

Millage Rate...from Page 1A

have experienced higher city taxes this year.

But with the rollback rate, Hiwassee property taxpayers whose values stayed the same as last year will actually be seeing slightly smaller tax bills for 2018.

For example, a person with a non-homestead property worth \$100,000 in both 2017 and 2018 will be saving about \$3.52 with the 2018 rollback rate.

Leading up to the Sept. 11 called meeting to set the millage rate, Ordiales argued that, even though \$7,081 in additional tax revenues citywide is not a lot of money in terms of the city budget, every little bit helps.

Specifically, Ordiales discussed using the additional tax dollars to go toward funding a 3 percent cost of living raise for Hiwassee Police Officers, though the \$7,081 would still not be enough to cover the entire cost of the raise.

"But if we roll it back to (2.170 mills), then the increase is \$2,000 - we would not have enough money to fund a 3 percent increase," said Ordiales in the Sept. 11 public hearing. "Now, will we do it? We will find a way to do it because it's the right thing to do for our employees."

Furthermore, the mayor related that a third of 2017 property taxes have yet to be paid, which is problematic from a budgetary standpoint, especially for a city strapped with close to \$400,000 a year in debt service on a number of outstanding loans totaling more than \$4 million.

"Is the \$7,000 going to allow us to pay off any loans? Clearly not," said Ordiales. "But it will allow us, certainly, to give raises to the people who deserve it that work in the city. And that's the story, pretty much, in a nutshell."

In the weeks since Mayor Ordiales announced her millage rate proposal, councilmembers have fielded questions and concerns from a number of property owners around town.

And the public hearings worked exactly as intended, allowing property owners on both sides of the issue to share



Hiwassee City Councilmembers Nancy Noblet and Amy Barrett on Sept. 11. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

their views with city officials. Much discussion was had about the \$7,081 figure during the Sept. 11 hearing, which was the best attended of the three public hearings, and it came down to whether or not the council believed it was worth it to forgo the rollback rate to collect the additional revenue.

Ultimately, public comments about the rising costs of doing business, the fact that the city wouldn't suffer an undue burden giving up the \$7,081, and concerns over people living on fixed incomes swayed a majority of the council to vote against the rollback rate.

"When we enacted the franchise fee, which I thought was really good and we needed to do, do you know that six of the elderly people in the low income apartments above me ... had to move out because their Social Security disability would not go up?" said Councilwoman Amy Barrett. "Could you imagine being 80 years old and having to be relocated because you can't afford the franchise fee?"

"And property taxes get passed on to them. Their rent does go up. They don't just eat it, the federal government doesn't just open it up."

Barrett argued that, instead of raising the additional revenue, the mayor and councilmembers should take a closer look at the budget and "find some good places

to cut." "We've got some really smart people on here, and Liz has done a tremendous job, and we have accomplished great things," said Barrett in the Sept. 11 meeting, taking time to reflect on the city's achievements before looking ahead. "I feel like it's crunch time for us instead of you guys (the taxpayers)."

In that same public hearing, Ordiales informed everyone that the tax commissioner was working to send out delinquent notices to get people caught up on their city tax bills.

Also in the hearing, the mayor, councilmembers and guests took a moment to remember the nearly 3,000 Americans who were murdered in the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

As always, Hiwassee residents and business owners are encouraged to attend these public meetings to forward civic engagement with city leaders.

The next opportunity to do so will be on Sept. 24, when the mayor and city council gather to accept the rollback millage rate.

Immediately following the Sept. 24 called meeting, the council will continue its discussion of city finances in both a budget public hearing and a regular council work session.

refreshed and talked to about training their students, and we'll follow through with that next week with Mr. (Roy) Perren."

Chastain said all else was looking good for the middle school. A fundraising committee is in the making to help raise money for the out-of-state trip next year, and middle school athletes are off to a great start this year.

All of the 2017-2018 Pioneer RESA scores for the middle school were above the state level, according to Chastain.

"I want to say that I am proud of these scores and feel like our students are definitely ready and prepared to go on to the next grade level," said Chastain.

High School Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs' report was very promising as well, and there are 301 students enrolled.

Dr. Hobbs said the seniors will be painting their parking spaces on Sept. 22, which is always a lot of fun. Juniors will be placing orders for their class rings soon.

High school teachers will be conducting active shooter drills with students in all classes in the next week.

Dr. Hobbs said all rankings for the 2017-2018 Pioneer RESA test results for the high school were above the state average.

she awaits spring and more gardening.

"I love to read when I'm not working in the yard, and Romance is my favorite to read," said Nichols. "I get a break in the winter when it all dies, and we start back on it usually at the beginning of May."

Apart from doing yardwork and reading, Nichols enjoys going to church twice every Sunday, and she regularly attends the Mountain Home Music Theater on Saturday nights.

"She is the most remarkable woman I have ever met," said Kendall. "It's hard to imagine a 96-year-old doing all this work and still going out to do all these things with very little difficulty and complaint."

Of course, Nichols plans to keep the yard going as long as physically possible.

"Life is about the things we do," said Nichols. "If you don't get a hobby or something you love, then you really aren't doing anything that makes you happy with yourself. Everyone needs a hobby that they can be proud of doing often."

BOE...from Page 1A

October. However, if we do not get that back in October, we do not think, by the end of October, we'll have enough money in our fund balance to actually cover the payroll for the end of October."

Continued Dr. Berrong: "We don't think we'll have to use it, but we would like to go ahead and apply for a line of credit from (a) bank just in case that happens, and we'll have that to fall back on."

If use of the credit line becomes necessary, he said, it would be for a very short period of time, only until reimbursement from the state is received.

In other news, Elementary School Principal Dr. Sandy Page said the school year is going very well and, seemingly, very quickly. Progress reports will be going home with students on Sept 19, and there are 417 elementary students enrolled at this time.

Dr. Page said she is very proud of her students' significant improvements in most areas of the recent Georgia Milestones testing results as prepared by the Pioneer Regional Educational Service Agency, or RESA.

Nearly all scores for elementary school students were above the state average, and Dr. Page pledged to maintain a focus on improvement moving



Township Middle School Principal Erica Chastain giving her principal's report in the Sept. 10 regular BOE meeting. Photo by Mark Smith

forward.

Middle School Principal Erica Chastain said her enrollment total was at 230 students, and that progress reports would be going out to middle school students on Sept. 19 as well.

"Our teachers had a refresher or an additional training course on (the most recent terrorist mitigation) training last week, and we will be using that to train our students, which I think is very beneficial," said Chastain. "Teachers have now been

Nichols...from Page 1A

Chatuge, which was installed in the early 1940s.

In fact, the creation of the lake made her family decide to move over to Union County, where her brother would eventually open up Truelove Tires.

Senior Center events

Towns County Senior Center would like to invite the public to attend the following events:

Live music on the third Tuesday of every month at 12:15 p.m. Shake Rattle and Roll with the Mountain Mafia All Star Band.

BalloFlex Fitness class every Tuesday and Thursday at 10 a.m.

Silver Sneakers exercise class every Monday and Wednesday at 2 p.m. T(Sep19,F)SH

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Planning...from Page 1A



The Towns County Planning Commission on Sept. 11, 2018, at the Towns County Civic Center. Photo by Mark Smith

still leaves a great deal to be determined by counties and municipalities.

Each county in Georgia has its own "personality," and part of that personality is the land where that county lies. Part of Towns County's personality is its mountains and lakes and spectacular views.

Another part of Towns County's personality is its economic base, which is largely tourism and retirement living, with many visitors eventually becoming residents.

And therein lies the rub: how exactly does one strike a happy medium between maintaining the county's pristine natural beauty and allowing businesses to responsibly advertise their products and services?

The moratorium is the result of an experience Bradshaw had earlier this summer, when his office was approached by three billboard companies that each applied for multiple sign permits within a two-week period in July.

Bradshaw said the owner of one of these billboard companies told him Towns County's sign ordinance was so lax that the county was going to "get hammered" with billboard signs going up everywhere

if they didn't do something quickly.

"We want businesses to advertise," said Bradshaw. "We want controlled growth in the county."

"However, if we had turned these companies loose and didn't do anything, we would have billboards from one end of this county to the other."

Alisa Richards, secretary to Commissioner Bradshaw and a member of the planning commission, said two companies got at least six sign permits approved before the moratorium was enacted, which means that those billboard signs are grandfathered in under the old ordinance.

Some residents have expressed to Bradshaw their desire to severely restrict the number and type of signs allowed.

However, Steven Phillips, a local business owner, told commission members during their meeting on Sept. 11 that he felt he should be able to do with his property as he saw fit and without restrictions.

Phillips said he owns property on both sides of US 76, and he doesn't want to be restricted by local government from erecting billboard signs if

he wants them.

City Attorney Robb Kiker said that he surveyed surrounding counties and found them to be more restrictive than what this commission is proposing for Towns County.

The commission is proposing that new off-premises billboard signs along major routes, including Georgia 17, US 76, and Georgia 75, have a maximum size of 300 square feet, a maximum height of 30 feet, and be single side, monopole and of metal construction.

Further, the commission wants these signs to be landscaped at the base, not be digital, multi-message signs, and be 2,500 feet apart and 500 feet from a school or park.

For secondary roads, the commission is wanting to propose that signs not exceed 75 square feet in size, and that they may use six-by-six wooden supports.

The above listed proposals of changes to the sign ordinance are not all-inclusive of everything that may appear in the final draft ordinance, nor are they absolute.

"The bottom line is, we're doing this to protect the county," said Bradshaw.

Memorial Ride...from Page 1A

Joshua's Warriors, American Legion Riders Posts 23 & 121, and the Cherokee County (NC) Sheriff's Office - went kickstands up at 10 a.m. on the Hiwassee Town Square in Towns County.

From there, the riders traveled to Hayesville, North Carolina, then through

Young Harris and around the Downtown Blairsville Square in Union County, before heading to Murphy, North Carolina.

Several people spoke at various stops during the ride, all with messages "honoring our fallen heroes who died in terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center in NYC on Sept.

11, 2001, and in Benghazi, Libya, on Sept. 11, 2012."

The sheriff's offices in Union and Towns counties of Georgia, and in Clay and Cherokee counties of North Carolina, worked together to provide escorts for the event.

Also participating in the ride were members of the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association and the Nam Knights of America.

Brasstown Manor...from Page 1A



Members of the North Georgia Honor Guard saluting the flag at Brasstown Manor on Sept. 6. Photo by Mark Smith

gathering, some of whom were residents of Brasstown Manor, and the shared message was clear - respect the American flag.

But there was an underlying theme that came through loud and clear also, consisting of concerns over the erosion of respect for the American flag because of ignorance of what the American colors stand for.

"That flag up there's cost a lot of blood and treasures," said Drummond. "It should always be honored."

The project to "plant" a flagpole at Brasstown Manor began about two years ago with a request from the residents to the American Legion Post 23 Veterans Visitation Committee, whose sole mission is to visit elderly veterans in Towns County.

Drummond said that, at first, the project wasn't taken seriously and lay dormant for a long time, but that after a change in management, Helen and Todd Kimsey rekindled the project, and the go-ahead was finally given by the owners of Brasstown Manor.

"After two years, the owners and the management, with Bobbie Rohr as the executive director, called me and said, 'Get the flag and get the pole. Let's get her done,'" said Drummond. "We did that exactly a month ago."

everybody in the county invited."

Volunteers with the American Legion Post 23, the American Legion Auxiliary, the VFW Auxiliary, the American Legion Riders, the Sons of American Legion, and the Marine Corps League, all under the umbrella of VFW Post 7807, donated their time and effort to the project.

The money for the new flag and flagpole came from a generous donation to VFW Post 7807 by the Kimseys, both residents of Brasstown Manor.

The Kimseys' one stipulation was that the donation be used "for education and for other purposes of Americanism," said Drummond.

When they were asked if part of that donation could be

used for the Brasstown Manor flag project, the answer was yes.

Drummond then purchased the flag through American Legion Flag and Emblem online.

Drummond said the staff at Brasstown Manor is a very patriotic group, and that the two maintenance men, Rickey and J.C., paid for the concrete to set the pole themselves, then planted the pole, rain notwithstanding.

Rohr, the new executive director of Brasstown Manor, was all smiles while hugging several of the residents during the ceremony.

The Marine Corps League provided the Color Guard for the dedication, and Drummond said the event was "a project of the veterans of Towns County, GA."



Veteran Scott Drummond with Brasstown Manor Executive Director Bobbie Rohr during the Sept. 6 flagpole dedication. Photo by Mark Smith