

JANUARY

Sheriff adds downtown weekend patrols

The Buncombe County Board of Commissioners approved a \$56,000 budget amendment on Jan. 16 to fund a proposal from Sheriff **Quentin Miller** to send four deputies downtown between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays.

The added patrols continued through June and were later supplemented with the co-responder program that sends Buncombe County sheriff's deputies,

community paramedics, mental health clinical practitioners and critical incident project managers to calls for help with people in distress.

On the city side, the community responder program grew throughout the year to include five firefighters, two civilian peer support specialists and a community responder manager. X



Sheriff Quentin Miller. Photo by Greg Parlier

City ramps up plans to shore up its neglected structures



Photo courtesy of the City of Asheville

The City Council continued discussions of how to fix the city's buildings and parking structures, many of them out of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. While the city had set aside \$1 million per year for maintenance, at least \$3.5 million was needed. Essential repairs to the city's parking garages alone added up to \$11 million.

One consultant's report said more than 70% of city-owned facil-

ities are older than their expected useful lives.

Fast-forward through the year, and work began on city parking structures, repairing elevators and removing curbs to make them accessible. In November, big projects got a funding boost when voters approved \$80 million in bonds to invest in infrastructure for housing, parks, fire and police, and transportation. X

High price tag of downtown bathroom gives Council — and community — pause

At its Jan. 23 meeting, Asheville City Council postponed a vote on the installation of a prefabricated 24-hour restroom outside the Rankin Avenue parking garage, balking at the high cost — \$650,000. The following month, Council approved over \$400,000 for the project. The bathroom was installed just before Tropical Storm Helene's arrival, but it did not open until November. Its features - louvered walls and blue lights — are intended to deter individuals from using the site for IV drug use and camping. X



Photo by Thomas Calder

"PORTLAND LOO"

COVER OF THE MONTH

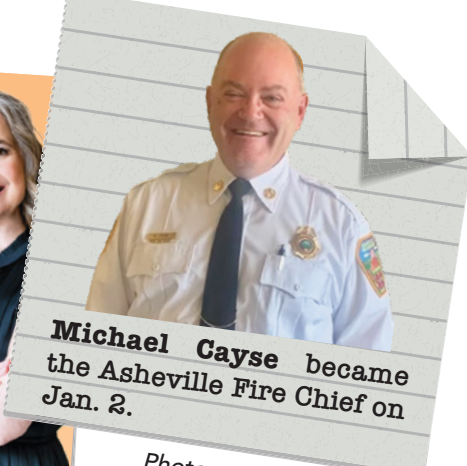


Illustration by Brent Brown



Tracey Morgan Gallery moved from the South Slope to 22 London Road.

Photo courtesy of Morgan



Michael Cayse became the Asheville Fire Chief on Jan. 2.

Photo courtesy of the City of Asheville

SONG OF THE MONTH

Hannah Kaminer, "Asheville"

Little did the Americana singer-songwriter know how prophetic her tune about the city's shifting identity would prove just a few months later. **Hannah Kaminer's** insightful lyrics about the rising cost of living and artists being displaced by tourism initiatives now took on a deeper significance in the post-Helene days as the future for local creatives feels more uncertain than ever. Listen at avl.mx/ed7.

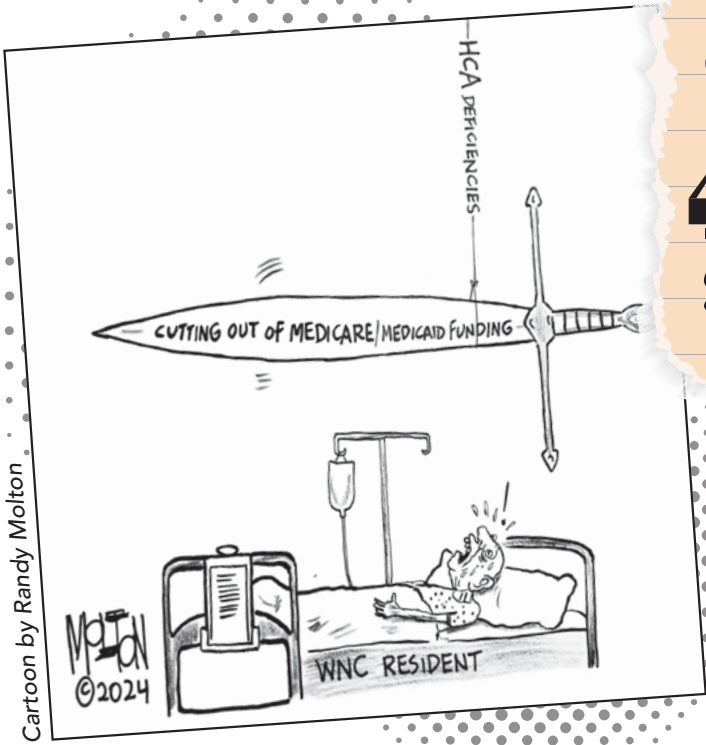
— Edwin Arnaudin X

Council pauses affordable housing program

Nearly 15 years after it went into effect, the Asheville City Council was informed that its Land Use Incentive Grant program shuts out most minority residents.

The 20-year property tax rebates were applied if developers made 20% of a development's units affordable to households earning 80% or less of the area median income (AMI), which is about \$68,000 for a family of four. (A 2021 report showed that 2,200 households are on waitlists for affordable housing.) Thrive Asheville told the Council that even if the city were to lower the bar to 50% AMI, it would still be above the median income for most Black and Hispanic households. To date, 17 projects have received LUIG grants.

The Council suspended the grants pending the city's Affordable Housing report, released in September. The report recommended tweaks to zoning and building codes to expand housing options and laid out how the Housing Trust Fund and LUIG can be expanded. Plans were boosted when voters approved \$20 million in bonds to address affordable housing. X



Cartoon by Randy Molton

IN CONVERSATION WITH Mike Lamb



Photo courtesy of the City of Asheville

Asheville Police Chief **Mike Lamb** began 2024 as the department's interim police chief, following the Dec. 15, 2023, resignation of former Chief **David Zack**. In February, Asheville City Manager **Debra Campbell** announced Lamb's acceptance of the permanent position.

Lamb has served as a member of the APD for more than 26 years. *Xpress* caught up with him to discuss his first year as chief.

Xpress: February 2025 will mark your first year as Asheville Police Chief. What has surprised you most about your new role?

Lamb: I have been humbled by the outpouring of support for me as chief, but more importantly support for the officers of the Asheville Police Department. I have seen that our

community truly values our agency and even more so the relationships that other officers and I have developed over the years. One tenet that I have relied upon throughout my career is the fact that relationships are the real currency of policing.

When people are in crisis or need help, they will inevitably reach out to

someone that they trust. It is for this reason that it is so important for officers to have strong relationships with various members of our community. Along that vein, we have reinstated the Citizens Police Academy (CPA), which was paused in 2019. The CPA provides an opportunity for members of our community to have a better understanding of police work, and it also provides an excellent opportunity for people to develop relationships with APD staff.

What were the greatest challenges APD faced this year, both pre- and post-Helene?

The greatest challenge that we have faced both pre- and post-Helene has been our reduced staffing. This has made it difficult to offer the level of service that this community

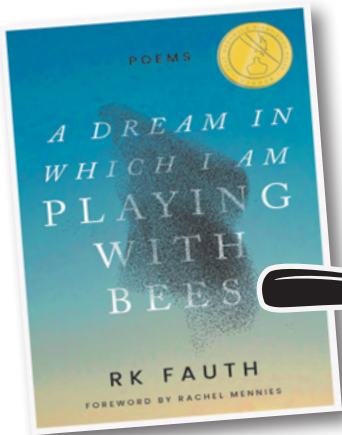
deserves. After the storm, when cell service returned, our call volume hit historic highs. These calls ranged from looting to reporting missing persons.

Despite the staffing challenges, our officers and supervisors found innovative and creative ways to deliver services and handle investigations. We also benefited from the assistance of other police departments across the state and nation offering staffing assistance. We currently have 62 vacancies, but thankfully we have 15 cadets slated to start the academy in January. This class is three times larger than classes from the last five years. I believe this is a hiring trend that will continue.

For the full interview, visit avl.mx/wordcapm X

BOOK RELEASE

RK Fauth debuted her poetry collection *A Dream in Which I Am Playing with Bees*. In it, the Asheville poet explores natural imagery, queer metaphors, personal observations and historical circumstances surrounding honeybees.



Former "Top Chef" contestant **Ashleigh Shanti** opened Good Hot Fish at 10 Buxton Ave. on Jan. 20. The highly anticipated restaurant is the first for the James Beard nominee, who previously gained recognition as chef de cuisine for Benne on Eagle.

Also on Jan. 20, vegan food truck The Smokin' Onion opened a brick-and-mortar restaurant at 697 Haywood Road.