

Macedonia...from Page 1A

had more control on the polling operations.

With this in mind, Commissioner Bradshaw offered to assist the board with finding reliable workers to work the precincts, and stated that several residents had already offered their services if it meant the precincts would remain intact.

In a continued case for consolidation, Board Co-Chair Scott Ledford said that while he held Commissioner Bradshaw to his word, he still supported the consolidation. According to Ledford, while volunteers may promise services now, it will only be a matter of time before the board is yet again without workers.

"The motivations for (consolidation) have been strictly two things," said Ledford. "One is getting the polls staffed properly for the elections, and two, costs and efficiency."

"With all due respect to Commissioner Bradshaw, the matter of getting the word out and we'll get volunteers, well, that has not been our experience. We put out the call and newspaper ads out and other means of advertisement."

"I know people have said they would volunteer at the public hearing and the Tate City meeting. It's one thing to get up at a meeting and say you'll volunteer for something, but the reality is, people aren't doing it."

The board continued to



Janet Oliva, Towns County Board of Elections and Registration Chairwoman

discuss the various possibilities of closing specific precincts, such as Macedonia or Young Harris, while leaving the others as is, as well as a total consolidation. However, the board could not reach a majority decision on the matter.

Board Chairwoman Janet Oliva suggested closing the Macedonia precinct only, which garnered support of fellow board member Rob Murray. She made the case that the close proximity of the Macedonia precinct to the Hiwassee precinct – 2 miles – rendered the smallest impact to voters.

After several votes

and greater discussion on the wording of the motion to exclude verbiage against future consolidation of the existing precincts, Ledford voted to close the Macedonia precinct as well, giving the three-precinct compromise a majority of votes.

Shook and Youngblood voted against any changes to the precincts.

While this is the final decision for now, the board anticipates this is only the first step toward further changes to the precincts in the coming years.

GA 515...from Page 1A

County and the office building and parking area of the Habitat for Humanity ReStore just over the Towns County line.

GDOT will host a property owners meeting next month, to which "all the people who own property will be invited to come talk with one of our right of way specialists," according to Katie Strickland, GDOT District One Communications Officer.

"This meeting will help (property owners) understand what land we will want to buy," said Strickland. "No offers are made, just information and dialogue for us and them."

The total cost of the project, including right of way authorization and construction, is an estimated \$90 million, and will consist of federal and state monies with no local match.

According to GDOT, GA 515 is part of what's known as "Corridor A" of the Appalachian Development Highway System, or ADHS.

"The ADHS was authorized by Congress in 1965, and was designed to generate economic development in the previously isolated Appalachian region," according to GDOT literature. "SR 515/US 76 is designated as part of the Governor's Road Improvement Program (GRIP)."

"The purpose of the GRIP system is to provide transportation infrastructure necessary for economic growth by providing connectivity in rural areas of Georgia. The section of SR 515/US 76 from Young Harris Street in Blairsville to Timberline Drive north of Young Harris is one of two remaining segments of the ADHS Corridor A and the GRIP that is two lanes."

One of the main goals of a pair of informational meetings held last week was to give residents of Union and Towns counties chances to provide feedback on what is likely to be the final set of plans for the project.

According to GDOT, the plans will be finalized soon so that property owners can be notified about the right of way process, with the next three



Marsha Elliott discussing one of the proposed Young Harris bypass roundabouts with her neighbors at the Thursday, April 6, meeting inside the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center.

years of the project allotted for acquisition of properties along the project corridor.

Public comments become part of the official record of each GDOT project, and in some cases actually cause changes to be made to projects.

Residents interested in leaving public comments, which must be submitted by Thursday, April 20, can view plans for the project by visiting www.dot.ga.gov/ps/public/publicoutreach.

Look for the "Search Public Outreach" heading about halfway down that webpage, and select either Union or Towns from the "By County" list, then click "Go."

A list of projects will appear – click on the link that says "122900 Young Harris Bypass." From there, residents can see the entire layout of the project, and can leave comments by clicking on the "Comment" link above the name of the project.

This information and more was made available by GDOT in a couple of public meetings last Thursday, one in Union County, attended by 177 residents, and the other in Towns County, attended by 120 residents.

An item of interest for many included the two-lane

bypass of Main Street in Young Harris, which will feature a roundabout at each end and two new bridge crossings over Brasstown Creek.

Many of the nearly 300 residents to attend the open houses expressed interest in the relocation aspect of the project, including John Yandell, who lives on Swanson Mountain in Young Harris.

Callie Moore, executive director of the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition, attended the meeting in Blairsville, and she, too, was surprised to see just how much of 515 was being relocated.

The relocation part of the project includes stretches of GA 515 that GDOT plans to straighten in order to make travel safer, which in turn will require the road to be moved from its current location in several places.

In some instances, the relocated roadway will be much closer to Butternut Creek and Bitter Creek, which Moore said would almost certainly cause the streams to heat up due to closer proximity of water runoff from the new road.

Residents with questions can contact the project manager, Achor Njoku, at (404) 631-1550.

Black...from Page 1A

Sorry for any inconvenience, and looking forward to a great show next weekend!"

That Greenville show was once again rescheduled to a later date, however, because Black still hadn't recovered in time for the originally rescheduled play date.

Black was still sick leading up to the April 7 show in Hiwassee, and due to scheduling conflicts, that show was canceled and not rescheduled.

"So sorry to report I'm still under attack by the flu bug and won't be able to sing in Hiwassee," wrote Black the day before the concert. "Begging your forgiveness."

And according to a release on Black's website, ticketholders were advised to return tickets "to the original point of purchase for a refund," and to call the Anderson Music Hall Box Office at (706) 896-4191 for more information.

"We tried to reschedule it... he doesn't have another date open, he's booked all the way through next March for a weekend," said Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason. "We're just going to try to get him next year."

"But we're either giving people refunds or letting them pick another show if they want another show."

Thomason worked hard

Thursday night to get the word out that the show had been canceled, and she stayed busy all day Friday, trying to let as many ticketholders as possible know that the show had been canceled in order to save them a trip to Hiwassee on Friday evening.

Her efforts to contact people included social media blasts about the cancellation and reaching out over all of the radio stations the fairgrounds had advertised with, plus attempts at direct contact with customers.

"The hotels are working real good with everybody," said Thomason. "I've called all the hotels and told them, and they're refunding their hotels without any kind of penalty, and we're refunding the campground reservations without any penalty or anything."

"We're just trying to not make anybody mad, and make sure that everybody's taken care of."

Thomason said that this is the first time the fairgrounds has ever experienced a cancellation at such short notice, though she's dealt with cancellations in the past when artists have died before their concert dates, or else experienced an illness well in advance.

"We're taking care of

everything," said Thomason. "It's just real sad that it happened at such a short notice, and we just hope that Clint Black will recover soon and get back on the road, and get the flu behind him."

Added Thomason: "We're just very sorry that this happened, but we will recover, and we want the fans to keep coming and visiting and supporting the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds for all these great concerts that we have coming to our area."

As far as ticket exchanges, the fairgrounds office has plenty of other excellent shows to offer those affected by the cancellation.

"We have Sawyer Brown and Little Texas May 13, and we have Martina McBride June 23," said Thomason. "We also have Confederate Railroad and the Kentucky Headhunters on July 14. And we have the Oak Ridge Boys Aug. 11."

Also, coming up at the fairgrounds is the Mountain EggFest, arriving May 19 and running through May 20.

"We'll have the welcome party on the 19th, and then the EggFest on Saturday, May 20, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.," said Thomason. "The tasting tickets are \$25 each, and if you want to purchase a Big Green Egg, contact Hiwassee Hardware for a great discount on your Eggs."

Housing...from Page 1A

council has been working toward a solution that would allow the college to build in the overlay district while still adhering to the ordinance.

The building would consist of another housing option for on-campus students. Currently, the college is close to capacity, and with continued growth expected in the coming years, the college anticipates a greater need for campus housing.

During last month's meeting, the council decided to move forward with an amendment to the zoning ordinance that would allow the college to begin construction.

City Attorney Marvin Harkins presented the council with a draft of the ordinance last month, explaining the particulars of the amendment that would change both the zoning verbiage as well as the map itself.

The overlay district is currently divided into two sections, Zone A and Zone B. Zone A has consisted of the college's core campus, and Zone B has been the property located on the intersection of Murphy Street and Main Street.

Amending the overlay will allow for construction by bringing the land across from the college under the same, less restrictive height limitations of the main campus.

"This is a zoning change," said Harkins. "This changes the text of the zoning ordinance and it also changes the zoning map. What that means is, it changes the regulations if you're in that overlay district of what you're required to do."

"The second part is, with the map, it adds properties to the overlay that were not before in Zone A. Under the current regulations, there is not a 50-foot setback for Zone A. There is a requirement for Zone B, but not for the new zone it will be under."

"This actually adds the 50-foot setback requirement for the Provident property, which will be added on the map under Zone A, as well as any other Zone A property."

The second reading and final adoption of the amendment to the overlay district will take place during the May meeting.

In other city news, the council discussed a potential new service for all city water



Young Harris City Councilmen Matt Miller, Jared Champion and Stuart Miller



Carol Townsend and Marsha Elliott visited the Young Harris City Council at the April regular meeting to promote 'A Blooming Affair' at Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge.

and sewer customers through Servline, which would replace the current policy regarding leak coverage.

As of right now, under the city ordinance all city customers are granted one leak credit per year. With Servline, the service would mimic the city ordinance and customers would still be granted one leak credit per year through set dollar amount coverage.

"Servline is a private vendor, similar to an insurance," said Harkins. "It would be a service that we would offer for a fee to where, if there is a leak at your house, it would be insurance for that."

"By paying, say, a \$1.25 a billing cycle, you would be paying for that service and it would cover up to \$1,000, depending on the level we choose. The benefit that we've seen so far is mainly toward residential customers."

The Servline program would not be an opt-in service, but an opt-out. Essentially, all Young Harris residents would be signed up for the Servline service automatically. If a resident chooses not to participate, the resident would need to contact Servline to take them off the billing list.

However, if the resident chooses not to opt-in to the Servline insurance, there would be no coverage through the city. The city's ordinance does not currently allow both coverage opportunities for residents.

After much deliberation, the council decided to proceed with more research on the service and the current city ordinance to better determine what will be the best course of action for residents. The council will continue discussion on the service during the May meeting.

County...from Page 1A

occurred on Wednesday, March 29, and included Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, Fire Chief Harold Copeland, EMS Director Greg Taylor, 911 Mapping Director Marty Roberts, and Road Superintendent Clyde Shook, among others.

Furthermore, representatives from the health department, school system, Young Harris College, both cities, the Red Cross, amateur radio, the hospital and nursing home, the EMC, county water authority, and others attended.

Overall, it was a Towns County tour de force of public safety.

"We had an outstanding turnout," said Mathis. "I was very impressed that the people took the time to come out and show the interest in



Dr. Ralph 'Rafe' Spraker Jr. and Towns County EMA Director Rickey Mathis in a March 22 meeting to discuss disaster management software.

formulating and developing this plan, assisting it."

Laura Gustavson, a hazard mitigation planner from the Georgia Emergency

Management Agency/Homeland Security, also attended the kickoff meeting to get everyone up to speed on the timeline of the plan.

According to FEMA.gov, "hazard mitigation planning enables action to reduce loss of life and property, lessening the impact of disasters."

And when disaster strikes, having a GEMA and FEMA-approved plan is essential to recovering losses incurred due to damage caused by disaster, which could potentially translate into hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars in state and federal reimbursement.

"FEMA requires state, tribal and local governments to develop and adopt hazard mitigation plans as a condition for receiving certain types of non-emergency disaster assistance, including funding for mitigation projects," per FEMA.gov. "Jurisdictions must update their hazard mitigation plans and re-submit

them for FEMA approval every five years to maintain eligibility."

And according to Gustavson of GEMA Homeland Security, Towns County's current plan dates to March 25, 2014, with an expiration date of March 25, 2019.

That may be two years away, but Mathis knows that putting a plan together takes time, which is why he's entered into the process now.

Plus, the planning grant for completing the plan, which will cost about \$28,000, expires Sept. 30, 2018, and the plan takes at least a month for the GEMA review process and 45 days for the FEMA review process.

The breakdown of the plan cost is \$21,000 in federal funding, \$4,200 in

local monies and \$2,800 in state funding – that's \$23,800 in grant money to complete the plan, which is being done with the help of Katy Westbrook of Lux Mitigation.

So, unless the county wants to miss out on all that grant money, it needs to have its plan submitted for approval well before the actual plan expiration date of March 2019.

County public safety offices will continue to meet with Mathis and the main planner throughout 2017 to complete the plan before submitting it to GEMA and FEMA for approval.

Any residents interested in becoming part of the planning process should contact Rickey Mathis on his cellphone at (706) 781-9653.