

# Towns County Herald

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## New Agriscience Center taking shape at TCHS

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Construction on the Towns County High School Agriscience Center is going smoothly, with an expected opening date sometime between mid-March to early April.

While bad weather may have forced a bit of a delay on the project, the basic frame is well in place thanks to Charles Black Construction, and siding will soon be applied.

"We're about to be dried in, hopefully, in about another week," said Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong in late January.

The brand-new building is essentially divided into two different sections minus the bathrooms, storage rooms and office, with dedicated areas of instruction for each specific discipline – a welcome change for Career, Technical and Agricultural Education Teacher Sabrina Garrett.

For years, just one classroom has served as the stage for almost all CTAE courses – not including the greenhouse utilized for horticulture.

At about 40 feet by 60 feet, the current space holds tables and carpentry equipment, a car lift, a tractor, and a tiny loft for all the plumbing and electrical equipment that also serves as general storage

for the various courses.

Often, tools from the "upstairs" must be brought downstairs for hands-on learning, only to be taken back up to make room for other classes.

Garrett said it's hard to keep the space totally clean of dust and other particles from carpentry and welding, which in turn makes it difficult to keep some pieces of delicate machinery or other materials out for extended periods.

By contrast, the new Agriscience Center quite literally has room to work, measuring in at 110 feet by 80 feet, including an outdoor classroom that can double as a banquet hall. The building also features a 10-foot overhang at

each end.

Welding, HVAC and construction classes will be separated from the rest of the facility by a wall to maintain cleanliness and safety. This will leave the old classroom fully dedicated to automotive courses, since the car lift is already installed.

The total cost of the facility is \$4.4 million, though a grant is covering \$1.75 million of that. The remainder will be paid with Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax funds.

Originally, Berrong considered a commercial cannery, but that would have driven the price of the project up to \$10 million.

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CTAE Teacher Sabrina Garrett and Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong are pleased with how the new Agriscience Center is coming along on campus. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## Royston outlines vision for City of Young Harris

By Shelly Knight  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Last Friday, Jan. 31, the Mountain Movers and Shakers welcomed guest speaker Rosemary Royston, who serves as the Main Street Director for the City of Young Harris.

Royston has worked in the city for 30 years, mostly at Young Harris College, where she is also an alumna.

"I did a little bit of everything at the college, from recruiting to vice president to strategic planning to assistant professor of English," Royston said. "I've done a lot of things, and I was able to transfer many of those skills into the job I do for the city now."

When she first came to work for the city, Royston said she was excited to learn that Young Harris had a strategic plan concerned with how the Enchanted Valley would be moving into the future.

"My vision of leadership is to leave something better



Rosemary Royston  
Main Street Director

than I found it," Royston said. "I want to leave a foundation for the city to grow thoughtfully and with the input of the community and not leave it to just some entity out there."

"We want to keep the village feel and we want to continue to respect the cultural heritage, the outdoors, and the family community, because those are the values we have."

"Based on the survey

That is the vision which guides the planning process."

Royston turned the discussion to the program she leads for the city, Main Street, "which ensures the viability and the use of downtown."

"Economic vitality, promotions, organization and design are the core of a Main Street Program, which we embrace," she said. "We want smart growth. We want, as much as possible, to control the growth, and not the developers. That's why we have ordinances and zoning so that we have some control. We want to protect the valley as a whole."

"We are committed to the village concept. A village is a group of houses associated with buildings that is larger than a hamlet and smaller than a town, situated in a rural area. That is the concept we're going for, which means you're not going to see a whole lot more growth."

See Planning Vision, Page 7

## Law enforcement agencies warn of police impersonator

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Area law enforcement agencies took to Facebook last week to warn the public of a man impersonating a police officer to pull over motorists, though no suspect had been apprehended by press time.

The first warning arrived on Jan. 29 after a report of the impersonator came into the neighboring Cherokee County Sheriff's Office in North Carolina.

Describing the suspect as "a while male, smaller in stature with brown hair," the Sheriff's Office said the man was reportedly driving "a black Dodge Charger with tinted windows and a tinted tag cover" on US 19, just south of NC 141, when the incident under investigation occurred.

"The suspect was wearing a gray and dark blue uniform with a vest containing a radio and handcuffs," the post

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Last week, TCSO posted an image of its uniform patch for people to be able to recognize in the event they are illegally pulled over by a law enforcement impersonator that is thought to be roaming the area.

## Georgia 515 final phase awarded for construction

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Progress continues to widen Georgia 515/US 76 between Blairsville and Young Harris to four lanes, with the last of three construction phases having been awarded last week by the Georgia Department of Transportation.

Construction company AIS Infrastructure announced Jan. 29 that the state had accepted its bid, resulting in a successful contract to build Phase III of the massive project. Phase III will stretch from Young Harris Street inside

Blairsville city limits to Earl Shelton Road in Union County.

"This \$110,976,976 contract involves the widening and reconstruction of approximately 4.39 miles of roadway, transforming the existing three-lane rural section into a four-lane divided rural roadway with a 32-foot grassed depressed median," AIS Infrastructure said.

Continuing, "Within the Blairsville city limits, our team will also design and construct a five-lane urban roadway with sidewalks, three special-design retaining walls,

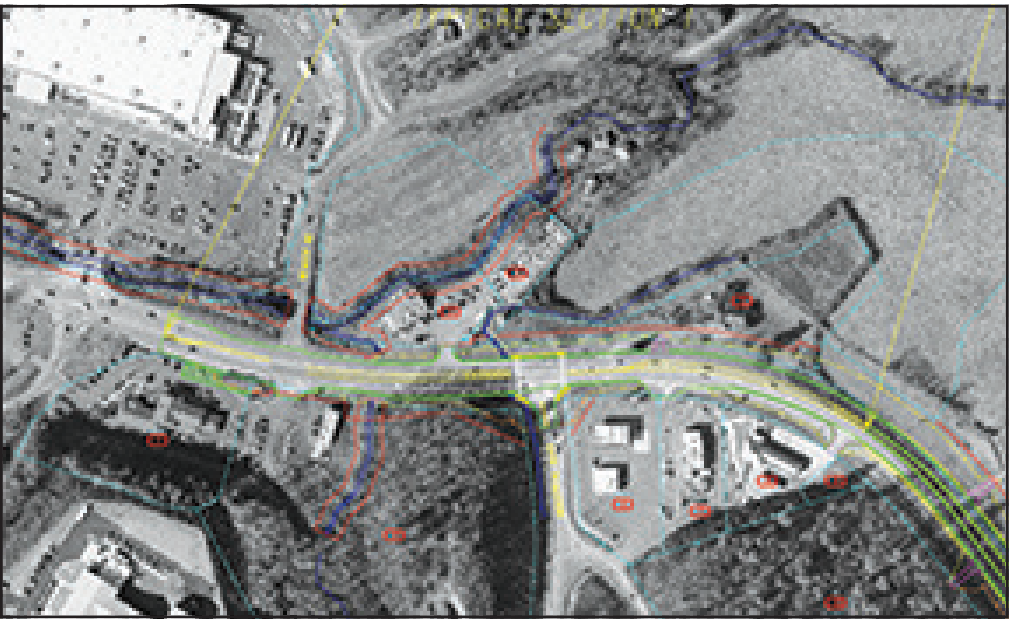
and incorporate trout stream restoration efforts.

"This project is set for completion by Nov. 30, 2027, and reflects our continued commitment to delivering innovative infrastructure solutions."

When AIS Infrastructure begins work, all three phases of the project will finally be under construction, with a total project completion estimate of 2028 provided previously by GDOT.

The project has been on the books since 1999, initially consisting of a single construction

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Phase III of the GA 515 widening and relocation project should begin soon. Pictured here is the starting point of the work to be done inside Blairsville city limits.

## 2025 'Polar Bear Plunge' a first for Vertical Church



Dozens of people participated in the Polar Bear Plunge by Vertical Church at Lake Nottely on Jan. 25.

Photo by Shelly Knight

By Shelly Knight  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – On Saturday, Jan. 25, Pastor Philip Kight and about 40 other participants bravely leapt into the icy waters of Lake Nottely at the TVA Boat Ramp Beach in a fundraising campaign for Vertical Church.

Still others looked on while enjoying the warm cinnamon rolls and hot cocoa provided by the Food Ministry Food Truck. There were even bonfires to warm everyone up

As for the primary pur-

after the dip into the water, which was a balmy 44 degrees that day.

"Today is our first ever Polar Bear Plunge to help raise money for our building campaign," Pastor Kight said. "Ninety percent of the donations we receive will go toward our building fund, and the other 10% will go to the Jones Creek Food Pantry. They do amazing work in our community, and we are really proud to be able to support them and what they do."

As for the primary pur-

pose of the fundraiser, Kight said the church is trying to pay off the debt on its building in Blairsville, which formerly housed the Skillet Cafe.

"When we bought the building, we created some debt, and our goal is to be debt-free," Kight said. "We believe that when we are debt-free, we will have more money to go out and serve in our community – that's what I feel like a church is supposed to be doing."

Vertical Church has

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# Polar Plunge...from Page 1

several plans in mind to be of greater service in the area, especially since there are "certain things our community needs, like childcare."

"Childcare is a big need," Kight said. "We'd love to do some kind of daycare or something that would specifically serve in our community to help parents find a cost-affordable option for daycare. So that's on the vision board (for Union and Towns counties)."

The church has two locations serving people in the mountains, one in Blairsville at 223 Wellborn Street and another in Hiwassee at 1460 US 76.

Kight has been pastor of Vertical Church since 2021 but has been on church staff since 2019. He graduated from Lee College in 2012 and had a stint in the business world, but his calling turned out to be in ministry.

"I love it here," he said. "Our church is very kind and loving and supportive, and I am very fortunate that I get to be here. Most of the 'plungers' are from our church, but we do have some who've heard about what we're doing and want to be a part of it and support what's going on."

"You've got to be a little bit crazy to want to jump in the lake, and then you drum up sponsors. We wanted the event to be fun, but anyone can jump in. This is an amazing turnout."

The Polar Bear Plunge was concocted by the church's Building Campaign Chairman Chris Milhous.

"This seemed like a great idea in July, but the last couple of weeks, maybe not so much," joked Milhous on the cold January morning of the plunge. "The thought here was

to do a fun event that anybody could do, and the support from the church has been outstanding."

Milhous reviewed logistics before the plunge, taking a head count, introducing the nurse on standby and highlighting other safety procedures. Plungers were warned against hypothermia and given a rundown of the symptoms, just in case.

The unique event was quite a success, as the church raised over \$16,000, and talking with the brave souls who took a dip afterward was enlightening.

"I do these every month," said 60-year-old plunger Frank Stapleton. "This is the first one of the year. I'm going to do them at least until I'm 90."

"It was awesome," attested plunger Rick Jones. "These people are amazing. It's all about loving each other and loving the Lord. I'm having a blast. I mean, as cold as it



Vertical Church was thrilled with the turnout for its first ever Polar Bear Plunge fundraiser at the end of January.

is, I'm a little numb right now, but it was wonderful."

"Gosh, how do you even explain it?" said plunger Hannah Graham. "It's the craziest thing I've ever done. I did it for the Lord. And actually, I feel pretty good, like my body

kind of needed it." For more information on the church, visit <https://www.vcotm.org/>.

# Towns Co. Lions learn more about Almost There Ministry



L-R: Club Treasurer Julie Payne gives Lions donation to Almost There Board Members (and Lions) Danny Meeks, Janie McConnell, and Brenda Micali



The Towns County Lions Club focused their January 28 meeting on the local women's rehab ministry, Almost There, Inc.

When mission teams from local churches first began visiting the women in Towns and Union County jails, the missionaries quickly realized most of the female prisoners were incarcerated for drug-related offenses and how often

they were returned to the jails for repeat violations.

In order to reduce this recidivism, the Georgia court system evolved into drug and family courts in which judges and local citizens saw the need for community involvement and intervention services.

In 2016, Miss Elaine's House, a 5 bedroom, 3 bath mobile home in Hiwassee was provided by an anonymous donor that can accommodate 4 women and a program director, and was named after an early Towns County pioneer in this groundbreaking effort. 7 local churches completely furnished the home.

Almost There addresses

this local need toward a more positive opportunity for these women to succeed in a 2 year organized Christian-based therapeutic rehabilitation program. Please contact danny.meeks@gmail.com for more information.

All Lions are encouraged to attend the next club meeting which is one of the most important events/celebrations on the yearly calendar, the annual Towns County High School Student-Teacher Achievement Recognition (STAR) awards program which is sponsored statewide by the Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE), and locally by the Lions.

# Essential Tips for Safe Debris Burning this Spring

Spring is coming. (I promise)! It always has and this year should be no exception. Spring is the time for us to emerge from our winter hibernation, shake off our winter coat and start cleaning our yards to get rid of all the debris, leaves, limbs, and pine straw that has collected since last fall. The usual method to do this is to pile it in the yard, light a match and watch it burn.

While this debris burning is easy, quick, and smells good, it is also very hazardous for our houses. All it takes is one spark from the burn pile to fly up and land on a leaf covered roof and you can be the subject of a 911 call which brings the bright red trucks with flashing lights, sirens, and water hoses. How embarrassing and devastating!!

A glowing ember that your burning pile can travel up to a mile with the right wind and land where it is not detected and cause a fire that you or your neighbor may not be aware of until it's too late. Ask California! Debris burning is Georgia's #1 cause of wildfire, and it accounts for over 50 percent of all wildfires in the state and burning leaf piles in your yard is the most common cause of these wildfires. Debris burning for a hand piled 6' x 6' pile, now does not require a burn permit from the Georgia Forestry Commission but be sure that you are in compliance with the GFC STAR 5 rules for burning to prevent getting a ticket from the GFC if it gets out, because you can be held liable for suppression costs if you are not within the rules.

Burning forests, agricultural fields or land clearing requires direct GFC notification and their approval before you can strike the match. Burning of household garbage is prohibited and not permitted by the GFC and the fire department. A major cause of wildfires is burning with improper weather conditions. Permits for big burns are obtained by calling your local GFC county office or dialing 1-877-OK2-BURN. It's free and releases you from liability if your leaf pile turns into a rag-

ing inferno. Fires should not be initiated before 8:00 a.m. and should be completely extinguished before dark.

Burning permits are not required for Hand Piled Natural Vegetation including leaf piles on the premises where they fell. Existing small garden spots, existing small clearings to plant vegetables and flower gardens, vegetative debris disposal from storm damage, weed abatement, and disease and or pest prevention require you to notify the GFC and get a permit. This permit does not include the burning of debris generated by machine clearing of an area for establishing a garden spot or other clearings.

If your unpermitted fire gets out and damages your neighbor's house, you can be held liable, or if it burns your house, your insurance company may not pay, but if you have a permit, you have a get-out-of-jail-free card. You can also be held responsible for suppression costs if you cause a wildfire and do not have a permit including bulldozers, hot shot crews, and air tankers which do not come cheap! So, think before you burn and get a permit for the big stuff and adhere to the STAR 5 rules for a small leaf pile in your yard. It's the cheapest insurance policy you can get.

Here are Smokey's Safe Debris burning tips: Comply with Local Regulations: Contact GFC in advance to confirm that burning is allowed and to find out if permits are being issued that day. The call must be made on the day you plan to burn, and it is only good for that day. You must call each day you plan to burn. Check the Weather Forecast - Weather fluctuations, such as sudden gusts of wind, cause debris burning to spark a wildfire. Contact the GFC on the day you plan to burn to find out if the weather is safe enough to burn, and if it is not, they will not issue a permit. Choose a Safe Burning Site - A safe site will be far away from power lines, overhanging limbs, buildings, automobiles,



Frank Riley Executive Director of RC&D

and equipment. It will have vertical clearance at least three times the height of the pile, as heat from the fire extends far beyond the actual flames that you see. It will have horizontal clearance twice the height of the debris pile. Prepare the Site Correctly: The ground around the burn site should be surrounded by gravel or dirt for at least ten feet in all directions. Keep the surrounding area watered down during the burn.

Most Important - Remain With your Fire until your fire is completely out. To ensure the fire has been completely extinguished, drown the fire with water, turn over the ashes with a shovel and drown it again. Repeat several times. Check the burn area regularly over the next several days and up to several weeks following the burn, especially if the weather is warm, dry, and windy.

Once burned a large debris pile (with a permit), covered it with dirt to put it out at the end of the day, and we had several rains, and 6 weeks later when I uncovered the mound, it was still burning inside, so you must monitor it until you are completely sure that the fire is out.

Keep it Legal - It is illegal to burn plastic, tires, and most other waste products not from a tree or shrub. It is illegal to burn any kind of building materials including lumber and the burning debris can only be natural material.

For more information on debris burning, burn permits, and wildfires, contact your local Georgia Forestry Commission office - 706-781-2398, US Forest Service district office - 706-781-2593, local fire department, or the Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D council at [www.chestatetrcd.org](http://www.chestatetrcd.org), or [www.gatrees.org](http://www.gatrees.org).

# Police Impersonator...from Page 1

continued, advising drivers to keep an eye out for the distinctive county patch worn by its patrol deputies.

"Non-uniformed members will have a clearly visible badge and rarely conduct traffic stops, but do occasionally," the Sheriff's Office said. "The same applies to Alcohol Law Enforcement."

"If you are ever concerned for your safety, please call 911, indicate by a turn signal and travel to a well-lit area."

Two days later, on Jan. 31, the Towns County Sheriff's Office announced that "an unknown individual has been reported in multiple counties surrounding our area pulling over cars and approaching citizens impersonating a law enforcement officer."

TCSO revealed that the man had reportedly been using "a single emergency light" to stop people and that the tinted tag cover was "to conceal their tag."

"So far, this has been reported in Cherokee County (North Carolina), Towns County and in the Union County area as well," TCSO said.

In a follow-up post on Saturday, TCSO said it had investigated two potential instances of the impersonator being present in Towns County, concluding that these reported incidents - including one involving a picture of roadside activity - were actually "mistaken identity."

"One incident is one sitting on the side of the road and the other involving a male in a black Charger pulling over a car," TCSO said, noting that it had no all-black Dodge patrol cars in its fleet. "Both incidents have been cleared."

"The first was found to be a (Georgia State Patrol) Trooper, and the second was the one in which the picture is being circulated. This was a Towns County Deputy in a marked patrol car wearing a uniform conducting a lawful

traffic stop.

"At this time there has been no incidents involving a black charger in Towns County. In (North Carolina) there has been an incident of a male pulling over a car in a black Dodge Charger or a Black Tahoe."

The Union County Sheriff's Office issued a warning last Friday, too, and concurred with TCSO in a follow-up post on Saturday that "there have been no further incidents involving a black charger in either Union or Towns County."

Also last week, the Blairsville Police Department shared a post by the Hiwassee Police Department warning the public about the original incident in Cherokee County, North Carolina.

Generally, motorists are advised to pay attention to the official patches worn by each respective law enforcement agency and to call 911 if they are ever in doubt during a traffic stop.

# Understanding How Young Harris City Hall Works



The City of Young Harris, just like the many other cities throughout Georgia, was created by the Georgia legislature through their enactment of a city charter. A city's charter sets the boundaries of that city, describes the governing structure of the city, city election requirements, describes the powers and limitation of that city, including zoning, utilities, police & fire protection, eminent domain, public safety, setting budgets and many other provisions necessary to run the city.

The Charter for the City of Young Harris was last updated by the General Assembly in 2018. Under that Charter, the governing authority of the City of Young Harris consists of the mayor and a five member city council. The mayor and council members are all elected to staggered four year terms, with the mayor and two council members standing for election in one cycle and the three other council members being elected two years later. Like most cities in Georgia, elections for mayor and the city council are non-partisan.

The Mayor: The mayor, as the chief executive officer of the city, presides over city council meetings but does not vote except to break a tie among the council members. Responsibilities of the mayor include: Preside at all meetings of the city council. Sign all written contracts entered into by the city council on behalf of the city. See that all laws and ordinances of the city are faithfully executed. Appoint and remove all officers, department heads, and employees of the city. Supervise all executive and administrative work of the city. Call special meetings of the city council.

The City Council: The City Council serves as the legislative body of the City of Young Harris and is responsible for making decisions affecting the local community. The City Council is generally vested with all the powers of government of the City, but specifically is authorized to adopt and provide "for the execution of such ordinances,

resolutions, rules, and regulations which it shall deem necessary, expedient, or helpful for the peace, good order, protection of life and property, health, welfare, sanitation, comfort, convenience, prosperity, or well-being of the inhabitants of the City of Young Harris". The duties of the City Council also include the following:

Budget Approval. One of the critical functions of a city council is to review and approve the city's budget. This includes allocating funds for various city departments and services.

Policy Making. The council sets policies that guide the city's operations and long-term planning. These policies can impact everything from signage to development.

Oversight. City councils provide oversight to ensure that city services are delivered efficiently and effectively. They hold public officials accountable and address concerns raised by residents.

City Council meetings and public hearings: The Young Harris City Council holds both council meetings and public hearings. Council meetings are the time for the council to deliberate and vote on matters before the council. Public hearings provide an opportunity for the council to hear from members of the public concerning those council matters. Members of the public who wish to speak at a council meeting may do so by notifying the City Clerk prior to the meeting. The public is always permitted to speak at public hearings. All meetings and public hearings of the city council are open to the public allowing citizens to stay informed about current issues and decisions.

Regular Meetings. The Young Harris City Council holds regular meetings every single month on the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30 PM at City Hall located at 50 Irene Berry Drive in Young Harris. (Meeting times are sometimes moved to account for holidays or lack of a quorum.)

Special Meetings. In addition to regular meetings, special meetings may be called either by the mayor or four council members. Special meetings are held for various reasons but typically to deal

with business that needs to be addressed before the next regular meeting. Regular and special meetings are open to the public but may be closed for some limited reasons, including to discuss personnel matters, to discuss real estate, or to discuss threatened or pending litigation.

Citizen Engagement. The mayor and council members encourage members of the public to attend meetings to provide their input, and to hear discussions and decisions made by the city council.

Committees, Boards and other Governmental Bodies: The mayor and city council also conduct business through a variety of committees, boards and other groups. Those include:

Administrative Committee (members are the entire city council; among many duties, they meet to work on and adopt the annual budget).

Water and Sewer Committee (members are a subset of the city council; committee addresses issues related to the delivery of water & sewer services by the City).

Roads and Trees Committee (members are a subset of the city council; committee addresses issues related to city roads, traffic and trees within the City).

Economic Development Committee (members are a subset of the city council; committee addresses issues related to economic development within the City).

Ethics Board (consisting of three members, one appointed by the mayor, one appointed by the city council, and one appointed jointly by the mayor and council; duties are to enforce Code of Ethics adopted by the City Council)

Planning Commission (consisting of between three and five members appointed by the City Council; duties are to give recommendations to the City Council regarding zoning, planning and development issues).

Main Street Program (consists of no more than nine board members approved by the City Council, with the Main Street Director serving as liaison between council and board. Focus is economic development, promotions, organization and design of downtown district).



# Agriscience Center...from Page 1

million. Still, the Agriscience Center will feature a kitchen for students to learn how to can their own food.

A dehydrator will allow for more food preservation options, and pre-processing, a walk-in cooler and a freezer will prove useful for food storage.

Technology and computer science classes will also be moved to the center, which will house 3D printers and engravers. Along with that, there's promising new ideas for hands-on activities that students can take part in to benefit not just their own learning but the community as well.

The overhangs, Berrong said, will enable construction

students to create tiny homes one day; similar to neighboring Union County High School's partnership with Habitat for Humanity, Towns County High School kids might start putting their skills to use to make local houses.

"Our hope is getting into building the smaller sheds or the tiny homes ... where our kids are getting the same education, just on a smaller scale," said Berrong, with Garrett adding that the reduced scale suits TCHS more because of its smaller student body.

One long-term goal, estimated to come to fruition by the end of the summer, involves additional space behind the center. Berrong said he's

drawing up quotes to fence in the land potentially for the care of honeybees and perhaps even fruit trees or small livestock like chickens or goats.

From there, the students would be able to work in the center's kitchen using food they have grown right there on campus.

"We're hoping to raise a steer out up there (once a year)," Garrett said. "We're also working with Miss Becky Mullins in the lunchroom. She told me if we could do that, then we could do the Farm to Table for the whole school. Then, we could serve our meat, our vegetables, on our line, for our other kids to eat, too."



All but the automotive classes will be moving into the new Agriscience Center following its completion, where there will be plenty of space to house the various vocational disciplines being taught. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

# GA 515 Final Phase...from Page 1

tion phase to both straighten and widen roughly 8.5 miles of the highway between Blairsville and Young Harris city limits.

After bids came back too high in 2023, GDOT divided the project into three phases to bid out separately, with the same ultimate goal for the roadway, that is, to future-proof the corridor by reducing both traffic congestion and crash frequency.

Phase I is about 46% complete and will result in a two-lane rural bypass of 1.25 miles in length running around the west side of Downtown Young Harris, beginning with a roundabout at Brasstown Creek Road and ending with a second roundabout at Timberline Drive.

GDOT has estimated the bypass should be done by September 2026, but the project was put on hold last summer after Native American petroglyphs were disturbed during construction following an apparent miscommunication about the presence of the an-

cient stone carvings.

Fortunately, the state has arrived at a resolution and has set a meeting with the appropriate tribal authorities to discuss the issue on-site this Friday, according to GDOT District 1 Communications Officer Nathan Johnston.

The meeting will include archaeological planning to ensure this does not recur, and Phase I construction is expected to resume within weeks.

Also last summer, the state's subcontractor, C.W. Matthews Contracting Co., damaged two water lines belonging to Young Harris during bypass construction, Mayor Andrea Gibby said, putting the city in a position of having to ask GDOT to pay \$2,493 to cover repairs and water loss.

Gibby said the state claimed that "the insured is not the proximate cause of this accident or loss" - a contention disputed by the city.

And this issue has been resolved, too, as C.W. Matthews decided last month to

pay the amount requested from the state in a spirit of cooperation with the city.

Phase II of the project encompasses the 3.2 miles of Georgia 515 between Earl Shelton Road in Union County and Sampson Road in Young Harris, currently listed by GDOT as 7.82% complete.

GDOT greenlit Phase II for construction by Vertical Earth Inc. last May, but the company had to wait until the fall to begin roadside clearing because of federal regulations around protected bat species that could possibly roost in the trees.

Estimated to be done by August 2027, Phase II will feature straightening and widening of 515 to a four-lane divided highway with a 32-foot depressed median and 10-foot shoulder, to include a 6-foot paved shoulder to accommodate bikes from both directions.

A new bridge is being built across Brasstown Creek at the county line, parallel to



Phase II of the project continues between Earl Shelton Road in Union County and Sampson Road in Towns County. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

the existing bridge. Traffic will eventually be diverted onto the new bridge, at which point the old bridge will be demolished and replaced with another new bridge to form twin bridges over the creek.

As Phase II gets further along, GDOT will implement eight detours to tie sideroads back into the highway.

On top of the tens of millions of dollars in combined right-of-way and en-

gineering costs, the three construction phases of the project figure to a hefty sum: Phase I, \$26,916,958; Phase II, \$64,085,296; and Phase III, more than \$110 million, according to GDOT.

# Planning Vision...from Page 1

I conducted when I started in this position, the community has made their priorities known. We want a viable Main Street that is healthy and vibrant. We want a Main Street that has retail, dining, services and social activities. We want starter homes.

"We have a certain design in mind. It's not set in stone, but whatever is built we

want it to fit into the area. We don't want it to stand out and look like it doesn't work. We are also committed to pedestrian connectivity.

"By the way, the crosswalk light that has been out (on Main Street) is being fixed by (the Georgia Department of Transportation). It was such a dated piece of equipment that they couldn't get replacement

parts, which is why it's taken so long to repair."

Royston said that another guiding principle of the city is "to exhibit a strong sense of place."

"We love the area; we want the parks and trails to grow even further," she said. "We want to have public art and community gathering spaces. We'd like to connect

all the parks. We need wayfinding - signage. We want to connect with the outdoors. We want to minimize sprawl.

"That means we have design guidelines. We want it to be aesthetically pleasing for our visitors. We want to be welcoming and accessible to all visitors. And, of course, we want to be a partner in the region."

Highlighting work done with the University of Geor-

gia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government, Royston presented some conceptual designs being considered that showcase a village center, residential infill, pocket parks and trails.

"Again, nothing is set in stone, but when planning, you have to start somewhere," Royston said. "We will depend heavily on our business partners and meet with the incoming president

of (Young Harris College) to determine what we can work on together.

"Those are our next steps moving forward, but we want you to know we are committed to our principles when considering the growth of Young Harris."

For more information about the city and upcoming events, people may visit <https://www.youngharrisga.net>.