

Day of Prayer ...from Page 1A

our own understanding, and to trust him even when it doesn't make a whole lot of sense."

The program will remain online for people to visit and revisit as many times as they please, making it the first time the event has been readily available to the public whenever they want it. To watch the program, visit the "2020 Towns County National Day of Prayer" Facebook Page.

A similar event usually hosted in Union County each year did not take place due to COVID-19.



Associate Pastor Bradley Thomas of Macedonia Baptist Church was a central organizer in the 2020 Towns County National Day of Prayer event. Photo/Screenshot

Young Harris ...from Page 1A

wanted to give any incentives or initiatives for people that want to develop, but there are some criteria to that.

"First off is job development. If they cannot create any jobs, then there aren't any incentives that are warranted. This is only for job development, and they have to create a minimum of two full-time jobs before you can even offer them any incentives, and you can offer how much you want to give them."

McKay discussed other details of the Enterprise Zone, including what kind of incentives the council could offer developers. Other programs and initiatives were discussed in relation to the zone, and the council will have several options to consider later in terms of city development.

Council members also went over the progress of the Mayor's Park pavilion, which is to be timber-frame in style. The timbers were meant to be delivered last week but were postponed due to rain,

according to Councilman Dr. John Kelley.

Discussions are still ongoing regarding Young Harris College's request to convert its water rate to regular commercial to effectively lower its minimum water usage for billing purposes, as school has been out for a while now due to COVID-19 and no one is there using water.

The Water/Sewer Committee met after press time on Tuesday, May 12, at 6:30 p.m. to discuss the matter further.

Kelley gave an update on the COVID-19 situation and his recommendations for the community.

"Even though the state has been released to roam around, I can tell you right now that COVID is alive and well," Kelley said. "We have not yet seen the end of this pandemic by far."

"I think our case volume is going to increase because there is going to be more testing. Hopefully, people will

respect the social distancing and wearing masks to protect one another.

"Unfortunately, we have all seen examples in the press and life right now that dictates otherwise, and unfortunately, I think we are going to see another spike. I recommend we continue our policies."

The council will reexamine the situation again during its next meeting in June, where members will decide next steps for city operations and keeping Young Harris safe during the pandemic.

"We are following Dr. Kelley's recommendations," Gibby said. "The doors (to City Hall) will be closed at least through May. We will reevaluate next month."

"Everybody has heard about the governor's orders, and the emergency order is going to be in place until mid-June. We are going to do at least one more meeting on Zoom in June. We are following our good doctor's orders."

Towns County Jail ...from Page 1A

importance tasks. Furthermore, the Sheriff's Office has and will continue to take all recommended

precautions and guidelines from the Health Department, Georgia Emergency Management Agency and the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention to reduce the risk of spreading the virus to the community, inmates and staff.

Bagpipe instruction

The Appalachian Saint Andrew's Pipes and Drums Bagpipe Band is offering free instruction to all who want to learn how to play the Great Highland Bagpipe or to learn Regimental Drumming.

The band meets each Saturday from 9:30 a.m. until 12 noon in the Parish Hall of St. Clare's Episcopal Church for instruction and practice.

For further information, call 770-833-5411 or 1-828-557-3812. NT(May13ZJ)CA

Hiawassee ...from Page 1A

masks – for a group photo with Kendrick.

Ordiales also announced that the city would be holding a public hearing and subsequent first reading of the Fiscal Year 2021 Budget the same day as the next council work session, on May 26. The hearing will be streamed live over Facebook.

The budget is available for viewing at hiawasseega.gov, and comments/questions may be submitted via the city website, or by emailing clerk@hiawasseega.gov, calling 706-896-2202, commenting on Facebook, etc.

A second reading and adoption of the budget will take place in the June 2 regular city meeting.

The council also approved a number of items that were discussed in detail during the April 27 work session.

Council members voted to make a water treatment payment to the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority on an old loan in the amount of \$237,585 to go toward the principal.

Prior to the payment, the city owed \$679,000 on a \$1.96 million loan taken out years ago for water tank and water distribution enhancements.

This payment accounts for about 35 percent of the remaining balance and eliminates the water treatment portion of the loan, with the remaining 65 percent of the payback amount to continue coming out of the water/sewer fund.

"Hopefully within the next year, we'll be able to pay (that loan) off altogether," Ordiales said recently.

Council members also approved an intergovernmental agreement between the city and Downtown Development Authority for \$20,000 to assist the newly created organization until it can come up with funding of its own, through grant applications and other means, to be used for local improvement projects.

The council approved a \$39,996 contract to renew the city's property insurance through the Georgia Interlocal Risk Management Agency. The city switched to GIRMA in 2018, when the insurance cost \$36,133 compared to a \$42,796 quote by the city's previous provider.

Timothy Barrett of Barrett & Associates Insurance provided the quotes for the insurance, as he's done for

years now. Councilwoman Barrett, wife of Timothy Barrett, recused herself from voting on the contract.

GIRMA is operated by the Georgia Municipal Association, and it provides liability insurance coverage for all city owned properties.

Also on the agenda, the council gave the go-ahead for a \$53,000 contract with Colditz Trucking to construct a crosswalk at Chatuge Regional Hospital on Main Street and to provide modifications at the Lloyd's Landing entrance/exit on US 76 East.

At the end of the meeting, Barrett spoke briefly about the Community Scholarships she's raising money for, which will go toward assisting seniors of Towns County Schools.

Donations can be turned in to any of the drop boxes at Hiawassee City Hall in envelopes marked "Scholarship for Towns County Schools."

Councilman Jay Chastain, who serves as a paramedic, recommended that everyone remain vigilant in washing their hands, wearing their masks and following appropriate social distancing guidelines during the pandemic.

Board of Education ...from Page 1A

not going to bail us out of the situation that we'll be in, so I still foresee us having to make calendar reductions next year."

Berrong added that the CARES Act could help reduce calendar reduction days in 2020-21, but as a result of being a one-time benefit, the 2021-22 school year and beyond could see a jump in furlough days.

Although, at this time, there isn't any additional information available, and the state likely won't set anything in stone until mid-June, when state lawmakers are back under the Gold Dome.

"This is something that we need to talk about, so I wanted to give you guys these numbers, (but this is) something we'll discuss a lot further in

June," Berrong told the school board. "Another thing is, no schools can set a budget."

"We were supposed to have two budget meetings to set a budget for the next fiscal year, so we will have to pass a resolution in June saying that we don't have a budget yet, but we can spend one-twelfth of our budget in this year in the month of July."

"We'll have to do that every single month until the budget gets passed. Hopefully, by the end of June, the state will send us what our allotment is going to be so we will have a lot better understanding of what our budget is going to be next year."

In closing, Berrong said the school could handle a budget cut for a year or two

thanks to a large fund balance built up over the past six years. Still, he recognized any surplus would quickly disappear should hard economic times continue to affect sales tax revenues for an extended period.

In personnel news, the board approved Tammy Jackson, a former elementary school para-professional, for a teaching position at the elementary school.

Rebecca Flanagan will fill the school nurse position, and Hailey Silvey will take over as the new elementary school counselor. The board also accepted the resignation of a school nutrition professional and an elementary school teacher.

General Primary ...from Page 1A

a statewide absentee ballot drive to get as many people as possible to vote by mail to slow the spread of COVID-19, and the initiative has experienced a number of misfires, including many undeliverable ballot applications and incorrect ballot mailing instructions.

Voters, poll workers and election officials across the state have expressed concerns about in-person voting, so the increase in absentee voting is a welcome addition in 2020.

And now that the state is finally ready to resume electoral proceedings amid one of the strangest election seasons on record, people who do decide to vote in person should expect longer than usual wait times, as social distancing measures will be implemented.

For the General Primary, voters will be selecting candidates for various local, state and federal offices to lead their party of choice in the Nov. 3 General Election, and winners of the Nonpartisan Election will be sworn into office in 2021.

Sample ballots listing all candidates in the June 9 election appeared in the May 6 edition of the newspaper, and these ballots can be found at mvp.sos.ga.gov.

It should be noted that the Special Election to fill the remaining term of retired U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson will take place in November and will not appear in the General Primary Election.

Early voting for the General Primary will run weekdays between Monday, May 18, and Friday, June 5, during which time locally registered voters can cast their votes at the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration Office next to the courthouse from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., even during lunchtime.

Due to social distancing constraints, the Board Office will be limiting the number of people allowed inside the building at one time, with lines expected to go outside the building.

Plastic gloves will be provided to voters wanting to use them with voting machines, and all election equipment will be regularly cleaned during early voting. At press time, the Board Office was still working to procure hand sanitizer amid continued widespread shortages.

Voters who find themselves too busy to vote during the scheduled weekdays can participate in one weekend day of early in-person voting on Saturday, May 30, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Board Office, also during lunchtime.

Since this is a primary,

voters will need to declare a political party to receive a ballot.

Those who voted early for the Presidential Preference Primary will receive a ballot without presidential candidates, while people who didn't get to vote in that election will receive a ballot with them.

Registered voters who will be at least 18 years of age by Election Day will be eligible to vote during General Primary early voting, though Monday, May 11, was the registration deadline for voters looking to participate in the June 9 election.

Absentee Ballots marked for the May 19, 2020, General Primary Election are good for the June 9, 2020, election. The election date was changed after the ballots were printed.

The state has worked to fix instructions that came with many absentee ballots saying that each voter should have received two envelopes with their ballot: one to place the ballot in for privacy and another to place the enveloped ballot in for mailing.

However, the ballots don't actually come with two envelopes. Instead, people should fold the included piece of paper around the ballot for privacy before inserting the ballot into the mailing envelope.

By the end of last week, the Board Office had received and entered more than 3,000 absentee ballot applications out of some 10,500 active registered voters, with about 500 absentee ballots having been cast at that time.

Absentee ballots are due at the latest by 7 p.m. on Election Day, on Tuesday, June 9.

If people want to fill out their ballot applications/ballots and drop them off in person, they can do so using a specially marked drop box located outside the Board Office.

People who did not receive an absentee ballot application due to either having a P.O. Box or experiencing a change in address since initially registering to vote can call the Board Office at 706-896-4353.

For more information on applying for an absentee ballot, visit the Secretary of State's Office website at sos.ga.gov, or call/swing by the Board Office at 67 Lakeview Circle, Suite A, in Hiawassee.

Voters can access mvp.sos.ga.gov ahead of the election for information on voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county office, sample ballots and more.

Two county wide

referendums and a city referendum will also be decided in the June 9 General Primary Election: the SPLOST and Freeport Exemption brought by Towns County Government, and Hiawassee's Fluoride Referendum.

As previously reported, concerning the SPLOST referendum, the county is calling for voters to decide on an estimated \$12 million SPLOST to be instituted starting Oct. 1 to finance renovations and possibly an addition to the Towns County Courthouse, which dates to 1964.

Voter approval of the SPLOST, to be collected over six years, will also constitute approval of the issuance of a General Obligation Bond not to exceed \$8 million to facilitate courthouse renovations and a possible addition.

The current Education-SPLOST, which makes up 1 percent of the 7 percent sales tax in Towns County, will expire on Sept. 30 this year, so the sales tax rate will simply remain the same at 7 cents on the dollar should voters approve the county's 1-cent SPLOST referendum on June 9.

Regarding the freeport exemption referendum, such an exemption would allow businesses to temporarily store certain goods and raw materials without being subject to property taxes on those goods and materials, at least for a time.

If passed, the freeport exemption would aid existing small manufacturing businesses in Towns County and help to attract new ones, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said.

As for the fluoride referendum, Hiawassee will be asking city voters whether or not they want to add fluoride to the drinking water supply produced by the city for many city and county residents.

Fluoride is not currently being added to the city's drinking water, though the Georgia Environmental Protection Division requires water treatment facilities to add fluoride to drinking water unless a referendum is passed and a subsequent ordinance is enacted to exclude it.

The city originally reported that the referendum, which met city petition requirements last year, would be countywide, as many Hiawassee City Water customers live outside city limits.

However, the city has since said the referendum will be for city voters only after clarifying a misunderstanding with Georgia EPD.