

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

A F.A.I.R. Perspective

Chris Mitchell is the consultant who wrote the Cost of Service study for Blue Ridge Mountain EMC. We, F.A.I.R. (Families Against Inequitable Rates), have asked for a copy on numerous occasions.



Guest Column
Lucille Heil

This study is the basis for BRMEMC raising residential customer fees. The General Manager, Jeremy Nelms, has refused to release the study even though BRMEMC is a co-op and we, the members, paid for the study.

Ironically, Mr. Mitchell did a presentation at the October Board Meeting. This presentation was not publicly advertised beforehand so that members would know. Shame on them. Fortunately, I attended the Oct. 22 meeting.

Mr. Mitchell described the variables used to support his calculations. His basis for recommending raising customer fees? It provides a fixed flow of money regardless of kWh usage variations. Historically, maintenance costs have been factored into the variable power side, which has higher kWh users paying according to their use. Makes sense. But not to Mr. Mitchell and his "new way of thinking."

Fixed costs for maintenance include physical poles, power lines, meters, substations, transformers and the like. We all use them, therefore we should all pay these costs – understanding that the greater electric users place greater demands on the system.

However, Mr. Mitchell recommends ONLY raising residential customer charges, and recommends continuing to raise customer fees annually for the foreseeable future.

Residential fees have already increased a whopping 27.5% over the past five years. Hold on to your hats, because they aren't done raising those customer fees yet!

BRMEMC will tell you that they have lowered the electric rate so all this is revenue neutral. What they don't tell you is that the increased monthly charges for low energy users pay for the decreases they're giving to higher energy users! Then, they will tell you that they have overcharged high energy users. No, they haven't. High energy users should pay for their greater demands on services.

There is absolutely no discussion of increasing business customer fees. Every customer class should be treated equally. Businesses and high energy users place a greater demand on the system than the average or below average residential customer. Their fees should go up also, but high-end electric users' bills are going down.

As a lower kWh user myself, my bill keeps going up regardless of how conservative I am. That new heat pump did me no good whatsoever pertaining to my electric bill.

I also found it interesting that only one board member had questions of Mr. Mitchell's presentation. And, ironically, the questions had nothing to do with those customer fee increases.

Turning to the Annual Membership Meeting, I previously wrote an Opinion Letter to The Clay County Progress regarding the meeting.

I expressed that the meeting was held on a Thursday at three in the afternoon, which did not allow a significant part of the BRMEMC membership to attend – those who work and those with families and children needing to be picked up from school. I also passed on that Mr. Nelms made a statement that employee overtime pay was a significant part of the decision to hold the annual meeting on a Thursday at three in the afternoon. At the Oct. 22 Board Meeting, Mr. Nelms gave a report on the cost of the annual meeting.

The cost associated with holding the Annual Meeting was \$56,267. According to an article in the Towns County Herald and North Georgia News, the meeting expenses were \$23,000 under the allocated budget.

In addition, this was said to be a \$13,000 savings in the overtime expenses since the meeting was held during business hours, denying a large percentage of members from attending. No overtime was paid.

Doing the math with these numbers, the actual cost of the meeting was \$56,267, which was \$23,000 under budget. If \$13,000 in overtime costs HAD been paid to hold the meeting on a Saturday, then BRMEMC would still have come in UNDER BUDGET by \$10,000.

BRMEMC Management would have been able to hold the Annual Meeting on the second Saturday in September as the by-laws state, while still being \$10,000 under the allocated budget for this meeting.

I requested a breakdown of the \$56,267 spent, but the request went unanswered by Mr. Nelms.

The question that remains is, where was that exorbitant amount of money spent with no entertainment, no overtime pay, no venue costs and considerably less in door prizes?

Only 61 people showed up. Eleven of those folks, or roughly 20% of attendees, were members of the new group called F.A.I.R., which is speaking up, giving the power to be heard to you, the members of BRMEMC.

The letter sent to Mr. Nelms addressing these concerns about the Annual Meeting was not responded to.

The Annual Meeting was a failure, with only 61 folks in attendance compared to about 300 in previous years. That is a 70% reduction in attendance compared to previous years. Mr. Nelms simply stated at the Oct. 22 Board Meeting that attendance has been decreasing over the years, and maybe next year they need to hire entertainment and give away more door prizes, rather than considering moving the meeting back to the second Saturday in September as the bylaws state.

I do not know who is benefiting from these decisions, but it certainly is not you and me.

I hope this is helpful. Visit us online at FAIR-BRMEMC.org.

The Lonely Traveler

There are surely as many different kinds of people as there are human beings in the world, but today we're considering just two: those who, whether from choice or circumstance leave the families of their birth behind to seek out their destiny, and those who keep family central to their journey through life. Some of us are planets revolving around the central sun of family ties, and some are comets.

Travel is easier now than it has ever been, and we have abandoned our villages to seek our fortunes as far away from the places and peoples of our birth as the limits of a small planet will allow. The momentum of youth, the discovery of self and the lure of adventure pushes many of us outward. Love and affection and support draws us back. Our orbits are defined by the balance between these forces.

We are a nation of immigrants on a planet of migrants. Our history is a story of explorers and pioneers, prospectors, adventurers, missionaries and rogues pushing out our boundaries until we now occupy almost every corner of the planet. For millions today, the only connection to the families of their birth is a phone call, a letter or the brief appearance of pixels on a screen.

Only the traveler can judge which pathway, the orbit of a planet or the far flung journey of a comet, is the most rewarding. I've spent a lot of time over the last several years visiting nursing homes, and I've heard regret near the end of both paths. Some who clung tightly to their family ties regretted the things they might have done but did not, and the places they never got to see. Some who chose a life of adventure regretted not spending more time with family and friends.

In truth, however, I've heard more regret expressed over the latter when the terrible loneliness of a nursing home, family scattered around the globe, friends left in the wake of the journey, becomes palpable. The dull sameness of the endless days and the cold emptiness of the nights can be terrifying in the company of strangers "waiting for God." Holidays can be cruel reminders of what was lost or abandoned, and a brief visit once or twice a year on Thanksgiving or Christmas does little to fill the emptiness.

But...we're Facebook friends with mom, and dad has finally learned to Skype. Yes, and technology has allowed the touchscreen to replace human touch for so many, and the agony and unrest of the present day has grown proportionally as the support and stability of the extended family in our society yielded to the ascendancy of the self.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and we have our gratifications and distractions, our dramas and our pixel opinions, even our nanny state all expanding to fill the needs once satisfied by family and community. They are a poor replacement for morality and faith and maturity, for the wisdom of a grandmother, the compassion of a grandfather and the comradery of brothers and sisters and cousins. Technology can never equal the faces of family and friends sitting together around a table.



The Middle Path
By: Don Perry
onthemiddlepath.com

Soil Testing

Soil testing is a very important part of growing a quality crop, having a good looking garden, having a quality lawn, or a good pasture. Soil testing gives you an insider look at what is going on in your soil. Let's take a look at what a soil test can do for you and why it's a good idea to have your soil tested.

If you have a garden at your house it's a good idea to have your soil tested every other year. A soil test will show you the pH, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, zinc, and manganese levels in your soil. These are essential elements for plant growth.

Nitrogen is also a very important nutrient for plant growth. However, nitrogen is very mobile in the soil. Therefore, you could test your soil and by the time that you receive your soil results back from the lab the amount of nitrogen in the soil could be drastically different.

pH is often the most limiting factors when it comes to growing plants in the mountains. A soil test will tell you the pH and the recommended lime to bring that pH up to an acceptable level for the plants. Any lime that is added to soil will take 3-6 months to fully take effect. That means for spring plantings, now is a good time to take a soil test and begin adding lime.

When taking a sample for your lawn, a depth of 4 inches is appropriate. If you're taking a sample for gardens, ornamentals, mixed fruit trees, and wildlife plots sample to a depth of 6-8 inches. You can use a spade or a soil probe.

When you take the sample it's best to take multiple samples from around the plot that you are interested in. This way you'll get an average of the area that you're sampling and a better representative sample. Using a trowel or small shovel, take 8-10 samples and mix them together in a bucket. From that bucket take the sample that you'll bring into the Extension office so that we can send it to the UGA labs. Make sure that you get enough soil so that the lab can test properly. About 2 cups of soil is needed.

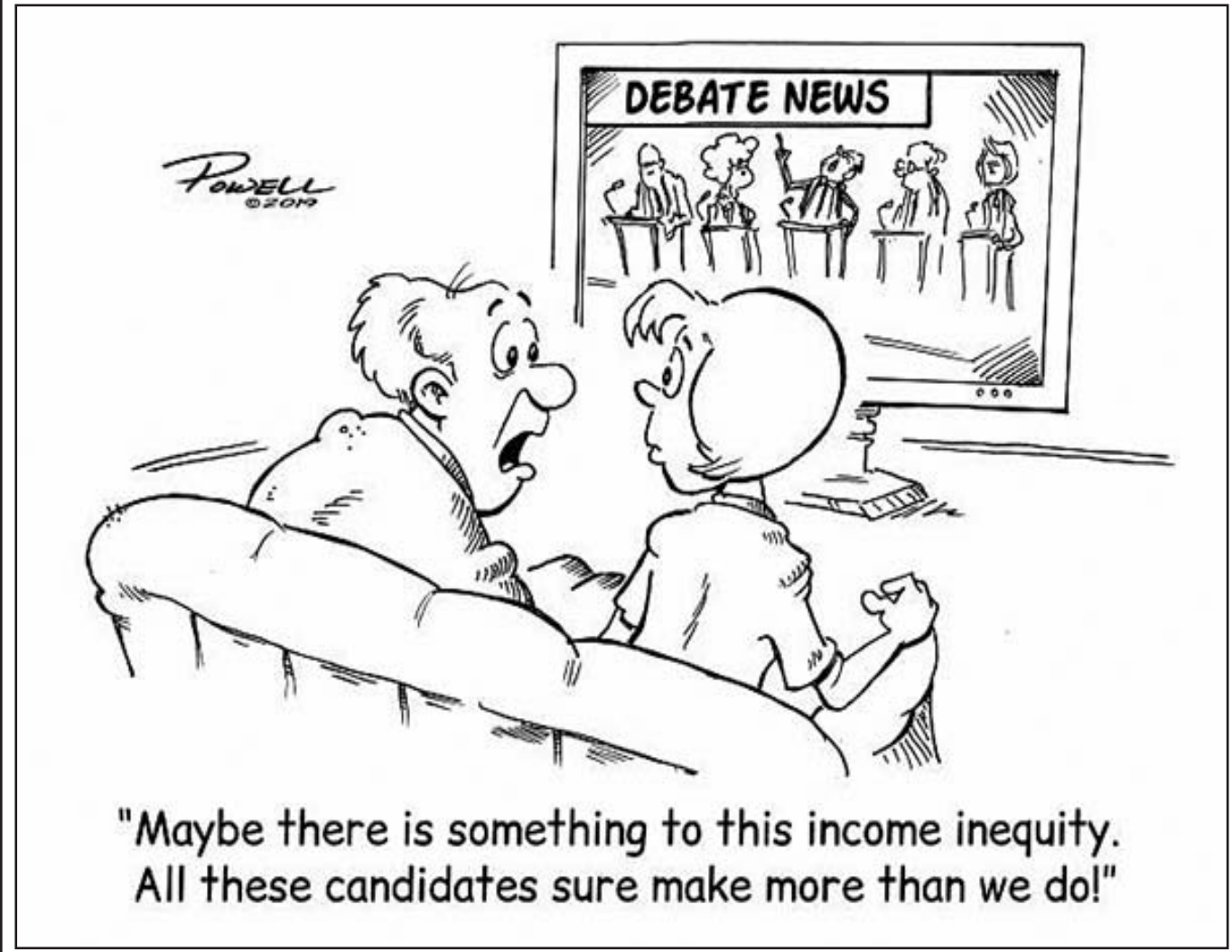
If you're sampling from an area that has mulch or grass on top of it push that material away so that you penetrate down to the soil. Pull out any rock or roots that you get with the soil sample and throw them away. When you take the sample, spread the wet/damp soil on a newspaper and let the soil air out overnight before bringing it in to the office, so that it dries out some.

When deciding how many samples you need to take, look at the area and determine how many different types of conditions you have. For example, if you have a low lying spot, a steep slope, and a wooded area, each one of these would need a unique soil sample done. When you receive the results from the lab they will have recommendations for you based on the types of plants that you have or plan to have.

Bring soil samples into your local county Extension Office. If you have questions regarding the soil sampling or the results you can call your local Extension office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.



Watching and Working
Jacob Williams



GUEST COLUMNS

From time to time, people in the community have a grand slant on an issue that would make a great guest editorial. Those who feel they have an issue of great importance should call our editor and talk with him about the idea. Others have a strong opinion after reading one of the many columns that appear throughout the paper. If so, please write. Please remember that publication of submitted editorials is not guaranteed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SHOULD BE EMAILED OR MAILED TO: Towns County Herald, Letter to the Editor, PO Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546. Our email address: tcherald@windstream.net. Letters should be limited to 200 words or less, signed, dated and include a phone number for verification purposes. This paper reserves the right to edit letters to conform with Editorial page policy or refuse to print letters deemed pointless, potentially defamatory or in poor taste. Letters should address issues of general interest, such as politics, the community, environment, school issues, etc. Letters opposing the views of previous comments are welcomed; however, letters cannot be directed at, nor name or ridicule previous writers. Letters that recognize good deeds of others will be considered for publication.*

Note: All letters must be signed, and contain the first and last name and phone number for verification.

Towns County Community Calendar

Bridge Players	Every Monday: All Saints Lutheran	12:30 pm
Free GED prep.	Every Tuesday: Old Rec. Center	4 pm
Alcoholics Anon.	Sharp UMC (Men)	7 pm
Alcoholics Anon.	Every Wednesday: Hiawassee UMC	Noon
SMART Recovery	Red Cross Building	7 pm
Bridge Players	Every Thursday: All Saints Lutheran	12:30 pm
Free GED prep.	Old Rec. Center	4 pm
Movers & Shakers	Every Friday: Sundance Grill	8 am
Alcoholics Anon.	Red Cross Building	7 pm
Alcoholics Anon.	Every Sunday: Red Cross Building	7 pm
Conv./Vis. Bureau	Second Tuesday of each month: Civic Center	8 am
Gem & Mineral Club	Senior Center	1:30 pm
Arts & Crafts Guild	Calvary Church	4 pm
Lions Club	Daniel's Restaurant	6 pm
Mtn. Coin Club	N. GA Tech	6 pm
Basket Weavers	Second Wednesday of each month: SC Fire Hall	10 am
USCG Aux.	Senior Center	7 pm
Hiaw Writers	Second Thursday of each month: Hiaw Pk. Comm. Rm.	10:30
Awake America Prayer	Civic Center	Noon
Mtn. Comm. Seniors	Senior Center	1 pm
Democratic Party	Civic Center	6 pm

Have something to sell?

Let the Herald work for you!



Deadline for the Towns County Herald is Friday by 5 PM • 706-896-4454

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

Kenneth West Owner/Publisher	Shawn Jarrard Editor	Mark Smith Staff Writer	Chad Stack Sports
Derek Richards Advertising Director	Shawn Henrikson Copy Editor	Todd Forrest Sports	Lowell Nicholson Photographer

Publication No: 635540

Advertising, News deadlines: Friday at 5 p.m.

Towns County (1 Year) \$25. Out of County (1 Year) \$35. Entered as second-class matter on November 8, 1928, at the post office at Hiawassee, Georgia under Act of March 3, 1879. With additional mailing points. The Towns County Herald is not responsible for errors in advertising beyond the cost of the actual space involved. All advertisements are accepted subject to the Publisher's approval of the copy and to the space being available, and the Publisher reserves the right to refuse any advertisement. **Postmaster:** Send change of address to: Towns County Herald, P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546.

Office located at: 518 N. Main St. Suite 7 "The Mall", Hiawassee
Phone: (706) 896-4454 Fax: (706) 896-1745 Email: tcherald@windstream.net
Or mail to: PO Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546