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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 3 Late Summer Edition 2024

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

For those that attended our June 25 meeting, we want to thank you for being a part of our 20th anniversary event. It was a great meeting that was well attended. Those of us on the Board apologize for not having enough tables and food for everyone but we hope to do better next time. None the less, we had great speakers, great fellowship, and hope everyone learned about some of the topics that are important to our community. A summary of the event is on page 4 with a few pictures of our speakers. We are already planning for our next meeting in January of 2025.

MESSAGE FROM ONE OF OUR REGIONAL LEADERS



Mayor Hiawassee Jay Chastain, Jr.: *“I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Jay Chastain, and I am currently serving as the Acting Mayor for the City of Hiawassee. Since stepping into this role in June, I have been working with each department to ensure they have what they need to continue operating smoothly during this transition, including helping out where needed. Recently, I spent the day with the Water & Sewer Department as we cleaned the roadside ditches throughout the downtown area in preparation for the GMF parade. This was something that had not been done in several years and was cleaned just in time for the crowds to line the streets of downtown. I cannot stress enough how blessed we are*

to have such a great staff working for the city. They are truly the ones who keep everything running smoothly, and we could not do it without them!”

“Right now, we are working on a survey focusing on our infrastructure. Currently, we know that the City Water Department is losing at least 53% of the water it produces. While it is not uncommon to lose some water during production (a good goal is less than 15%), the fact that this number has grown over the last decade is unacceptable. This survey will help us identify where these leaks are occurring within our pipelines so that we can fix them, ultimately saving taxpayers money and reducing waste.”

“I want to extend an open invitation to anyone who would like to come to City Hall and meet with me. While serving as Acting Mayor, I have arranged my work schedule as a paramedic to be available to the citizens of Hiawassee three to four days each week. Hiawassee is my home; I grew up here, and have served on the council for 16 years, and, just like you, I want to see it thrive and be the best it can be. I look forward to meeting everyone and working together for the good of Hiawassee.”

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES FROM MEETINGS ATTENDED BY TCCA BOARD MEMBERS

(Summary of meetings taken place since last newsletter)

City and County Government

City of Hiawassee:

- * Mayor Ordiales stepped down from Mayor's office in June, Jay Chastain's 1st day as acting Mayor Pro Temp was June 18th. Board of Elections cancelled City election for Mayor at the 11/5 election date, leaving City election undecided. Council member Nancy Noblet is now Mayor Pro Temp of the Council. **(June July Minutes)**
- * Water Plant float in the lake was broken by Wake Boats, contacting the Division of Natural Resources for a No Wake sign. **(June July Minutes)**
- * Energy Management, Inc. (EMI) Pres. Fletcher Holliday said 3rd filter is installed with final Environmental Protection Declaration (EPD) approval. He said water loss over the past 15 yrs. of 40% of treated water is a big problem even though employees hunt and repair leaks. In 2023 audit loss of treated water was up to 53%. EMI proposed a 4–6-month study to find where the water is leaking, costing \$35K+. Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is one of the leaks. They have had a company checking, but still can't find the leaks. **(June July Minutes)**
- * Accessory Structure Ordinance had several changes re: name now Ornamental Structures which were defined, and standards set. **(August September Minutes)**
- * A city resident complained that two Stop signs removed from a nearby intersection, now dangerous and need replacement—Police Chief & Council disagreed. **(August September Minutes)**
- * The ongoing work on the restoration of the Paris Business Center back wall and front facade will need work costing \$52,915. Furniture cost: \$64K. **(August September Minutes)**

City of Young Harris:

- * Valley Trail development is proposing property annex, unit variance, and parking variance. Height of the structure(s) is no longer an issue (Commissioner will not vary from 35'). The project is to develop in two phases. It is favored by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, State of Georgia grants, and federal grants. **(June July Minutes)**

Commissioner's Meetings:

- * Ribbon cutting for return to renovated courthouse—extra courtroom, extra offices, central H/A, electric fenced area & annex w/holding cells for inmates on trial. **(June July Minutes)**
- * Retirement rates for County employees' contributions were matched by the County from 4% to 6%. A 4% increase in salaries of 4-H Coordinator Keri Bradshaw and Extension agent Jacob Williams. **(June July Minutes)**
- * The old Rec Center gym will return to youth basketball & winter pickleball court; the offices will be shared by Towns County Historical Soc., CASA, & GED adult education program. **(June July Minutes)**
- * Teresa Stephens, T.C. Food Pantry, spoke on lack of support, i.e. food shortage @ Northeast GA Food Bank (Backpack Program—weekend food for low-income children—is cut). **(August September Minutes)**
- * Commercial properties are being reassessed—the County is penalized if assessments are not at Fair Mkt. Value **(August September Minutes)**
- * Enchanted Valley moratorium on construction is extended by 30 days due to questions on sewer capacity and density—this area is a floodplain & has flooded in the past. **(August September Minutes)**

Convention Visitors Board (CVB)

- * Motion to increase the amount of minimum reserve to \$20K as a contingency buffer for unanticipated budget demands was approved. Grant applications and guidelines changes and deletions were presented. **(August**

September Minutes)

- * Considerations of applications to be actively encouraged beyond the Georgia Fairgrounds & Chatuge Chamber to serve other qualifying “non-profit” organizations was approved. (August September Minutes)
- * Bureau presented a new slogan and symbol for “Georgia’s High Point” promotion which can be seen at the Towns County CVB website. (August September Minutes)

Health and Education

Board of Education (BOE):

- * Supt. Berrong’s contract was renewed another 3 years. (June July Minutes)
- * S.O. contract renewed for School Resource Officers on campus–Board of Education pays 75% of contract for traffic control and Resource Officer (\$19,659); the County pays 25%. (June July Minutes)
- * Agriculture facility has a delay, footings for the bldg. must be re-engineered, putting completion to Jan. ‘25. Grant does not pay for the \$400K site prep. costs. (June July Minutes)

City and County Utilities

T.C. Water & Sewer Authority (TCW&SA):

- * Nathan Noblet declared financials to be in very good condition. They put cameras where water was being stolen from hydrants and voted to assess a \$500 fine to anyone caught stealing water. One perpetrator of water theft, a contractor, was identified and located. In Towns Co. every gallon in the hydrant lines is bought by the TCW&SA from the City of Hiawassee. The one known contractor has agreed to pay for metered hydrant water. Any other unknowns will have the same opportunity once they are identified and located. (June July Minutes)
- * The Frog Pond project to date, 6,000’ of water pipe is completed. Meter upgrade/swaps are ongoing. Discussion continues about the Environmental Protection Declaration (EPD)-mandated Asset Management Plan. A rough estimate to contract a civil engineer is \$30-50K. On another EPD mandate, lead (metal) check has cost approximately \$200K in compliance costs. (June July Minutes)
- * The Frog Pond project is ahead of schedule. Only 130 updated water meters are left to be changed. (August September Minutes)
- * Parrot Feather treatments appear to be working very well. There is a new, invasive concern with snails. A rate study is underway. (August September Minutes)
- * There has been a suggestion that a separate line item appear on bills to indicate “compliance costs” from government mandates that the Authority must pay but cannot control. For 2024 alone, those costs exceed \$250K. (August September Minutes)

Blue Ridge EMC:

- * They have 56,700 meters in GA & NC, 42K have been changed out; 16,758 Fiber customers in April. Outages due to weather bringing down trees-61%, animals-20%. Long term debt is \$120 million. (June July Minutes)
- * Their annual meeting was Sept. 14, Harp Rec. & Commencement Center, Young Harris College, 10 a.m. lunch and business meeting with door prizes. (August September Minutes)
- * Added 1,058 new electric meters bringing total meter count to 58,228. (August September Minutes)

Community Interest

Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce:

- * Made in Georgia income was up approx. \$2,600 over 2023 and had attendees from 10 different states.
- * 4th of July Boat Parade had 33 boats registered (June July Minutes)
- * Chamber will put the TCCA enrollment cards in the tourist’s and new homeowners packets they send out. (August September Minutes)

- * Holiday Bazaar November 2 & 3, 2024 (**August September Minutes**)
- * Scottish Highlands Games 2025 which have been held in Meeks Park in Blairsville, are moving to Towns County - June 7 & 8 2025 at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and ball fields (**August September Minutes**)

County Health Department:

- * Tony Berrong, Environmental Health Manager, honored for 25 yrs. of service; honored in memory of her 5-yr as Office Mgr. was Ms. Laura Beth. (**June July Minutes**)
- * Covid 19 cases on the rise—free test kits are available. Multistate outbreak of Bird flu (HPAI) has infected poultry, now dairy cows and humans; 100 million chickens infected, 163 dairy herds in 48 states, and 11 cases in humans in 3 states. No cases in GA since poultry cases in early 2022. (**June July Minutes**)

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.

The TCCA 20th Anniversary Meeting



The June meeting was an overall success as we had around 100 people in attendance that enjoyed being around fellow members and guests and enjoying a satisfying meal thanks to those brought special dishes and snacks to the meeting. The attendance was far more than expected and the TCCA regrets any inconvenience cause by not having enough tables and food for everyone.

None the less, it was great opportunity for our members and guest to hear from both the Democratic and Republican candidates for the 9th District Georgia House of Representatives. The Republican incumbent, Mr. Stan Gunter and the Democratic candidate, Ms. Charlotte Sleczkowski, who is new to running for public office but is very excited about running, both shared their vision and party platforms for their candidacies.

Towns County Commissioner, Cliff Bradshaw, shared his thoughts on several topics including the proposed new affordable housing project scheduled to be built along Highway 76 near Young Harris.

The new Mayor of Hiawassee, Jay Chastain, Jr., spoke on his history of living in the area, the love he has for managing growth and the obstacles he is having to overcome as he learns his new role as Mayor.

Ms. Denise McKay from the Hiawassee Downtown Development Authority explained the plans that are being discussed to improve and promote Hiawassee presence as a destination location for tourist and people wishing to make this area their new home. Ms. Rosemary Royston from the Young Harris Main Street Program shared their vision on improving the main street area in Young Harris.

There was also a special tribute to former Mayor of Hiawassee, Ms. Liz Ordiales, for her service to Hiawassee and her commitment to the citizens of Hiawassee.

If you missed this year’s meeting, please try to attend our next meeting which should be in January of 2025. We have equally outstanding plans for this event as well.

★SPECIAL FEATURED ARTICLE★

LASTEST INFO FROM GADOT ON SR515/US76 PROJECT

The Expansion of State Route 515 and More As of Late August

By Elizabeth C. Johnson; D1 Planning & Programming Liaison & Jason Dykes District Engineer

Construction and widening of the multimillion-dollar Georgia 515 along an 8.5 mile stretch of highway between Blairsville and Young Harris is becoming a reality. The project has been in the works for more than two decades and is now underway.

Future traffic conditions on SR 515/US 76 through this area of Union and Towns Counties demonstrated a need to provide capacity improvements to the corridor. To the north, the project would tie into the existing four-lane section at CR 1553/Timberline Drive within the northern city limits of Young Harris in Towns County. To the south, the project ties into the existing four-lane section at Young Harris Street in Blairsville, Union County.

The massive undertaking has been broken up into three phases, The first phase began in October 2023, it has two projects associated with it. The first prong of this phase is Trout stream restoration. Once accomplished, GDOT would then move onto building a bypass.

The ecological restoration project is in Young Harris. The project restores a portion of a perennial trout stream that has been degraded by past anthropogenic activities. It is currently located within an active pasture where cattle access is prevalent. The reach of stream that is being restored is actively eroding, lacks stable substrates, and has areas of bank collapse throughout. Approximately 353 linear feet of stream is being relocated to the adjacent historic floodplain area and restored to improve streambank stability, water quality, and aquatic habitat thus restoring hydrologic function; reducing lateral migration rates; and removing non-native vegetation from the riparian corridor. Once completed, a 2-lane rural bypass along with two roundabouts will be constructed around the west side of Young Harris beginning at Brasstown Creek Road and ending at Timberline Dr. GDOT's contractor, C.W. Matthews, has thus far completed approximately 39% of the job.

Phase II of the undertaking consists of 3.2 miles of widening and the reconstruction of SR 515/ SR 2/ US 76 from Earl Shelton Road to Sampson Road which is just east of Blairsville. The contractor, Vertical Earth, LLC, began work in June 2024, however, earthwork has been suspended upon the discovery of potential archeological artifacts. The work is paused to adequately assess the situation and findings.

Phase III of the project widens State Route 515 from State Route 11 to East of Earl Shelton Road. The widening project will make a 3-lane road into a 4-lane divided roadway with a 32-foot depressed median. Within the city limits of Blairsville, this includes sidewalk with three retaining walls. This project has been put out for bid, but the contractor has not yet been announced. The third phase is anticipated to start Fall 2024.

The TCCA Has Voted to Support the Guardians of Freedom



Caleb Taylor is a twelve-year-old seventh grade student that lives in Towns County. He became interested in honoring deceased veterans around Towns County by placing memorial markers, in the shape of a cross, to expand on the beautiful Veteran's Park in front of the school and to educate citizens and particularly youth about the differentiating meanings of the specific federal holidays of Memorial Day, Independence Day, Veteran's Day, September 11th terrorist attacks, and Pearl Harbor. The purpose of this project is to provide community unity in honoring deceased veterans and those who died fighting for our country or who served and died later. "We seek to provide a welcoming environment to veterans and to support veterans by having a similar tradition as Lumpkin, White, and Union counties."

President's Note: Mr. Caleb Taylor presented his plan to the TCCA Board on August 12. The Board was excited about the plan and pledged to do what we can in support of this effort. As of this publication, details are still being worked out as to what extent the TCCA will do to help.



CONTACT INFORMATION

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

TCCA BOARD MEMBERS

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Larry Dietsch Anna Denton David Best
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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**

MountTrue Coalition

Enotah CASA

Music on the Square

GENERAL TCCA ENROLLMENT INFORMATION

TCCA membership is currently at 117 individual memberships, 2 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 and the surrounding area. 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.