

City council goes over improvement plans in work session

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Steps toward repairs and restorations for the City of Hiawasse were the primary topics of discussion during the Hiawasse City Council work session on Tuesday, May 30.

A little over a year ago, in an effort to work toward implementing and utilizing the city's newest comprehensive plan; Hiawasse Mayor Pro Temp Liz Ordiales applied for a grant that would provide the city with a strategic plan.

"This was 12 or 14 months ago, we went to a meeting in Blairsville for the Appalachian Regional Commission," said Ordiales. "They had money that was available for us to do things with. So, I applied for a grant for \$30,000 for them to give us a strategic plan for the city."

Unlike the city's comprehensive plan, this strategic plan will delve into the specific details of achieving goals set out in the comprehensive plan for

redevelopment and community improvement, such as in-depth planning outlines and programs that could further help the city move toward goals established in the comprehensive plan.

"This is going to be great," said Ordiales. "While the comprehensive plan is very high level, this will be much more detailed. It will tell you exactly what you need to put where, how things need to be done to move forward and all of that."

"We're going to use the comprehensive plan as the model. It's going to help us accomplish the comprehensive plan, but in a more detailed manner. We're pretty excited about this."

There is not a set date for when the strategic planning project will be underway and the council is awaiting a final approval from the ARC because of paperwork that had to be resubmitted.

When Ordiales initially applied for the grant, it was under former Hiawasse Mayor Barbara Mathis. Since she is no



Mayor Pro Tem Liz Ordiales. Photo/Lily Avery

longer in office, all paperwork must be slightly adjusted to reflect that, however, as soon as that is complete, the city plans to move forward with the

strategic planning project. Also during the work session, the council discussed much needed sidewalk repairs throughout the downtown area

that are currently cracked, broken and in very poor condition.

"We're going to fix all of the sidewalks that we can," said Ordiales. "It needs to be done. It's a walking hazard and it just doesn't look good. This is really going to improve the look of downtown."

These repairs will cost roughly \$22,000, all of which will be funded through a Georgia Department of Transportation Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant that the state sets aside each year to help counties and cities with maintenance such as these.

The city will be repairing the sidewalks in front of Lake Chatsuge Regional Hospital, Eller's and McLain's on Main.

Along with the sidewalk repairs, the council also discussed plans to extend the current sidewalk into other areas in the city, specifically at the Georgia Mountain Restaurant.

This new sidewalk will

run from the restaurant until it connects with the current sidewalk at Hiawasse Hardware, amounting to a fourth of a mile of new sidewalk.

Paid through SPLOST monies, the new sidewalk will cost approximately \$40,000.

"That whole strip that has grass right now, is going to have sidewalk," said Ordiales. "People will be able to walk on the sidewalk, down the street, and not get their feet wet. Now, there is going to be a foot of grass left and then there will be sidewalk."

According to Ordiales, this new sidewalk will eliminate the strip of downtown that often receives foot travel but up until this point, required walkers to trudge through grass, mud and dirt.

A begin date for construction has yet to be determined but the council hopes to have the project underway within the year.

Drug Court shows off new facilities with open house

By Lily Avery
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BLAIRSVILLE – After five months in the new facility, the North Enotah Drug Court held an open house on Thursday, June 1, to give an inside look into the program.

While the open house was not extended to the general public, all entities and organizations that either work with drug court or are invested parties in the results produced through drug court were invited to attend.

"The open house is mainly for people who have a vested interest in drug court," said Barbara Honaker, Court Coordinator. "Union County (Sole) Commissioner Lamar Paris and his office were instrumental in getting this facility and all of the work that went into our new building. I wanted them to be able to see what we've done so far with it."

"We also have outside



North Enotah Drug Court Coordinator Barbara Honaker

agencies that work with us very closely, but they really don't know what we do. So, I wanted them to be able to see that there are classrooms and rooms for screening and places for our participants to relax between classes.

"We want people to know that we're here and we're stronger than we've

ever been."

For those unaware of the ins and outs of the North Enotah Drug Court, it has become a staple in aiding residents in both Union and Towns counties to receive freedom from an addiction lifestyle.

A participant becomes a part of the program after

Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley's office recommends a candidate for the program, which is overseen by Superior Court Judge Stan Gunter and then Honaker administers the program.

If a candidate receives a referral and makes it through a series of intense evaluations, they are then admitted into drug court for two years, where the true battle begins to regain a normal, drug-free lifestyle.

During those two years, participants undergo a series of unannounced surveillance visits, three days a week of classes with homework, random drug screenings and much more.

All of which combined assists in participants obtaining a much better life after the program than when they started.

Since drug court first came to the area, there have been approximately 30 graduates and a success rate of around 90 percent – the

highest it has been for the North Enotah Drug Court Circuit as of yet.

"We have a 10 percent recidivism rate in both Union and Towns counties," said Honaker. "That's an excellent record. We're very proud of that. We've graduated 30 so far. We make a difference in everyone's lives that come into the program."

"We're proud of our program, we're proud of what we've accomplished with our participants and that's what it's all about, success with them."

While Honaker sees the benefits of drug court on a day-to-day basis, she is not the only one who recognizes the positive outcomes of the program. Judge Gunter, who oversees each participant's case, not only acknowledges the benefits but also firmly supports the continued use of drug court to assist those riddled with addiction.

"You take a look at our graduations," said Judge

Gunter. "The number of people we've graduated has been between 20 and 30 people. Out of all those graduates, only three have relapsed."

"I would say that's a pretty good percentage and a lot better than prison."

At the end of the day, the huge impact that drug court has on the lives of dozens of area residents says it all. These participants are not just given deliverance from their addiction; they are given back their lives.

"This gives people a second chance," said Judge Gunter. "It gives them a second chance with their families, with their community and it integrates them back into the community."

"I think it's very successful and I also look at it as the future of our judicial system. I think you're going to see more of these types of courts in the coming years. I think it's a good thing."

BRMEMC...from Page 1A

beginning with the pivotal 2014 election that saw Jenkins, Phillips and Logan enter their first terms.

Those three were EMC freshmen when elected in '14, though now they are the ranking board members, as each annual meeting since, the membership has elected fresh leadership to the board.

When Jenkins, Phillips and Logan ran for election three years ago, they were required to gather more than 100 member signatures apiece to receive their nominations by petition, as the board's Nominating Committee at that time had no clear process by which to nominate members interested in running.

All that has changed over the past few years, as new policies have made it easy for EMC members to run for the board.

Just last week, on Thursday, June 1, the board-appointed Nominating Committee met to nominate members who had submitted their names to the committee.

That meeting resulted in the nomination of four EMC members from Union County, three from Towns County and two from Clay County, North Carolina, all of whom will potentially appear on the ballot in September.

Those members who have been nominated must still be vetted by the member-led Elections and Credentials Committee, which will work in concert with EMC management to make sure that the nominees are members in good standing with the EMC, and therefore qualified to run.

The Nominating Committee is composed of EMC members, and it met for the first time on April 10 to discuss its duties and

responsibilities.

Those on the Nominating Committee are as follows: Bruce Little of Cherokee County, North Carolina; Guy Grant and Michael Anderson of Clay County, North Carolina; Robert Turner of Fannin County; Alan Rogers and Jason Dyer of Towns County; and Ruby Jones, Lee Knight and Paul Brown of Union County.

Between that April 10 meeting and the June 1 meeting, the members of the Nominating Committee spoke with members interested in running for the board, informing them of the duties, responsibilities and personal commitment expected from elected board members.

All members who submitted their names to the Nominating Committee received nominations, and should appear on the ballot in September pending vetting by the Elections and Credentials Committee.

The Elections and Credentials Committee will meet in July to vet nominees, after which the names of candidates for the upcoming election will be made public.

Technically, it's not too late to receive a nomination from the Nominating Committee, though the committee has already fulfilled its obligation per the EMC bylaws.

The Nominating Committee decided to meet at the beginning of June because, after the announcement soliciting nominations appeared on the EMC website and in various newspapers EMC-wide over the last couple of months, there came a period after which no more names came in to the committee.

Since the committee has met to conduct nominations,

the time to be nominated by committee is closed unless the board decides to have the committee reconvene for such a purpose, and that option is only viable through Friday, June 30.

Reconvening the Nominating Committee would require sufficient notice for the board to call a special meeting.

This means that members interested in receiving a nomination by committee would need to hurry up and get their names in to one of the board members by around the middle of June in order for the board to be able to reconvene the Nominating Committee by the last Friday in June.

It's likely that, at this point, the easiest process for latecomers interested in running for the board of directors is to go ahead and start the petition nomination process, the successful completion of which would guarantee a spot on the upcoming ballot.

To be nominated by petition, prospective nominees would need to acquire the signatures of 113 EMC members, at which point their nomination would be turned over to the Elections and Credentials Committee for vetting.

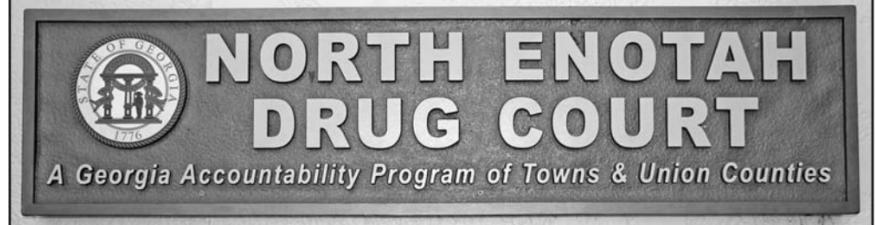
Those interested in receiving a petition for candidacy should visit the EMC headquarters, and all petitions must be received before the third Monday in July.

"I would like to say a special thank you to the Nominating Committee," said EMC Board Chairman Mickey Cummings. "We had an extraordinary committee, they brought forth some good names for us to consider, and I really appreciate all their hard work."

EMC Board Vice Chair Steven Phillips, who served last year as board chair and currently heads up the board's Policy Committee, said that the board has taken the membership's concerns to heart, including the nominating process.

"When we got elected, we said we'd make some major changes at the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, and one of them was the Nominating Committee," said Phillips.

This year's annual meeting will be held on Saturday, Sept. 9, at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center.



This sign, affixed to the front of the new facilities, was made by one of the program participants as a "Give Back" project.

Sign...from Page 1A



Speed was a determining factor in this Main Street Hiawasse accident back in March, according to the Hiawasse Police Department. Photo/Gary Kendall

a radar speed sign to alleviate speeding in that area.

"We just put it up May 25, and we've been able to gather some data showing the amount of traffic that went by there, as well as the average speed."

Pulling data from the sign is as easy as Acting Hiawasse Police Chief Paul Smith pulling up alongside it for a wireless transfer, and the first figures pulled indicated 56,000 passes of vehicles over the three days of Memorial Day Weekend.

The new sign works as one might imagine – it measures the speed of oncoming vehicles using radar and flashes the speed at drivers, and counts the number of vehicle passes in both directions.

"Out of the thousands of cars that it read, only 25 of them were going 50 or higher," said Smith. "Traffic is going to be slower with that many cars on the road, so I'm interested to see what data we can gather over the next month to see during the week versus weekends, and how the amount

of traffic affects the speed."

Smith thinks that the sign, which confronts people with the reality of their speed, will be an ally in keeping speed under control within city limits, especially where the sign is currently located across from the Post Office.

"I think it definitely acts as a speed deterrent," said Smith. "Just having a sign that shows how fast you're going, even if you're not going much over the speed limit, you tend to just slow down."

"I think it has a similar effect to seeing a police officer parked on the side of the road. Even if you're not speeding, you tend to take your foot off the gas and slow down a bit."

The sign cost the city about \$2,900 and is solar powered, meaning it won't be adding to the city's electric costs.

And in time, the city may purchase another sign, though the police department plans to move the current sign around periodically to different parts of the city.

Furthermore, the

sign will also act as added protection for people walking through the downtown area, as slower traffic means gains for pedestrian safety.

The sign also has the capability of flashing messages at drivers, such as "Thank You" for drivers following the posted speed, and "Slow Down" or "Warning" for those who are not.

"People have asked, it does not take a picture of the car, there's no tickets being issued from the sign," said Smith. "It's just purely to warn people and to slow them down."

Other safety improvements made throughout the City of Hiawasse in the last year include the crosswalk with flashing lights at Hiawasse Post Office and the conversion of the Post Office parking lot into a one-way drive from Main Street through to Ingles.

The city is also looking at installing new sidewalks in parts of the city sometime in the foreseeable future.