

# Council seated; Wisler elected vice mayor

Three sworn in after hard-fought election

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ASHEVILLE - The winners of November's hard-fought election made the official transition into the role of City Council members Tuesday, promising to work together and using their first vote to help pick a vice mayor.

The short organizational meeting at council chambers in City Hall involved the swearing in of three council members: Brian Haynes, Julie Mayfield and Keith Young. The newly seated governing body then voted 7-0 to pick Councilwoman **Gwen Wisler** as vice mayor.

The swearing in and vice mayor election are part of an every-other-year ritual for the council. This year, those taking the oath were all new members with no re-elected incumbents. Among them was the first African-American elected to the body since 2009.

Proceedings included the singing of the national anthem by senior firefighter Bentley Andrews, who accompanied herself on guitar, and a invocation written by Mayor Esther Manheimer's father Ron Manheimer. The mayor's father led audience members in the singing of "Asheville Is Our Town" to the tune of "This Land is Your Land" by Woodie Guthrie whose melody was borrowed from a Baptist hymn, Ron Manheimer said.

Then council members-elect each stood surrounded by family and swore to uphold local and national laws.

Speaking afterward, the new members said they were humbled by the experience, thanked voters and said they looked forward to working together. The comments came after a highly competitive election that showed fissures among candidates, the electorate and current council members.

Haynes spoke first and most briefly, saying he looked forward "to working with everyone on council."

The Habitat for Humanity assistant manager said he was "very proud of our city voters" and thought "they did a good job," a line that drew laughs.

"I don't want to let you down," he said. "I would also like to tell voters to stay involved. Join committees. Come to meetings. And let your voices be heard."

Mayfield, the co-director of the regional environmental advocacy group MountainTrue, recalled the campaign and said candidates seeing their names on signs and in the newspaper run the

risk of getting "a really big head." "But what this is for me is an incredibly humbling experience."

She said with the support of the public and other council members she was confident they could lead Asheville to a place "where this city remains a great place for the people who live here" and where economic opportunity is increased every day "for more and more people."

"My hope is also that we are able to come together as a city. We have some big challenges in front of us and we will do better in those challenges if we are together pulling in the same direction," she said.

Young, a deputy clerk of Buncombe County Superior Court and the first black council member to be elected in six years, said "our city is in a very transitional time, a very transformative time." Young was the top vote-getter in the six-way election.

He said all council members have the city's best interests at heart. "I'm looking forward to being able to roll my sleeves up and dig in and work with each and every one of you."

He thanked those who voted and encouraged people to stay active in their community and noted that the way the city moves forward will be important both to those who went to the polls and those who didn't vote.

"And I think these folks up here, as well as myself, will be striving for the next four years to make Asheville a better place for everyone," he said.

Manheimer said she expected the council to have disagreements. "I hope we do, otherwise we are not a functioning body," the mayor said.

"What I look forward to is working together through those differences to find an outcome that makes us a better community."

When it came time to pick a vice mayor, Councilman Gordon Smith nominated **Wisler** and Councilman Cecil Bothwell seconded the motion.

"She does very difficult things with extraordinary grace and she's taken on really difficult negotiations and been in rooms where very hard conversations have had to happen and has done that with great skill," Smith said.

Her role filling in for the mayor will be especially important as Manheimer takes the role of chair of the N.C. Metropolitan Mayors Coalition, he said.

A former CEO of the Coleman Company, **Wisler** now runs Asheville Profits, LLC, a business consulting company where her clients pay for her work by donating their time to a local nonprofit of the client's choosing.



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Keith Young, one of three new Asheville City Council members, hugs his mother, Mary, after being sworn in to the office at Asheville City Hall on Tuesday.

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