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# TOWNS COUNTY CIVIC ASSOCIATION (TCCA)



*"Addressing the issues and concerns affecting the citizens of Towns County and its environs."*

Newsletter Volume 3/ Issue 2 Late Winter/Spring Edition

### **Mission Statement >>>**

The TOWNS COUNTY CIVIC ASSOCIATION is a non-partisan/non-political association supporting the community since 2004. Our mission is to provide a platform for **Individuals, Families, Businesses, Organizations, Neighborhood Associations, City and County Governments** to address issues and concerns which affect the management, planning, and development of the County and its environs. Our objective is to share the concerns expressed by the TCCA, to ensure transparency and accountability of both Cities and County government officials as well as State appointed authorities and utility providers, and to fully cooperate with those authorities in the best interest of Towns County.

### **Some of What Your TCCA Is Doing:**

- *Keeping abreast of the treatment and control of the Parrot Feather invasive plants in Lake Chatuge, especially in the area around Macedonia Baptist Church.*
- *Assessing the pros and cons of rapid growth in and around Highway 76 especially in the Hiawassee area, and what impact it might have on traffic and housing needs.*
- *Looking into the possibilities of renovating or building a new Post Office for both Young Harris and Hiawassee.*

### **Summer Membership Meeting – June 25, 2024**

Our June meeting is going to be a special one as it is our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the Towns County Civic Association. We hope to have several previous TCCA Presidents to attend to talk about their experiences. We have tentatively scheduled a couple of political candidates and administrators to speak on future growth in Hiawassee and Young Harris. So, plan to be there **Tuesday June 25th from 6:00-8:00 p.m. at the Towns County Civic Center in Hiawassee.** Looking forward to seeing a lot of our members and visitors which are always welcome. ***Also, the TCCA will be presenting at Movers & Shakers June 21.***

### **MESSAGE FROM ONE OF OUR REGIONAL LEADERS**



*Submitted by Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw: — Things are going very well within the county. Our office is extremely busy and excited as we are coordinating the move into the newly remodeled courthouse which should take place from June 14 through the weekend. We should be up and running on June 17 in our new offices. I have scheduled two dates to hold an open house for the public to get their first view of the project. **The dates are Tuesday June 4 and Thursday June 6 between the hours of 5pm to 7pm.***

I would like to give a special thanks to Senator Bo Hatchett and State Representative Stan Gunter for the hard work in the capital. Towns County has made history as we will be receiving a \$400,000 grant to combat Parrot Feather. I would also like to take this time to thank the citizens for their hard work, dedication, and financial support of this extremely important endeavor. I am overjoyed with what has been accomplished and am certain we will be able to overcome our Parrot Feather problem. I am also excited about the new monument signs that we have placed at the entrance to the county and at Foster Park. They are now complete and should last for many years.

I would like to thank everyone for all the support you guys have shown me during my service as commissioner. I hope to continue to serve the county successfully for at least the next 4 years. As always, if you have any questions or any need, please do not hesitate to contact me or stop by the office.

# **SIGNIFICANT ISSUES FROM MEETINGS ATTENDED BY TCCA BOARD MEMBERS**

(Summary of meetings taken place since last newsletter)

## **City and County Government**

### **City of Hiawassee:**

- \* Session-Rushton & Assoc. gave the city a good audit report. City Hall getting bids for roof leaks; 1st Hiawassee on square for this year with 10 hikers based in. **(February Minutes)**
- \* City contributed \$20K to Parrot Feather eradication out of Parks & Recreation Account. **(February Minutes)**
- \* Chief Parker said City is down to 2 officers (health reasons). City only pays \$19.50/hr. which is less than surrounding areas. He will be buying several Patrol rifles @\$129 each, taken out of drug money: also 2 Tasers, and a 3rd camera (for license plates). **(February Minutes)**
- \* Council accepted 3 DDA resignations, Efren Lopez, Monica McKenna, & Mayor Liz Ordiales; and accepted Paul Smith, Steven Harper & City Council member Amy Barrett as new DDA Board members. **(March Minutes)**
- \* Council also approved ARC grant money (\$42,166.74) to be paid back to DDA for work they had done in '23/'24 on the Paris Business Center. **(March Minutes)**
- \* Council approved a joint retreat for future planning with DDA in May, costing \$1,750 for site & facilitator. Third filter at the Water Plant should be done by mid-April; the full-compliance Water Quality Report is online (@City of Hiawassee). **(April Minutes)**
- \* Hydrant flushing will be done from mid-April to mid-May. Lift station near the Sand Bar will have a study by EMI, which will cost \$28,800. The SPLOST money of \$60,997 will pay for the restaurant part of the building and 17.65% of the private use part. The public portion of \$85,580 will be covered by a grant and then a line of credit. **(April Minutes)**
- \* The DDA owned Shook House is now available for an incubator space. **(April Minutes)**
- \* The Accessory Structure Ordinance now requires these structures to be placed at the side or rear of principal buildings (due to dragon structure controversy last year). **(April Minutes)**

### **City of Young Harris:**

- \* Approved a 5% increase in sewer rates on March bills. **(February Minutes)**
- \* DOT has started on Y.H. Bypass & Hwy. 76 road work. **(February Minutes)**
- \* New water meters have arrived with installation in March or April. **(February Minutes)**
- \* Timberline booster pump project after many setbacks, will have 2 alternating submersible pumps in underground cans made from high-density polyethylene & have added protection from an insulated aluminum box. Byers Well Drilling is doing the work, cost: \$83,639. **(April Minutes)**
- \* Mineral Springs Rd. will be partially paved (915'). Following development of Kaiser-Dean property, the rest of the road will be paved. **(April Minutes)**
- \* 800 new water meters are being installed; City insurance is due May 1st, but no bids yet. **(April Minutes)**

### **Commissioner's Meetings:**

- \* Courthouse is on schedule and on budget, completely paid for with SPLOST, and tours will be in. June. **(February Minutes)**
- \* Parrot feather: More than \$300K has been raised and TVA will hold a meeting at Foster Park at 5 p.m. 2/27. **(February Minutes)**
- \* County entrance signs are being worked on, first at Hwy. 76-75 and then at Union County line in Y.H., also a sign for Foster Park at Mining Gap Rd.-Hwy. 76. **(February Minutes)**
- \* Public tours of the newly renovated courthouse should be in early April (Now scheduled for June), depending on weather allowing the parking/landscaping in front to be completed. **(March Minutes)**
- \* Commissioner signed a Budget Revenue addition–SO Insurance reimbursement, and a Budget Expenditure addition–SO Vehicle repair. Also signed an Internship Program Grant Agreement for this summer (\$3,259); a

contract with GMRC for Firefighters Grant Application Service of \$3,60K for a new truck; and a USDA Food Program for T. C. Daycare. **(March Minutes)**

- \* Steven Harper was appointed to fill the Chairman of the Board of Elections now that Roy Perren resigned to run for a position on the Board of Education. **(April Minutes)**
- \* April is the 50th Anniversary of Mountain Community Chorus and Bradshaw signed a Proclamation to that effect. **(April Minutes)**
- \* Bradshaw presented Jerry Taylor with a plaque for serving 25 years as Towns Co. Historian. Taylor & Tyler Osborn presented a short slide show on the 165th birthday in March of the County. **(April Minutes)**
- \* A 2024 Budget Amendment was adopted to transfer \$65K from the Jail Fund to the Sheriff's Office for a patrol car and body cameras. **(April Minutes)**

### Convention Visitors Board (CVB)

- \* Jon Peels, Gen.Mgr, Brasstown Valley Resort, is a new member. **(April Minutes)**
- \* Andrea Anderson, Treasurer, reported net revenue of \$24,366. **(April Minutes)**
- \* The new Towns County welcome signs, a work in progress, is expected to cost approximately \$52,500. Board approved an advertising package from Mnemonic to include radio, TV, billboards, and more to cover 17 surrounding counties. **(April Minutes)**
- \* Fairgrounds reports that there are very few weekends without scheduled events through 2024. **(April Minutes)**
- \* Mr. Scott Newton, a local media producer, presented audio/video promotion productions as examples of his work that is Towns County oriented. He has a resume that includes many other Towns County government entities. It was pointed out that the CVB website needs updating. **(April Minutes)**

### Health and Education

#### Board of Education:

- \* Feb. meeting-10 staff resignations need to be filled, most are retiring. 8th graders Tucker Wheeler and Maddie Walls awarded REACH Scholarships if they keep a 2.5 GPA through High School. **(February Minutes)**
- \* Finances are good with the Elementary playground having had a big upgrade and E-SPLOST will pay for replacing the Elementary School's floors, a new Ag Facility, and facility, tech & campus-wide security upgrades. One of the 3 buses to be replaced will be a Bookmobile that can be taken to daycare and libraries for kids to come aboard to learn. **(February Minutes)**
- \* They were very happy E-SPLOST passed because the \$1.75 million grant from the state, funding the new ag building now has a bid of \$2.4 mill. They also had to buy a new lawnmower. **(March Minutes)**
- \* Jeff Langley provided info. on an off-campus Bible Study Course: voluntary, credit approved, not tax-funded, not on Govt. property, parent-approval, non-denominational, non-political, free tuition, only High School. This is legal, already in surrounding counties. Starts in Towns Co. in January 2025. **(April Minutes)**
- \* Ground was broken for the Ag building at the school on this date, April 8, 2024. **(April Minutes)**

### City and County Utilities

#### T.C. Water & Sewer Authority:

- \* (Corrections from previous report) 2 water breaks, \$500K is the contract for the Frog Pond branch construction; the \$14K is a customer agreement to connect to the new line; Frog Pond bond and work contracts are being finalized and expected to be complete in mid-March, '24. **(February Minutes)**
- \* Considering area developments, the growth in water services potential is high. A position remains open for skilled, experienced, CDL-licensed talent. Applications have been solicited. **(February Minutes)**

- \* Chairman Noblet conferred with Parrot Feather TVA contractor regarding concerns about water inlet. Contractor suggested that a 6-hour inlet shutdown has been used successfully on 16-20 invasive treatments per year with no errors. **(April Minutes)**
- \* Chairman Noblet expressed ongoing effort to hire new talent primarily to work on leaks. Encouraged all staff and board to keep alert for good prospects. **(April Minutes)**
- \* Manager Nichols expressed considerable distress over USPS foul-up in mailing customer paper bills. Many customers either didn't receive their bill or incurred late charges as a result. In a related issue, she states that some customers "never pay" their bill. **(April Minutes)**
- \* Manager Nichols also ran point with the State of Georgia to ensure that T.C.W&SA licensing was secured. **(April Minutes)**
- \* Attorney Eddie Corn to meet with Frog Pond parties on March 27th at 10 a.m. for contract settlement and signing. **(April Minutes)**

### **Blue Ridge EMC:**

- \* A solar rooftop installation in YH is in process. **(April Minutes)**
- \* Additional power line for the Caldwell Detention center will enable welding classes there. Most customers pay on-line. **(April Minutes)**
- \* There are significant delays in the mail delivery by the PO. Any customer charged a fee due to a late payment caused by the poor mail service will be reimbursed. **(April Minutes)**
- \* New Fiber customers are continually being added; **(April Minutes)**
- \* Power outages are promptly handled ranging from 30 minutes to about 6 hours duration depending upon the complexity. **(April Minutes)**

### **Community Interest**

#### **Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce:**

- \* Burger Week Plus–1/16-25/24 brought in 200 passports w/winner Gary Caines; YHC Burgers, Brew & Basketball event was well attended. May NEGMTA meeting will be at Hamilton Gardens. **(February Minutes)**
- \* First quarter Business After Hours–2/27, 5:30 @ BRMEMC. **(February Minutes)**
- \* Wearing of the Green for St. Patrick’s Day, a Gift Basket from 8 businesses will be held for customers wearing green. **(March Minutes)**
- \* April had 103 visitors and 78 calls, 6 new members. **(March Minutes)**
- \* President Julie Payne spoke at Movers & Shakers on 4/5. 10<sup>th</sup> Annual GA Mountain Story Telling Festival- April 12 & 13 at the Ridges Resort. **(March Minutes)**
- \*

#### **County Health Department:**

- \* The first order of business was the election of officers. The same officers were elected. They reviewed the Environmental Reports, Nursing Report and Financial Reports. The financials are in good shape. The fund balance is \$531,077. **(March Minutes)**
- \* The nursing report reviewed immunizations and annual training. Dr. Zachary Taylor, Director of District 2 Public Health, and his associates, presented a report on “State of Health: Towns County.” Childhood diseases are on the rise in many states, including GA, because many young children are not getting immunity shots. **(March Minutes)**

#### **Save Lake Chatuge (Per Shannon Watson May 2, 2024):**

- \* **Irrigation restriction is for treatment area & those who irrigate using lake water ONLY. If you are outside of treatment area and/or use city water for irrigation, you are not under a restriction. Also, annual broadleaf plants are those that are planted every year.**

- \* We're thrilled to announce that Aqua Services will be on-site tomorrow for the first application to an area upstream of the Mayor's Park boat ramp and just past the bridge. This marks an important step forward in our ongoing efforts to preserve the beauty of our community's waterways.
- \* As part of this application, we kindly ask residents to take note of the following restriction: there will be a 3-day irrigation restriction on annual broadleaf plants, including vegetables.
- \* We appreciate your cooperation and understanding as we work together to maintain the health and vitality of our environment.

*Note: The information presented in the above may not necessarily reflect the final decisions from the noted meeting. Summaries are as submitted by Board attendees and edited for this publication. Future newsletters will reflect updated information as it becomes available.*

## ★SPECIAL FEATURED ARTICLE★

### ARE GMO's IN OUR FOOD SUPPLY SAFE

From time to time, the TCCA will publish a special article on a topic, whether it be governmental, political, environmental, or just something that is of interest to our citizens. Many of us on the TCCA Board have noticed numerous posts in media about our food supply, basically focusing on how safe it is or why costs keep rising. This issue highlights a topic we have heard about that has been of interest to many – **What are GMO based foods and are they safe?** So, we asked our local County Extension Office. Jacob wrote the following and we liked it so well we plan on starting a new series called “ASK JACOB” that will be published from time to time.

#### **“Ask Jacob” A TCCA Regular Newsletter Feature >>>**



*Submitted by **Jacob Williams, County Extension Agent, Northeast District:***

As the County Agriculture Agent, I work with farmers who are open to using GMO crops and farmers who are opposed to it. I try to be open to all approaches, while promoting good stewardship of the resources that we have. You won't find me saying that organic is the only way or that all farmers should use pesticides and GMOs. I tend to view these things as tools. Any tool that is used inappropriately will either be broken or will not produce the desired outcome.

GMO stands for genetically modified organism. It might sound obvious, but products that are not organisms cannot be genetically modified. I've seen ads for salt stating that it is non-GMO. Salt is a mineral and contains no DNA; therefore, it cannot be genetically modified. This branding is often used as an advertising enticement.

Gene modifying technology has come a long way. It used to be done using the particle gun method. Tiny metal particles were coated with desired DNA and blasted at plant pieces, hoping that the genetic modification would take. Methods of genetic engineering now are very specific and only target the desired genes. The naturally found *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* is the bacteria used to insert genes from one species into another. At times you will now see, the phrase genetically engineered (GE). This often refers to CRISPR. CRISPR is a new technology that can also be used, which edits the genes already existing in the organism. CRISPR can turn on, off, or delete genes.

I would propose that GMOs seem like they are everywhere, but at the same time they aren't. What I mean by that is that there are 14 species of crops present that are GMO that have received approval for use. Not all of those are still in production. This link has all of the bioengineered foods that are currently approved. (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/be/bioengineered-foods-list>) I say that it seems like they are everywhere because crops like corn and soybean are almost ubiquitous in the ingredient list when look at products in the grocery store. However, at the same time they aren't everywhere, because when you walk down the produce aisle it is very unlikely that you would find something that is GMO. Oftentimes advertisers want us to believe that GMOs are everywhere, so that you will buy non-GMO lettuce. The fact of the matter is that GMO lettuce does not exist, and you could not buy it if you wanted. Labeling products as non-GMO also implies that non-GMO is superior, which is an opinion. In the US, GMO crops undergo extensive testing before hitting the market to make

sure that they are safe for human consumption. In the US, corn, soybean, and cotton are by far the most common GMO crops.

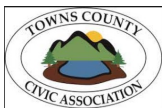
So, for what traits are GMOs normally modified? Herbicide tolerance is a big one. Herbicide tolerant crops allows farmers to use fewer herbicide applications and use conservation tillage, which captures more carbon in the soil. Insect resistance in crops reduces the amount of insecticides used on a crop such as corn, and improves the quality of the product brought to the market. Disease resistance has been done too. A GMO papaya saved the Hawaiian papaya industry after papayas were nearly wiped out by a virus. Some modifications can make a crop contain more vitamins, or last longer on the shelf, resulting in less waste.

One term that often confuses people is ‘hybrid’. All GMOs would be a hybrid, but not all hybrids are GMO. An example would be Silver King sweet corn. It is a hybrid, but it is not GMO. To create a hybrid, plant breeders cross two different parents. Each parent has desirable traits like flavor or disease resistance. The plant breeder will use conventional breeding methods, that have been used for hundreds of years, to create a hybrid that captures the desirable traits of both parents. The drawback is that any seed produced by that hybrid produces will not be true to type. So, if you are a seed saver hybrid, are not an option for you.

If you want to grow a GMO crop there is a lot of paperwork that you must sign first. You are not going to accidentally purchase one at box store or nursery. You will likely purchase a hybrid. Hybrids are great for home gardeners because they often have more disease and insect resistance that has naturally been bred into them. GMOs also have a minimum order amount. Usually, you need to be planting at least 1 acre of a specific variety to meet the minimum. The companies that create these GMOs spend a fortune on it, so that don’t allow their seed to be out there floating around.

GMO crops have provided benefits, but there are negatives too. There are cases where pests have become resistant to pesticides due to reliance on individual pesticides instead of a rotation. Pesticide resistance means that pests present an even larger problem than they did before. The companies that manufacture these GMO crops have patent rights to the seeds, which means that farmers can’t keep the seed from the crop they grow. Some farmers have gotten in trouble and been taken to court because their neighbor planted GMO and it cross-pollinated with their crop. GMO crops are a tool that farmers can use to feed and clothe the world, but just like any tool, if it’s used improperly, it will be broken. Therefore, the responsibility is on people to be good stewards of the resources that we have, to achieve the goal of feeding and clothing the world.

If you have questions about GMOs, you can contact your County Extension Office or email me at [Jacob.Williams@uga.edu](mailto:Jacob.Williams@uga.edu).



### CONTACT INFORMATION

**Towns County Civic Association**  
PO Box 455, Hiawassee, GA 30546-0455

### TCCA BOARD MEMBERS

*John Clemens   Michael Courey  
Larry Dietsch   Anna Denton   David Best  
Joan Crothers   Jim Olson   Joe Liguori  
Steven Harper*

**Email:** [townscountycivicassociation@gmail.com](mailto:townscountycivicassociation@gmail.com)  
**Website:** [townscountycivicassociation.com](http://townscountycivicassociation.com)

### For Members to Know

As a member of Towns County Civic Association, you are always welcome to attend our monthly meetings. They are typically held on the second Monday of each month (time and location may vary so please check with a Board Member before attending). If you, as a member, wish to share a concern or wish to make a presentation, please let one of our Board Members know to have time scheduled.

### NON-PROFIT SUPPORT (contributions over the years)

The TCCA, on occasion, will share their funds with various organizations supporting the citizens of Towns County. Below are a few of those organizations we have helped fund.

**Towns County High School  
Scholarship Fund**

**MountainTrue (Formally  
Hiawassee River Watershed)**

**Enotah CASA**

**Music on the Square**

## GENERAL TCCA ENROLLMENT INFORMATION

TCCA membership is approximately at 95 individual memberships, 1 HOA's and 2 businesses. Most annual memberships end on June 30 of each year unless you have paid for a two-year membership which saves \$5.00. If you haven't already paid your dues for this year (2024-2025) or for a two-year membership, please do so right away. See form below:

*The TCCA does not get any funds from the city, county, or state government. We solely rely on your membership dues and our volunteers to do what we do in support of Towns County. So please, for those of you needing to renew their membership, complete the form below and continue to support our efforts.*

### Application Form Instructions:

Complete each question below and mail with your dues to:

**Towns County Civic Association**  
**PO Box 455**  
**Hiawassee, GA 30546-0455**

\*\*\*\*\*PLEASE COMPLETE FORM, PRINT AND MAIL WITH DONATION\*\*\*\*\*

APPLICANT NAME(S): \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address (Towns Co. or Other): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

City & Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phones: \_\_\_\_\_

Emails: (TCCA uses BCC for mailouts): \_\_\_\_\_

If you have an address out of our immediate area, please enter below:

Address, City, State and Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

The Membership fiscal year is July 1 to June 30 for 2024-25 (\$25) or for two years (\$45) 2024-26. One year membership dues: **\$25.00**, or two-year membership dues – **\$45.00**. Paid Check # \_\_\_\_\_ or Cash: \$ \_\_\_\_\_. Please print and cut out the form and send to address above.

Please mark whether this is a new or renewal membership:  New Membership  Renewal Membership

As always, the TCCA appreciates your support, and we couldn't do what we do without your continuing membership in support of our efforts for Towns County.