

High-quality, reliable internet in
HUNTSVILLE!

No hidden fees.
No sudden price increases.
Local service with a smile.

936-825-5100
MidSouthFiber.com



The Item

WEEKEND

August 17-18, 2024

\$2.50

 **HOT 100** • 78 FORECAST, 2A

Man arrested in Sign Shop fire



Paul Kinser

STAFF REPORT

Paul Kinser, 51, was arrested on Thursday, Aug. 15, in connection to an arson that occurred on June 2.

Detectives began the arson investigation after “The Sign Shop,” located at the intersection of Smither Drive and Interstate 45 North feeder road caught fire.

At the time of the fire, Huntsville Police officers, Huntsville Fire personnel, the Montgomery County Fire Marshall’s Office, and Houston ATF located evidence leading them to believe the fire had been intentionally set, according to the Huntsville Police Department in a press release.

During the investigation, Kinser was identified as a person of interest in the crime. Enough evidence was gathered and Kinser was ultimately charged with the arson offense.

He was arrested and placed in the Walker County Jail. At this time, no bond has been set for the charge, according to the press release.

The Department thanked all the involved agencies, as well as, the Crabbs Prairie Volunteer Fire Department and the North Montgomery County Fire Department, who assisted with extinguishing the five alarm blaze.

Zoning ordinance back on the table for city

BRENDA POE
EDITOR@ITEMONLINE.COM

Administration and staff of the City of Huntsville have brought an updated zoning ordinance back for approval, offering several changes from the last attempted zone change.

Chapter 211 of the Texas Local Government Code mandates that zoning promotes “the public health, safety, morals, or general welfare” and protects and preserves “places and areas of historical, cultural, or architectural importance.”

Kevin Byal, Director of

Development Services for the City, says the city zoning must also align with the adopted comprehensive plan.

“These principles are crucial for preserving the character of Huntsville and ensuring that all citizens and business owners have the certainty and predictability they deserve as our city grows,” Byal reported in the agenda item for Tuesday. “This need has been recognized and discussed over the past four years, with discussions beginning even earlier.”

On June 5, 1990, the Huntsville City Council estab-

lished three zoning districts that have largely remained unchanged for 34 years.

“As the city has experienced increased development pressure, challenges in managing growth and protecting neighborhoods have arisen,” Byal said.

In response, the City Council authorized an update to the Comprehensive Plan in September 2020, involving community input through town hall meetings, listening sessions, and an advisory committee. Byal said the process identified a need for additional zon-

ing districts and led to funding being allocated to revise the development code and zoning map in the FY 21/22 budget. The City Council’s Strategic Initiative the following year emphasized the need for updated zoning guidelines.

Byal added that an 8-member steering committee was appointed to provide feedback on these revisions. Progress was reviewed in joint City Council and Planning Commission meetings. An open house on June 8, 2023, allowed for pub-

See CITY, page 2A

It’s Back to School time



Let’s All Meet the Teachers in Huntsville ISD

It’s almost time. This week, throughout Huntsville ISD schools doors were opened and students’ families were welcomed to Meet the Teacher. Staff, students and families were able to spend Thursday evening at Estella Stewart Elementary School. Pictured are just a few of those moments of anticipation, tenderness and excitement. This year is particularly special at Huntsville ISD, as it marks the beginning of new grade alignment, as approved overwhelmingly by voters in the 2021 Bond. All four elementary schools were converted into PK-5th grade campuses and Mance Park Middle School was made a 6th through 8th grade campus – reducing campus transitions in every child’s lifetime from five schools to only three. Parents are reminded that several schools are still under construction, especially at Huntsville High School, Mance Park Middle School, and Scott Johnson Elementary. Contractors, custodians, grounds crews, technology and maintenance teams have been working overtime all summer to get the buildings ready for the new year. Everyone can still expect some inconveniences and will see a few incomplete projects as the new year begins. More photos at itemonline.com.

ALL PHOTOS BY MATTHEW LAHEY/HISD COMMUNICATIONS

COVID-19 hasn’t gone away, federal health officials suggests it’s on the upswing

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS — COVID-19 hasn’t gone away, and data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests it’s on the upswing around the country.

“We’ve seen these summer increases every summer that COVID-19 has been

with us,” said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a Johns Hopkins University infectious disease physician. “What’s different about these cases this summer vs. prior summers is that they don’t translate into hospitals in crisis.”

Adalja said factors in the seasonal increase could be increased

travel, people staying indoors to avoid summer heat and the virus’ continued evolution — which could help it get around people’s immunity.

Testing for COVID-19 is sporadic and the true number of cases isn’t clear because many infections aren’t reported.

But one way to spot trends is to see what percentage of lab tests come back positive. By that metric, COVID-19 is surging, with nearly 15% of tests coming back positive vs. less than 1% for flu.

Nevertheless, doctors’ offices aren’t seeing an outsized share of peo-

ple with symptoms of respiratory illness. The proportion of doctor visits for flu-like symptoms remains low.

And COVID-19-related hospitalizations are rising, but they remain below the levels seen in winter — and far below the peaks seen earlier in the pandemic.

The CDC also tries to monitor the spread of the coronavirus by looking for it in sewage and other wastewater at participating sites across the country.

The most recent wastewater data — from the beginning of

See COVID, page 2A

