

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

www.townscountyherald.net

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1928

75 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 90 Number 21

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

Fixed charge, TVA rate hike and fiber expansion highlight EMC meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

YOUNGHARRIS—Blue Ridge Mountain EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms sought to clarify some of the issues surrounding recent discussions regarding potential upcoming adjustments to the co-op's fixed charge in the monthly EMC Board meeting on Monday, March 18.

As previously reported, Nelms told the board in January that, based on an updated cost of service study by the EMC's rate consultant, the fixed charge portion of each customer's bill should actually be in the \$38 to \$40 a month range.

Currently, the customer

charge is \$21.37, though Nelms explained at the time that any increase in the fixed charge would occur incrementally over several years and would likely include offsetting adjustments to the energy charge resulting in revenue neutral rate adjustments for the average consumer.

Furthermore, Nelms said that adjusting the fixed charge would correct for the modern problem of energy efficient homes providing too little revenue to cover fixed costs moving forward due to the high level of fixed costs historically built into the variable portion of the power bill, i.e. the energy charge shown as kWh.

That bit of discussion from the January board meeting

prompted several members to voice their concerns publicly and in letters to the editor, mainly regarding the potential detrimental effects on low and fixed-income households.

In the March 18 board meeting, Nelms signaled his desire to step back from the public debate for now, stating that no recommendation had been made regarding a fixed-charge increase and no formal plan was in place to increase the fixed charge.

He reiterated that any significant adjustment to the fixed charge would occur incrementally over a period of years, and that, unless additional operating revenues became necessary, the plan



Jeremy Nelms

would be to reduce the energy charge to offset increases in the fixed charge.

Doing so would result in a series of revenue neutral rate adjustments, said Nelms, which would help to flatten electric

costs throughout the year for most EMC members.

Should any member wish to discuss the matter further, Nelms said all they would need to do is pick up the phone and call him at the EMC Headquarters in Young Harris.

In other business, Nelms warned the board that another wholesale power rate increase was expected from the Tennessee Valley Authority Board of Directors in August, meaning the EMC would have to decide before June what to do with the increase, which would go into effect in October.

For the past two years, the EMC has opted to pass the TVA rate increase directly on

to members via the customer charge, and this year's TVA rate hike would result in a customer charge of \$22.91 a month, up from the current \$21.37.

Also in the meeting, Nelms announced that TVA had chosen a new CEO in Jeffrey Lyash, who will succeed Bill Johnson as president of the \$11 billion federal corporation in April.

Lyash has charted a similar career path to Johnson, according to Nelms, meaning the EMC can likely expect a very familiar TVA glidepath in years to come.

Nelms also reported in the March board meeting that the fiber expansion plan
See EMC, Page 8A

Taylor Cornett signs to play soccer for the Barons in Mount Vernon

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Monday, March 18, Towns County High School senior Taylor Cornett signed a letter of intent to attend college and play soccer at Brewton-Parker College in Mount Vernon.

The High School hosted a signing celebration for Taylor in the library, with members of both Indians and Lady Indians Soccer Teams attending, as well as her mom Kelly, her five brothers and sisters, and her dad John Cornett, who is also the girls' soccer coach.

"There are pros and cons of playing for my dad, as he knows what I'm capable of and demands the most out of me, but I absolutely love playing for my dad," said Taylor. "He has taught me a lot about how to be a leader on the field, how to play as a team, and about keeping the team positive."

"He has always taught me how to fight till the last whistle and to keep going no matter what the score is or how bad I might be playing."

For his part, Coach Cornett said one of the main reasons he moved his family up here was because Towns County offered him the chance to coach his daughter in high school.

"I coached her in middle school, and she told me she wanted me to keep coaching her," said Coach Cornett. "So, I am grateful to Principal (Dr. Connie) Hobbs for giving me the opportunity to coach. It has been great. She knows what I want in a player and has those qualities. I have enjoyed watching her compete."

"Taylor is one of the most determined and competitive people I know. Growing up, she was always smaller than most of the girls she competed

See Cornett, Page 8A



Towns County High School senior Taylor Cornett surrounded by friends and soccer teammates at her March 18 signing ceremony.
Photo by Chad Stack

Firewise Citizens Coalition awarded \$4,600 Fire Hazard Mitigation Grant

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County Firewise Citizens Coalition has received its 2019 Firewise Hazard Mitigation Grant of \$4,600.

Coalition Chairman Michael Courey made the announcement in the group's regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, March 19.

Tate City, a small and isolated Towns County community accessible only by dirt roads, will get \$2,000 for street and address signage, which is partially non-existent at this time.

"Last August (2018), Tate City became a Firewise Certified Community," said Coalition Member Judy Potter, who owns property in Tate City. "So, then we formed a committee, and we came up

with a list of potential projects. And then we chose projects for this year.

"This year, we're doing things like (getting) with Towns County 911 (meeting) sure every structure has an address and (clearing) up the 911 map. We made sure that every street has a street sign. There were three that were missing."

With this year's grant, they will also be able to install signs at the beginning of each of the eight roads that go off of the main Tate City thoroughfare that are along each road.

"Just the house numbers, so people keep their privacy," said Potter.

They now have a designated 911 helicopter landing site so that community members know where to go to meet a life flight helicopter in case of a dire medical

emergency. At this point, a life flight helicopter can't be called until an ambulance arrives and makes the call, which can be a 45-minute wait plus the diagnosis, weather permitting.

They are checking to see if the five nurses who are each there at various times of the year can be certified to make a diagnosis in the field and make a life flight call.

Potter said they're looking not only at what makes them fire safe, but at general safety as well.

The remaining \$2,600 of the grant will allow the coalition to purchase fire/hazard mitigation tools such as pole saws, chainsaws, fire rakes, wheelbarrows, water hoses and the like for use by all of the local Firewise-designated communities as needed.

See Firewise, Page 8A



Attendees of the regular Towns County Firewise Citizens Coalition meeting on Tuesday, March 19.
Photo by Mark Smith

County restaurants can start applying for new alcohol licenses this week

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Starting this week, Towns County restaurant owners will be able to apply for brand new alcohol licenses that will allow them to serve liquor to their customers.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw held the second reading and adoption of the new Alcohol by the Pour Ordinance in his Tuesday, March 19, regular meeting.

The ordinance has been a work in progress for quite some time, having won public support with 66 percent of the vote in the November 2018 election.

"We have not done a lot of ordinances, but this one is very, very strict," said Bradshaw. "We are going to hold people accountable, so we want to make sure that people abide by the ordinance."

"To give you an overview of the ordinance, it has a lot in it, and we went through it five to seven times. The



Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw

hours for alcohol by the pour for a restaurant are 11 a.m. to 11 p.m., Monday through Saturday. We do not allow alcohol sales on Sunday - I don't believe in that.

"What we did, we went through and looked at a lot of other ordinances in other counties, and then we combined

the things we liked in theirs and left out the things we didn't to combine it to make it fit for Towns County."

Towns County joins both Hiawassee and Young Harris in allowing liquor by the drink sales, though the residents of both cities also approved Sunday alcohol sales in recent years.

Also in the meeting, Bradshaw talked about the road crew doing a wonderful job this winter keeping the roads safe and cleaned up.

"We haven't had that many phone calls like we thought we would," said Bradshaw. "They are out there working, and the weather is getting better."

"That's one thing I really enjoy about this job is getting to work with them, as I get to see things getting cleaned up and all going the way it should. All things are important to me, but I want to share everything that we're doing."

"They do a great job,
See County Meeting, Page 8A

Mike Gowder requests nonjury trial ahead of April 8 court date

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

In an interesting legal maneuver, former hospital CEO Mike Gowder has requested that his April 8 specially set jury trial be conducted as a nonjury trial instead, to run concurrently with co-defendant Dr. James Heaton's jury trial.

Gowder is facing 150 criminal charges in his federal prescription drug case. Should his request for a nonjury trial be granted, he would be placing his fate in the hands of U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story, the presiding judge in the case.

Currently, Gowder is set to be tried by a jury of his peers alongside co-defendant Heaton, with whom he was closely associated leading up to their initial arrests in February 2016.

Representing Gowder is the highly regarded criminal defense attorney Steven Sadow of Atlanta, who filed the "Defendant's Request for a Nonjury Trial" on Friday,



Mike Gowder

March 22.

In May 2018, Sadow asked the court to sever the defendants in the case so that Gowder and Heaton could be tried separately, though the judge has yet to rule on that motion.

Sadow argued at the time that trying the two separately would put Heaton in a better position to testify in Gowder's defense, given exculpatory statements previously made by Heaton.

However, with just two weeks remaining before the April 8 trial and no severance forthcoming, Gowder and Sadow's defense strategy has seemingly shifted.

"He is not seeking a severance," Sadow said of his client in the March 22 filing. "The court can conduct both trials simultaneously. The jury would be instructed they are only there to decide Dr. Heaton's guilt."

Now, they are apparently hoping to capitalize on Story's more nuanced understanding of the case and its proceedings rather than 12 of Gowder's peers.

"In a jury trial, the ultimate decision-maker is the jury," according to the American Bar Association. "Jurors generally have no knowledge of the parties' pretrial positions, theories or actions."

"Conversely, in a bench trial, the ultimate decision-maker is the judge. Unlike jury trials where a juror may
See Gowder, Page 8A

2 Sections 16 Pages
Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1,678.30
Chatuge 1,923.15
Nottely 1,765.85

Inside
Arrests 2A
Church 4B
Classifieds 6B
Opinion 4A
Legals 7B
Obits 5B
Sports 2B

SPORTS
BASEBALL
Mar 29 Vs. Copper Basin
4:30 PM
SOCCER
Mar 26 @ Union 5 & 7 PM

Lions Club
White Cane
Days
See page 2A

HAMILTON GARDENS
Hamilton Gardens Photo Contest
See page 1B

Historical Society presents:
Fish Camps & Cabins
See page 3A