

Early Voting...from Page 1A

party to receive a ballot, otherwise, voters will only be able to vote in the Nonpartisan General Election.

Election Day will be Tuesday, June 9, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Voters assigned to polling places outside of the Hiawassee Precinct will want to pay special attention to major changes this year as decided in the local Elections Board's May regular meeting.

Citing emergency circumstances regarding voting during the pandemic and in accordance with state law, the board has decided to change the polling places of the Macedonia and Young Harris precincts to Hiawassee for the upcoming June 9 election.

As such, all Towns County voters will be voting at the Hiawassee Precinct on Election Day, which is located at the Civic Center building where the Board Office resides.

"The Macedonia Church and Young Harris Lodge are currently closed to the public and not equipped with the necessary resources to adequately address current state of emergency order restrictions, State Election Board rules and state law pertaining to public gatherings at polling places," the Board Office said.

"Because of time constraints, the existing state emergency order restricting gatherings and regulating social distancing and closure of most buildings sufficient to serve as polling places that could meet the current requirements for the subject primary ... afford no opportunity for reassignment of designated polling places within the precincts," the notice continued. "Further, Towns County has an insufficient number of poll workers available to work during the June 9, 2020, primary and special election."

The precinct changes are temporary, meaning the Elections Board would need to vote again to do the same in the General Election come November.

With the blessing of Tate City residents, board members voted to permanently consolidate the Tate City Precinct with the Macedonia Precinct last year, so Towns County only has three precincts currently.

People are still being encouraged to wear masks to vote in person, though facial coverings are not required to cast ballots.

Due to social distancing

constraints, the Board Office will continue limiting the number of people allowed to vote at a time, with lines expected to go outside the building.

All election equipment is being regularly cleaned during voting. Hand sanitizer, gloves and masks are being provided as available, and people are more than welcome to bring their own personal protective equipment.

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 can be found at mvp.sos.ga.gov.

As previously reported, the Special Election to fill the remaining term of retired U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson will occur in November. As such, people will not see this race on their June ballots.

People 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 presidential candidates.

As a recap, registered voters who will be at least 18 years of age by Election Day are eligible to vote during early voting, though 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.

People may drop off their absentee ballot applications/ballots in the specially marked drop box located outside the Board Office. All absentee ballots are due back by 7 p.m. at the latest on Election Day.

Voters who have received an absentee ballot by mail but decide to vote in person will need to have their absentee ballot canceled at the polling place.

For more information on applying for an absentee ballot, visit the Secretary of State's Office website at sos.ga.gov, call the Board Office at 706-896-4353 or swing by in person.

Voters can access mvp.sos.ga.gov ahead of the

election for information on voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, registration information on file with the county office, sample ballots and more.

Two countywide 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.

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 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 the courthouse renovations.

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.

Towns County would receive 82 percent of SPLOST collections over the next six years, and the cities of Hiawassee and Young Harris would each receive 9 percent of collections for use on various projects.

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.