

## **Pine Lake mayor ousted after judge's probe**

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***CORRECTION:** 02/19/02, page A/02: A story in Saturday's Metro section incorrectly reported that **Pine Lake** Mayor Al Fowler had been removed from office after Municipal Court Judge Phillip Hancock ruled that Fowler was guilty of four counts of financial impropriety in city matters. The **Pine Lake** City Council voted to oust Fowler after Hancock presided over a hearing into allegations of impropriety. Hancock did not rule on Fowler's guilt or innocence at the hearing, and no criminal charges have been filed against him. The story also should have said that the city of **Pine Lake** was given an award from the Georgia Municipal Association in February 2000 for creating new ethics guidelines.*

**Pine Lake's** Al Fowler has been removed as mayor after a judge ruled he was guilty of several financial misdeeds. **Pine Lake** Municipal Court Judge Phillip Hancock held an investigative hearing Wednesday into eight allegations against Fowler. The judge found Fowler guilty of:

- > signing a promissory note for \$25,000 without council approval and ordering city employees to enter the transaction as a donation.
- > authorizing a \$3,000 bonus to a city employee and instructing the city clerk to not run the payment through normal payroll accounts and withholding procedures.
- > signing contracts without the City Council's approval.
- > providing misleading information and possibly forged documents to the city auditor.

Council members voted to remove Fowler from office after the hearing. "If I wasn't in the middle of it, I'd find it sort of funny," said Vicky McCall, named acting mayor. Council member Mimi Woods said the ruling likely will be sent to the secretary of state's office, which could lead to a criminal investigation of Fowler. Fowler was not present at Wednesday's hearing. DeKalb County Superior Court Senior Judge Edward Wheeler denied Fowler's motion for a temporary restraining order on the council's vote. Fowler, who became mayor in January 1999, called his removal an effort by some longtime critics to "create turmoil." He said the charges were not true, but declined to elaborate.

Known for its art exhibits, **Pine Lake** has seen its property values soar in recent years, thanks to renovations and new home building. But the community of 658 residents also has seen its share of troubles. Fowler's predecessor, Michael Stuckey, was forced out of office in 1999 after being accused of spending unauthorized city funds on restaurant meals and video equipment. Then there were complaints that **Pine Lake** police were preying on black motorists by handing out speeding tickets for extra revenue.

Fowler was awarded an ethics award in February 2000 by the Georgia Municipal Association for creating new ethics guidelines. McCall said she was disappointed that the city could suffer another black eye from the recent troubles.

"If we have to suffer the consequences, we'll suffer the consequences," she said.