

Young Harris talks budget, sewer rate increase

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In their November regular meeting via Zoom, the Young Harris City Council and Mayor Andrea Gibby discussed the city's Proposed 2021 Budget and upcoming sewer rate increase.

"We based (the budget) off of 2019 because it didn't include COVID and it didn't include leachate (treatment)," Councilman Steve Clark said. "If you think about it, since then, Andrea, you guys have reallocated some labor things

... so there is extra expense."

Gibby commented on the work Clark has done to adjust sewer rates, with an upcoming increase of 28% to create a 7.5% contingency fund for any needs that may arise at the sewer.

Clark said that 7.5% may end up getting absorbed by the city's extra labor costs after reallocation, "so the fact that your expense numbers for '21 are coming out higher, that doesn't surprise me."

"Steve did a quick review of our three long contracts with the USDA, two water and one

sewer," Gibby said. "They all have language in them that state that we have to meet our obligations. We have to set our rates high enough to cover our debt, or USDA can come in and set them for us."

The mayor also informed the council of an expense involving putting gravel and dirt at a property owned by the city.

"In the early '90s, the (Zell Miller family) gave the city 2.25 acres of land right on the corner of Brasstown and Corn Creek," Gibby said. "It has been landlocked until recently. Last year, (City Attorney Marvin Harkins) helped us get an easement from Shirley Miller to put a road in there.

"All of a sudden, we had an opportunity to get some dirt and gravel in there, but we had to take the opportunity and get it done. The invoice – and we had this in SPLOST – was \$16,983.43. You can go down there and look at it.

"We have put a fence over it because there were some people that had already gone in and been spinning in their cars."

Councilman John Kelley visited the property recently with Shirley Miller and Councilman Matt Miller, with Kelley noting that Shirley was very happy with the results. Gibby said the property was "stunningly gorgeous" and will be great for future generations to enjoy.

Along with the development of this property,

Mayor Gibby asked that the council ratify a grant process for \$450,000.

"Everything happened all at the same time because the Land and Water Conservation Fund only happens every two years," Gibby said. "I was kind of at the end of some things going on, and (Economic Development Director Denise McKay) was finishing up some things.

"We started looking at the grant, and we realized, whether we get the money or not, we really needed to try to get this in. It was a huge process, and it was just a pre-application."

With approval from the

council, Gibby said she will bring more information at the beginning of the new year regarding the process and steps going forward.

Projects such as the pavilion at Cupid Falls are nearing completion, concluding a series of SPLOST projects for the city this year.

As advertised in the Towns County Herald, the Young Harris City Council held two public hearings last week for the 2021 budget and sewer rate increase, and councilmembers will present these topics again in their Dec. 1 regular meeting.

Unfortunately, the annual Christmas Tree Lighting that



Steve Clark

has taken place for decades at the beginning of December is canceled this year due to COVID-19.

Holiday Cheer...from Page 1A



More than a dozen volunteers showed up at the Hiwassee Town Square Saturday to put up Christmas decorations for the community. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Up Hiwassee event that the city hosts every year, but due to COVID-19, the usual public gathering has been canceled and the event is being moved to an online setting.

"We feel like that event will draw a lot of people at one time that would stay," Ordiales said of a potential public gathering. "That is a little different from our First Fridays, because that is four or five hours, and people are in and out and there is not a congregation of a lot of people."

The lights will still be on for people who want to visit at other times, but the mayor and City Council think the current course of action is best to ensure the safety of families.

"We are going to have Santa sitting by the tree with a mask on saying sorry he couldn't be here this year," Ordiales said. "There is a Letters to Santa, so we want to make sure that people come by and drop them off and make sure they leave their address, because we will be writing back to all who have

left us your address.

"That is how we will do it this year. It will still be Dec. 5 at 6 p.m., which is when we would have lit up the square, and we will have virtual shots of the square lit up. The square will be lit up the whole time through January so people can come take pictures.

"We have a few new ornaments, the big candy cane and the penguin in the pickup truck. We try to add more and make everything look a little nicer (every year)."

Election...from Page 1A

recount to detect any voting irregularities, an effort that was undertaken by local elections boards Nov. 13-18.

According to a Nov. 19 audit report, "Georgia's original machine count resulted in a margin of 0.3% between candidates Joe Biden and Donald Trump, requiring a full manual count of just over 5 million ballots to complete an efficient risk-limiting audit.

"Audit boards from all 159 Georgia counties examined 41,881 batches, hand-sorting and counting each ballot as part of the process, which was the largest hand count of ballots in United States history."

Ultimately, several counties found ballots that ended up adding nearly 500 votes to Trump's totals, but it was not enough to overcome the more than 12,000-vote Biden lead.

"The audit process also led to counties catching mistakes they made in their original count by not uploading

all memory cards," the release said Thursday. "Those counties uploaded the memory cards and re-certified their results, leading to increased accuracy in the results the state will certify."

Here in Towns County, the complete hand recount turned up a single additional vote for Trump, who won the county with 80.01% support. The Secretary of State kept the county's previously certified vote total in Friday's statewide certification.

"The audit confirmed that the original machine count accurately portrayed the winner of the election," the release said, with Raffensperger adding that the statewide audit "reaffirmed that the state's new secure paper ballot voting system accurately counted and reported results."

"This is a credit to the hard work of our county and local elections officials, who moved quickly to undertake and complete such a momentous task in a short period of time," Raffensperger said.

Currently, it appears that Biden has enough Electoral College votes to be named the next president of the United States. Most national news agencies have already dubbed him "president-elect," but unless Trump concedes, Biden will earn that title only if at least 270 electors vote for him on Dec. 14.

Trump is waging multiple legal battles in several states to try to prove widespread fraud and/or irregularities in the overall result, and it remains to be seen whether his efforts will be successful in overturning Biden's apparent victory.

The state runoff for District 4 Public Service Commissioner will coincide with Georgia's two U.S. Senate race runoffs on Jan. 5, 2021.

Dec. 7 is the registration deadline to vote in the Jan. 5 runoff elections, and there will be three weeks of early voting set to begin Dec. 14, with no Saturday voting for the runoffs.

Christmas Lights...from Page 1A

and they learn the concept of 'Home Made' just the way grandma used to do it!" the website says.

And Thomason is expecting a full house this year, with booths filled by local businesses and community organizations alike, not to mention the Fairgrounds' own family-friendly offerings.

"We will have our hotdog and marshmallow roast over by the barn," Thomason said. "We have food booths selling food. Down in the Exhibit Hall, we will have more arts and crafts, and Jerry Taylor will be playing Christmas music on the organs.

"We will have organizations with display booths down there and different businesses that will be with us. We are going to give some prize money away for the Exhibit Hall booth and the best-decorated booth on the Fairgrounds."

On Saturday, Nov. 28, a church out of Bryson City will have 30 people Christmas Caroling to add to the wonderland experience at the Fairgrounds.

Of course, there can't be a Christmas Wonderland without Santa and his workshop, which the Fairgrounds has tweaked to ensure kids remain socially distanced from Santa but still get to see him.

"Santa Claus will be in

booth No. 2 right as you walk in, and he will be inside," Thomason said. "We are doing a Santa's Workshop, and the children can watch him and wave at him. They can get a photo with him; there is a little porch they can go up on and look over at him, but they won't be close to him."

Added Thomason, "We do have a Towns County Community Residents Night. Everyone in the Towns County community will be admitted for free on Thursday, Dec. 3, from 6-9 p.m. We do that every year just for our Towns County Residents.

"I don't know if the nursing home will be able to do anything because of the shut-ins, but we will be doing a drive-thru on Tuesday, Dec. 8. We don't do it on a night where we have other visitors here.

"That will be from 5:30-7:30 p.m., and that is for anybody that can't get out and walk. We will have golf carts to take people around on other nights."

Golf carts used will be sanitized, and the Fairgrounds encourages people to wear masks and practice social distancing as much as possible when they visit.

"We want to say thank you to all of our sponsors who helped with prize money and helped with the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights,"

Thomason said.

Event sponsors include United Community Bank, Lake Chatuge Lodge, Towns County CVB, Jim McCreary, Mauldin Grading and Galaxy Bowling.

Alcoholics Anonymous meetings/times

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope, in order to solve their common problem and help others to recover from Alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Blairsville: Lutheran Church, 83 Earl Shelton: Monday 5:30 PM, open meeting. Mountain Presbyterian Church, 2945 Hwy 76: Monday 7 PM, open meeting; Wednesday 7 PM, open meeting; Saturday 8 AM, open meeting. St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Hwy 76 next to Presbyterian Church: Tuesday 7 PM, Ladies Meeting; Wednesday noon, open meeting.

Young Harris: Sharp Memorial Methodist Church on College Campus: Tuesday 7 PM, Men's Meeting.

Hiwassee: Methodist Church, 1139 Hwy 76: Wednesday, noon, open meeting. 1298 Jack Deyton Circle: Friday 7 PM, open meeting; Sunday 7 PM, open meeting.

For more meeting info, call 828-837-4440.