

Hiawassee...from Page 1A

now, the biggest issue is, any piece of property in the city limits which is under 1 acre pretty much has no guidelines. There's no easement guidelines – it's excluded mostly from the Comprehensive Plan."

Ordiales noted that, under the current guidelines in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, someone could build a 1,200-square-foot home on a quarter acre of land right up to their property line, which could create a hostile relationship with neighboring landowners.

"Another thing that's in the Comprehensive Plan, it says that adult entertainment, for example, is permissible," said Ordiales. "I'm fairly positive that the folks of this town do not want to allow strip bars, adult bookstores within the city limits or at all, for that matter. But currently, that can happen."

A building planning committee, in conjunction with city council and the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, will be going through and updating the 2010 Comprehensive Plan.

"We just want to make sure that, moving forward, we can handle the growth the way we want to handle the growth," said Ordiales. "Not the way I want to handle the growth, but the way the city wants to handle the growth."

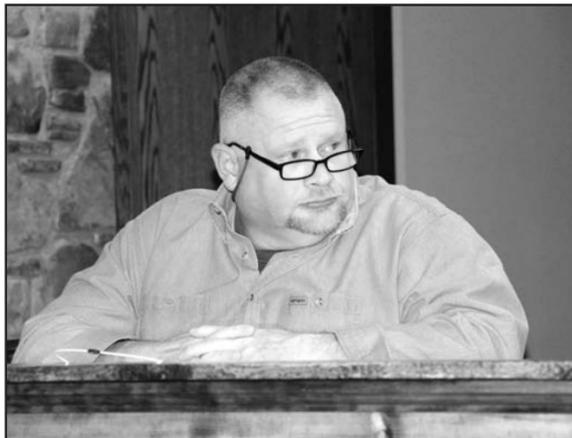
"The only way to do that is to stop for a minute, figure out what that should look like, and then adopt a new Comprehensive Plan to follow."

Essentially, the city is giving itself a three-month timeline within which to fix its Comprehensive Plan, and will hold hearings on the updated plan once it comes out of committee.

"We want to hear from our people, it's not up to us," said Ordiales. "We run the city, but it's not our city. It's run by the citizens of the city, and we want their input. We want it all the time. We encourage them to come to the work session so



In the Tuesday, May 2, meeting of the Hiawassee City Council, Towns County Middle School seventh-grader Bazya Smith delivered her award-winning speech concerning the influence of ancient Greek culture on modern society. Photo/Shawn Jarrard



Hiawassee City Council member Jay Chastain Jr. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

they can voice their opinions. We encourage them to come to the city council meetings to hear what is going on in the city."

Also in the meeting, the council held a first reading of an ordinance to set the mayor's salary at \$26,000 to start the next term of that office.

Acting Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith announced that Brandon Barrett had been hired on as a full-time officer

with the city, and that the city had been experiencing a larger than average number of drug arrests year to date.

Council members received their own personal email addresses, such as krisberrong@hiawasseega.gov.

Towns County Middle schooler Bazya Smith opened the meeting with her award-winning speech on modern day appropriation of Greek mythology.

TVA...from Page 1A

recent study funded by the TVA was shared with the group about the economic impact that TVA reservoirs and waterways had throughout the Tennessee Valley.

"We partnered with the University of Tennessee to do a study on a question that we always got asked a lot, 'what is the economic impact of the TVA lakes,'" said Travis Brickey, senior program manager for TVA public relations. "We never really had a study to show or to give us a solid answer for that question."

TVA released the data from the study to the public shortly after Monday's meeting, with astronomical results.

Three of TVA's 49 reservoirs were selected for the study – Norris Reservoir, Watts Bar and Chickamauga. These three were chosen to represent an urban environment, a rural environment and a tributary reservoir.

From these three reservoirs, the University of Tennessee students conducted in-depth analysis of visitors to the lakes, property owners and the net economic value of these factors.

These studies concluded that, on average, the combination of water recreation and waterfront property owners along TVA shorelines create an annual economic impact of \$11.9 billion.

"This has always been a question that we wanted to answer," said Chris Cooper, TVA natural resource manager. "We wanted to get a feel for what kind of money these reservoirs bring into each county."

"On an annual basis, UT came out with a study that we're at \$11.9 billion a year. That's what's coming to the



Chris Cooper of TVA. Photo/Lily Avery

areas on an annual basis. If you want that down a little bit further, that's \$1 million a mile of shoreline.

"As far as jobs, we've provided 130,000 jobs a year that that provides for. As far as taxes, you're looking at about \$900 – \$916 million a year in taxes that comes in."

"TVA is a very valuable resource, not just for live, work and play, but also good for economics as well."

TVA is looking into the possibility of continuing this research in other areas of the Tennessee River Valley by focusing on the non-commercial forms of reservoir use, such as hiking, biking and camping, in the coming years.

Tom Barnett, senior manager of TVA's River Forecast Center, shared information on local lake levels and how the severe drought in the region has effected when area lakes will reach full summer pool.

"We're coming off of one of the driest years we've seen in quite some time, since 2007 and 2008," said Barnett. "The drought in 2007

was a record drought for the Tennessee Valley and 2016 wasn't much better.

"We ended up well below normal on both rainfall and runoff. We had a really parched fall, the fifth driest second half of the year in TVA's records. October was actually the driest runoff we've had in 142 years."

Because of this dryness, TVA had to push water flow from reservoirs in Western North Carolina, North Georgia and Eastern Tennessee to make up for the low runoff levels that would typically feed the entire Tennessee Valley water system.

"Those lake levels will suffer as a result of this," said Barnett. "You saw last fall that we were having to draw reservoirs down to nearly winter pool levels in early October just to meet those minimum flows to keep those aquatic habitats healthy and make sure that we're assimilating all those waste flows that come into the river."

While lack of rainfall last fall was detrimental to lake levels, December and January proved to be wetter with more rainfall, though still below average runoff into the waterways. However, this increase helped in making the spring pool more feasible for lakes throughout the region.

"April has proved to be one of the wettest Aprils since 1998," said Barnett. "While rainfall is starting to catch up, runoff still hasn't. We're at 105 percent for rainfall for the calendar year, but still only 70 percent for runoff."

"Part of what we do this time of year it to balance the fill and flooding. We're trying to balance and do what we can to get those reservoirs full by June 1, while also minimizing that potential for flooding that we often see in the April, May time frame."

for breakfast. The sky's the limit."

The fairgrounds has pre-sold nearly 400 taster tickets already, so the event is sure to be a huge social extravaganza of good eats and fun times.

"We'll have between 2,000 to 2,200 people, probably," said Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason. "We've got 130 cooks registered, with 25 on the waiting list wanting to cook."

Hiawassee Hardware, which has partnered with the Georgia Mountain Eggfest since it began, has sold dozens of Green Eggs leading up to the festival this year, and discounts on the cookers will be available

Firefighters...from Page 1A



Gov. Deal handing out pens used to sign the landmark legislation, inside Gilmer County Fire Station No. 1. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Fire Station No. 1.

During the signing ceremony, which was attended by more than two dozen area firefighting agencies, bill sponsor and District 67 State Rep. Micah Gravley of Douglasville highlighted individuals important to the bill.

He spoke on the advocacy of Atlanta firefighter Frank Martinez, who died last year of cancer before being able to benefit from the bill he fought to secure for all firefighters in Georgia. Martinez' children attended the signing and collected pens used to sign the bill from Gov. Deal.

Present for the signing was bill advocate and Gilmer County Firefighter Brian Scudder, who previously underwent more than a year of chemotherapy for a firefighter cancer.

Gov. Deal, who vetoed a similar bill last year, called HB 146 an innovative solution in the way it provides "compensation and money for treatment and care for firefighters who contract cancers that are related to their work."

Moving forward in 2018, the bill will require fire departments to have insurance

coverage to pay for cancer claims, to include lump sum payments to firefighters when they are diagnosed with cancers related to the job.

Furthermore, firefighters diagnosed with a "firefighter cancer" will be eligible for up to three years of disability payments if they can't work because of their illness.

After the signing, District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch, who at one point was a volunteer fireman in Lumpkin County, said that the bill was well-deserved by firefighting heroes all over the state.

"You've got these firefighters who are out in unknown conditions," said Sen. Gooch. "They're going into burning buildings and industrial fires and commercial fires, even residential fires today, and there's a lot of toxins in those buildings. You don't know what you're getting into."

"So, you walk in there to try to save property or even other humans, and you're breathing in those poisonous gases. And then, a year or two later, you end up with cancer that can be pinpointed back to that fire, I think we owe it to those people that put their

lives on the line every day to take care of them when they're sick."

Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland attended the signing, and he said the event was a great day for firefighters in Georgia.

"There are certain cancers caused by carcinogens that we're around in every fire," said Chief Copeland. "The way furniture is built today, the plastics, the home building materials – with certain types of cancer now, if we come down with it, then we'll have compensation."

Chief Copeland said he has been 100 percent behind the bill since he first heard tell of it, adding that he was proud to be present for the signing alongside neighboring Union County Fire Department.

"We have mutual aid and automatic aid agreements with those guys," said Chief Copeland of Union County. "We've fought a lot of fire with them and we'll be fighting more fire with them. I was honored to be with my brothers from the adjoining county, and obviously, with the governor of the great state of Georgia. What a wonderful day."

Wildfire...from Page 1A

flowers to raise money for neutering and spaying stray pets in the community.

Each year, the Towns County Fire Coalition joins in the national celebration to highlight ways to prevent and reduce the likelihood of wildfires in the community.

"This is National Wildfire Preparedness Day across the United States and we chose to promote it here as well," said Marsha Elliott, Towns County Fire Coalition member. "We want to educate the citizenry of Towns County of the dangers of wildfire and the preventative measures they can take to prevent or reduce wildfires at their homes."

With the thoughts of last year's rampant wildfires still lingering in the not so distant past, Elliot and Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council Executive Director Frank Riley wanted this year's celebration to be more educational than before by providing countless free brochures and booklets on wildfire safety.

"We're hoping that by providing this literature, it will encourage people to take some proactive measures around their homes," said Elliott. "There are so many little things around the home, such as landscaping and materials and plants, that can really be thought about to have a safer home against fires."

"These wildfires that happened so close to home last fall, I think they really alerted people to how dangerous wildfires can be."



The Wildfire Preparedness event was truly a community experience. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Included in the educational literature was information on how to become a Firewise Community, something that is sponsored and promoted by Riley and the Towns County Firewise Citizens Coalition.

Becoming a Firewise Community is simple and requires basic home preparedness, such as keeping leaves raked and not stacking firewood near the home, and can prevent severe damage during wildfires.

As of right now, there are 21 Firewise communities in Towns County, making up for a large portion of the 91 Firewise communities across the state of Georgia.

"There's proof that Firewise communities work," said Riley. "Just in the last three years, Fannin and Union County have had 131 wildfires

and Towns County has only had nine."

These fire safety coalitions are not the only ones geared up after last year's wildfires. According to Hiawassee Mayor Pro Tem Liz Ordiales, the city fully supports the efforts of the coalitions and hopes to continue to support National Wildfire Preparedness Day and other efforts in the future.

"We're going to start putting construction and landscape guidelines in our building permits," said Ordiales. "Hopefully this will help reduce the risk of fires." For those who are interested in becoming a Firewise Community and learning more about fire safety, visit www.firewise.org.

Eggfest...from Page 1A

that Friday, or food to cook on one of six Green Eggs that will be available through the fairgrounds.

The main event, however, will be Saturday, May 20, and through the cook signup is over, there are plenty of tasting tickets to go around for \$25 per ticket, while children 12 and under get in free.

At 9 a.m. that Saturday, the Eggfest will begin its traditional "Lighting of the Eggs," which will signify the official start of the Georgia Mountain Eggfest at the fairgrounds.

served all day, and patrons of the event are encouraged to explore the offerings of the various egg chefs.

There is quite literally no limit to the kinds and varieties of foods that can be prepared on Big Green Eggs.

From breakfast to lunch, the Eggfest will have patrons' appetites covered – pizza, lobster, steak, shrimp, scallops, sausage balls, desserts.

"On and on and on," said Thomason, describing the possibilities. "You can't imagine some of the things – I've seen donuts cooked down there on the Green Egg

in-store all the way to the day of the fest.

The event is spearheaded by John Hall, who brought his extensive Green Egg knowledge to bear when helping to plan the Georgia Mountain Eggfest. Thanks to the efforts of Hall and others, the Eggfest is one of the largest and well attended Green Egg events in the country.

"It's a big tourist attraction," said Thomason. "It fills up the hotels here in the area and brings people into the community. It's just a really fun event. Cooks come from all over the United States, plus Canada."

Added Thomason: "They have a lot of eggfests all over

the country, but our Eggfest is the second biggest eggfest in the nation, and the most fun with the best venue."

This year, the Georgia Mountain Eggfest will feature 17 different vendors to give fest patrons even more to do in between plates of food,

and vendors will be selling rubs and glazes, as well as homemade crafts and wares.

"We just appreciate all the cooks and all the volunteers that come and help make this event successful," said Thomason.