

Mayor concerned about housing for soldiers

By **Alena Parker**

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Traffic and housing needs are among the concerns over the next couple of years, Hinesville Mayor Jim Thomas explained during Thursday's city council meeting, as the city and Liberty County brace to accommodate a population swell of up to 10,000 from their neighbor, Fort Stewart.

Thomas and City Manager Billy Edwards sat down with post officials, including 3rd Infantry Divi-

sion commander Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo, earlier this week to discuss impending issues.

The 3rd ID is supposed to have its new fifth brigade on post by October 2010, but the trickle of troops is set to start arriving in April or May.

"We even expect — 2009 — folks will start arriving in early summer," said Fort Stewart spokesperson Richard Olson.

"For every soldier that's coming, we figure about 1 1/2 family members," Olson said.

The goal is to try and keep the soldiers as close to Fort Stewart as possible.

"We're going to get so many people at one time," Thomas told the council. "These people are coming, and we need to be very proactive in finding places for them."

The mayor said being able to adequately respond to the city's growth needs is one of the things that "keeps me up at night."

"There's no way we're going to meet our requirements for houses

if the banks don't loan us the money," Thomas said. "We're trying to get some congressional legislation to provide some additional assurance that these people are coming and extend (to the city) the loans."

Besides housing, the mayor said the military influx does not stop with city government, but affects the community on every level, from healthcare and industry to law enforcement and education.

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"If we don't get started going fairly quickly, we're going to have a problem, and I'm not sure we know how to handle it," Thomas said.

In other business, Councilman Charles Frasier was appointed to another term as mayor pro tem, "by default."

according to a smiling Thomas after all the other members declined the position.

"It will be kind of tight, and we'll have to call on all of you to stand in at certain times," Thomas said, referencing the upcoming year's busy schedule.

"The business of the city will move forward," Frasier said. "I fully understand and

appreciate the opportunity."

The mayor and council also decided to go ahead with the resolution to seek a Neighborhood Stabilization Program grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. If awarded, the grant will be used to demolish, redevelop and revitalize 19 foreclosed homes and 36 dilapidated structures in Hinesville.

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