

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Schools propose leaving millage rate unchanged from 2018 at 11.74 mills

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

In two millage rate public hearings held last Thursday, the Union County Board of Education heard Superintendent John Hill and the board office's proposal to leave the millage rate unchanged from 2018 at 11.74 mills.

Between 2018 and 2019, the total value of properties in Union County grew by about 2.1% to roughly \$1.274 billion. Given the new digest values, a millage rate of 11.74 mills would result in a total school property tax levy of \$14,956,237 at 100% collections in 2019.

This would mean that the 11.74 rate would generate about \$314,758 more in tax revenues

in 2019 than in 2018.

School Finance Director Karen Bundy said the rate of 11.74 mills would net the school system \$14,582,331.10 at 100% collections after the 2.5% county collection fee of \$373,905.93 is assessed.

Should the school board opt to adopt the 2019 rollback rate of 11.701 mills instead, the schools would net \$14,533,888.95 at 100% collections, for a difference of \$48,442.15.

Bundy pointed out that the \$48,442.15 difference between the rollback rate and re-adopting the 2018 rate could be explained by growth in the county, and not because taxes were going up.

Put another way, no

taxpayer will pay more in 2019 than they did in 2018 at 11.74 mills, provided individual property valuations stayed the same as last year, she said.

Union County property owner George Burch was the sole attendee of the 8 a.m. meeting that Thursday, while the 6 p.m. meeting had no attendees from the public.

"Union County Schools has a long history, and very proud history," Burch said. "They have been at the top of the state testing scores. They've been at the top of the state completion rates. They have, over the many years that I have been associated and studied the numbers, been a very consistent school system."

"But at the same time,

you have a situation that, since you have had so much success, you get into a syndrome that I call 'never enough.' Well, I'm here to address the board, because I have a concern. I'm afraid that since the re-election of the board members, the passage of the ESPLOST, that you have fallen into a concept of 'never enough.'

"That concerned me in the fact that all the options that you had in amending the adopted budget to where you could have changed many things, taken those alternatives, and not had a tax increase."

Continued Burch, "My hope is that you will go back to the alternatives that were presented to you on things that you could adopt, that you could



Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill

amend the budget for, and not have a tax increase."

Board Chair Cindy Odom thanked Burch for his comments and said that the board always

discusses public input and takes it into consideration.

Under Georgia law, unless the rollback rate is accepted, it is considered a

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## Griggs talks LongHorn, Arby's and local economic development in meeting

By Shawn Jarrard  
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LongHorn Steakhouse is "absolutely coming here," Mitch Griggs said in the sold-out Eggs & Issues Breakfast sponsored by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday, Aug. 14.

As executive director of the Union County Development Authority, Griggs has been hands-on with this project for many years, and he said the famous restaurant chain was aiming to open by February/March 2020, though sooner was possible.

"We've been working on LongHorn for seven years. It's been a long haul," Griggs said. "We had them for five and a half years ago. They made some corporate decisions and changes, killed all the small-market projects, including us.



Union County Development Authority Director Mitch Griggs discussing economic development in the Aug. 14 Eggs & Issues Breakfast. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

"Then, about 18 months ago, we started working with them, and went through a few bumps in the road. We waited and waited and waited, and got through all the hurdles and barriers and everything,

but they are absolutely coming here."

Griggs said that the restaurant will bring around 60 new jobs to the area and constitute a local investment of

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## Leader of TVA wants to hold electric rates flat for next 10 years

By Shawn Jarrard  
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New Tennessee Valley Authority CEO Jeffrey Lyash said in a public meeting earlier this month that he'd be recommending electric rates be held flat for the next 10 years in the upcoming TVA Board meeting on Aug. 22.

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms reported this news in the Aug. 12 meeting of the BRMEMC Board of Directors in Young Harris, noting that he and other EMC staff had attended the meeting in which Lyash made his comments.

The comments are notable in that they: one, remain consistent with remarks Lyash made earlier this year; and two, they signal a potential departure from a 10-year planned series of TVA rate increases aimed at reducing the federal corporation's fuel

costs, operating costs and debt service.

TVA began seeking annual 1.5% wholesale rate increases as part of its 2013 long-range financial plan, with last year's increase, forecasted to raise about \$200 million in additional revenues from all over the Valley.

A TVA representative attended the August 2018 BRMEMC Board meeting and said that the TVA would likely only seek one more rate increase - to be effective Oct. 1, 2019 - before abandoning the remainder of its increases planned through 2023.

But that was before TVA CEO Bill Johnson retired earlier this year, with new CEO Lyash indicating his willingness to deviate from the planned 2019 increase after coming aboard in April.

Ultimately, the decision to nix the planned 2019 TVA



TVA CEO Jeff Lyash

wholesale power increase will be up to the TVA Board, which will meet this week, on Aug. 22, to decide the issue, among other things.

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## State Sens. Gooch, Wilkinson speak on Georgia politics in GOP meeting

By Shawn Jarrard  
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HIAWASSEE - District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch of the Georgia General Assembly served as the featured speaker in the monthly meeting of the Towns County GOP on Thursday, Aug. 15.

Gooch, of Dahlonega, represents a number of North Georgia counties, including Union, and he enjoys a close working relationship with District 50 State Sen. John Wilkinson, who represents Towns County and who also spoke in the meeting last Thursday.

Addressing a standing room crowd at Daniel's Steakhouse in Hiawassee that evening, Gooch talked about changes at the capital this year before touching on his concerns about the future of state politics.

"The governor's office had a total changeover, almost every employee," Gooch said. "In fact, every person in the capital that worked for (Gov. Nathan Deal) left, and a new crew came in."

"Of course, Gov. (Brian) Kemp was sworn in on the second Monday of January, and then, we had a new lieutenant governor that was also sworn



District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch

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## First responder agencies improve communications by going digital



L-R: Union County E-911 Director David Dyer, Dispatcher Ashley Churchill, E-911 Lt. Millie Baxter and Dispatcher Carrie King inside the 911 Center. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard  
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On Monday, Aug. 12, Union County experienced a momentous occasion that went entirely unnoticed by the public

at large when all local first responder agencies switched over from analog to digital radios.

These agencies included the E-911 Communications Center, the Fire Department,

Sheriff's Office, Blairsville Police Department and Union General EMS.

Fortunately, the switch to digital went smoothly enough, with a few initial adjustments

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## DDA Board discusses Arby's Restaurant, downtown parking plans

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Arby's was a prime topic of discussion in the Aug. 12 meeting of the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority Board.

Board Member W.C. Nelson reported that recent soil samples taken at the potential Arby's lot located at Georgia 515 and Bob Head Street had come back showing water near the surface, and that the site developer had said fixing the issue could cost as much as \$200,000.

"They're asking us to either fund it all, or what would we fund it," Nelson said.

Asked by fellow Board Member Tony Dyer if the developer had pulled out of the contract, Nelson said no.

"They've already probably got \$45,000 invested

in the project, and they're asking for what are we willing to do to help," Nelson said.

After further discussion, the board voted to offer the site developer matching funds of up to \$25,000 toward fixing the lot's soil issues.

The land is currently under an extended contract, and the DDA is hopeful that it can close on the deal sometime in the next month.

In other business, Nelson said that paving the downtown gravel parking lot will need to wait until Steve Cockerham is ready to start building his mixed-use commercial development on the Haralson property parcel that he purchased across from Foodland.

The parking lot will require lots of dirt, and the DDA is planning to use the dirt excavated during construction of the Cockerham Building to avoid having to haul it in for



DDA Board Member W.C. Nelson

the parking lot, then haul it out from the Cockerham project.

"It doesn't have to be, but (the parking lot) really needs to be fixed before he starts his project, and moving the dirt

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## NOTICE: Transfer Station closing commercial side only for renovations

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Attention, Union County residents: the commercial side of the Transfer Station off Deep South Farm Road will be closed for renovations starting Saturday, Aug. 24, and it will remain closed until further notice.

The Transfer Station's residential side for bagged garbage/recycling will remain open as usual.

Commercial haulers who regularly use the commercial side of the Transfer Station are being notified independently, but many residents also use the commercial side to drop off large quantities of unbagged garbage, so be sure to spread the word.

During renovations, people needing to use the

commercial side of the Union County Transfer Station must either hold onto their trash or take it to the Transfer Station in Fannin County at 10169 Lakewood Highway in Mineral Bluff, which is about 20 miles from the Union site.

Advanced Disposal operates both Transfer Stations, and it will be conducting the Union County renovations, which have been planned now for several years.

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