

# TOWNS COUNTY CIVIC ASSOCIATION (TCCA)



*"Addressing the issues and concerns affecting the citizens of Towns County and its environs."*

Newsletter Volume 1/ Issue 3 Late Summer/Fall Edition 2022

## TCCA MISSION

The TOWNS COUNTY CIVIC ASSOCIATION is a non-partisan/non-political association supporting the community since 2004. Our mission is to provide a platform for Individuals, Families, Businesses, Organizations, Neighborhood Associations, City and County Governments to address issues and concerns which affect the management, planning, and development of the County and its environs. Our objective is to share the concerns expressed by the TCCA, to ensure transparency and accountability of both Cities and County government officials as well as State appointed authorities and utility providers, and to fully cooperate with those authorities in the best interest of Towns County.

## GENERAL TCCA ENROLLMENT INFORMATION

TCCA membership is currently at 122 individual memberships, 2 HOA's and 1 business. Most annual memberships end on June 30 of each year unless you have paid for a two-year membership which saves \$5.00. If you haven't already paid your dues for this year (2022-2023) or for a two-year membership, please do so right away. See form on last page.

## MAJOR TCCA ACTIVITIES

**IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT:** TCCA plans to have their winter Membership Appreciation Dinner on January 19, 2023 at the Towns County Civic Center next to the courthouse. The theme of this event will be the **History of Towns County Past, Present and Future**. Guest speakers invited include the following:

- Jerry Taylor, Towns County Historian
- Dr. Drew Van Horn, President Young Harris College
- Dr. Darron Berrong, County School Superintendent
- Rev. Fred Whitley, Former Pastor Sharp Memorial
- Cliff Bradshaw, Towns County Commissioner

As always, everyone is welcome to attend whether members or not. TCCA will supply a variety of meats and other snacks but please bring a covered dish to share with everyone.

## MESSAGE FROM OUR CITY AND COUNTY LEADERS



**Mayor Liz Ordiales:** *"The long-awaited approval for the Boardwalk to connect Lloyds Landing and Mayors' Park has arrived! This project will run the length of 815 feet along Hwy 76 and will contain 2 fishing piers. TVA approved the project earlier this year and just last week, we were awarded an Appalachian Regional Commission grant for \$690,000 to complete this project. Our goal is to fulfill our strategic plan for the city to provide a better quality of life for our citizens and visitors, we believe this will go a long way serving those goals. We're hoping for completion in 2023, nothing moves quickly!!"*



**Mayor Andrea Gibby:** *"Summer came to an end with our first annual 'PorchFest' in the City of Young Harris. We were threatened by horrible weather, but decided to hold the event anyway. We had music from 5 groups who played at 3 different locations. We want to expand this musical genre next year. We would love to have your ideas for the next one. The holiday season is quickly coming up in the valley. The Christmas Tree lighting and community gathering will be held on Friday, December 2, 2022 at 6 PM. Come early, bring your chairs and enjoy time with neighbors and friends."*



**Hiawasse Police Chief Paul Smith:** *"The Hiawasse Police Department has been utilizing new technology to solve crimes. Through the use of automated license plate readers, we have recently recovered several jet skis that were stolen from Lake Chatuge and the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, as well as a stolen vehicle from Metro Atlanta. The plate readers have also played an integral role in our ongoing drug investigations and arrests."*

## SUMMARY OF COUNTY MEETINGS ATTENDED BY TCCA BOARD MEMBERS

(Summary of meetings taken place since last newsletter)

### City and County Government

**City of Hiawasse:** (*July-August highlights*): Mayor showed a video of the speeder inside City limits being chased by Deputy Tracey James w/lights on within City limits. Towns Sheriff contends James made an illegal stop outside City limits. This confrontation was caught on Deputy's body camera. Still under investigation. City has an application for a third liquor store and the owner of one of the two liquor stores was present to ask the City Council to limit the number that can be within City limits. This had already been discussed and Council agreed to let the free-market system be in control here. ARC has determined that Towns Co. is no longer an "at risk" county; Mayor thanked volunteers from MBRA for cleaning up the weeds at water's edge at Mayors Park, and the work they started on the Holocaust Project at Lloyd's Landing. A diver was hired to clean tank filter at Sewer Plant. (*September-October highlights*): A moratorium on liquor store licenses is in effect until 1/17/23 with a new committee to review changes to present ordinance. Owners (John & Becky Landress) of 2 present businesses at the Town Place Plaza (across from Zaxby's) complained about a 3<sup>rd</sup> liquor store being put next to their businesses. "Underage girls will be shopping next to a liquor store and that kind of store could bring vandalism & other illicit activities putting property and people in danger." After attending this meeting, a Board member inquired with our neighboring communities around Hayesville and Murphy by checking with the ABC stores, the Coffee Shop in Hayesville, the Sheriff and Chamber of Commerce offices as to whether those cities have had more crime at the ABC stores or anywhere else close by or at other parts of town. All individuals contacted said "No." and also added that they were a "peaceful business". The city has received \$197K from property taxes; hotel/motel tax brought in \$67K last year at 5% and Mayor would like to raise it to 8% to accomplish 5 different projects with the extra money. Police reported cameras at each end of City led to stolen jet skis being recovered.

**City of Young Harris:** (*September-October highlights*): Set up their annual budget workshop on October 11th at 6:30; the long-delayed Timberline booster pump issue might be finally moving along again, but nobody seemed able to find a lady from which they needed a tiny easement; they apparently had given up on buying fancy new do-everything meters that nobody could manually read if the electronics failed and instead were buying simpler analog meters; and the city attorney was going to put out an RFP for new engineering firms.

**Commissioner's Meetings:** (*July-August highlights*): Commissioner signed several agreements: Contract was signed for 3 crews of Colwell detainees, 1 year for \$147,954 (pays for guard, etc.); signed agreements with Legacy Link (Senior Center); renewal agreement w/UGA for Extension Agent + 1 employee: \$4,406. He also opened the one bid received for an ambulance box and accepted that bid. (*September-October highlights*): Commissioner said he hopes to move Courthouse offices to the Historical building first part of Oct.; also hopes to have detainee crews by then. Schedule of fees at Chatuge Campground raised \$50/mo.

**Towns County Planning Commission:** (*July-August highlights*): Talked about putting six cabins on 40 acres on Scataway; and doing more compliance with Mtn. Protection Act. (*September-October highlights*) Mtn. Protection Act needs to be explained when people get a building permit. One person cut too many trees above 22K feet and claimed it cost \$15,000 more to build due to permitting, delays and the price of reforestation; another case, a carport had to be moved as it was too close to the highway; and an acre of land is needed per mobile home.

### City and County Utilities

**Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corp.:** (*July-August highlights*): It is understood that no expected electric rate increase in the near future. There is no longer a contract required for fiber internet service. Rates are: \$44.95 for 50 Mb; \$49.95 for 75 Mb/s; \$59.95 for 100 Mb/s; \$74.95 for 250 Mb/s. The June 2022 electric outage was held to a minimum: 3800 homes experienced 45 minutes or less; 800 homes experienced 3 hours or less. There are 56,390 electric meters serviced for all serviced Counties; Growth is approximately 130/month.

### Health and Education

**Board of Education:** (*July-August highlights*): High School Principal Roy Perren will be retiring at the end of this school year. He is training his replacement.

**Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB):** (*July-August highlights*): Focus of meeting was to go over financial matters associated with the funds allocated to the various entities that had requested funding from the previous year. It was pointed out that several entities are not spending down their allotted funds or either they're not doing the proper paperwork to report their spending. Welcome signs at both ends of the county need replacing, but getting a contractor has been difficult. Young Harris College was given the opportunity to design the new signage, but they have not responded as yet. Business at Brasstown Resort is back to pre-COVID levels and they anticipate this year's revenue will result in somewhere close to the top 4 best years since in operation. Many businesses are struggling with labor issues with the primary reason being lack of affordable housing in the area. No solutions for this issue are apparent in the short-term, but discussions are active on possible options.

**Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce:** (*July-August highlights*): Next Business After Hours will be at the Paris Project on 9/14 at 6:30-8:30 p.m. (*September-October highlights*): they agreed to a replacement for Candace to be announced soon. In the meantime, Mary Ann Miller has been doing a fine job at the office. They are currently in the process of improving their website and social media to better serve those interested in Towns County.

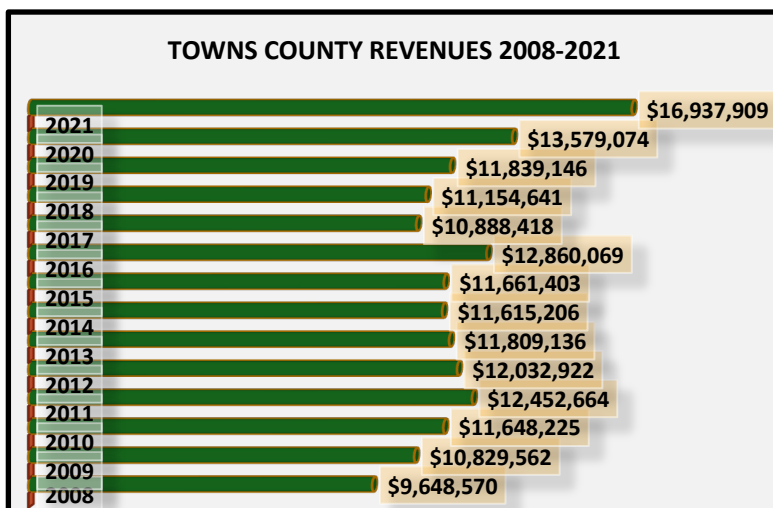
*Note: The information presented in the above comments from the SUMMARY OF COUNTY MEETINGS may not necessarily reflect the final decisions from the noted office meeting. Summaries are as submitted by Board attendees and edited for this publication. Future newsletters will reflect updated information as it becomes available.*

### ★ SPECIAL FEATURED ARTICLE ★

All of us living in Towns County know too well the rapid growth taking place in our County and region. Many of us have come here in an attempt to escape the more active lifestyle of urban life for a more relaxed, tranquil, restful and less cluttered environment in the beautiful mountains of Northeast Georgia. It is not a surprise that many people from across our state and elsewhere in America and beyond have discovered our treasure. There is little doubt that our beautiful Towns County will continue to grow as more and more people decide to join us in this area. The Towns County Civic Association has been very much aware of this growth and, from its inception back in 2004, have made it a priority to make sure our beloved Towns County remains the beautiful treasure it is now. To be perfectly clear, the TCCA is **NOT** against growth. As an Association supporting our citizens in Towns County, we support our leaders to make the necessary decisions to ensure growth is managed properly with the understanding that our prestigious environment should remain as pristine as possible given the anticipated continuing growth of our area.

This issue has the first of what is planned to be several articles addressing the growth of our Towns County and the cities within its boundaries. As expected, growth results in both positive and negative outcomes. This article focuses primarily on the Towns County revenues that have increased due to this growth over the years.

### TOWNS COUNTY GROWTH – TOTAL COUNTY REVENUES



Revenues are one of many indicators that establishes whether a county is growing as it measures the sales taxes and other revenue sources taking place in the county. Towns County has had relatively stable revenue over the years except for a period between 2012 to around 2017 when the revenues reflected no growth or reduced growth. The recovery since 2018 has been significant as fiscal year 2020 and 2021 reflected double digit percentage growth which was best reflected in fiscal year 2021 which showed a 20% increase in revenues over fiscal year 2020 (see graph at left and chart below). Indications are that fiscal year 2022 will also reflect an increase. The decreases in revenues between 2012 and 2017 will be discussed in the next section.

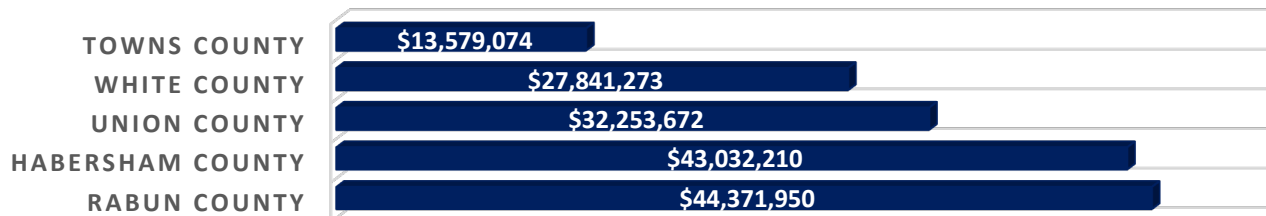
### TOWNS COUNTY PERCENT CHANGE IN REVENUES 2008-2021

FY	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Revenue (\$M)	9.64	10.82	11.64	12.45	12.03	11.8	11.61	11.66	12.86	10.88	11.15	11.83	13.57	16.93
% Change		+11%	+7%	+6.50%	-3.5%	-2%	-2%	0.40%	+9.3%	-7%	+2%	+6%	+13%	+20%

*Note: Revenues are reported in millions of dollars; % Change from previous years revenue total*

As a comparison of the total revenues collected, we pulled together the revenue numbers for Union County, Habersham County, Rabun County and White County, which all border Towns County, to see their total revenue streams. Although the comparison is interesting, this is not a true apple to apples comparison as each county's revenue structure is different with different population numbers, larger square miles, more local businesses and industries which are dissimilar from Towns County. What can, however, be concluded from the comparison chart below is that Towns County has much less revenues at its disposal to use in support of its citizens. None the less, the county has managed their funds well despite the low revenue numbers. What is worrisome is that as the county grows, support agencies responsible for security, safety, education and utilities may not have the necessary funds to properly handle growth. More people coming into the county does translate into more tax dollars but the tax growth figures may not necessarily keep up with the demand for needed services. Let's be clear, the TCCA does **NOT** necessarily advocate for higher taxes but we also may not want to lag behind our neighbor counties in services to its citizens.

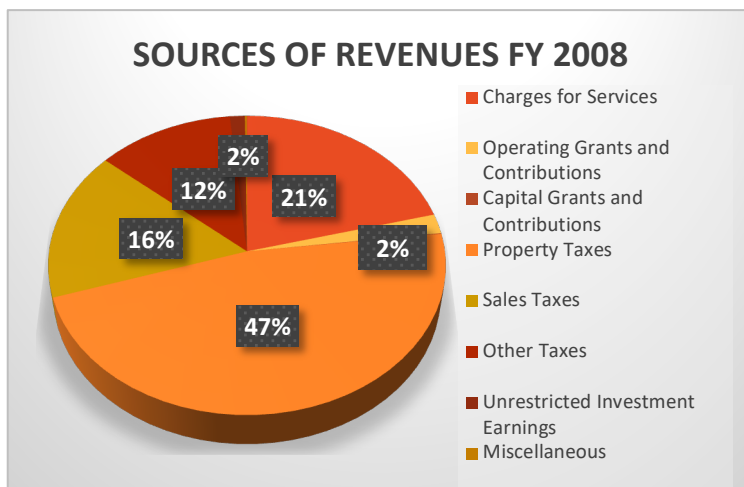
### TOTAL REVENUES GENERATED BY COUNTY FY 2020



NOTE: Some of the above counties have not, as yet, reported 2021 revenues which is why the figures above reflect only FY 2020

### TOWNS COUNTY GROWTH – REVENUE SOURCES

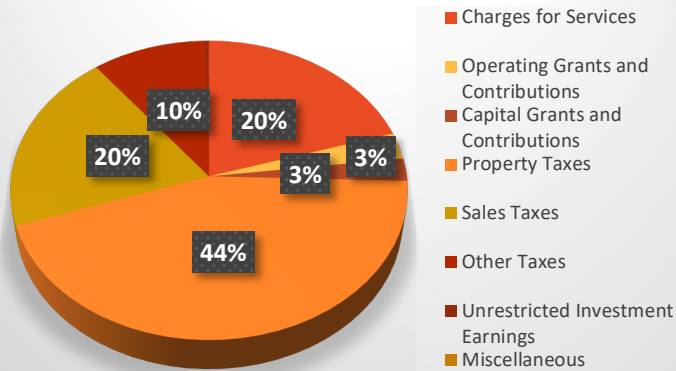
To better understand Towns County revenue, we have to review the sources of revenues coming into County coffers. Like most counties and municipalities, revenues come from a variety of sources. Many of us may not realize how many sources of revenues our counties and municipalities have at their disposal. Without going to the trouble of looking at



every year's revenue distribution, we have chosen to view the revenue sources and amounts in fiscal year 2008 with fiscal year 2017 which reflected the largest drop in revenues and ending with the most current year reported of FY 2021. The following graphs and charts summarize these sources and the amounts/percentages from each source.

There are a couple of things to note in the revenue sources in FY 2008. In FY 2008, the revenues from property taxes made up 47% (\$4.5m) of the total revenues collected followed by charges for services at 21% (\$2.0m), sales taxes at 16% (\$1.5m), other taxes at 12% (\$1.2m) with the rest of the revenues totaling around ~4%.

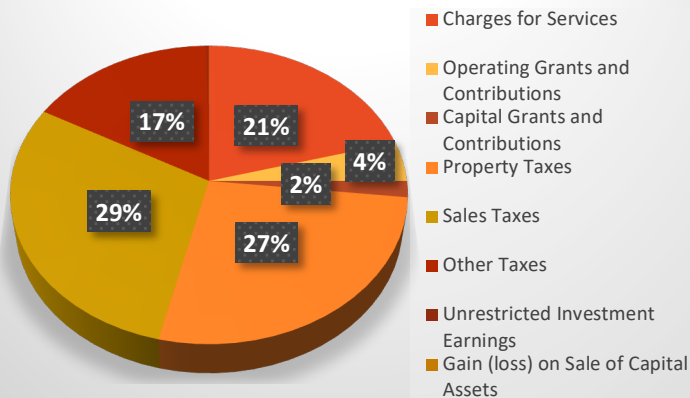
## SOURCES OF REVENUES FY 2017



In FY 2017 total revenues reflected their biggest drop from the previous year (-7%), the revenues from property taxes made up 44% (\$4.8m) of the total revenues collected followed by charges for services at 20% (\$2.2m), sales taxes at 20% (\$2.1m), other taxes at 10% (\$1.1m) with the rest of the revenues totaling around ~6%.

Sales tax revenues grew from \$1.5m in FY 2008 to \$2.1m in FY 2017 which is an increase of almost \$600,000. Property tax revenues also increased by almost \$300,000. Other areas showed modest increases and decreases from FY 2008. Take special note to the property tax figure of 44% (\$4.8m) as it will reflect an interesting comparison in FY 2021 and FY 2008.

## SOURCES OF REVENUES FY 2021



In FY 2021 when total revenues reflected their biggest increase from the previous year (+20%), the revenues collected by sales taxes was at 29%, followed now by property taxes of 27% (\$4.6m) of the total revenues, then charges for services at 21% (\$2.2m), other taxes amounted to 17% (\$2.8m) with the rest of the revenues totaling around ~6%.

The most significant changes in revenues collected from FY 2017 to FY 2021 are as follows:

- Charges for Services increased by **\$1,310,984**
- Sales Taxes Increased by **\$2,829,477**
- Other Taxes Increased by **\$1,710,010**
- Property Taxes dropped **\$247,606**

Note from FY 2008 to FY 2021 the growth in nearly every category has increased by significant percentages. In contrast from FY 2008 to FY 2021 total property taxes have increased by less than 1%, in fact, the total property taxes collected for FY 2017 versus FY 2021 have decreased by 4% (\$247,000). An interesting statistic given the growth of individual property owners in the county.

It seems clear from the data analyzed that Towns County is committed to keeping property taxes as low as possible. Basically, our increases in revenues have come from other sources available to the county such as sales tax revenues from those visiting our area for vacations and recreation and spending their dollars at our various businesses.

The above data is recorded from annual audits submitted to the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts and compiled for this report. The information supplied in this article does not imply any irregularities in the management of Towns County as the audit reports do not state nor address any such irregularities. The information is simply a summary of the information reported in the years noted as it relates to revenues. A more extensive review of the data is available at the Department of Audits and Accounts website at <https://www.audits2.ga.gov/resources/orgs/local-government/> or <https://georgiadata.org>. The TCCA and its members assume no responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions in the content of this publication. The information contained in this Newsletter is provided on an "as is" basis with no guarantees of completeness, accuracy, usefulness or timeliness...

In the next Newsletter, a summary of expenses will be highlighted for the same years so we can learn where Towns County spends these revenues. Those of us on the Board of TCCA hope this information is useful and informative to our members. If you have any questions, comments, or please submit them [townscountycivicasociation@gmail.com](mailto:townscountycivicasociation@gmail.com).



### CONTACT INFORMATION

**Towns County Civic Association**  
PO Box 455, Hiawassee, GA 30546-0455

**Email:** townscountycivicasociation@gmail.com

**Website:** townscountycivicasociation.com

### TCCA BOARD MEMBERS

*John Clemens   Michael Courey  
Larry Dietsch   Anna Denton   David Best  
Joan Crothers   Gordy Jones*

### UPCOMING EVENTS

Next meeting of TCCA Membership Appreciation will be on January 19, 2023. Please try to attend. The Board Members of the TCCA assure you will enjoy the fellowship with other citizens of Towns County and will learn a lot about what is happening in Young Harris, Hiawassee and across Towns County and the surrounding area.

### NON-PROFIT SUPPORT (recent contributions)

The TCCA, on occasion, will share their funds with various organizations supporting the citizens of Towns County. Below are a few of those organizations we have helped fund.

- Hiawassee River Watershed Coalition
- Towns County High School Scholarship Fund
- Enotah CASA
- MountainTrue (Formerly Hiawassee River Watershed)
- Music on the Square

*The Towns County Civic Association exists to support you the citizens and businesses of Towns County. We monitor the various media sources reporting on the activities within Towns County to understand what is of interest to our citizens. More importantly, we listen to you, our members, to understand what they believe we as an Association should be doing to make Towns County a wonderful place to live, work and play. The TCCA does not get any funds from the city, county or state government. We solely rely on your membership dues and our volunteers to do what we do in support of Towns County. So please, for those of you needing to renew their membership, complete the form below and continue to support our efforts.*

#### Application Form Instructions:

Complete each question below and mail with your dues to:

**Towns County Civic Association**  
**PO Box 455**  
**Hiawassee, GA 30546-0455**

\*\*\*\*\*PLEASE PRINT \*\*\*\*\*

**APPLICANT NAME(S):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Street Address (Towns Co.):** \_\_\_\_\_

**City & Zip Code:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phones:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Emails: (TCCA uses BCC for mailouts):** \_\_\_\_\_

**If you have an out of Towns County Address, please enter below:**

**Address, City, State and Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

The Membership fiscal year is July 1 to June 30. One year membership dues: \$25.00, or two-year membership dues – \$45.00.

Paid Check # \_\_\_\_\_ or Cash: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**As always, the TCCA appreciates your support and we couldn't do what we do without your continuing membership in support of our efforts for Towns County.**