

EMC...from Page 1A

called New Markets Tax Credits, a federal program that would ultimately allow the EMC to complete a \$10 million project for a little more than \$8 million, and board members signaled that they were willing to take a deeper look into the program.

Also in the meeting, Nelms discussed a problem that's cropped up concerning the system's Advanced Metering Infrastructure.

About eight years ago, the EMC undertook a systemwide replacement of meters, and now, the company that makes those meters has announced that it will stop producing them in 2020, leaving the EMC in a bind over replacement meters in the next decade.

The EMC is currently evaluating its options, and Nelms told the board that a total replacement of all the system's meters will cost about \$8.5 million.

In other news, Nelms shared a map showing neighborhoods in the EMC coverage area where the co-op has decided to launch its pilot fiber expansion plan.

The plan will include an expanded \$740,000 in total funding and will reach

neighborhoods in all five counties serviced by the EMC, pending member interest.

Areas in Union County to potentially receive fiber expansion under this initial pilot program include Forest Drive, Boxborough Drive, Pleasant Hill Road, Murphy Drive, Canal Lake and Litton Way.

In Towns County, potential areas to receive fiber expansion include Bald Mountain Park, Holly Hills, Tater Ridge, Hiawassee Estates, Old Forge Estates, and parts of Lower Bell Creek and Upper Bell Creek.

Another point of discussion that evening was the implementation of the Tennessee Valley Authority annual rate increase that passed a TVA Board vote in August and went into effect on Oct. 1.

Details about the rate increase are available at BRMEMC.com, though most residential customers can expect an increase of about \$1.84 in their monthly customer charge.

Nelms played a recent clip from the Clark Howard Show in which the radio host responded to a Sept. 10 article in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that featured insight into rural broadband from several employees of the

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.

Particularly, Howard has taken issue with the opposition and lobbying power of big cable and phone companies when it comes to local power companies supplying broadband internet in rural areas.

"The state of Georgia has not adopted a policy saying that's okay, because the cable companies and phone companies are so powerful at the state legislature," said Howard. "Well, I've got to say something to you if you're a member of the state House or state Senate.

"If you really are about creating more opportunity for people in rural Georgia, we have these EMCs that provided electricity so long ago in rural Georgia - we should give them the chance and encourage them to install high-speed internet where the traditional companies don't want to go anyway."

Nelms also spoke to board members about a new project in Union County that will be bringing fiber internet to Neels Gap and the Walasi-Yi Interpretive Center.

The EMC and Union County Government have teamed up to make the project a reality, and together, they'll be employing a specialized drone company to install the

necessary 7,000 feet of fiber line.

More details will be forthcoming as the project gets underway in the next couple of weeks, but Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris is excited about the project.

The Georgia Department of Transportation has installed special weather equipment up at Neels Gap to help monitor conditions related to travel, but the isolation of the gap means that the equipment can't reliably connect to the internet wirelessly during inclement weather.

For years, the commissioner has driven out to the gap by himself every time there's been a big storm, often in the middle of the night, to check whether the mountain road is drivable.

When fiber is introduced to the gap and GDOT weather station, it is very likely that information regarding road conditions will be more readily available to emergency services needing to drive the mountain to reach the nearest trauma center.

"Hopefully, we can make all or most of that available to the public, where they could access it online," said Paris.

Furthermore, there's also the potential for public access to viewing cameras installed at Neels Gap, and hikers will be able to better utilize the internet at the Walasi-Yi Interpretive Center.

All necessary line extension to the gap will be paid for by Union County, and the line is expected to be installed in the coming weeks.

Grand Jury...from Page 1A

Marvin Travis Thompson, two counts sale of methamphetamine; sale of marijuana.

Tonya Faye Ensley, distribution of methamphetamine; recidivist.

Mark Anthony Roberson; distribution of methamphetamine.

Billy Chance Schmeltz, aka Bosco, two counts sale of methamphetamine; two counts illegal use of communication facility; criminal use of an article with an altered identification mark; possession of firearm by first offender probationer.

Chad Mitchell Platt, possession of firearm by convicted felon.

Kevin Scott Stockwell, burglary in the first degree; burglary in the second degree; recidivist.

Curtis Neil Mason, sale of Schedule II controlled substance.

Jeannie Marie Brewer, possession of methamphetamine.

Clifford Bradley Gibson, possession of methamphetamine.

James Bradley Plemons Jr., possession of methamphetamine.

Frankie Carpenter Hall, possession of methamphetamine.

Edward Lee Houston,

possession of methamphetamine; three counts possession of firearm by convicted felon.

Justin William Holloway, violation of Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO); five counts sale of methamphetamine; sale of marijuana.

Courtney Bryce West, burglary in the first degree.

Amanda Lawson, six counts public assistance fraud.

Dillon Wayne Mullavey, trafficking in illegal drugs; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce; recidivist.

Fumiko Brook Snow, trafficking in illegal drugs; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce.

Voting...from Page 1A

candidates will appear on the ballot:

For Governor, Republican Brian Kemp, Democrat Stacey Abrams and Libertarian Ted Metz.

For Lieutenant Governor, Republican Geoff Duncan and Democrat Sarah Riggs Amico.

For Secretary of State, Republican Brad Raffensperger, Democrat Josh Barrow and Libertarian Smythe Duval.

For Attorney General, Republican Incumbent Chris Carr and Democrat Charlie Bailey.

For Commissioner of Agriculture, Republican Incumbent Gary Black and Democrat Fred Swann.

For Commissioner of Insurance, Republican Jim Beck, Democrat Janice Laws and Libertarian Donnie Foster.

For State School Superintendent, Republican Incumbent Richard Woods and Democrat Otha E. Thornton Jr.

For Commissioner of Labor, Republican Incumbent Mark Butler and Democrat Richard Keatley.

For Public Service Commissioner District 3, Republican Incumbent Chuck Eaton, Democrat Lindy Miller and Libertarian Ryan Graham.

For Public Service Commissioner District 5, Republican Incumbent Tricia Pridemore, Democrat Dawn A.

Randolph and Libertarian John Turpish.

For U.S. Representative in 116th Congress from the 9th Congressional District of Georgia, Republican Incumbent Doug Collins and Democrat Josh McCall.

For State Senator from the 51st District, Republican Incumbent Steve Gooch is running unopposed.

For State Representative in the General Assembly from the 8th District, Republican Incumbent Matt Gurtler is running unopposed.

For District Attorney of the Enotah Judicial Circuit, Republican Incumbent Jeff Langley is running unopposed.

For County Board of Education District 2, Republican Incumbent Tony Hunter is running unopposed.

For County Board of Education District 4, Republican Incumbent Keith Potts is running unopposed.

For County Board of Education District 5, Republican Incumbent Patrick White is running unopposed.

For Blue Ridge Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor, Jennifer Logan is running unopposed.

Union County voters will also be asked to support or reject the continuation of the county SPLOST in the Nov. 6 General Election.

A SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) is a 1-cent sales tax that

is collected by counties for up to six years for the purposes of funding county and city capital outlay projects such as roads, public safety, infrastructure, etc.

The sales tax in Union County is 7 cents on the dollar, which includes a penny for current SPLOST IV collections.

Since the county is already collecting SPLOST money, if residents decide to renew the SPLOST, the sales tax rate within the county will stay the same at 7 percent.

SPLOST V is expected to collect \$24 million over its six-year collection period, just like SPLOST IV.

The county would also be able to issue \$10 million in SPLOST-backed bonds to complete projects if the referendum passes.

Also on the ballot are five Proposed Constitutional Amendments, including: the creation of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund to protect water quality, wildlife habitats and parks; the creation of a statewide business court to lower costs, enhance efficiency and promote predictable judicial outcomes; the encouragement of the conservation, sustainability and longevity of Georgia's working forests through tax sub-classification and grants; the provision of rights for victims of crime in the judicial process; and the authorization of fair allocation of sales tax proceeds to county and city school districts.

Further, there will be two Proposed Statewide Referenda on the ballot, one providing for a homestead exemption for residents of certain municipal corporations, and another providing a tax exemption for certain homes for the mentally disabled.

Of course, voters will want to more fully familiarize themselves with the language of the amendments and referenda before voting.