

# BRMEMC Franchise Fee to be reintroduced in Hiawassee

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Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales will be asking the Hiawassee City Council to approve a first reading of a new EMC Franchise Fee Ordinance in the Feb. 6 regular city meeting.

The ordinance will feature wording that more clearly compels the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC to collect the fees from its Hiawassee customers, distinguishing it from a similar ordinance the council passed, then repealed last year.

Mayor Ordiales also said that the city will be look-

ing into the possibility of implementing a cap on the total amount of fees to be collected from individual entities in a given year, which would benefit the EMC's larger customers, like Chatuge Regional Hospital and Nursing Home.

"The intent of collecting these franchise fees is to improve our city," said Mayor Ordiales.

After considering public feedback, the mayor sensed definite support for the ordinance in the community, from people who believe the city will be able to put the money toward improvements that will benefit everyone.

Out of an abundance

of caution, Ordiales decided to meet with the EMC and several community stakeholders over the last month to determine if the franchise fee would impose an undue burden on businesses and churches, and she was satisfied that it would not.

She held meetings with three of the biggest power customers in Hiawassee – Chatuge Regional Hospital, McConnell Memorial Baptist Church and Ingles.

"One of the complaints that we heard at the (Nov. 27 franchise fee) public hearing was, if you raise this fee for Ingles, they're going to raise their groceries, and we're

going to have to pay more money," said Ordiales. "So, I asked them, is this something that would affect your pricing? Would you consider increasing your prices to cover this? And they said no."

Continued Ordiales: "I feel it's something that we need to put back on the table and discuss ... considering we are losing SPLOST, we are building parks, we are trying to correct the lighting in the city."

"Everybody's talking about where is that money going to go to. First of all, we don't know how much it is, but just to light up Mayors Park will take the first year of franchise fees. And then, we'll worry about fixing and correcting the lighting for the rest of the city."

Should city councilmembers collectively decide to approve the first reading of the new EMC Franchise Fee Ordinance, they will get the chance to vote on a second reading and subsequent adoption in a follow-up meeting, and the ordinance would go into effect this summer.



Hiawassee City Hall

It should be noted that the council dynamic has changed since the ordinance was repealed in December – two councilmembers who voted no are no longer on the city council.

The franchise fees would be collected from all EMC account holders inside Hiawassee City Limits, and would appear as line items on bills to the tune of 4 percent

of gross electric sales based on kWh usage, and 5 percent of gross cable and fiber sales.

Per state law and the Hiawassee City Charter, the city has a right to collect the fees as rent for the EMC running its infrastructure through city property. Once again, whether the city will actually begin to collect the fees is now up to the council.

## Stowers chosen as DAR Good Citizen in 2018

The DAR's Good Citizen program is Old Unicoi Trail Chapter's way of recognizing outstanding high school seniors who exhibit the qualities of good citizenship in their homes, schools, and communities. Annually, high schools in Union, Towns and Fannin counties, respectively, select a Good Citizen from their graduating class. This year, the Chapter is pleased that Towns County High School (TCHS), Hiawassee, has chosen Hayley Faith Stowers. Hayley is the daughter of Jeff Stowers, wrestling coach at TCHS. Lana Parker, TCHS counselor, coordinated the school's award.

Miss Stowers was selected for her dependability (truthfulness, honesty, punctuality); service (cooperation, helpfulness, responsibility); leadership (personality, self-control, initiative) and patriotism (unselfish loyalty to American ideals). Hayley is a member of Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) and United Community Bank Junior Board of Directors. She is TCHS Senior Class President, October Rotary Student of the Month, All A Honor Roll, Wrestling Manager (4 Years), Football Manager (2 Years), and member of the Varsity Cross Country Team (4 Years).

Hayley plans to attend North Georgia College to major in nursing; she speaks of her ultimate goal of being a physician's assistant. She received a medal, certificate, and honorarium from Old Unicoi Trail Regent, Annette Hopgood of



Annette Bomar Hopgood, Regent and Hayley Stowers

Blairsville. Ann Atkinson of Young Harris chairs the Chapter's Good Citizens committee.

The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution was founded in 1890 to promote historic preservation, education and patri-

tism. Its members are descended from the patriots who won American independence during the Revolutionary War. For information on membership or to attend a meeting of Old Unicoi Trail, email oldunicoitrail@gmail.com. NT(Jan31.Z19)gg