

Signs...from Page 1A

Georgia has stringent rules on that already, and Kiker said they should steer clear of First Amendment issues.

Eddleman asked if digital and trivision signs are allowed in Towns County, to which Bradshaw answered in the affirmative.

Digital and trivision signs will accommodate multiple advertisers, thereby reducing the total number of signs, said Eddleman.

Digital signs are the TV-screen type signs that have become popular in recent years. Trivision signs contain groupings of triangular prisms

that spin together on a vertical axis to change messages.

Eddleman said most operators of digital signs will typically accommodate eight advertisers per face, and many digital signs have sensors that adjust the brightness for daylight or nighttime.

Trivision signs accommodate three advertisers, given the three sides of the vertical prisms.

Kiker asked if other counties preferred digital signs over conventional billboard type signs, and Eddleman said they do because public service messages such as AMBER

Alerts and weather warnings can be programmed into them swiftly and easily.

"Most companies will work with local authorities to implement those things," said Eddleman. However, requiring all digital signs in the county would probably not be a good idea because of power requirements and spacing.

"I just think our sign ordinance needs to be very, very strict," said Bradshaw. "We can always adjust. We're in a beautiful place. We don't want to stop people from making money, but we don't want to see signs everywhere."

Ordiales...from Page 1A

feel, the town square, location and natural amenities, and the mayor and city council also made the list.

As for what needs work, the summary showed that residents and business owners want to address vacant buildings and lots around town, focus more on beautification of the downtown area, make traffic flow better, and work on mixing up what downtown has to offer business wise.

"The next thing, of course, is they'll come back with a formal plan with designs (in the next month or so)," said Ordiales.

Mayor Ordiales also talked about work that has been completed so far over at Hiwassee Mayors Park, noting that the bathrooms were finished, electrical outlets had been added to the big pavilion, and a couple picnic tables had been delivered.

Another exciting topic in the meeting was the mayor's announcement that Hiwassee was in the running for designation as a PlanFirst Community.

"The (Georgia) Department of Community Affairs has this program called PlanFirst," said Ordiales. "In order for you to participate—of course, you have to be a local government—you have to have all kinds of criteria, and you have to be current on all of their reports."

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"So, since we're getting ready to enter into two giant loans with GEFA for the sewer plant and the water treatment plant, I wanted to see what we could do to make this happen. Well, we are in the final selection, and they will be up here Aug. 28 for a two-hour presentation (and tour)."

Switching gears, Ordiales revealed that she had finally received the first franchise fee payment from the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.

The check was made out for \$5,849.61 to cover the first month of collections from this summer, and Ordiales expects the city to receive similar checks every month moving forward.

"If you all remember, when we were campaigning and running for mayor and stuff like that, the big deal was that we were going to get \$120,000 from Blue Ridge EMC, and it was the highest tax increase in the history of Hiwassee. Do y'all remember that?" said Ordiales. "Bring out the abacus and tell me what math \$5,800 times 12 equals \$120,000."

"But hey, you know what? I am not complaining. We'll take \$5,800 from now on and spend it wisely, which is one of the things that we need to start thinking about, is to how to spend it wisely."

Ordiales estimated that the city would likely be receiving about \$60,000 a year from the franchise fees moving forward, as the total fee is expected to fluctuate with power use throughout the year.

Looking ahead, she said the city will probably use the fee to help with the streets and lighting around the city, "which is kind of the right-of-way use."

Another subject covered that evening was the new bill collection process the city began recently.

"We have quite a few folks that are very behind in paying their water and sewer bills," said Ordiales. "I don't think we ever had a process in the past, so we've pulled a past due report that identifies everybody who is late on their current payment."

Added Ordiales: "So, anybody who is 60 days late, we've called them, we've gone to see them, we've given them two weeks to pay for it. If they haven't paid for it, we're cutting off their water."

"At 30 days, we're going to send (a postcard reminder) basically saying, hey, you've got 10 days to pay your water bill or else we're going to cut off your water. Now, these are folks that are almost two months late."

Ordiales said the policy is flexible as long as people are willing to work with the city to pay down their bills.

"We don't want to be horrible people, but we need to get paid," said Ordiales.

The city will soon be setting its millage rate, and Ordiales spoke a little about that process, as the city had just received its tax digest information.

"To keep the exact same amount of money in taxes, we would have to roll back the taxes to 2.17 from 2.258 (mills)," said Ordiales. "And I think that's because of those 57 properties that were not paying taxes ... I'm waiting for more information, but I wanted you guys to get it because we've been waiting for this for a while, and that's the story on that."

"So, as soon as we get more information on that, we'll see. I would love to leave it at what it is, 2.258. No higher, no less—just leave it like it is. But I need more information before we make that decision."

Also in the meeting, Hiwassee Police Chief Paul Smith updated everyone on some local statistics regarding the new Hands-Free Driving Law.

"We've stopped about 50 cars," said Smith. "We wrote 47 warnings—we're being pretty lenient there—and three tickets, which coincided with (other offenses)."

Added Smith: "In June, we had a total of nine arrests. There were two felony drug arrests, four misdemeanor drug arrests, and three other traffic-related arrests. Those

numbers are down, and it's always good to see fewer drug arrest numbers."

Local retired mental health specialist Dr. Vernon Dixon spoke with the council that evening, asking that they consider adopting a resolution endorsing a Carbon Fee and Dividend Policy as "the best way to combat climate change."

"When you put a fair price on the production of carbon dioxide from the fossil fuels, they become more expensive than do wind and solar, and there's a rapid switch to wind and solar," said Dr. Dixon. "What it does is send a signal to the entrepreneurs to say, hey, we know what we need to invest in, since America, I believe, can do this better than anybody else."

"Right now, China is eating our lunch, we don't want to let them eat our lunch anymore. So, this could open up the green energy economy, which is going to be the next great revolution."

Added Dixon: "What we do is, we take this to our congressmen and say, this is another community that says, hey, we want something done."

Under new business, Ordiales spoke about the city's ability to pay off another old loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as was done similarly earlier this year.

"I finally got the authorization from the Towns County Water Authority to pay off one of those 5 percent loans that we have with USDA," said Ordiales. "The payoff is about \$120,000, and we have \$127,000 that we can pay off that loan with."

Paying off the loan early will help the city to avoid costly interest payments that would have accrued for years to come.

"We're finalizing (the agreement), and I'm hoping to have that paid off by mid-August," said Ordiales. "From that point on, the water authority will pay us their portion of the loan plus interest, and we will keep that money, and we will pay off that loan. One less loan to worry about."

Toward the end of the meeting, Councilwoman Anne Mitchell asked the rest of the council to consider benefiting the environment by outlawing single-use plastic bags inside city limits.

"We are a very small community—it should be easy," said Mitchell. "I don't know any of the rules about this sort of thing. I know they don't have plastic bags in California, they don't have them in Australia, and they don't have them in Switzerland, out of the places that I know about."

"Maybe, if we start, we can outlaw plastic bags in Hiwassee."

Councilwoman Amy Barrett respectfully disagreed with Mitchell, saying, "I just think maybe making more places that we can recycle them would be better, and just dispose of them responsibly."

Millage...from Page 1A

will be adopting a lower rate of 0.483 mills to bring in virtually the same revenues as last year at \$364,295.

"The overall economy in the country is very good, and we're feeling the effects of that and trying to take advantage of it by promoting our tourism as much as possible to create more dollars being spent and tax dollars being collected in the county," said Bradshaw. "And it's working. Things are going really good, and we're very thankful for it."

Over on the school side, the board of education decided in a July 31 called meeting that it will be setting its millage rate in an Aug. 23 called meeting at 7:30 a.m. at the board office.

The school board will be accepting the rollback millage rate, which means the millage will be going from last year's rate of 7.956 to a new rate of 7.671 mills.

This will result in the countywide imposition of property taxes in the amount of \$5,793,266.

"That is not a reduction in revenue for us, however,"



Towns County Board of Education Member Stan Chastain with Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong in the July 31 called board meeting.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

said Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong. "It is actually an increase in revenue of \$40,000, which isn't a significant increase for an individual taxpayer."

Added Berrong: "I will say that it's a pretty good sign for the economy, because since 2013, there has been a steady increase from the real estate revenues coming in. So, in

2013, the total tax digest for the county was \$771 million, and now it's up to \$821 million.

"That is a \$50 million increase, which is why the millage rate continues to go down but the value is still up. Property values are starting to rise again in Towns County, so that's a good sign for our county."

Alcohol...from Page 1A

REAPs, or Regional Economic Assistance Projects, but the November referendum would allow restaurants across the board to apply for liquor licenses.

"When I was campaigning, a lot of the restaurant owners felt like it was unfair because they couldn't serve liquor when other restaurants could that were in the REAP," said Bradshaw. "I told them that we would put it on the ballot so that the voters could vote on it and hopefully give them an equal playing field."

As to why Bradshaw is putting it on the ballot now instead of last year, he wanted to avoid a costly special called election by piggybacking off the 2018 General Election.

Separately, the Hiwassee City Council voted unanimously in July to adopt a Sunday brunch alcohol resolution to place a citywide referendum on the November ballot.

Right now, Sunday sales of alcohol by the drink inside Hiwassee City Limits don't start until 12:30 p.m.

However, thanks to a new bill passed by state legislators and signed by Gov. Nathan Deal earlier this year, Hiwassee residents will be able to decide in November if they

want to accommodate earlier brunch sales of alcohol in local restaurants on Sundays.

The measure would move the start time of alcohol sales by the drink from 12:30 p.m. to 11 a.m. on Sundays, creating an extra hour and a half window for local restaurants to better serve their customers.

Putting the local referendum on the November ballot will allow the city to forgo many of the costs associated with holding a special election.

"Since we're going to have an election anyway—it's not a special election just to put that one thing on there—we thought we'd take advantage of it," said Ordiales in July. "The only cost to us will be the paper ballots for absentee ballots."

Also, several Hiwassee residents have been busy collecting signatures for a petition calling for a referendum to put package sales of liquor before city voters.

Based on Georgia law, they needed to collect signatures from 35 percent of the registered and qualified voters of the City of Hiwassee, which in this case was approximately 233 signatures.

On Aug. 1, the petitioners turned in 304 signatures for verification by the Towns

County Board of Elections and Registration.

Only 178 signatures passed the verification process, meaning the petition was 55 verified signatures short of making the Nov. 6 ballot.

Reasons the remaining signatures failed to pass verification included: duplication, likely from combining lists with a previous effort; people falsely believing they had registered to vote; people being out of precinct; people having moved recently, etc.

LaJean Turner was the main circulator of the petition, and she expressed her disappointment after learning that the petition had failed.

"Many volunteers have spent countless hours walking the streets of Hiwassee and knocking on doors, some being slammed in our faces," said Turner. "We all share the same passion for our city's growth and viability."

"This referendum could have brought much needed income into the city. Instead, Towns County residents will continue to spend their money in Clay County, North Carolina. Thank you to everyone that volunteered in this endeavor."

March...from Page 1A

where you were born or the color of your skin. God loves each and every one of us so much, that He sent His only begotten Son to walk the earth with human beings to share His love."

The March for Jesus is the brainchild of Terry Rathmann, a relative newcomer to the Hiwassee area. Rathmann said he's been riding his motorcycle between Blue Ridge and Hiwassee for years and finally decided to buy a home here.

He grew up farming in Minnesota, and as a young man, he joined the U.S. Army Infantry to serve his country.

After returning from military service, he earned college degrees in political science and business administration.

Rathmann spent his working career in the satellite television industry, and he authored "Juror 11: A Story of Murder, A Story of Judgement," which is a true story based on a time when Rathmann was the foremen of a jury in a murder trial.

He also founded a nonprofit corporation called "A Shepherd's Life," a ministry-based company with the purpose of leading people in studying the Bible.

Most recently, Rathmann said was moved by the Holy Spirit to found "March for Jesus," another nonprofit corporation dedicated to organizing marches "in different cities to glorify God by honoring His Son, Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior."

Hiwassee will be the first such March for Jesus, and according to Rathmann, there

aren't bringing Bible study into the home, then where are they going to get it?"

As stated on his website, Rathmann believes that Christians can come together to help transform families and entire communities by committing themselves to be role models worth following.

"If you want to change a community, in my opinion, it starts at the home with the parents, and then those parents, with their children, get engaged at the local church," said Rathmann.

In turn, church attendance will lead to Bible study in the home and involvement with like-minded people, he said.

"And the next thing you know, they're building a community," said Rathmann. "It starts with the family, goes to the local church level, and then from there, the sustaining, positive impact can happen at a community level."

are people in Hiwassee from all over the nation who are unified by an appreciation of their surroundings in what many refer to as "God's country."

"When you have that type of gratitude and that type of appreciation, you take care of it and you take care of one another that are here," said Rathmann. "So, that's why I think there's a special bond here, because they have that unifying characteristic of appreciation."

Rathmann is concerned, however, that television and smartphones have taken away interaction within the family unit, and that parents, as role models, have been replaced by technology and public schools.

"Without the role model of the parents, then what are the children really learning from?" asked Rathmann. "If the parents

Perren...from Page 1A

is not being used."

Perren said the first phase of the project was finished ahead of schedule and that all the furniture has been moved back into the classrooms. The school will be teacher and student-ready at the start of the school year.

"Without the support of you and this community, this project wouldn't have happened," said Perren. "Had we not passed the SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax), there'd be no way we could have come up with the funds for us to do this thing."

Perren then shifted his presentation over to school safety.

"There's been a heightened sense of awareness since the tragedy that happened at Parkland this past year, and also the one in Santa Fe, Texas," said Perren. "We've been meeting with the sheriff, the local EMA, GEMA (Georgia Emergency Management Agency)—a series of meetings all summer long that actually started last spring."

He said GEMA has developed a scenario for a table-top exercise that will take place on Tuesday, Aug. 7.

Following that, a full-blown active shooter exercise at the school will take place in the near future. It will be held on a day that students are not there, though some students may participate, he said.

It used to be that, in an active shooter situation, schools would go into lock-down with the students huddled together in a corner with the lights out, according to Perren.

"That actually makes it easier on the shooter," he said, noting that, sometimes, the best course of action is to get the students out of the building if there is a clear path to do so.

Perren said the school system is implementing a new program call A.L.I.C.E., which stands for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter and Evacuate.

He went on to explain the protocols associated with each of the words in the acronym, stating that they are not meant to be done in order, rather, in a sequence that makes the most sense.

Perren will return as a guest speaker on Aug. 17 to continue the discussion on school safety.

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Rotary names 2018 Citizen of the Year

Lake Chatuge Hiwassee Rotary Club

Vice President Gerry Guttenstein (left) and Lake Chatuge Rotary President Kerry Clem present the "Citizen of the Year" Award to the outstanding Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales for 2017/2018. The Rotary Club meets every Tuesday at the Brasstown Valley Resort and Spa at noon. For more information see us on Facebook. T(Aug8,GI)SH

Mountain Home Music Theater presents Mountain Home Music Band

Saturday night, August 11, The Mountain Home Music Band will be in concert with Larry Berrong on piano, banjo and fiddle; Tim Burch on bass, Dale Nicholson on drums, Jimmy Hooper on lead guitar, Billy Nicholson on steel guitar, Jerry Nichols singer, Danny Burch emcee and singer and Marilyn Berrong lead vocals. This is a professional band. They opened the show for Joe Diffie at the Georgia Mountain Fair and got three standing ovations.

Tickets are \$8 each and children under 10 get in free.

Mountain Home Music Theater is located 2.5 miles west of Hiwassee on Hwy.

Georgia Boot reunion

The Georgia Boot Reunion will be held Saturday, August 18th at the Senior Center Pavilion in Blairsville, beginning at 11 a.m. Please bring a covered dish. Meat, drinks, and paper products will be furnished. For information contact: Lorella at 706-745-6560 or Mirle at 706-896-1654. NT(Aug8,F4)SH