

## EMC...from Page 1A

in 2020, leaving the EMC in a bind over replacement meters in the next decade.

The EMC is currently evaluating its options, and Nelms told the board that a total replacement of all the system's meters will cost about \$8.5 million.

In other news, Nelms shared a map showing neighborhoods in the EMC coverage area where the co-op has decided to launch its pilot fiber expansion plan.

The plan will include an expanded \$740,000 in total funding and will reach neighborhoods in all five counties serviced by the EMC, pending member interest.

Areas in Union County to potentially receive fiber expansion under this initial pilot program include Forest Drive, Boxborough Drive, Pleasant Hill Road, Murphy Drive, Canal Lake and Litton Way.

In Towns County, potential areas to receive fiber expansion include Bald Mountain Park, Holly Hills, Tater Ridge, Hiwassee Estates, Old Forge Estates, and parts of Lower Bell Creek and Upper Bell Creek.

Another point of discussion that evening was the implementation of the Tennessee Valley Authority annual rate increase that passed a TVA Board vote in August and went into effect on Oct. 1.

Details about the rate increase are available at BRMEMC.com, though most residential customers can expect an increase of about \$1.84 in their monthly customer charge.

Nelms played a recent clip from the Clark Howard Show in which the radio host responded to a Sept. 10 article in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that featured insight into rural broadband from several employees of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.

Particularly, Howard has taken issue with the opposition and lobbying power of big cable and phone companies when it comes to local power companies supplying broadband internet in rural areas.

"The state of Georgia has not adopted a policy saying that's okay, because the cable companies and phone companies are so powerful at the state legislature," said Howard. "Well, I've got to say something to you if you're a member of the state House or state Senate.

"If you really are about creating more opportunity for people in rural Georgia, we have these EMCs that provided electricity so long ago in rural Georgia – we should give them the chance and encourage them to install high-speed internet where the traditional companies don't want to go anyway."

Nelms also spoke to board members about a new project in Union County that will be bringing fiber internet to Neels Gap and the Walasi-Yi Interpretive Center.

The EMC and Union County Government have teamed up to make the project a reality, and together, they'll be employing a specialized drone company to install the necessary 7,000 feet of fiber line.

More details will be forthcoming as the project gets underway in the next couple of weeks, but Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris is excited about the project.

The Georgia Department of Transportation has installed special weather equipment up at Neels Gap to help monitor conditions related to travel, but the isolation of the gap means that the equipment can't reliably connect to the internet wirelessly during inclement weather.

For years, the commissioner has driven out to the gap by himself every time there's been a big storm, often in the middle of the night, to check whether the mountain road is drivable.

When fiber is introduced to the gap and GDOT weather station, it is very likely that information regarding road conditions will be more readily available to emergency services

## Ledford..

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That also made them fifth in the state.

"That is 16.1 percent higher than our state average," said Hobbs, adding that it beat "all local area school systems, including Union, Rabun, White and all the way down the line. So congratulations,

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L-R: Dr. Connie Hobbs, John Cornett, Kerry Rogers, Erica Chastain and Dr. Sandy Page in the Oct. 8 meeting of the Towns County Board of Education. Photo by Mark Smith

## GWRRA meetings

Chapter J of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association (GWRRA) meets on the third Saturday of each month (excluding December) at Daniels Steakhouse, Hiwassee. Fellowship/food at 11 a.m. with the meeting at noon. We welcome riders of all motorcycle brands located in the north Georgia area. We focus on friends, fun, riding safety, and knowledge. Check our website for ride schedule. For further information, you may contact Dave or Judy Hurd at 828-369-5918. www.chapterj.gwr-ra-ga.com.NT10&17Z2)CA