

Shake Rag Road...from Page 1A

with KCI on various county road projects in recent years.

For its part, KCI provided a summary of recommendations for improvements, including supplementary signage reiterating the 5-mph speed

limit, steep grade and winding nature of the road, as well as “adding additional width to the roadway” where feasible and shoulder repair.

Signage has since been installed, and Bradshaw has

shortened park hours and hired a deputy to keep watch and enforce parking limits during times the park is expected to be busy. But the timeline and details on other safety improvements are still outstanding.

Bradshaw announced last week that he was in the process of requesting an engineering survey to outline exact specifications to make the road safer via widening and/or other measures. This work will differ from KCI’s previous efforts by supplying concrete parameters for construction.

To speed up the process and save money, KCI has recommended the commissioner contract a company closer to home. As such, he was scheduled this week to meet with a representative of a more local engineering firm to discuss surveying plans moving forward.

Ultimately, the construction timeline on safety improvements will depend on upcoming weather conditions and availability of any company that earns the job.

In Bradshaw’s Dec. 15 meeting, the Shake Rag residents expressed frustration over the matter, arguing that the road has long been plagued with numerous safety issues like lack of guardrails amid drop-offs, extreme narrowness on steep grades, and little enforcement of anything.

Several of these residents have been in semiregular contact with the Commissioner’s Office for half a year or more, and they feel like Bradshaw has not taken their concerns seriously enough, pointing out, for example, his resistance to conducting a traffic study.

The group has asked for a few different remedies, including the shutting down of the park until the road can be made safer; that a new entrance be designated on the other side of Bell Mountain; and, finally, that Shake Rag be widened to a bona fide two-lane road.

Resident Catherine Luckenbach addressed the county meeting for the second month in a row, exasperatedly saying she was now “done”

speaking publicly on the issue. Luckenbach has objected to Bell Mountain Park since before former Commissioner Bill Kendall opened it in 2016.

“I think I’ve put up a good fight, but I’ve also realized the reality of the situation,” Luckenbach said, adding her belief that she and her neighbors had very likely exhausted their avenues for relief. “I honestly feel this is a wrong that I don’t have much power over at all right now.

“It’s taken my family dog from me. It’s taken my (right of quiet enjoyment) from my house. It’s made just driving to my own driveway a threat. I’ve tried everything. I’ve called state senators, I’ve called representatives. Lee (Steinberg) and I have written formal letters to our governor.

“I’ve met numerous times with Cliff, and here we are with still nothing done on the road. I don’t know that it’s in this next budget, but I do know that, if the road’s done the right way, it’s going to cost the county millions of dollars.”

Neighbors Luckenbach and Steinberg have repeatedly denounced the KCI recommendations as being unprofessional, “more like a Band-Aid on an open wound,” and not reflective of what they believe is necessary to make the often-busy road less dangerous.

“It’s unconscionable that our leader, Cliff Bradshaw, has taken this long to really get something done about this road,” Luckenbach said, before imploring Bradshaw to “do the right thing.”

Also in attendance, Steinberg echoed Luckenbach’s sentiment that the small group of residents had done everything they could hope to do, and that continued efforts would likely be in vain.

“One of the most frustrating things that we deal with every day ... the situation on that road is a public safety disaster, and it’s also an environmental disaster, and it’s been going on really ever since the park was opened,” Steinberg said.

He commented that past car accidents on the mountain had effectively shut down access to emergency services, though Bradshaw said he was confident that local first responders with county equipment would be able to get to anyone on that road in an emergency.

Bradshaw said he was

more worried about future icy conditions on Shake Rag, which would be an access concern no matter how many improvements they made to the road.

In terms of shutting the road down until fixes are made, Bradshaw said he couldn’t do that outside of construction because it was a public county road. Moreover, he disputed the characterizations that his office wasn’t doing enough to alleviate the concerns of the residents.

“We’re doing everything we can,” he said, adding that, given the current width of the road and physical barriers like rock outcroppings on the way up, he couldn’t commit to two full lanes at this time. “I don’t know how wide (the road) will be yet.”

Added Bradshaw, “Honestly, I feel like Bell Mountain is going to be an ongoing thing through the years that we try to improve upon for the visitors and the residents, (with) safety being my main concern.”

The commissioner said 911 Director Marty Roberts was researching surveillance equipment to keep better tabs on park visitors, and he said County Attorney Robb Kiker would be working on a letter to residents outlining more specific steps as details become available.

Coming to Bradshaw’s defense in the meeting, David Phillips – there to see his wife Debbie receive retirement recognition for her 30 years of service to Towns County Public Library – said he felt the residents’ pain, but that he saw the issue as one concerning the growth of the county.

“I used to live on a nice, quaint two-lane road,” Phillips said. “Everything’s changed ... it’s a four-lane road now. I sit out there sometimes five minutes. I told Cliff I’m the only one in the county not for economic development.

“I hate it, I can’t get out of my driveway – I’m on (US) 76. Be careful what you ask for, because when they widen that road, you’re going to have more traffic ... Towns County is growing.

“Everybody likes coming here because of what it is, then they want to change it to what it was where they left. When it gets wider, then more people are going to say, ‘Wow, I can drive up there now’ ... The people that go up the mountain,

they’re paying (county salaries) right now.

“They’re coming in here, they’re staying overnight, they’re buying gas. They paid Debbie’s salary for 30 years. They’re paying the sheriff’s salary coming up. We’re for people coming here. That’s what it’s all about. And Bell Mountain is the (most beautiful) place in Georgia.”

Luckenbach agreed that people coming to town was good for everyone but countered that it didn’t make up for the fact that her road was unsafe.

“My daughter’s been run off the road,” Luckenbach said. “And that could happen on any road, but this is a high numbers game where thousands of cars are crammed on a 10-foot-wide road every day.”

Following the Dec. 15 meeting, Steinberg sent two emails to Bradshaw, copying the Towns County Herald on both.

In the first email, Steinberg continued to criticize the KCI recommendations, pointing out the absence of the word “safety” in the summary, and noting that certain distressed parts of the road appeared to have been neglected in the company’s assessment.

The second email discussed a Dec. 26 icy road incident in which a park visitor bypassed a “Road Closed” sign put out by the county and subsequently got stuck on the side of the roadway.

A 911 call came from someone other than the person involved in the incident, so an ambulance was automatically dispatched to the scene.

Apparently, the ambulance also got stuck due to ice from the lingering Christmas Eve snow – a concern expressed by Bradshaw in the December county meeting – though ultimately, it seemed the situation was resolved without injuries thanks to Turpin’s Wrecker Service.

“This is an alarming reminder of how dangerous Shake Rag Road has become since the opening of the park,” Steinberg wrote. “The county’s planned corrective action to start in Spring 2021 as summarized in the KCI letter of Aug. 5 is inadequate and fails to solve the public safety and environmental issues that impact residents, property owners and visitors to the park.”

District 2 announces changes in Covid-19 Testing Schedules

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

GAINESVILLE – To ramp up vaccination for Covid-19, health departments in District 2 will reassign staff from testing for Covid-19, to immunization clinics.

Beginning on January 11, testing will be offered between 8:00 am to 9:00 am only, for symptomatic first responders, school employees and court system personnel by appointment. This change will help meet the demand for providing vaccines to more people as we work through the phases identified by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Residents should continue to monitor our web page www.phdistrict2.org, Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/district2publichealth> and local media for announcements for vaccine availability.

Beginning January 11, adults 65 years of age and older can receive the Covid-19 vaccine (based on vaccine availability). Please watch for announcements for instructions on where and how to get vaccinated. <https://dph.georgia.gov/press-releases/2020-12-30/more-georgians-become-eligible-receive-covid-19-vaccine>.

COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Plan

We are currently in Phase 1: Limited COVID-19 Vaccine Availability

Phase 1-A

Phase 1-A will include paid and unpaid persons serving in a healthcare setting who have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials. Hospital staff, public health clinical staff, EMS, and other first responders, long term care facility (LTCF) staff, and urgent care facility staff are examples of people who will be included in this phase.

Additional examples include: Staff in clinical settings (e.g., physicians, nurses, pharmacists, EMS, laboratory staff, environmental services, LTCF staff etc.); LTCF Residents.

Georgia Vaccine Plan

Follow the plan for distribution and administration of the COVID-19 vaccine in Georgia.

Download this pdf- COVID-19 Vaccine Plan (1.24 MB)

Beginning January 11, all adults 65 years of age and older, law enforcement and fire personnel.

Phase 1-B

Phase 1-B will include other essential workers and people at higher risk of severe COVID-19 illness.

Examples of people that will be included in this Phase are listed below:

Critical workforce employees (e.g., pharmacy staff, educational faculty and staff, correctional facility staff, court employees, food processors, grocery store workers, transportation staff, nuclear power plant employees, air traffic controllers, etc.)

Phase 1-C

Phase 1-C will include people at higher risk of severe COVID-19 illness, not vaccinated during Phase 1-A or Phase 1-B.

Examples of this population include:

Other essential workers; Adults below age 65 with significant comorbidities.

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American Red Cross Volunteers



Make a difference in your community! As a volunteer with the American Red Cross, you can help families recover after a home fire, train individuals in first aid and CPR, support America’s military families, or take on any number of other roles that make our communities safer, stronger and more resilient. Get started at <https://www.redcross.org/local/georgia/volunteer.html> or call your NWGA chapter office to ask about volunteer opportunities 844-536-6226. NTJJan6.Z11)CA