

Masontown officials look back at the past year

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MASONTOWN — Borough council members looked back at a busy year after its last meeting of 2012 last week.

In January, council held its first meeting in the borough's new \$925,000 municipal complex. Located at the corner of East Church Avenue and Main Street, borough offices moved into the building in early February. The district magisterial judge and police department are also located in the complex.

"We're very happy with the new place," said council President Harry Lee. "It's working out real well. The more time that goes by, the more we realize how much more convenient it is."

In June, council paid tribute to a former longtime police chief by renaming the borough's mini-park after him.

John T. Lewis died on June 23. He was a graduate of the Masontown High School Class of 1956. Immediately after graduation, he joined the U.S. Air Force and retired after 20 years of service. Returning home, he became a member of the Masontown Police Department and retired as police chief after 27 years of service.

Redwood Mini-park is located at the corner of Central Avenue and Redwood Street.

"I thought it was a good idea — John always had a good rapport with the children in the borough," said Mayor Toni Petrus. "He was very good with kids. This is a perfect way to honor him."

Also in June, council approved a measure that allows people to pay their water bills electronically by accessing funds from a bank account or credit card. The processing fee would be \$3.50, which many council members agreed is better than a \$30 reconnection fee charged after service has been terminated because of an unpaid water bill.

"This technology helps move Masontown into the future and makes it easier for people to pay their utility bills," said Councilwoman Kim Essig.

In August, a waterline break left thousands in the area without service for a few days.

More than 4,500 customers were without water when a pipe broke near the River Road pump station between the borough's water and sewage treatment plants. To add insult to injury, the leak quickly drained the borough's 1 million-gallon water tank. The tank had to be filled before service was restored.

Fayette County Emergency Management Agency brought in water buffaloes to provide water to people. Hundreds of people walked up to the water taps to get enough water to get them through the temporary outage. Washington County provided a 8,000-gallon water tanker truck and Walmart donated 50 cases bottled water to help people in need.

Borough employees and firefighters took water to area nursing homes and the elderly in the community.

Water service was restored to most people within about 48 hours.

"We really appreciate everyone's help and cooperation when dealing with this crisis," Lee said.

Also in August, council unanimously approved a loitering ordinance after Tanya King had asked council for help controlling unruly people outside her bar on Main Street. As owner of Adolph's Tavern, King said some people loiter on the sidewalk outside the bar and cause trouble. King said there was little the bar could do to stop people loitering because they are on a public sidewalk.

Ryan said the ordinance successfully curbed the number of people loitering downtown.

"It's worked out well -- less people downtown," said police Chief Joe Ryan.

Borough council approved a resolution in October to create a bank account proceeds from the Act 13 Marcellus shale natural gas drilling impact fee.

Like many other municipalities in Fayette County, Masontown is the beneficiary of an impact fee allocation. The borough will receive \$20,518.

"That money will be helpful," Lee said.

In November, council approved the promotions of borough police officers Sgt. Jeff Standish and Cpl. Scott Miller. Standish was promoted to lieutenant and Miller was promoted to sergeant. Standish's pay will increase by 25 cents an hour and Miller's

pay by 20 cents an hour. The promotions and salary increases will become effective Tuesday.

“I think they’ve both done a wonderful job. Both are more than deserving of this. They are both dedicated and good police officers. They are very people-oriented,” said Petrus.

Also in November, the mayor and council worked in conjunction with the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority to tear down dilapidated and unsafe buildings located at 22 N. Main St.

“Tearing down these buildings will be a big improvement for our Main Street,” Petrus said. “This is getting rid of an eyesore.”