



## Council Makes Decision on Harrison's Job

June 6, 2004

By Stacy Cox

General Manager

Michael Harrison will retain his position as Town Marshal, the Shirley Town Council decided on Saturday after he was recently issued a Class C Misdemeanor citation by the Henry County Prosecutor's Office for contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Following an executive meeting with Harrison held prior to its regular monthly meeting on June 5, Shirley's three board members each made statements after voting to suspend Harrison for five days without pay and place him on a six-month probationary period with the town. Deputy Marshal Earl Patterson will continue as Acting Marshal until Harrison returns from his suspension.

"I've had a lot of residents in town expressing their support of Mike," said Councilman Dennis Denney. "Since the article in the paper came out, I've received a couple of letters. In fact, coming in this morning, I received another letter and a petition signed by many residents that were in support of Mike."

In the past two weeks, council had received letters from business owners and a petition signed by about 30 residents requesting that Harrison be allowed to keep his job. Harrison, who has served as Marshal since 2000, had placed on paid administrative leave on May 11 after the council was informed by the Henry County Sheriff's Department that an investigation was underway involving furnishing alcohol to a minor.

The minor in the case, 20-year-old Ashley Roberts, also had a connection with the Town of Shirley. Roberts had been approved by the council at its March 6, 2004, meeting to ride along with officers of the Shirley Police Department as a Reserve Officer Trainee. Council at that time said Roberts would not be permitted, due to insurance stipulations, to become a SPD reserve officer until she turned 21, which they stated would occur in August 2004.

Though The Banner has been unable to obtain further information on the case, Councilman Dave Carnes said he had spoken to Henry County Prosecutor's Office and was informed of the status of Harrison's case. Town Attorney Tracy Newhouse said that "actually they're withholding prosecution" and council added that Harrison will be placed on probation through the court system.

"I want to thank the public for being patient with us while we worked through this," said President Kyle Austin. "I would also like to make a motion that we send a formal letter to Reserve Trainee Ashley Roberts, using our council rights with reserve officers, to tell her that her services are no longer needed by the town."

Carnes seconded the motion which then passed unanimously.

Former councilman Joe Smith was in attendance and questioned whether Deputy Patterson will receive a pay increase for his time served as Acting Marshal. Council agreed to review the ordinances regarding salaries to see if Smith's concern could be addressed.

"I'd also like to add to the record," said Councilman Carnes, "As a law enforcement officer, I've worked with Mike Harrison on occasion and with Earl (Patterson) and I've found them to be very professional, competent individuals and police officers."

Harrison's suspension is scheduled to occur from June 6 through June 10.

"We hate to have a situation like this arise, but the town seems to strongly support Michael, his duties and the job he's done as chief," said Denney.