

## The year brought change in leadership in towns

### JANUARY

Franklin County got off to an expensive start for taxpayers in 2022.

Engineers rebid a new 911 center, hoping scaled back plans and a different construction environment would help them meet their budget.

The gamble failed.

Instead, designers presented county commissioners with bid results that were higher than the ones they rejected four months before.

The county agreed to spend \$50,000 more for 900 fewer square feet of space. The total cost worked out to \$912 per square foot, not including the land.

•That wasn't the only expensive county project approved in January.

Commissioners agreed to move forward with a nearly \$22 million contract with Florida-based Williams Communications to build a 700/800 MHz digital simulcast trunked radio network.

Williams was chosen over VIPER, which stands for Voice Interoperability Plan for Emergency Responders.

•Youngsville commissioners approved a development agreement that paved the way for an 85-acre, 362-unit residential development along one of the town's busiest corridors.

•With COVID cases spiralling upward across the nation and Franklin County, fueled by the Omicron variant, the Franklin County Board of Education voted to keep a mask mandate in place for the foreseeable future.

The move came as Franklin County COVID cases are rising at a "meteoric" rate, according to local health department officials, who said the county had the highest-ever single-day number of new cases, 206, on Dec. 28 which was surpassed on Jan. 3 with 213 new cases.

•The Louisburg Town Council agreed to extend its water agreement with Franklin County.

The council approved an amendment to its water contract with Franklin County that would tie them to a three-year deal and increase rates, going from the current rate of \$3.50 per 1,000 gallons to \$3.75 per 1,000 gallons, effective on Aug. 1.

•COVID-19 cases, mostly because of the Omicron variant, were spiraling upward across the nation and North Carolina — and unfortunately Franklin County was no exception.

North Carolina reached 20,000 deaths from the virus with the number expected to climb, although vaccines and booster shots significantly reduced the death rate, according to health department officials.

•Franklin County commissioners agreed to move forward with a 15-year financing agreement to pull the public utilities department into the future.

Public Utilities Director Chris Doherty and county consultant Adam Kiker with LKC Engineering presented the board with plans to install an automated meter reading system for all the county's water and sewer customers.

•Architects were getting closer to presenting commissioners with plans for a new judicial complex and administration facility. A preliminary price tag of more than \$40 million was expected.

•The Omicron variant of COVID-19 was making its presence in the county schools. There was some good news near the end of the month as the number of students experiencing new infections dropped from the 283 recorded one week to 211 new cases a week later.

But school staff members weren't faring as well. The number of infected staff members jumped from 53 recorded to 66 in one week, a 25 percent increase.

### FEBRUARY

•Franklin County's Innovative Young Farmer of the Year was a Franklin Countian with a name that mirrors his occupation — Jason Farmer.

Jason began his career in the sod production industry upon graduating from North Carolina State University in 2009 with a degree in Turfgrass Science.

After marrying his wife, Natalie in 2012, Jason returned with her to a full-time farming operation in 2013 at Wester Farms. In

February 2020 with the passing of Len Wester, Jason assumed all the day-to-day operations of Wester Farms.

•Franklin County commissioners heard its medical director say the county needed to fire its emergency services director, remove the county manager from emergency services oversight and bring back its "ousted" emergency services director.

The county's Emergency Medical Services was operating under the medical license of Dr. Barbara Stiehl.

She appeared before commissioners and staff on to express her dissatisfaction with the departure of Hendrix Valenzuela, who resigned his leadership position within the department as its emergency services director.

Stiehl alleges the county's human resources office and County Manager Kim Denton forced Valenzuela's resignation.

•Franklin County Schools were reporting about a 50 percent drop, week to week, of COVID cases among both staff and students.

The numbers mirrored national statistics which were tending to indicate that the Omicron variant cases had peaked even as the nation has surpassed more than 900,000 dead in the pandemic.

Locally, the county schools reported that 76 students were diagnosed with COVID last week, down 52 percent from the 157 reported a week earlier.

•Not many people can boast 52 years of dedicated service to their jobs — but then not many people are Mrs. Rosa Johnson! She began her career working for Franklin County Schools on Feb. 16, 1970 and on Feb. 14, 2022, she found herself accepting an award from the school system for her years of dedicated service to Laurel Mill Elementary School, some 52 years later.

•The Louisburg Town Council approved one of the largest single annexations in town history then, after a nearly 90-minute secret session, emerged to tighten council control of town business in moves some observers said appeared to be an effort to put pressure on town Administrator Jonathan Franklin.

The annexation of the Greenhill Subdivision, on the site of the former golf course, was approved unanimously and will expand the town by up to 151 homes over the three phases of its construction.

But the most far-reaching of the council's action came after a long, closed door session when the council took steps to tighten control of town operations. After emerging from the closed-door session, the council:

1) Agreed to limit town Administrator Jonathan Franklin's authority to spend money to just \$1,000 without the council's prior approval.

2) Decided that only the council would hire department heads or supervisors, not the town administration.



**A JANUARY 'SNO-PRIZE'.** A much anticipated batch of cold weather accompanied by a little precipitation blanketed Franklin County with a thin covering of snow in January. The snow, much less than some forecasters predicted, caused few problems and roads and streets were quickly cleared. Because of the warm weather leading up to the storm, ponds and lakes like the ones shown here remained free of ice, a fact that must have been greatly appreciated by the Canada geese seen paddling quietly along the pond in the above photo. That pond is along East River Road near Louisburg.

### MARCH

•Filings for the spring primary and general election were winding down.

Already, political races were guaranteed for sheriff, school board seats, county commission posts and state representation.

In June, Sheriff Kent Winstead announced that he would not seek re-election, apparently bringing forth a number of candidate prospects.

•Franklin and county officials were set to meet with regional transportation staff to figure out how they'll move forward with a nearly \$3 million "rails to trails" grant to build a trail from Franklinton to Louisburg.

•The Louisburg Municipal Fire District had achieved a rating of "2" which was to go into effect on June 1.

Likewise, the Central Franklin Rural District achieved a rating of 4/9E, also to be effective on June 1.

•Embattled Louisburg Town Administrator Jonathan Franklin was on his way out of town. The Newton Town Council voted to make Franklin the offer to become that city of nearly 13,000 residents its new town manager. Newton is in Catawba County near Hickory.

Franklin had come under increasing pressure in the last month following a 90-minute secret session of the town board in late February.

•A superior court judge ended a two-year confederate monument legal dispute when he ruled that a dozen Franklin County resi-

dents who challenged its moving had no legal standing to do so.

Superior Court Judge Michael O'Foghludha relied on precedent in two "very important" appellate court cases — both of which dealt with the issue of legal standing — which had been decided since the legal challenge was filed in Franklin County in June 2022.

Essentially, O'Foghludha said, published case law doesn't give the defendants standing because they suffered no specific harm which would be required to give them the ability to bring a lawsuit.

•A study of the county's emergency services system revealed that the county will need to invest more in its workers, facilities and vehicles to sustain operations.

The county hired the Center for Public Safety Management [CPSM] to conduct a comprehensive assessment of its EMS system, focusing on how and where it deploys resources, and determining how best the system can move forward.

During the board's Monday night meeting, consultant Matt Zavadsky presented the findings that highlighted the challenges facing EMS, from staffing, system design and infrastructure needs, dispatch and response processes, as well as how to make improvements — offering competitive salaries, a plan to improve fleet rollout, plans for at least three new EMS stations and plans to improve the county's dispatch and response process.

"The EMS agency here in Franklin County has a lot of challenges," Zavadsky said.

•Retired Chief Resident Superior Court Judge Robert Hobgood received the John B. McMillan Distinguished Service Award in the Franklin County courtroom he presided over for more than 38 years. Presenting him the award on behalf of the North Carolina State Bar was local attorney Charles Davis, himself a recipient of the award in 2017. Judge Allen Cobb said Hobgood has a "sterling judicial reputation" and was known for putting service above self.

### APRIL

•A superior court judge permanently disqualified former Franklin County Clerk of Court Patricia Chastain from holding the office ever again.

Judge Thomas H. Lock issued the order nearly three weeks after listening to arguments about Chastain's future.

Chastain's attorneys had filed a motion to have her immediately reinstated as Clerk of Superior Court, get back pay from the time of her removal, and any other relief the court deemed appropriate.

•Franklin County commissioners agreed to purchase three ambulances and begin efforts to replace a Bunn EMS station, the first public actions taken to address a study of the county's EMS system that highlighted several shortcomings.

Staff and officials, though, noted that the actions are just the first of several steps the county has planned to bolster its emergency services system.

•A huge new multi-use development — probably the largest of its type ever proposed in Franklin County's history — was brought before the Louisburg Planning Board.


Continued on next page



**Some 'Unmask Our Kids' popped up at the Franklin County Board of Education meeting in February.**



**CONDEMNATION RESULTS.** A track loader tears into a small house in Louisburg January 28, hours after the structure's owner saw it condemned by town officials. The owner missed several deadlines for repairing the building and it was destroyed — with the owner to be billed for the demolition and cleanup. The adjacent two-story home to the left was not part of the condemnation.

  
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## APRIL (continued)

If Louisburg Falls is built as the plans indicated, it would represent an investment of about \$112 million in Louisburg, increasing the town's property tax valuation by roughly 30 percent or about \$506,000 in additional property taxes per year.

The total property tax increase to Franklin County is projected at \$894,758 at build out.

•Franklin County commissioners were asked to fund the county school system to the tune of \$24,360,124 for the 2022-23 school fiscal year which begins on July 1. That's an increase of about \$1,638,252 over the funding provided for the current school year.

The request came on a unanimous vote by the Franklin County Board of Education.

The funding represented \$2,167 per student.

•The sheriff's office held a memorial for a canine killed in the line of duty. K-9 Major was shot and killed in Granville County while trying to help authorities apprehend an armed robber in the Antioch Community of Granville County.

•Franklin County commissioners announced their new town manager, tasking Zachary Steffey with leading the town into the future.

Steffey, 29, followed Gregory Bethea as town manager in late June.

•After meeting in a secret, closed-door session for an hour and eight minutes Monday night, the Louisburg Town Council selected Jonathan Barlow of Cary as the town's temporary administrator following the resignation of Jonathan Franklin.

Franklin, whose last day was April 22, left to take the town manager's job in Newton in Catawba County after facing increasing pressure from the Louisburg board, which unexpectedly reduced his authority earlier this year without explanation for their actions.

•The Northeast Franklin Revitalization Committee partnered with Vance Granville Community College's Small Business Center to put 12 people through the college's entrepreneur course.

The goal is to help those 12 either establish a business plan and viable new venture or expand a current one.

## MAY

•The Louisburg Town Council agreed to spend \$57,472 more to stabilize the controversial Depot Hill project and protect it from the weather before "mothballing" the project to determine how — and whether — to proceed with the \$2.1 million rehabilitation project.

The action came during a tense, sometimes confrontational 90-minute special meeting where the only topic was the Depot Hill property.

As designed, the Depot Hill project would include a large public meeting room, a commercial kitchen and a commissary kitchen that could be used by food truck operators to prepare food.

•It's a familiar building with a critical purpose that's located centrally in Louisburg — but it has a new name.

Once called the Louisburg Police and Fire Training Center, the structure has been named the Karl T. Pernell Public Safety Complex in honor of a man who gave 65 years of service to the community — and who says he's still ready to help if he's needed.

In a ceremony, the sign was unveiled after several public officials expressed their appreciation to Pernell, a long-time mayor, town councilman and firefighter.

•COVID was still stalking Franklin County — and health officials warned that the warning signs are "flashing yellow" as local cases increased.

"Flashing yellow" means Franklin County is starting to trend toward higher community transmission, health officials said. Red is the most significant warning



**GARDEN CREW.** Established in 2018, Franklinton Community Garden members help raise food for seniors and needy families. Volunteers, from left, Pierre and Claudette Giani, Bill Jones, Bernie Meader, Bill Sloop, Joyce Roberts and Jessica Jones. Bruce Womack, not pictured, was still in the garden. (Times photo by Carey Johnson)

level and only Alamance County was still designated as red. Green is the lowest level of warning.

Franklin County's positivity rate had increased to 11.7 percent and it was in double digits from April 24 through April 30, the last dates that the data was available.

By comparison, the positivity rate was 2 percent on April 4 — and the trend to double digit positivity rates hadn't been seen here since the end of February.

•The main news from the Louisburg Town Council wasn't what it did but rather what it "undid."

After huddling in a closed-door session for nearly 45 minutes to discuss "personnel," members emerged to "rescind the restrictions" they had placed on the town administrator in February, a move that many perceived as an effort to oust Town Administrator Jonathan Franklin.

Franklin left in April to become town manager of Newton.

In February, the council agreed to limit Franklin's authority to spend money to just \$1,000 without the council's prior approval. In addition, the council decided that only the council would hire department heads or supervisors, not the town administration.

But that changed Monday, after the council rescinded restrictions passed in February.

•Franklin County commissioners got their first chance at a budget that proposed to add new employees, raise salaries and lower the tax rate. It also cut into the school system's operating request by just more than \$1.3 million.

•The Franklin County school system was preparing to pull money from savings to cover the gap between what it requested and what county management was proposing to provide in 2022-23.

The school system requested \$22.86 million in operating expenses. County Manager Kim Denton presented county commissioners with a budget that proposed to provide the system with operating expenses of \$21.47 million — a \$1.38

million cutback.

•The Louisburg Town Council got a detailed look at a proposed 2022-23 budget that included no tax increase and a 5 percent rise in electricity rates during a special meeting last week.

Of that total, the general fund totals \$4,753,923 — and in the form that town Finance Director Sean Medlin presented the document, no tax increase is required and all general fund fees and charges will remain the same.

•The Bunn community celebrated the lives of twin brothers who were killed in a single vehicle wreck. A memorial service was held at Bunn High School for Gabriel and Garrett Cribb, 16-year-old sophomores and active members of the sporting community there. The memorial service at Bunn High School came a week after they were killed in a car crash while driving along Howard Tant Road.

## JUNE

•Elections officials certified the primary election through a canvass that generated no significant changes from the May 17 election.

If there's need for a second primary in July, (there was) officials talked about expanding one-stop voting hours — which would give voters more opportunities to cast a ballot.

•Eligible candidates were nearing a deadline to request a runoff, but one candidate had already made the notifications.

During the May 17 primary, School Board candidates Steven Gupton edged out incumbent Elizabeth Keith, Tammy Raynor Petrosillo bested Christopher Perry and incumbent Paige Sayles beat Erin Patterson Reid in Districts 3, 5 and at-large 7, respectively, as their closest competitor.

General statutes require school board races to be settled by at least 50 percent of the vote, however, no one in the multi-candidate races achieved that mark —

allowing the closest vote getter to request a runoff.

The second primary date was scheduled for July 26.

•Without any discussion Tuesday night, Franklinton commissioners agreed to let staff present the public with a proposed budget that would raise taxes by five cents and cut department requests across the board, including one new police department position and eight new vehicles.

Commissioners met to discuss the budget, but during the public portion of the meeting, only acknowledged that management would make a balanced budget available to the public on June 1.

•The Franklin County Early College High School class of 2022 was about to graduate.

"Let me tell you," Early College High School Principal Erica Shoulders-Royster said during the school's May 26 graduation, "my babies worked hard."

"It was five years for some of them. It was four years for some of them, but not only did they graduate with a high school diploma, but an associate's degree."

As part of commencement, 37 students received their high school diploma and a number of college course credits.

•It became more expensive to live in or operate a business in Louisburg in the town's new budget. The budget raised the cost of electricity by 5 percent.

For the "average" residential customer that amounts to about \$7.59 per month on the electric-only portion of their town bill.

In addition, the town council increased the cost of residential sanitation rates by \$3.30 per month — from \$26.70 to \$30.

According to town officials, that would generate \$43,560 additional per year and allow the town-operated trash collection system to eliminate its operating deficit.

The proposed changes in the town's budget came during a workshop session on, June 1, and the final document was to be the subject of a public hearing on June 19.

•Franklin County commissioners approved a \$101 million budget that lowered the tax rate, provides employees with a bonus and includes a compromise that provides the school system with more funding than the county manager originally proposed.

While the county did not fund the school system's entire request, the initial budget proposal added \$250,000 more than what the county funded the previous year.

•Two significant items sailed through the Louisburg Town Council, both unanimously and with neither debate nor discussion.

The council approved rezoning 45 acres at the intersection of U.S. 401 and Fox Park Road as one step toward turning the proposed Louisburg Falls mixed-used development into reality.

The council approved its budget for the 2022-23 fiscal year that raised the cost of electricity by 5 percent — but kept the property tax rate unchanged.

Continued on next page



**Ben Castor is the center of attention for officers, first responders on May 26, Ben's seventh birthday. They all wanted to do something special for Ben, due to his history of health issues.**

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## JUNE (continued)

•Franklinton commissioners approved a \$3.38 million budget, but not before cutting two public-private projects from the budget.

And, they agreed to use \$300,000 from savings to balance the current budget.

Both of those decisions were made unanimously. New Town Manager Zach Steffey presented commissioners and the public with the 2021-22 budget amendment.

"It's my second day here, so I'm kind of jumping right into it," said Steffey, who replaced outgoing Manager Gregory Bethea, who led the town since September of 2018.

•The annual Relay for Life to raise money to fight cancer featured Jane Goswick and Evelyn Blackwell, both cancer survivors, leading the walk. This year's event supported cancer survivor Dale Byrns, as well as other survivors.

•Bunn commissioners approved a more than \$482,430 budget that maintained a static tax rate and provided a one-time bonus to employees who plugged through the pandemic.

The 2022-23 budget also passed along a water increase to keep up with the county's hike, as well as a sewer increase that acknowledges improvements made to the system.

The town's overall utility expenses comes in at \$1.1 million.

## JULY

•Volunteers cut the ribbon on The Journey Ministry Pantry, providing much-needed meals to those in and around Youngsville.

The effort grew from the pantry that operated as part of the outreach ministry of Glory Tabernacle Church.

The Journey Ministry is a collaboration between volunteers and Brian Whitley and Giuliana Abate, who operate The Victorian and have provide the pantry with space.

•The Louisburg Town Council hired GWP Developers to study the Depot Hill project and propose development options. Their results were presented to commissioners in October/November and residents got their chance to offer feedback on Jan. 25.

•The second election primary provided a reversal of fortune for two candidates who received the highest number of votes the first go around.

During the May 17 primary, Steven Gupton beat out incumbent Elizabeth Keith by less than one percent of the vote for the District 3 School Board seat.

## Iconic Youngsville building collapses



**LANDMARK GONE.** Sudden collapse of historic building leaves a hole in downtown Youngsville. Griffin's Restaurant was a downtown landmark that collapsed in early September.

However, in the second primary, Keith beat out Gupton.

Also, in May, Tammy Raynor Petrosillo beat out Christopher Perry for the District 5 School Board seat.

But, Perry won the second primary.

•Patricia Burnette Chastain's battle to get her clerk of court post back continued, but during a July hearing, a judge denied a motion that could have put her on the ballot.

Ultimately, Chastain was able to earn an ability to be on the ballot, but she was beaten by incumbent Shelley Dickerson.

Chastain's petition that she was wronged by the courts and deserves her position continues upon appeal.

•Crystal Hobby and Joni McPhetridge joined forces to start a farmer's market in Franklinton.

The farmers market is open on Saturdays, from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. during the summer.

They are open from 10-2 in the fall.

## AUGUST

•Franklin County commissioners approved an incentive policy that county management said would aid in the hiring process.

The Hiring Incentive and Referral Incentive Policy provides an incentive of between \$500 and \$3,000 to new hires.

It also offers current employees a bonus

of \$250 for each person that they successfully refer to the county for employment.

•The communities of Bunn and Louisburg took part in National Night Out, an event designed to spark better communication between law enforcement and other first responders and the community.

•The Louisburg Town Council agreed to move forward with purchasing the old gas station, a .17-acre site at the corner of N. Main and Franklin streets.

The building and .17-acre property has a taxable value of \$98,160, according to the county's tax office.

As part of the agreement, the town leased the property for \$36,000 for the first year, using it as a staging area for utility work done in the area.

The agreement also included an option to buy the property for \$425,000 -- minus the \$36,000 for the first year's lease. The town allocated \$25,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funds to assist with the purchase, staff said.

The exact use of the property has not been determined.

•Franklin County's class of 2022 captured \$6,832,842 in scholarships, grants and other aid to further their educations beyond high school, the Franklin County Board of Education reported.

•Youngsville police revealed they have dedicated a safe space in their parking lot, where residents and those nearby can conduct children custody exchanges, e-commerce transactions or other matters in a place that is surveilled and maintained by police.

•The state revealed a draft State Transportation Improvement Program plan that, if holds up, would secure improvements to U.S. 401 through Louisburg.

Plans to lengthen the county airport runway, along with plans to change the face of Bickett Boulevard via roundabouts and converting it to a four-lane highway with a median, would also be ensured.

To learn more about the STIP, visit <https://www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/Transportation/stip/development/Pages/default.aspx>.

•The Louisburg Town Council approved the 68-home College Park subdivision on 22.7 acres west of N. Main Street, between Louisburg High and Louisburg College.

•The opening of Wake Prep Academy was delayed as developers tried to improve traffic signals at the entrance to handle traffic.

Ultimately, the school was opened in September — but did encounter traffic congestion in its first few weeks.

The issue was resolved with staggered starts.

•Franklin County commissioners spent \$200,000 to purchase the old movie theater downtown.

It's purpose has yet to be revealed, however, it's anticipated that it would be demolished to make way for improvements to the courthouse annex.

•It was revealed that Franklin County agreed to pay Maria Parham \$2 million as part of its lease agreement, in an effort to help the hospital sustain itself at its Louisburg location.

•The first group of entrepreneurs sponsored by the Northeast Franklin Revitalization Committee earned certificates and seed money through a partnership with Vance-Granville Community College.

The goal is to spur new business or bolster existing business in the northeast and rural areas of the county.

## SEPTEMBER

•The iconic Griffin's Restaurant building in the heart of Youngsville collapsed — a day before work to stabilize the structure was set to take place.

Property owner and State Rep. Matthew Winslow said a storm that swept through the previous weekend damaged the front corner of the two-story building.

During the Labor Day weekend, the roof collapsed and the building — which was expected to become the home of a new venture — craters.

No injuries were reported.

•Youngsville commissioners approved a 350-acre development that, among other things, could hold the key to speed up plans for a bypass.

Rolling Meadows developers have committed to building one-third of the leg necessary for the bypass around Youngsville, as soon as their build-out warrants.

Youngsville has adopted a resolution in support of the project and have forwarded it to the county, asking commissioners to expedite the water and sewer allocation that Rolling Meadows need to get started.

County commissioners were expected to discuss the matter at its next meeting.

Continued on next page



**FUN FOR ALL.** Above, Kids ride around in a tractor-powered train driven (and built) by Marty Hall during Bunn Fun Day in September. Bunn Fun Day returned to the town after a pandemic-induced hiatus cancelled the event for two years. Visitors were treated to fun, food, games and music during the event held in the heart of downtown Bunn.

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## SEPTEMBER (continued)

- North Carolina provided the county with more than \$434,000 in State Parks and Recreation Trust Fund dollars to develop the Epsom Park.
- Rep. Matthew Winslow and Sen. Lisa Barnes presented the county with a ceremonial check, demonstrating the state's \$17.2 million commitment to address water woes, EMS facilities needs and court backlog.
- A big chunk of the allocation, \$8.7 million, will go toward the county's efforts to address its growing water and sewer needs.
- County commissioners approved a special use request to put a convenience center site just west of Youngsville — at a 4.72-acre site at 2275 Long Mill Road.
- The site will replace the small and heavily used site on Park Avenue.
- The site was owned by Pezza Properties LLC out of Raleigh, which bought the property from Richard Neil Holden in May 2020 for \$240,000.
- The county paid \$800,000 for the property.
- Franklin County commissioners committed to buy an old Louisburg industrial site property for \$900,000. The county would use an additional \$820,000 to improve the former Advanced Metal Processing site on T. Kemp Road.
- The county will use the site for facilities maintenance staff and space, and other storage opportunities.
- The Epsom Volunteer Fire Department celebrated its 60th anniversary with a Family Day at the firehouse in northern Franklin County.

## OCTOBER

- Gov. Roy Cooper toured PRTI, an industry leader in recycling old tires, turning them into new energy.
- The company, said CEO Chris Hare, is ready to spread its operations across the state and Cooper encouraged their efforts.
- Franklin County commissioners committed to providing \$6.3 million in incentives to a Missouri-based real estate development company intent on creating industrial site space on 106 acres at 2380 Long Mill Road.
- SRV Acquisitions LLC is expected to make a \$160 million investment.
- The Louisburg Town Council cleared the way for developer Matthew Winslow to add more than 60 acres to his planned Greenhill development.
- Franklinton created a biotechnology and life sciences zoning district in town.
- The impetus for the decision was not immediately clear, but it would help clear the way for a prospective biotech or life sciences company to operate in town.
- Youngsville residents and officials took a tour of town and engaged in activities that would be used to develop the town's plan for growth and development in the next 25 years.
- 3TP Ventures was hired to produce the document and held the tour and first community session on the project.

## NOVEMBER

- Following a closed session, Louisburg officials chose Steven Hicks as its town mayor.
- The decision was made despite some red flags and other issues that popped up during Hicks' previous government administration posts.
- Ultimately, the town rescinded that offer and hired Sean Medlin, who had been serving as the town's finance director, as its administrator.
- The town also hired Amy Weiser as its new planning and zoning administrator. She will replace Philip Slayter, who is resigning in June.
- Zackary Proctor, a Franklin County sheriff's deputy, resigned his post after the State Highway Patrol arrested him on charges of driving under the influence.
- Proctor had been with the office since 2017.
- Franklin County voters selected Kevin White as its new sheriff and Roxanne Bragg as the new county commissioner for District 2.
- White beat out Democrat Troy Wheless [who is slated to become Creedmoor's police chief in February].
- Bragg beat out incumbent Cedric Jones.

- Louisburg police investigated two shootings, one of which proved to be deadly.
- Authorities allege Thomas Lee Hicks Jr. shot and killed Ricky Shipman outside the In & Out convenience store at the corner of S. Main Street and Bunn Road.
- A few days later, officers responded to a shooting at Sheetz on Bickett Boulevard that appeared to be in self defense.
- In that case, 27-year-old Bandon Blanchard sustained injuries in the incident, but not charges have been filed.
- The incidents, though, did spark alarm in town.
- County commissioners agreed to spend \$1.4 million to purchase nearly 40 acres along U.S. 401, just south of the Walmart shopping center, apparently for the purposes of building a county administration complex.
- Kent Winstead, who opted not to seek re-election, reflected on his career in law enforcement and his tenure with the sheriff's office.
- He said he was most proud of bringing integrity and professionalism to the office.
- Two stalwarts said goodbye to public service as Bernard Hall left the Board of Education and Cedric Jones left the county commission.

## DECEMBER

- The Franklin County Board of Education was trying to cope with the loss of about \$3.5 million in state funding cuts — a drop that local staff and officials attributed to the state's miscalculation of the impact of charter schools on public education enrollment numbers.
- Novozymes bought just more than 51 acres at N.C. 56 and Mays Crossroads Road — a site that was once considered by its previous owner, Franklinton Development LLC, for residential development.
- Novozymes paid \$1.5 million for the property and a spokesperson said it's not for development, but would create a buffer for their current facility.
- An audit reflected Youngsville's strong financial position, but officials and staff warned that numbers might look a little different next time when those numbers reflect the work the town has done to improve Main Street.
- During a meeting, Louisburg Police



**THIS ONE.** Laurel Mill Elementary School Principal Genie Faulkner helps Maddox Hughes, Caden Jarman and Harper McCarter pick out the best gifts. With community help, Chris Edwards, The Northern Sportsman, organized the Christmas bounty.

Chief Jason Abbott made an impassioned plea to town leaders to boost pay for officers, in an effort to retain current officers and attract new ones.

- The Northern Sportsman, Chris Edwards, continued his tradition of helping to provide Christmas presents to all the students at Laurel Mill Elementary.
- Youngsville hired Katie Barber-Jones as its full-time town attorney.
- Louisburg staff and officials discussed lowering the speed limit along Bickett Boulevard from 45 mph to 35 mph, but no decision has been made.
- Bunn community stalwart and Town Commissioner Freddie Mack Jones passed away at 72.
- Centerville ended the year with their annual new year's parade, which took place on Dec. 31 in 2022.



Santa was the star attraction during the Louisburg parade



**CENTER OF ATTENTION.** Gov. Roy Cooper, center, talks about the innovative work taking place at PRTI, which converts waste tires into energy. Cooper was joined by local and state leaders in October.

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