean city. Melissa Parson, Pick It Up Possum Town Committee Chair said, “Our efforts are not limited to picking-up trash but to keep Columbus clean and presentable to residents, visitors, and travelers for generations to come.” Mayor Gaskin went on to say, “Making Pick It Up! Possum

Town a sustained success will take a collective and unified effort to make and keep Columbus clean, safe, and presentable forever.”

For people who weren’t able to attend the April 2nd Clean Up Event, people were asked to clean up in their own neighborhoods or an area that could use some attention and post “before” and after “photos.” The PIUPT Committee plans to hold quarterly events.

For the latest information on PIUPT, go to their Facebook page: www.facebook.com/PickItUpPossumTown and the City of Columbus Website: www.thecityofcolumbusms.org/calendar Or, contact Melissa Parsons, Committee Chair: maparsonslittercampaign@gmail.com



PICK IT UP! Possum Town

25th Annual
JUNETEENTH
FESTIVAL
JUNE 2022 | COLUMBUS, MISSISSIPPI

1st Annual
Juneteenth Freedom Ball
Friday, June 10, 2022
7:30 P.M.

James M. Trotter Convention Center
402 2nd Avenue North
Columbus, Mississippi 39701

Music by
ARTISTIK BAND & DJ Ejay

Tickets: \$15 per person | Table: \$150.00 (8 Tickets Provided)

ATTIRE: SEMI-FORMAL



GARDEN SPOT

ALWAYS GREEN

Hummingbirds are in Town

by Leslie Sorrell

It is the time of year when hummingbirds migrate north, as many winter in places like Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico. On March 26, a ruby-throated hummingbird was sighted in Columbus and added to Hummingbird Central's (a website for hummingbird enthusiasts) migration map. The earliest hummingbird sighting was reported on New Year's Day in Brownsville, Texas. To report a sighting or view the map: www.hummingbirdcentral.com

Hummingbirds fly during the day when food is more abundant. Their diet is of nectar (from flowers), small insects, pollen, and sap. While

there are over 330 species only about 18 are found in the United States and Canada, with the Ruby-throated Hummingbird being the dominant species east of the Mississippi River.

Hummingbirds travel up to 23 miles and consume up to twelve times their own body weight in a day. Want to provide some much-needed food for their journey? Consider incorporating bushes and flowers that will attract hummingbirds while providing colorful flower beds this season. Below is a list of colorful plants with a proven track record of attracting hummingbirds while providing beautiful landscaping. Keep in mind, red is the hummingbird's favorite color.

Zinnias. Their bright color attracts bees and hummingbirds. They make for great cut flowers. Annuals. Grow from seed easily.

Lantana. Small clusters of flowers that hummingbirds enjoy. Come in a wide variety of color combinations that will enhance your landscape.

Pentas. The big flower heads of pentas are considered hummingbird magnets and have the power to draw hummingbirds to your yard. Clusters of small, individual, five-petal flowers cover these plants through the summer.



Original Photograph by HummingbirdCentral.com

Salvia. Considered a garden must-have, for its versatility and wide range of flowers in dark purple, lavender, pink, white and a rare yellow. It comes in both an annual and perennial.

Other Hummingbird favorites: Milkweed, Hot Lips, Fire Bush, Nasturtiums, Coreopsis. Plants and flowers that may not rate as a "hummingbird favorite" but help draw them in with their powerful colors, provide additional dazzle, and complement the above plants: Geraniums, impatiens, verbena, and roses.

Leslie Sorrell is a Lowndes County Master Gardener, through the MS Master Gardeners program. Certified Individuals are trained, certified, and extend the education arm of MSU to the public.

5 More Solutions for Our City

A Special Report from A Better Columbus

- **Get Money in Faster.** Take Payment for City Services, Fees, and Fines Online. Taking monies in person or by mail is inefficient and subject to increased risks of human error or dishonesty. By having an online presence, the City is “open for business 24/7” and can allow people to pay at their convenience rather than the City’s. This is especially critical when City Hall is only open to citizens four days a week.
- **Enlist Citizen Ambassadors at City Hall.** When one walks into City Hall, there is no person to greet them or even a desk in the over-sized hallway. Many times, people roam around looking for someone to assist them, having general questions, but no one is readily available (to answer their questions or give them direction.) Some citizens may not want to go knock on the mayor’s door or COO’s door to simply ask where to pay their bill or pick up a document. We’ve been told the city is short-staffed. Perhaps, volunteers (think something like Pink Ladies at the hospital) could help with adding a welcoming presence, answering the phones, and other administrative tasks.
- **Create an Audit Committee.** Some on the Council and Staff Members admit to lacking the financial acumen required to make informed financial decisions, but since it’s the council who is tasked with ensuring the annual audit, it makes sense that they put together a committee of

people with financial, accounting, and auditing expertise. Most don’t expect the Council to be financial experts, but citizens do expect they know their knowledge and ability limits and reach out to competent qualified people that do understand, seek their opinions, get their insight, and make informed decisions. Further, because the management and staff are the subject of the audit, those individuals should not be the source of information to the council regarding audit matters, such as, progress difficulties, matters of concern, and disagreement resolution.

- **Have a Clear Travel Policy.** Limit spending. A common practice is to require staff to stay at a hotel that serves a complimentary breakfast (to reduce costs) and to limit meals (such as using the federal travel rate net of meals provided.) If the employee chooses to spend more, they can, but at their expense, not tax dollars. Currently, it appears the City has inconsistencies with its “policies,” enforcing, and applying them.
- **Verify.** If City Employees turn in requests for spending tax dollars, is there automatic approval? Is there a verification process? Trusting is not a control.

**These solutions are a continuation from our Generating Funds-Solutions for Our City. Feel free to reach out to us with your solutions for the City: leslies@abettercolumbus.net*

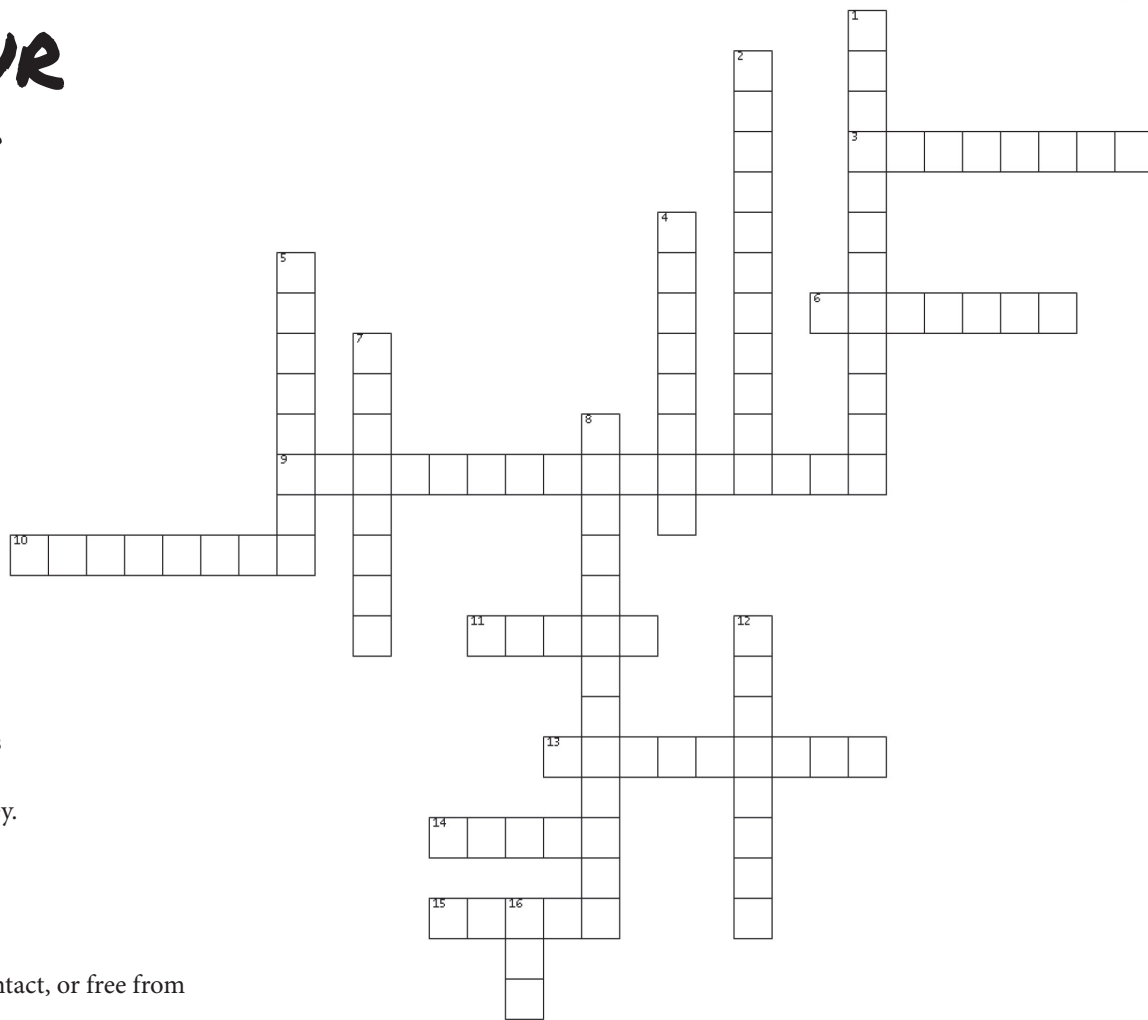
COLUMBUS - OUR PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

ACROSS

- Home to a Governor, Host of a President.
- A place or system in which something continues to survive
- Columbus is celebrating Tennessee Williams ___ Birthday this year.
- The last name of the Founder of the Tennessee Williams Tribute in Columbus.
- The last name of the Person for which Columbus is also called “Possum Town.”
- The Last Day of the Spring Pilgrimage Tour of Homes - April ___
- A group of ladies from Columbus placed flowers on graves of both the Union and Confederate graves. Their tribute to all soldiers inspired poet (Last Name) to write the Blue & the Grey.
- Featured in HBO’s documentary, Our Town, and in publications all over the country

DOWN

- The activity or process of keeping something valued alive, intact, or free from damage or decay.
- Current name [formerly known as Hamilton Hall] of the home/manor built for Laura Young Whitfield and her husband.
- An ante-bellum house built in Columbus by free men of color that now operates as a bed and breakfast.
- A home on Spring Pilgrimage Jubilee of Tours that has remained in the same family for seven generations.



- Only two families have lived in this Greek revival home built in 1847.
- Once the home of Jane Fontaine, one of the founders of Decoration Day (now Memorial Day.)
- Houses the largest collection of Rococo Revival furniture by John Henry Belter in the United States.
- The owner’s death prompted the nation to fly flags at half-mast (Last Name)



Columbus Arts Council & Munson & Brothers - Hosting and Organizing the Burns Bottom Arts Festival (third Saturday of the month.) April 16, May 21, and June 18.

Columbus Police Officers - To the officers that have long endured leadership failures not only within the department but from the city council that has ignored the obvious issues for years. We commend your bravery to stand against departmental dysfunction in spite of threats of repercussions from the Police Chief after first trying to work within the system.

The Commercial Dispatch- Celebrating 100 Years in producing a daily paper for our City

and the Golden Triangle. Also, for sponsoring the Mississippi Spelling Bee.

Donors and bidders that participated in ABC's 2nd Annual Auction - We understand that there are a lot of groups competing for funds and ABC is grateful for those who choose to invest in us.

Melissa Parsons - For being an engaged citizen and taking a leadership role by heading up "Pick It Up Possum Town," the mayor's initiative in addressing the City's trash challenges.

Lulu Taylor - Affectionately known as the "Mayor of Military" for brightening the lives of neighbors and passersby with her great smile and friendly waves.

Mississippi Spelling Bee Winner - Jessica Widodo (Oktibbeha County)

Mississippi Spelling Bee Co-Runners-Up - Elizabeth Simpson (Hancock County) & Eltahir Zein (Rankin County)

Jeff Turnage, (City Attorney) - Finding creative loopholes to circumvent the law— such as spending tax dollars on "free food"

and "one-time pay raises" that allows some of our elected officials to score political points. Contract back-dating also helps the City covers its tracks on matters done in executive session. As an expert at dealing with the Mississippi Ethics Commission, the city council has been wise to keep him around.

Preservation Society of Columbus - For restoring the tour of historic homes and exciting curiosity in our history through the Spring Pilgrimage Jubilee of Homes, showcasing exciting additions and changes.

The ABC Volunteers who tirelessly work to produce and deliver Columbus Matters to subscribers and businesses.

WCBI - Recording the Mississippi Spelling Bee Contest for broadcast at a later date in compliance with national spelling bee rules.

Zachary's - Hosting and Raising Funds for the Lowndes County Humane Society.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

N O I T A I C N U N N A A H Z L Q
 B X M S F D B Z E Y L E E H I G H
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 I Y E B O K N Q Z Y W L F H S N T
 N A H F K R P Q T A O H Q H E C O
 D K G T W E L V E G A B L E S S O

- | | | |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| Aldan Hall | Annunciation | Errolton |
| Lee High | Ole Homestead | Riverview |
| Rosedale | Shadowlawn | The Cedars |
| Twelve Gables | Waverly | White Arches |
| Whitehall | | |

COMMERCIAL
Yard of the Month

Sonic on Highway 45N has been recognized as our Yard of the Month for March. Previous mentions have been Jackson Square and The Grill.

Important Dates

March 24-April 16 Spring Pilgrimage Jubilee of Homes, presented by the Preservation Society of Columbus	April 18 • 4pm Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) Board Meeting Chamber of Commerce Meeting Room (3rd Monday of every month)
April 2 Pick It Up Possum Town	April 19 City Council Meeting 1501 Main St.
April 5 City Council Meeting 1501 Main St.	April 23 • 8am-Noon Master Gardeners Plant Sale Brickerton (their only fundraiser)
April 6 Mayor's Press Conference	
April 7-9 Catfish in the Alley-Downtown	



YOU ASKED WE ANSWERED

Question: Does a 4-Day Work Week Save Taxpayers' Money?

Answer: The traditional argument is that when an organization goes to a four-day work week less money gets spent on utilities. Since the City does not know where it stands financially, it's hard to believe someone there would have accurate information and the ability to make the determination that monies will be saved by returning to the Four Day Work Week. The City has not released a projected savings amount either (probably because they don't know.) Because the City is not certain of its own finances, we cannot do the analysis, but can provide information for a healthy discussion.

Productivity, Public Satisfaction, & Cost Savings: The state of Utah projected \$3 million dollars in energy savings if their state workers adopted a four-day work week. But the following year's report showed the state saved only about half a million dollars. Meanwhile, citizens reported feeling inconvenienced with government workers only being available four days a week despite many online services. The State Legislature grew concerned they were not delivering essential services and ended the four-day work week after a year.

What this means for Columbus: We have not seen where the City did a cost benefit analysis of productivity, public satisfaction, and cost savings. They may be operating on

blind faith. Unlike the state of Utah, Columbus does not have many online services so it may be considered even more of an inconvenience. The City of Columbus operated on a four-day work week for many years, but according to a WCBI report the City returned to a five day work week in August 2020 out of concerns that residents had limited access to City services (with not having the City offices open on Fridays.)

Other Considerations: The Public Works Director has discussed how hard it is on equipment "running it all day, ten hours at a time, four days a week." Perhaps, for some tasks, it would make more sense to spread the workload over another day and would result in less wear and tear on equipment. Maybe even a six-day work week. Or it may be that a rolling system is considered—so the City is open on Fridays, but maybe not all employees work every Friday. Is a four-day work week realistic? How many times do department heads get called in on Fridays but are supposed to have the day off? Can city officials really take Friday off when industry leaders that may consider doing business or relocating, want to meet on a Friday?

U.S. Gallup Poll/What Others are Saying: In many reports we've read, including Gallup, employees "love" the idea of a shorter work week. In another report, young parents did not like a four-day work week because they struggle to find childcare with extended hours. Interesting to note though, in a **March 2020 U.S. Gallop Poll, a shorter work week shows a higher percentage of disengaged employees. In other words, "if the goal is to build an engaging workplace culture, reducing the work week may not be the place to start," said Jim Harter, PhD, coauthor of Wellbeing at Work, a book that explores how to create thriving teams.** In the same study, U.S. Gallup asked 10,364 full-time employees the number of days they typically work.

Only 5% of respondents work four days a week, while 84% reported five days and 11% reported six days in the Gallup Poll. Yet, here is

the City of Columbus as an outlier and may be making decisions based on feelings and void of data. "A lot of employees don't like coming in five days a week," commented the Director of Human Resources in a WCBI interview on the City returning to four days a week. Never-the-less, those employees that live out of town and have an hour or more commuting time probably really appreciate only having to travel four days a week. Wouldn't it be ironic if the director of Human Resources were one of those employees?

Regardless of days worked per week, two-thirds or more of engaged employees reported thriving in their overall lives. How many cities in Mississippi, have a four-day work week and do it successfully? After a little research, we could not find any other city in the state that operated under a four-day work week. The City of Southaven voted to go to a four-day work week in December 2008, but when we called (and talked to several different employees) no one remembered a four-day work week and were unsure of how long the city operated that way. Today, "and for several years" the administration works five days a week. The Southaven employees also pointed out many other departments work six and seven days a week.



Keep an eye out for Lula Taylor as you drive down Military Road. If you are lucky enough to catch her sitting on her front porch, be sure to honk and wave. She is the "Mayor of Military" and her friendly smile and cheerful gestures will brighten your day.

**"NOBODY IS GONNA HIT AS HARD AS LIFE,
BUT IT AIN'T HOW HARD YOU CAN HIT.
IT'S HOW HARD YOU CAN GET HIT AND
KEEP MOVING FORWARD. IT'S HOW MUCH YOU
CAN TAKE, AND KEEP MOVING FORWARD
THAT'S HOW WINNING IS DONE."**

—Rocky Balboa

Planner Without a Plan

Continued from Page 3

and cleaning.) Our concerns were viewed as a complaint as noted in the September 1, 2020 council meeting, where the City Attorney responded that "no dilapidated property is exempted and 16th Section property is treated like all other property." No action was taken.

A Better Columbus took on (and no one else was willing to do it) a 16th Section Safety net program, to prevent properties from losing their special provisions and becoming worthless.

The process involves ensuring all 16th Section properties without prior sales of tax liens receive the minimum bid so that the lease interest does not escheat to the state.

Still No Plan:

When the City and County met jointly in March, the County was receptive to partnering in eliminating blight. But when they asked for specifics--a plan-- city planner responded that he hadn't put a plan together yet as he was waiting for the County to approve funds first. (This is the exact opposite of what should happen. Typically, when someone wants to ask for funds, one is prepared to demonstrate where funds go and how they will be spent. Making the donor have confidence in the project it's funding.)

So, now the "interim" city planner wants citizens to step out on faith that he can clean up the city if we give him a million dollars of "free money"? How much money has been already wasted, grants missed, and responsibility

shirked under the "interim" city planner role? Does anybody think it looks like Columbus has a plan in action?

The City has identified over two hundred properties that are dilapidated properties. Recently, the Code Enforcement Director said the City needs only "a couple of weeks" to get the dilapidated properties cleaned up. Is this believable or achievable? Why do the colorful monthly code enforcement reports not include a detailed inventory of properties under abatement orders and the current status?

If what has been happening is going according to plan, then all can forecast the future of higher taxes, more crime, more debt, and lower quality of life.

Blight Solutions:

Artist & Entrepreneur Relocation Program: Paducah, Kentucky, like Columbus, is both a river and hospital town, also has a population of about 25,000. "Lower Town," a historic area close to downtown had been declining for years, despite once being a thriving neighborhood. Neighbors brainstormed ideas and asked the City for an increase of community police patrols, aggressive code enforcement, and the Artist Relocation Program.

The community decided to start with recruitment of artists and entrepreneurs (obvious reasons is that many tend to choose not to have children or are fine with being somewhere and seeing how the schools are when they have a child of school age.) Incentives were offered to purchase dilapidated homes and fix them up.

It helped reduce a large inventory of homes,

improved home sales,

and property values mainly through code enforcement. In Columbus, people observe the low inventory of homes for sale, but the City has identified over 200 dilapidated properties that if the codes were enforced could either be sold, fixed up, or demolished for new construction, but for now, the properties sit, rot, and invite illicit behavior.

In Paducah, many structures were completely renovated or brought up to code, new infill construction has taken place, changing attitudes not only in Lower Town, but the entire city. The Artist Relocation Program recruited over 75 new artists/residents/businesses to Lowertown and over \$30 million in private investments and growing with only \$2 million coming from the City's General Fund. Paducah now serves as a model for communities throughout the nation.

Paducah is only one example of a success plan implementation. Several other successful plans, some directed at making slumlords provide better housing conditions, have been evaluated and could be customized and implemented. Funding a plan without details, forecasts, measurables, and controls will fuel corruption and failure. There are probably a few well-connected individuals hoping the non-plan plan gets funded. For the citizens, let's hope for reasoned judgement, enforce the code on a thorough, timely basis and hold the local government accountable. A cleaner Columbus is A Better Columbus. The planner submitted a "Blight Elimination Program Guide" for Tuesday's, April 5 Council Meeting. The guide was void of relevant content and certainly could not be considered a plan, but possibly a concept. Go to www.ABetterColumbus.net to review the summary and critique of the guide.



RECIPES BY MEREDITH

"FILLED" EGGS

- Ingredients:**
- 12 eggs hardboiled
 - Mayonnaise
 - Salt and Pepper to taste
 - 1 tsp. hot sauce
 - Paprika
 - Bacon
 - Dill Pickles
 - Pickled Okra

Preparation:

Bring eggs to a boil then turn eye off and cover with tight lid and let sit for 12 minutes. Run under cool water and peel. Slice eggs in half and remove yolk. Add mayonnaise, salt and pepper and hot sauce to egg yolks and mix well. Fill a Ziploc bag with egg mixture and snip off one corner so you can pipe the mixture into eggs. Sprinkle paprika on each egg then garnish with a piece of bacon and a half a slice of dill pickle.

My daughter came up with the name because the eggs are "filled" with stuff!

- Meredith M. Fraser



★ LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD ★
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Cathryn Boreer Hired as CLCC Director



Cathryn Boreer

Columbus, Miss., - The Columbus Lowndes Chamber of Commerce is pleased to announce Cathryn Borer as the new Chamber Director. Prior to joining the Chamber, she was employed at Annunciation Catholic School as the Testing Coordinator.

"I'm thrilled for the opportunity to connect with my community through an organization that makes such a positive impact on the place we call home," said Borer. "I can't wait to work with our existing membership on the awesome programs we have and recruit new members to join the effort."

Working with the CLCC Board of Directors and Chamber volunteers, Borer's duties will include membership recruitment and retention, public relations, programming and organizational administration of the Chamber. The Columbus Lowndes Chamber of Commerce represents approximately 450 businesses that employ more than 5,000 community members.

"So much of the Chamber's programming efforts involve military and education sectors, both of which Cathryn has extensive experience with," said Joe Max Higgins, CEO of the

Golden Triangle Development LINK, the oversight organization of the CLCC. "Her enthusiasm for bringing value to the membership and new ideas are going to be great for the Chamber."

Borer has both a bachelor's and master's degree from Mississippi University for Women. Her professional experience has been mainly in the education sector and she comes to the Chamber with a lengthy history of community involvement and volunteerism.

She is married to USAF Lieutenant Colonel Luke Borer and they have two sons William (11) and Henry (9).

The Mission of the Columbus Lowndes Chamber of Commerce is to promote a favorable business climate and increase membership value for our Chamber members through a cooperative, community effort.



The cherry trees in front of Welty Hall on the MUW campus survived the recent wind storm and will hopefully remain as pretty for the upcoming Homecoming Week.

Columbus Trivia Did You Know?

Columbus' Spring Pilgrimage is an 80-year tradition, featuring some of the most historic privately owned homes in the United States

To serve on some of the City's boards, individuals do not have to be a city resident. For example, Jackson, MS resident, Joey Henderson, and Lowndes County, MS resident, Kevin Stafford, each serves on the Columbus Development Board. [See the schedule of board openings in this issue.]

"At No Cost to the City" is a common phrase thrown around at City Hall regarding travel. When city employees still earn pay and benefits during these periods away that is still a cost. If someone else must fill the role while the employee is away that is an additional cost. If nobody must fill the role is that role necessary?

The FBI shows that the City of Columbus Police Department has not reported crime statistics since 2013. Failure to participate in the voluntary crime statistics program disqualifies police departments for certain grants.

The City of Columbus currently contains approximately 25 square miles after the last annexation in 2014 that added three square miles, five miles of road, and 1,462 residents. <https://cdispatch.com/news/2014-09-20/judge-approves-columbus-annexation/>

WORD SEARCH ANSWERS

N	O	I	T	A	I	C	N	U	N	N	A	A	H	Z	L	Q
B	X	M	S	F	D	B	Z	E	Y	L	E	E	H	I	G	H
Y	C	L	H	S	Q	W	N	O	M	E	G	M	Q	B	L	X
B	I	U	A	U	Q	D	W	A	S	J	Y	D	X	L	L	
I	S	W	D	F	F	S	Y	H	W	N	X	Z	T	L	M	B
X	P	H	O	S	J	S	A	O	O	L	O	A	A	H	F	R
S	A	I	W	K	W	E	R	T	E	L	I	H	Q	O	Z	I
R	V	T	L	U	G	H	L	A	E	D	N	I	K	S	U	V
H	F	E	A	U	I	O	I	H	D	A	I	L	L	U	B	E
Y	X	H	W	C	R	O	O	T	D	E	O	F	D	X	R	R
W	A	A	N	R	C	M	F	L	E	L	C	L	X	G	N	V
X	L	L	E	Z	E	T	A	E	L	A	D	E	S	O	R	I
R	N	L	L	S	S	B	Z	U	Y	P	R	S	H	Z	S	E
L	D	B	T	H	Y	L	R	E	V	A	W	C	N	T	Y	W
I	Y	E	B	O	K	N	Q	Z	Y	W	L	F	H	S	N	T
N	A	H	F	K	R	P	Q	T	A	O	H	Q	H	E	C	O
D	K	G	T	W	E	L	V	E	G	A	B	L	E	S	S	O

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

Crossword puzzle grid with answers filled in:

- 1 Across: CARADINE
- 2 Across: SNOWDOWN
- 3 Across: ONEHUNDREDELEVEN
- 4 Across: THEVALLO
- 5 Across: MCBEE
- 6 Across: SIXTEENTH
- 7 Across: FINCH
- 8 Across: TALES
- 9 Down: BASTION
- 10 Down: MCBEE
- 11 Down: THEVALLO
- 12 Down: SNOWDOWN
- 13 Down: THEVALLO
- 14 Down: FINCH
- 15 Down: TALES
- 16 Down: THEVALLO

Columbus, MS Boards and Commissions

<https://ms-columbus.civicplus.com/288/Appointed-Boards-Commission-and-Committe>

Board	Appointee	Term Expires	Term (Yrs)	Board	Appointee	Term Expires	Term (Yrs)
Development Code Board	unfilled	1/7/2022	unfilled	Zoning Board	Kevin Stafford	3/1/2024	3
GTR Airport Board	Gawyn Mitchell	6/20/2022	5	School Board	Fredrick Sparks	3/5/2024	5
Housing Authority	Willie Byrd	6/20/2022	5	Utilities Commission	Micheal Tate	6/30/2024	5
Utilities Commission	Jimmy Graham	6/30/2022	5	Convention & Visitors Bureau	Elizabeth "Liz" Terry	7/3/2024	3
Development Code Board	Quinn Brislin	7/2/2022		Housing Authority	Kegdra Grey (12/21/21)	7/16/2024	5
Civil Service Commission	Rita Felton	8/15/2022	4	Civil Service Commission	Thomas L Moore Jr	8/18/2024	4
Redevelopment Authority Bd	Mark Alexander, Sr.	9/5/2022	5	Historic Preservation Cmmsn	Kenny Frye	9/20/2024	4
Library Board	Clyde Hollis	9/30/2022	5	Library Board	Hillary Richardson	10/1/2024	5
Convention & Visitors Bureau	Thomas L. Moore	10/1/2022	4	Redevelopment Authority Bd	Dennis Erby	10/15/2024	5
Planning Commission	Chuck Bigelow	10/4/2022	3	Planning Commission	Evelyn Vidrine	12/1/2024	3
Planning Commission	MacArthur Inge	10/4/2022	3	Planning Commission	Quincy Harris	12/1/2024	3
Development Code Board	Ralph McLain	11/3/2022		Planning Commission	Melissa S. Smith	12/4/2024	3
Planning Commission	Jarvis Fenster	11/19/2022	3	Zoning Board	Stephen McBride	12/4/2024	3
Tree Board	Michael Foster	12/3/2022	3	Tree Board	Barbara Bigelow	12/18/2024	3
Tree Board	Mildred Monroe	12/3/2022	3	Waste Management Authority	Lesia T. Jackson	12/20/2024	4
Waste Management Authority	Julie Goodin	12/31/2022	4	Waste Management Authority	Kathy Goodwin	12/31/2024	4
Development Code Board	Joey Henderson	1/15/2023		Tree Board	Tanner Imes	1/2/2025	3
Tree Board	Carol Boggess	2/7/2023	3	School Board	Telisa Clay Young	3/3/2025	5
Development Code Board	Kevin Stafford	3/1/2023		Convention & Visitors Bureau	Jay Patel	3/5/2025	3
School Board	Yvonne Cox	3/2/2023	5	Historic Preservation Cmmsn	Bryan Brown	5/18/2025	4
Convention & Visitors Bureau	Melodie Cuningham	3/3/2023	3	Historic Preservation Cmmsn	Emily Johnson	5/24/2025	4
Convention & Visitors Bureau	Whirllie Byrd	3/3/2023	3	Utilities Commission	Brandy Gardner	6/16/2025	5
Zoning Board	Chris Chain	3/3/2023	3	Election Commission	George T. Sumrall	6/30/2025	4
Zoning Board	Rob Graham	3/3/2023	3	Election Commission	Julie C. Parker	6/30/2025	4
Tree Board	Bruce Sansing, Jr.	4/7/2023	3	Election Commission	Lavonne L. Harris	6/30/2025	4
Tree Board	Reid Nevins	4/19/2023	3	Election Commission	Linda Jean Harris	6/30/2025	4
Historic Preservation Cmmsn	Ann Davis	5/19/2023	4	Election Commission	Penasha M-Harrison	6/30/2025	4
Historic Preservation Cmmsn	Joseph S. Boggess	5/19/2023	4	Housing Authority	Vivian S. Irby	7/7/2025	5
Historic Preservation Cmmsn	Barbara Bigelow	6/2/2023	4	Historic Preservation Cmmsn	Bart Lawrence, Jr.	9/5/2025	4
Historic Preservation Cmmsn	Amber Brislin	6/18/2023	4	Redevelopment Authority Bd	Chris Chain	9/15/2025	5
Utilities Commission	Jabari Edwards	6/19/2023	5	Library Board	Sameca R. Gaines	10/16/2025	5
Historic Preservation Cmmsn	Dr. Julie Parker	7/2/2023	4	Waste Management Authority	Robert Smith	12/31/2025	4
Housing Authority	Greg Lewis	7/3/2023	5	School Board	Josie Shumake	3/1/2026	5
Civil Service Commission	Dr. Maxine Hall	8/4/2023	4	Utilities Commission	Sherry Ellis	6/15/2026	5
Redevelopment Authority Bd	Robert Rhett	9/1/2023	5	Housing Authority	Gretta Gardner	7/5/2026	5
Library Board	Christian G. Heinkel	9/30/2023	5	Redevelopment Authority Bd	Marthalie M. Porter	9/1/2026	5
LINK Board	Bill West	10/1/2023	2	Library Board	Randi Robinson	9/30/2026	5
Waste Management Authority	Roger Burlingame	12/31/2023	4	School Board	Cynthia Brown	3/20/2027	5
Development Code Board	Bryan Brown	1/2/2024		Planning Commission	City Engineer	ex officio	
Planning Commission	Quinn Brislin	1/20/2024	3	Planning Commission	Mayor	ex officio	
Planning Commission	Wythe Rhett	1/20/2024	3	City County Airport Board	Pierre Beard		
Zoning Board	Bo Harrison	2/17/2024	3	City County Airport Board	Rusty Greene		