



Editor's note: "Wandering Around Washington" is a regular, exclusive column from Joe Tennis highlighting the untold stories in the county, direct from the people who live and work here. Watch for him to wander into shops, restaurants and parks to bring you the gab and gossip — only in the Washington County News.

Video series shows off tourism, business opportunities in county

When you live in one of the most beautiful counties in Virginia, well, then you should expect folks to come see what you've got to share.

That's what Tonya Triplett is promoting as the town of Abingdon's director of economic development and tourism.



Joe Tennis

You can expect the same from Audrey Wells, who fills in for economic development these days in Washington County.

I've spoken to both this past week on their ongoing plans to make Abingdon and Washington County a great place to visit or do business.

Wells, for one, has been instrumental in helping launch a series of nine videos that showcases all that's great in the county — especially when trying to lure people to put their stakes in the ground and build a business here.

A bit of those videos — filmed in 2020 with federal CARES Act funding — showed up with a preview at a recent meeting of the Washington County Board of Supervisors.

Now, the rest are set to be shown at the William King Museum of Art in Abingdon on Thursday at 4 p.m., just to give folks a taste of what's there to promote, Wells said Monday.

Those videos include everything from developing a potential rail spur at the Oak Park Industrial Park to showcasing the Virginia Creeper Trail.

These days, while the town of Abingdon still waits to open a new visitor center, it's offering visitors a place to stop at the Virginia Creeper Trail Center near the Abingdon trailhead off Green Spring Road.

That center is open 24 hours a week, according to Triplett.

Triplett, too, plans to also be busy on Thursday, May 20. At just about the same time that Wells is showing off the promotional videos, Triplett plans to make a presentation to Town Council on the town's latest tourism happenings during a Town Council meeting at Town Hall.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Life of a nurse

Bristol ICU nurse traveled to crowded hospitals to help pandemic patients

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

BRISTOL, Va. — When travel nurse Laura Slaughter learned about the need for medical workers in New York City last year, she never thought twice. The Bristol, Virginia, ICU nurse packed her bags and headed to the city in the spring of 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Locating in New York City didn't intimidate the Southwest Virginia native. She had traveled to the city many times to visit her grandfather, Arthur Slaughter, who was a businessman in Bristol and New York.

"Since I was about 5 years old, New York has been like a second home to me," she said.

Slaughter called it an honor to serve as a nurse despite the vast number of sick patients she saw daily — horrific images that will linger in her memories for a lifetime.

"As an ICU nurse, you deal with significantly dangerous diseases. COVID didn't scare me," said Slaughter, who believes the work experience during the pandemic has made her a stronger nurse.

"I'm very confident in my skills as an ICU nurse. When I look at really sick patients, I don't focus on the emotions. I think, 'This is a problem, what do I do, I need to solve it. Now go.'"

'Like a war zone'

During her three-month stay in the city, Slaughter worked a labor-intensive 91 hours each week at Coney Island Hospital in Brooklyn, New York, a hospital that received COVID-19 patient overflow from neighboring facilities. She later served as an ICU nurse at Valley Baptist Hospital in Harlingen, Texas — another location in the country that was hit hard by a wave of COVID-19 cases.

Once she arrived, Slaughter was amazed to see that the city that usually had so much life was suddenly shut down with practically no one on the streets.

But in the evenings, when Slaughter and other night-shift nurses traveled in buses to work, people and emergency crews in the city lined the streets, flashing sirens and yelling. People even banged their pots outside their windows.

"It was to honor us. It was very humbling," she said.

Her first assignment in New York City is a difficult environment to describe.

"It felt like a war zone," said Slaughter. "The devastating number of dying people was exhausting."

Medical supplies were scarce, forcing Slaughter and other nurses to make provisions in order to help their patients survive the deadly disease that to date has claimed the lives of more than half a million people in the country.

Medications were delivered in boxes by the hospital pharmacy to the ICU department where Slaughter worked. While she was there, the 450-bed hospital eventually received as many as 650 patients, and those numbers quickly grew.

"The nurses had to mix their own medications. The pharmacy could not keep up with the supply and demand," she said.

"When boxes of drugs were delivered, nurses would have to sort through them to find what they needed. I sometimes had to pull medications from IV bags on patients to give to other patients just to keep them alive until we received more from the pharmacy."

Slaughter worked in a surgery unit that had been converted to an ICU for an overflow of COVID-19 patients. Layers of personal protective equipment worn by the nurses were essential but sometimes miserably hot.

"These makeshift ICU rooms were not ventilated, with as many as 15 patients in one room. We stayed in these rooms for 12-hour shifts and couldn't leave the room," said Slaughter.



Laura Slaughter, a travel ICU nurse, worked in the packed hospitals of New York and Texas during the worst days of the pandemic.

During this time, she was on a rapid response team, responding to frequent code blue emergencies. "I never thought responding to COVID code blue alerts would become a normal part of my work day."

After her assignment in New York City, Slaughter traveled to South Texas to work in Valley Baptist Hospital.

"That was awful in a different way," she said.

Slaughter said the bodies of patients who had died that night were stored in coolers on an 18-wheel truck.

"I had to wheel the bodies on gurneys to the truck. Keep in mind, it's south Texas in the summer. It was very hot outside," she said.

"When security opened the refrigerated cooler, a gulf of windy, contaminated air was blowing at you. I felt like I was in a horror movie."

Once the cooler was opened, the nurses were expected to place the body bags inside the truck.

"We had to transport the bodies to the back of the truck. As I'm walking in there, I noticed that many of the body bags had burst open due to the large sizes of the patients."

Born healer

Slaughter often saw media, including Fox News and CNN, reporting on the horrible conditions each day. "I will

never be able to say that I've worked in those conditions again," she said.

She actually never planned on becoming a nurse when she was young. Slaughter graduated from Furman University and East Tennessee State University with business degrees.

Following college, her first job was as a pharmaceutical representative. She later worked in operating rooms as an orthopedic device representative, representing companies that make device implants for patients.

In 2011, she decided to go back to school to earn a registered nurse degree at East Tennessee State University. After graduation, she worked as an ICU nurse at Johnson City Medical Center before relocating to Holston Valley Medical Center. Slaughter became a travel nurse in 2019.

She currently is pursuing a graduate nursing degree at King University.

Had she not injured her ankle while working in Texas, she probably would be on the road again as a travel nurse.

While her ankle heals from surgery, she is volunteering as an administrator of local COVID-19 vaccines.

"I'm always striving to do more and to accomplish something else," she said.

"I can't let down now. There's still so much to get done."

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.



Refrigerated containers hold the deceased outside a hospital in South Texas, where Slaughter worked during the pandemic.

Washington County considers dropping farm tax, creating cigarette tax **A2, A5**

Bristol, Virginia sheriff candidates agree on trying to keep jail **A3**

Wythe deputy's killer released from jail after 26 years **A3**

Washington County News

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FOOD

Ballad: Unvaccinated rates driving hospitalizations



Made-from-scratch French cuisine focus on restaurant

» B1

BY DAVID MCGEE
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

A delta variant-driven COVID-19 surge is generating some sobering statistics in this region, where less than half the residents are vaccinated.

More than 92% of Ballad Health inpatients hospitalized this week with COVID-19 were unvaccinated. Seventy of 71 patients — 98% — treated in intensive care units were not vaccinated, including 48 of the 49 people being kept alive on ventilators.

Over half are adults between the ages of 40 and 69. Their average age is 60, but the average age of the unvac-

inated inpatients is 58.8, nearly 18 years younger than the average age of vaccinated inpatients.

From the outside, they are nameless, faceless numbers. In reality, they are parents, grandparents, daughters, sons, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles.

Included in those totals were nine pediatric patients — children between the ages of 12-17 — none of whom have been vaccinated. Five are critically sick and are being treated in the Niswonger Children's Hospital ICU, and two are on ventilators. They are sons and daughters, nieces and nephews.

Some may not survive.

This past week, 37 people from Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia succumbed to COVID-19. Twenty-six died the prior week; 21 died the week before that, and 12 died the first week of August. There have been a total of 96 deaths in this region in just the past month due to COVID-19.

Since March, there have been 389 funerals for those who lost that battle.

Ballad Health officials last week forecast the rate could exceed 100 deaths per week if the current case explosion doesn't somehow slow.

Much of region remains unvaccinated

All of this suffering is occurring in a region where more than six in 10 residents aren't fully vaccinated. On Friday, 39.8% — just over 244,000 of 613,000 residents of 10 Northeast Tennessee counties — were fully vaccinated against the novel coronavirus, according to the Tennessee Department of Health.

Four counties are above 40%, paced by Washington County in Tennessee, at 48.9%. Totals are slightly higher for those who have taken the first of two injections.

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SPORTS



Abingdon stops John Battle in 41-0 shutout

» B2

KEEPING HONEYBEES



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Preston Holmes, a beekeeper in Damascus, removes the lid of a beehive to examine the worker bees.

Healing hobby

Beekeeping provides focus, purpose for Damascus man recovering from stroke

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

DAMASCUS, Va. — Stroke survivor Preston Holmes is buzzing with excitement to tell his inspiring recovery story in hopes that other patients can be helped.

Holmes, 61, of Damascus has learned that beekeeping pays in honey and other sweet rewards.

The new hobby has helped him achieve personal goals that once may have seemed impossible to him.

Every Saturday this summer, Holmes and his wife Ginger set up a table at the Damascus Farmers Mar-

ket to sell pint jars of their homegrown honey, an accomplishment they call a "blessing from God" after enduring months of rehabilitation.

Holmes hopes his story will have the power to inspire and uplift other people who are suffering with similar disabilities.

Seven years ago, Holmes suffered a hemorrhagic stroke, affecting his cognitive and motor skills. Unable to return to his Bristol Compressors job as a buyer, Holmes dealt with feelings of frustration and discouragement until a friend gave him

some advice.

"My friend Tim Widener kept suggesting I keep bees, and I thought he was crazy," said Holmes, who reminded his friend that his illness had not only affected his memory and decision-making skills but also his vision and reaction time.

Before his stroke, Holmes enjoyed hunting and fishing, but he had never had an interest in honeybees. He even felt a little uneasy around them.

After attending a few local Highlands Beekeepers As-

See **BEES**, Page A5

SOL test scores in SW Va. down

BY ROBERT SORRELL
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

A decrease in passing rates in Southwest Virginia for the state's Standards of Learning tests reflect how the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged students and schools, local education officials said Friday.

As expected, the results of the 2020-21 SOL tests released this week reflect the circumstances faced by students and schools last year, and establish a baseline for recovery from the pandemic, according to the Virginia Department of Education. Scores followed trends on state tests nationwide.

The VDOE said pass rates reflect disruptions to instruction caused by the pandemic, decreased participation in state assessment programs, declines in enrollment, fewer retakes and more flexible opt-out provisions for parents concerned about community spread of COVID-19.

Statewide, the passing rate dropped by 9% for English tests as 78% of students passed the exam in the 2018-19 school year, but only 69% of students passed in 2020-21. For math, the rate dropped statewide by 27%, and the science passing rate dropped 22%. The changes were nearly identical for local students, the data shows, as math and science passing rates dropped last year.

"We are not at all surprised by the drop in SOL scores," Bristol Virginia School Superintendent Keith Perrigan said Friday. "Every division in the commonwealth saw scores drop. We actually expected it to be worse."

Perrigan noted that stu-

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CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Preston Holmes and his wife Ginger sell pint jars of their homegrown honey on Saturdays at the Damascus Farmers Market at Laurel Creek Park on Imboden Road.

Bees

From Page A1

association meetings with his friend, he decided to give it a try.

By the next spring, he ordered two colonies of bees and other beekeeping supplies, including brood boxes, a protective jacket and gloves.

That first season was overwhelming for Holmes, even though his friend was available to set up the beehives and give him some pointers. "It was a lot to learn, and my mental capacity at that time was challenged."

Holmes also had lost the ability to read,

requiring him to have occupational therapy to learn other everyday skills.

The honeybees did not survive the first winter, and Holmes began suffering from grand mal seizures that required hospital time.

He started to second-guess why he was even trying.

Determined to not give up, Holmes ordered two new sets of bees for the second spring. Widener and another good friend, Jim Anderson, came to his aid again.

"The bees really gave him something to focus on when he was going through so much. It was a good thing for him,"

said his wife.

"I could tell I was retaining more information better as time went on," he said.

His beekeeping skills really started to soar during his third season. Holmes had increased his bee colonies by learning how to catch wild bee swarms with traps. His friends also taught him how to split a bee colony by taking a portion of an established colony and transferring the hive to create two colonies.

"I've never had to buy bees since," he said.

For a man who had never worked with bees until just a few years ago, Holmes may be



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Preston Holmes enjoys talking about how he created a bee haven in the backyard of his Damascus home.

getting a reputation for producing some of the best honey around. He named his small business Holmes Hives.

The beekeeper estimates he will collect more than 30 gallons of honey this season with more to harvest in the next few weeks.

He rents his beehives to a local pumpkin grower to help with pollination of the crop.

The life lessons he's learned from beekeeping have helped to calm

his spirit and give him hope, he said.

"Beekeeping has helped me to concentrate and focus my mind. My mind used to wander from one thing to another."

He's also fascinated by the culture of the honeybees — the role of the honeybee and the worker bees.

The couple enjoys watching the honeybees at work from a bee shed on their property — a place they can sit and

relax anytime of the year. The shed is appropriately decorated with all kinds of bee decorations.

"I don't think I could have chosen a better hobby to learn," said Holmes.

"I mean what could be better than drizzling fresh honey on your cereal in the morning?" he asked.

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.

Washington County commissioner wants to drop tax on farm equipment

BY JOE TENNIS

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — Washington County Commissioner of Revenue Mark Matney wants to get rid of the county's farm equipment tax.

"It's an extra tax," said Matney, who made an impassioned plea to drop the tax at last Tuesday's meeting of the Washington County Board of Supervisors.

But the board — especially Chairman Dwayne Ball — raised objections.

This year, with bills due Nov. 1, Matney expects to collect \$124,533 from 726 farmers who pay the tax on equipment, including tractors, hay balers and four-wheelers, Matney said.

Ball questioned whether it's fair to single out this tax and not drop others while also expressing concerns that the county needs the revenue.

"We have a \$19 million courthouse to pay for and schools to modernize," Ball said.

Farm equipment is taxed at the same rate as personal property: \$1.70 per \$100 of assessed value, said Matney. New equipment is taxed for 10 years.

"If you buy a tractor here, you're supposed to pay tax in Washington County," Matney said. "By law, you're supposed to report that to my office."

Over a decade, the tax on a new \$50,000 tractor would be more than \$4,000, according to Matney.

But, Matney reasoned,

this tax may encourage farmers to seek and keep used equipment older than 10 years — to avoid paying this tax.

Some farmers "won't buy new equipment because they don't want to pay on it," he said.

"There are some farmers that have told me that they play the 10-year game," Matney said. "If they see a tractor that's up for sale, they'll buy that because they don't want to pay tax on something for 10 years, which hurts our retailers here in the county."

He pointed out that if anyone other than a farmer buys a four-wheeler, they wouldn't

pay the tax.

No locality near Washington County charges such a tax, Matney said.

Across Virginia, 17 other counties charge a farm equipment tax, including Charles City, Henry, Northumberland, Southampton, Sussex, Caroline, Accomack, Charlotte, Clarke, Essex, King and Queen, Middlesex, Northampton, Prince William, Rockingham, Richmond and Matthews.

Four cities tax farm equipment, including Chesapeake, Franklin, Harrisonburg and Fredericksburg.

"We're the only one in Southwest Virginia,"

Matney said.

"It looks bad on Washington County when we're charging farmer equipment tax in Washington County when we don't need to," he added.

The Board of Supervisors took no action on Matney's suggestion to abolish the tax.

"I think this is something we need to look at," said Supervisor Phillip McCall.

Matney said he will campaign against the tax by contacting as many farmers as he can and by emailing supervisors.

"I think this is a tax that should not be," he said. "It's an extra tax on farmers."

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COMMUNITY



College student helps save man's life by performing CPR

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SPORTS



Abingdon Falcons get a crack at state championship

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RECREATION



Damascus Mayor Katie Lamb hoping for Trail Days this year

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A TRIPLE TREAT



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Joseph Vess and Emily Robinson welcomed three sets of triplets from their flock of Katahdin hair sheep in the span of a few days. "It was a nice surprise package," said Emily.

Lotta lambs

3 sets of triplets born to couple's small flock

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

MEADOWVIEW, Va. — Like good shepherds, Joseph Vess and Emily Robinson keep a watchful eye on their small flock of Katahdin hair sheep when lambing season rolls around this time of year.

Counting sheep is a routine thing to do each morning and night, they say. But when the Meadowview couple

awoke one morning last week, they found one of their ewes had delivered triplets.

"It was a nice surprise package," said wife Emily.

Just a few days later, two more ewes delivered three lambs each.

"We couldn't believe that we had three sets of triplets."

See **SHEEP**, Page A5



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Although not full-time farmers, Joseph Vess and Emily Robinson, of Meadowview, have made a happy farm life since moving to the area six years ago.

Local cases plummet, but virus still around

BY DAVID MCGEE
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

In just one month, this region's surge of COVID-19 cases has diminished from a firehose-like stream to a trickle, but the virus hasn't gone away.

The Tennessee Department of Health reported almost 1,700 active cases across 10 Northeast Tennessee counties Thursday. Sullivan has 411 active cases, Washington 255 and Hamblen 250. Virginia does not report active cases.

In addition, Sullivan County reported 374 new cases during the first 11 days of February. Its seven-day average testing positivity rate was 8.7%, with an average of 305 tests per day and Sullivan has averaged adding 40.3 new cases daily over the past seven days, according to state figures.

"While cases are lower, the virus remains a reality in our region," Ballad Health System wrote in a Tweet that accompanied its daily scorecard of cases.

Ballad treated an average of 100 inpatients daily over the past week in its hospitals across the region with about 20% of them in intensive care units.

Regionwide, Ballad reported 1,778 new cases during the first week of February. That continues a January trend as new cases declined from over 5,500 the first week of January to 2,181 during the last week of the month.

There have been 94 COVID-related deaths during the past week and 122 this month across Ballad's service area, an average of 11 per day. If that mortality rate continues unabated, February could finish with about 310 deaths, which would rank third highest since the pandemic began.

There were 477 regional COVID-19 deaths in January, an average of 15.3 per day compared to 412 in December, an average of 13.2 per day and 275 in November, an average of 9.1.

In recent days, the Tennessee Department of Health adjusted downward the number of cases reported in Washington County, while increases were shown in other counties, including Carter.

"Laboratories and health care facilities often report cases to us with county information. However, some facilities assign county based on an individual's zip code, which is not always accurate because zip codes often cross county lines. As we are able, we geocode the specific addresses of cases to verify that they truly live in the county they had been assigned. As we find errors in county assignments, we correct them."

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Sheep

From Page A1

While sheep normally can deliver one to three lambs, it may be a less common occurrence for a small farm with only 10 ewes, according to Mandy Fletcher, regional program specialist for the Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach Program.

“It’s not considered rare for ewes to have multiple sets of triplets, but instead it’s an indication the sheep are healthy,” said Fletcher. “It’s all based on good nutrition that the ewes have received at the time of breeding and prior to lambing, as well as great management practices at the farm. Also, certain breeds are more likely to have multiple births, such as Katahdin hair sheep.”

Fletcher said plenty of recent rainfall in the region, which produces rich forage, may be credited for causing greater fertility in the sheep.

In any case, the couple, both 41, is just happy their new “babies” are doing well and growing.

Even animals’ natural instincts work together for the good sometimes.

Joseph said one of their ewes gave birth to a single lamb before a nighttime predator snatched the newborn.

He later noticed that the ewe that had most recently given birth to triplets let the grieving mom have one of her lambs to nurse.

“That’s really good for both of them. The mother of the triplets won’t have to come up with enough milk for three, and the other ewe’s

milk will be put to good use,” he said.

Love of farming

The part-time farmers moved to the area six years ago with a desire to be part of the local agriculture industry.

“We knew we wanted to do some kind of farming and raise animals. Cows seemed very intimidating, so we opted for sheep primarily because of their size,” said the husband. The couple has been known to haul a sheep or two in the back of their Subaru Forester or Honda Fit.

The couple says they are making money but not quite a living from their agriculture ventures.

Joseph works at Emory & Henry College, where he supports student community engagement for the Appalachian Center for Civic Life. Emily, who worked in outreach at the Washington County Public Library before the pandemic, is home-schooling their 5-year-old son Thomas.

Thomas is incorporating the family’s sheep business into his language arts assignments by keeping a journal of the ewes and their offspring.

And it’s been a “wooly” good time for the new farmers.

Neither of them was raised on farms, but they have decided they prefer their farm life. In addition to raising sheep, they also enjoy having laying hens and a kitchen garden in the summer.

The couple says they gained newfound appreciation and respect for farmers once moving to Southwest Virginia.

“I didn’t realize how intel-



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

While triplets can be challenging for a single ewe to feed, one of the lambs’ mothers seems to have allowed another ewe who lost her lamb to nurse a triplet. “That’s really good for both of them,” said Joseph.

lectually demanding being a farmer is until we started raising sheep. You have to have some knowledge in veterinary medicine, soil science, plants, parasites, genetics, animal behavior, and, of course, it helps to learn about weather.

“You have to figure out why animals act the way they do and why you can’t make them do what you want,” he said with laughter. “Farmers get nowhere near the credit they deserve for the work they do.”

Learning how to raise sheep has been what you might say a “hair-raising” experience for them.

“The main thing I’ve learned

is how much I don’t know,” laughed Joseph.

“The agriculture community of Washington County is so incredible. There are so many people who are generous with their time and knowledge, and that’s incredible to be part of.”

The couple recently was chosen by Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach Program as mentor farmers for the Socially Disadvantaged & Veteran Beginning Farmer and Rancher program in Southwest Virginia.

They will be partnering with Fletcher to work closely with beginning farmers to assist

them with understanding the challenges and benefits of creating and sustaining a small farm.

“After receiving so much help, we can start giving back to other people and share what we have learned,” said Joseph.

“We have a wonderful agriculture community in Southwest Virginia, and we love being part of it. We want to help make it successful and accessible to as many people as possible.”

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.

Washington County Board of Supervisors awards bid to demolish building at courthouse — but lacks permission to tear it down

BY JOE TENNIS

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — The Washington County Board of Supervisors awarded a bid last week to tear down a building at the Washington County Courthouse.

But county officials do not yet have permission from the town of Abingdon to erase that building from the Main Street of this historic town.

The supervisors voted unani-

mously to spend \$54,250 to tear down the Elliott Building at the south side of the courthouse. Tearing down the building is part of a long-term expansion plan for the building.

The demolition contract is good for 120 days, according to County Attorney Lucy Phillips, who noted that county officials now have until June 4 to obtain a demolition permit from the town.

A week prior, county officials sought approval to tear down the building from the town’s Historic Preservation Review Board, said County Administrator Jason Berry.

But the demolition plan was not approved, Supervisor Saul Hernandez said after the meeting.

So, at the close of last week’s meeting, following a closed session, the supervisors voted in fa-

vor of Berry and Phillips filing an appeal with the town to obtain a certificate of appropriateness to tear down the structure.

The Elliott Building is full of asbestos and lead, said Supervisor Mike Rush.

The board also agreed to spend \$2,850 on an engineering study to determine the stability of the Elliott Building and the property of neighbor Emmitt Yeary, an Abingdon attorney who owns

173 E. Main St.

That study is necessary to check the structural soundness of the properties prior to the planned demolition, Berry said.

The courthouse has been under review for renovations since November 2019, when voters in Washington County decided the 1869 structure needed to be saved rather than move county court operations to a vacant Kmart building.

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