

# TOWNS COUNTY CIVIC ASSOCIATION (TCCA)

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



Newsletter Volume 1/ Issue 4 Late Fall/Early Winter 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 **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 TOWNS COUNTY CIVIC ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT**



**President John Clemens:** *"As we end 2022 and start thinking about 2023, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of our members for being a part of a unique organization whose sole purpose is to represent you, the concerned citizens of Towns County. If you are not fully aware of how the Towns County Civic Association was founded, I would like to share with you of how and why the TCCA became established. In 2003, a number of our citizens began to realize our representatives were not making, what they believed to be, decisions not in the best interest of our county. They were primarily concerned many decisions being made by our county and city leaders would jeopardize the pristine mountain environment that led to many of us to move to this region of Georgia. This led to the establishment of the Towns County Civic Association being established in 2004 with the MISSION as printed above. Our TCCA Board Members, which are all volunteers, try to attend every meeting taking place whether it be government, utilities, health organizations or whatever body that would be making decisions affecting our citizenry (see following pages). If you know of any issues we should be addressing, please let one of our Board Members know. We hope you will continue to support us in what we do."*

*"2022 has been a busy year for the TCCA. We hosted our first political forum in April which we had candidates running for US Representative in our district and for State Superintendent. In June we held our first semi-annual Membership Meeting of the year with Towns County Commissioner, Mayor of Hiawassee, Economic Development Director and a Krypto Currency expert with all speaking on a number of topics. We also published our newly designed Quarterly Newsletter in January. For 2023 we have other plans that are just as exciting. In closing, the TCCA Board Members thank you for supporting us and hope each of you have a Wonderful, Happy Holiday Season and a Happy New Year!"*

## SUMMARY OF COUNTY MEETINGS ATTENDED BY TCCA BOARD MEMBERS

(Summary of meetings taken place since last newsletter)

### City and County Government

**City of Hiawasse:** (*October highlights*): City of Hiaw.: Water Dept. fixed Tata's water, and River St. and Bell St. drains were fixed. Window glass in Liz's office replaced w/double pane glass; Unicoi Parkway at Lloyd's Landing was honored; Bradshaw donated a van to bring AT hikers to Hiawasse next spring; Halloween at GMF is on Mon. 10/31. ARC (Appalachian Regional Commission) awarded City a \$690K grant (70%) to install a boardwalk (8' wide x 815' long) from Lloyd's Landing to Mayor's Park boat ramp, City cost is the remaining 30%. 10/4/22: voted on Millage rollback rate; also, both cities are in mediation w/the County, wanting larger percentage of LOST (Local Option Sales Tax) they receive (by 12/30/22). Council passed local Hotel/Motel tax raise from 5% to 8% to be spent on "sight-seeing attractions," arts, signs. (*November highlights*): Set millage at 1.972. Local option Sales Tax negotiations are ongoing. Currently City of H. gets 11%, City of Y.H. gets 9.5% & County gets 79.5%; Cities want a split of 70/30 with the two cities splitting the 30%. Hotel/Motel tax voted to increase from 5% to 8%.

**City of Young Harris:** (*October highlights*): The old house on the Kiser Dean property, now owned by Dr. Kelley, was used as a training burn by T.C. Fire Dept. The Mayor was very happy about the positive response to Porchfest music event. They plan a public hearing in November on the budget that needs to be approved in Dec. Plans for the Timberline Booster Pump Project should be made public soon. (*November highlights*): 4 of the 5 council members attended this week. A public hearing will be held on 11/29 at 6:00, to present the final budget to the public and answer questions. The city finally received 30 new meters, with 80 more still on order. Mueller (the manufacturer) was previously selling direct to the city at \$185/each, but now they are selling through a distributor, Waterworks, who is charging \$240 each. The \$185 meters direct from Mueller are still not delivered, but the ones received (from Waterworks) are the \$240 ones. The new mil levy (not disclosed in the meeting) has been advertised and adopted, and is a rollback rate. It is being sent to the county treasurer. Timberline: the permit to start construction is in process with the state, as a "repair", not a "new" project, which should speed the process. Sewer line rehab: there are 2 or 3 bidders for a certain section, that should be finished by February. Water and sewer connection requests beyond city limits: There are apparently some undisclosed developers who may (or may not) be looking at starting projects near YH. The city is looking at proposing policies that will offer water (maybe sewer) to them, but only if the project is contiguous to existing city limits, and the developer is willing to annex their property into the city. At the same time, the proposed policy would give the council ability to deny connections if it would be too expensive to offer them. One consideration is that if a customer doesn't pay the city can shut off water service, but once sewer is in place, there is no way to stop the customer using it. Apparently, there are "miles" of unused water lines that can be accessed by a new user, but construction of sewer lines is very costly and will likely not happen. Considerable discussion was held, but Mayor Gibby finally stopped it and asked council members to suggest their questions after the meeting.

**Commissioner's Meetings:** (*October 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. Courthouse offices plan to move to Old Rec. bldg. (900 N. Main St., Hiaw.) Oct. 10-11; GDOT is only patching Hwy.76 thru Towns, turning lane added later. Callie Moore, Western Reg. Dir. of MountainTrue said weeds growing rapidly in Lake Chatuge are Parrot's feather & Brazilian Elodea from aquarium water being dumped in lake; she hopes cold after drawdown will kill them this winter. TVA will do a full inventory of all weeds next summer. Nov. 12 will be Lake Chatuge cleanup-meet at T.C. Beach area. Anonymous donor gave \$3K to T.C. Food Pantry, 1K to CASA, and \$1K to AVITA. AVITA CEO gave info. about their organization's services re: mental health, substance abuse and developmental disabilities. (*November highlights*): Met at temporary Courthouse offices at old Rec. Building. Commissioner Bradshaw is ready to sign the contract with Reeves & Young for Courthouse renovation: maximum price is \$10,591,847 with contingencies: Natural disaster \$100K, minor changes to design \$130K, construction (extra work) \$173K. T.C. millage rate for 2022 tax digest set at 4.729, which is a rollback; Taxes are due by 1/10/23. County has received \$4K Employee Safety grant, most will go to Road Dept. T.C. Transit Service for 2024: State paying 50% and County 50% of \$125,148 expenses; revenue from people riding is around \$11K. T.C. Rec. Dir. Stuart Nichols reported flag football has grown to 67 players from K.-5<sup>th</sup> with 43 cheerleaders; 132 registered for basketball (registration still open); 2 new swing sets added at beach playground; putting in a ½ mi. trail at Foster Park to the back of the property.

**Towns County Planning Commission:** (*October highlights*): One resident will pay \$200 to cut 5 trees to be in compliance with Mtn. Protection Act.

### City and County Utilities

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**Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corp.:** (*September-October highlights*): BRMEMC- 9/22: Received a clean slate from annual audit; they have installed 129 meters which is a 2% growth in each county they serve. Annual meeting is Sat., Sept. 24 at GMF Music Hall, registration, voting and entertainment starting at 9 a.m. TVA announced new “Give Back to Small Communities” \$30K program. We need to give them our ideas on who would be good recipients: T.C. Schools Book Vending Machine, CASA, Food Pantry, Hiwassee Police Dept., Mountain True, and Fire Corp were suggested.

**T.C. Water & Sewer Authority:** (*October highlights*): The septic system was messed up when working on the new building. New backhoe was bought for \$72K and the old one was sold for \$22K.

### Health and Education

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**Board of Education:** (*October*): 2022 Graduation will be the night of May 19; BOE put more training days for teachers on the School Calendar. Pay raises for Security Police working games will be given a raise, but not firm yet. Tourists have upped the sales taxes coming in so revenue is above their expectations. (*November highlights*): Towns County School Board adopted millage rate of 6.550, actually lower than rollback rate of 6.829

**County Health Dept:** They reviewed the Environmental Reports, Nursing Report and Financial Reports. The financials are in good shape. The fund balance is \$525,322. Dr. Zachary Taylor, District Health Director, reported the current Covid 19 numbers and vaccination rate (on the dph.georgia.gov website) numbers are down and declining in Georgia. Flu numbers are up and they recommend getting the Flu shot. A presentation was made on the Breast & Cervical Cancer program. Early detection is critical. This program and many others are available to those in need.

### Community Interest

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**Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce:** (*October highlights*): Local resident Julie Payne has been hired as Chamber President as of November 1st. (*November highlights*): The Chamber, over the last several months, has been looking into how best to better support and highlight those businesses that are members of the Chamber. The Advertising Subcommittee in particular has been stressing the Chamber’s webpages be more active in highlighting our businesses which has been evident in the recent postings. Additionally, more events and newspaper advertising will be stressed to help our members as much as possible be successful in their entrepreneur efforts in Towns County.

**Other:** Board Member David Best talked to Callie Moore about the invasive aquatic flora in Lake Chatuge while at the lake shore cleanup last Saturday. Apparently, she has been inundated with inquiries about it and that's good, in that a lot of folks in the County have been bugging her about it which shows they care deeply about the quality of the lake. Bottom line: we are in a period of watchful waiting to see if the seasonal drawdown and winter freezes kill the invasive aquatic plants. TVA is responsible for a lot of lakes and water bodies which they have to treat and which have much worse problems than Lake Chatuge. The good news is their commitment to do a complete aquatic plant inventory of Lake Chatuge next year. Apparently, that's a pretty big deal, as it will establish a baseline for the future. Cold weather and drawdown are our best hope.

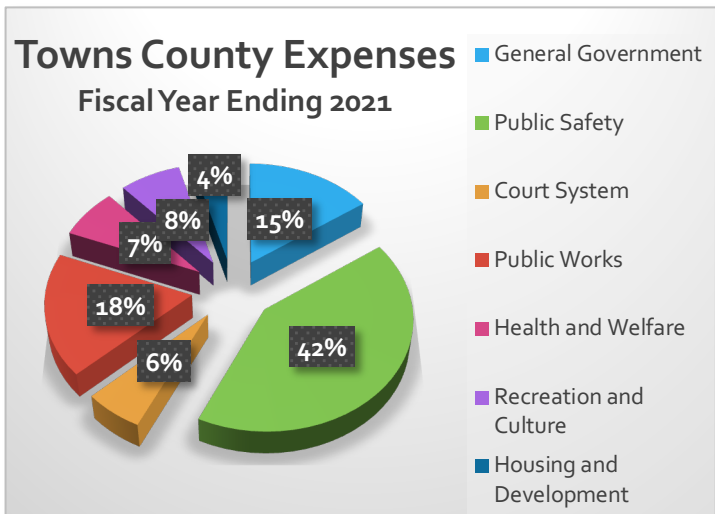
*Note: The information presented in the above comments from the SUMMARY OF COUNTY MEETINGS may not necessarily reflect the final decisions from the noted office meeting. Summaries are as submitted by Board attendees and edited for this publication. Future newsletters will reflect updated information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

## ★ SPECIAL FEATURED ARTICLE (Part 2) ★

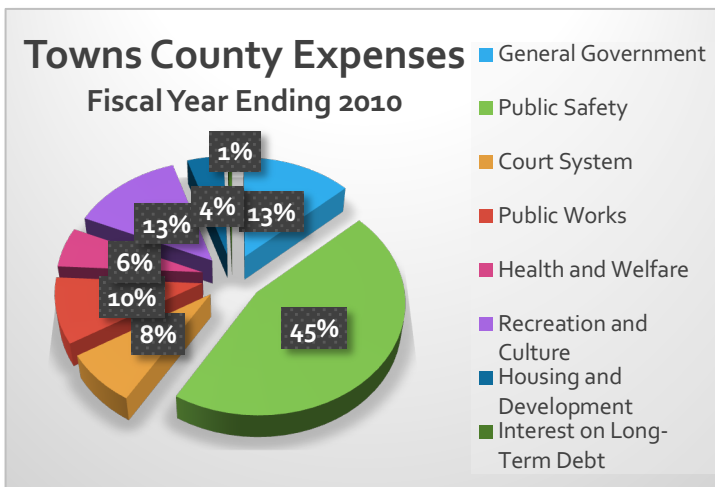
As mentioned in the previous Newsletter, the TCCA is reviewing the revenues and expenses in our cities and county operations. This is the second installment of that effort which centers on where the revenues are spent in Towns County. Future issues will spotlight the revenues and expenses in each of our two municipalities.

### TOWNS COUNTY USE OF COUNTY REVENUES - EXPENSES

Now that we have studied the sources of revenues for Towns County revenue, we need to better understand where those are spent in support of the efforts of the county. Counties, in general, have limited discretion as to where funds should be spent since much of the categories are associated with fixed costs. None the less, the decision-makers can choose to shift funds to areas/categories in which they believe the county needs more services or the needs are greater to meet certain demands.



Taken directly from the summary of the County's Statement of Activities in the Audit Report the following two pie charts breaks out how the majority of funds are used in support of Towns County for Fiscal Year Ending in 2021 and 2010. The county's expenditures in 2021(see chart at left) are broken out into seven categories: General Government, Public Safety, Court System, Public Works, Health and Welfare, Recreation and Culture, and Housing and Development. Note the largest category of expenditures is for Public Safety. As this is the category the County has chosen to use the bulk of their available funds speaks highly of the decisions made by our county leaders but it is not unusual as other counties we have reviewed typically spend most of their funds on safety.



To determine if there have been any significant shifts from previous years, the pie chart at left reflects the percentage of funds going to the same categories from FY 2010. There appears to be no significant changes expect that in FY 2021 a relatively larger percentage of funds in the past year went toward Public Works than was allocated back in FY 2010. A lot of reasons could be the cause of such an increase such as upgrades, additional personnel or inflation. None the less, Towns County has continued to emphasize Public Safety since it was a significant share of expenditures in FY 2010 and it is now in FY 2021.

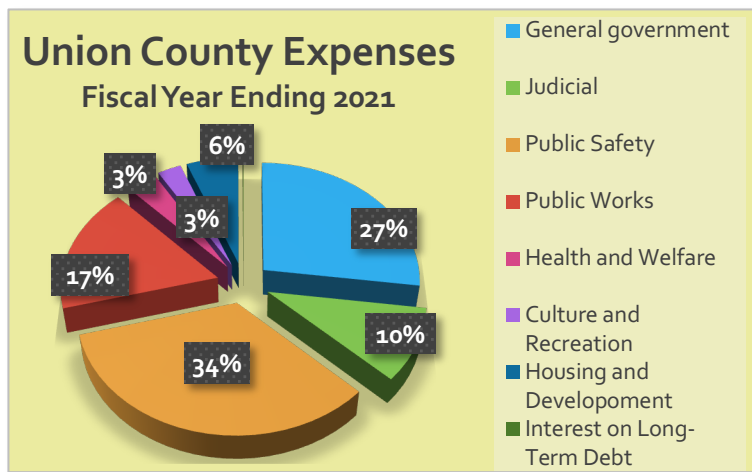
In summary, Towns County seems to managing their revenues and well as the Audit Reports do not reflect any irregularities. As would be expected, our review of the revenues and expenditures of Towns County is just a fraction of what the total Audit Report covers each year and submitted to the state. The audit report does an excellent job in detailing the complexities of the financial environment which is why the following excerpt is taken directly from the Towns County Financial Statements Audit Report for FY 2021:

- Towns County's total assets and deferred outflows of resources exceeded its total liabilities and deferred inflows of resources at the close of the most recent fiscal year by \$ 28,377,443 (net position). Of this, \$ 6,966,283 (25%)



represents an unrestricted net position that may be used to meet the County's ongoing obligations.

- At the close of the fiscal year, the County's net investment in capital assets, decreased \$ 134,024 or -1%. This decrease is due to the addition of some assets that have accompanying debt in the form of leases as well as an increase in depreciation of assets placed in service during the year.
- The County's total government-wide expenditures were \$ 14,299,001, an increase of 16% above the prior fiscal year. The expenditures were primarily impacted by an increase in salaries and wages for personnel and depreciation expense. In addition, the County saw total government-wide revenues increase to \$ 16,937,909, an increase of 25% over the prior fiscal year. Revenues were primarily impacted by grant funds, sales tax collections, and services in the various departments such as recreational and landfill charges.
- The greatest portion of the County's general fund operating reserves have been invested in liquid money market funds and Certificates of Deposits (CD's) which matured in the current fiscal year. The reserves were placed into these accounts to generate interest income. During the current fiscal year, the County collected \$ 33,023 of interest income through the interest-bearing money market funds, CD's and other cash accounts.



To contrast to how Towns County spends their funds against our neighboring county, Union County, I have included a pie chart based on how they have chosen to spend their available funds. Note the categories are similar in that each county generally report expenditures within the same general categories for the State Audit Report.

An interesting observation is that Union County appears to spend a smaller share of their funds for Public Safety than Towns County. It is unclear why that may be the case without meeting directly with officials from Union County but it is curious.

It seems clear from the data analyzed that Towns County is managing their funds responsibly. I think it is commendable that Public Safety is given such a high priority which, as all of us know, we seem to have a significant drug problem across our county which translate into other crime issues.

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 coming Newsletters, we plan to be looking at the audit reports from our two municipalities, Hiawassee and Young Harris. 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 [townscountycivicasassociation@gmail.com](mailto:townscountycivicasassociation@gmail.com).



### CONTACT INFORMATION

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

### TCCA BOARD MEMBERS

*John Clemens   Michael Courey  
Larry Dietsch   Anna Denton   David Best  
Joan Crothers   Gordy Jones   Jim Olson*  
**Email:** townscountycivicassociation@gmail.com  
**Website:** townscountycivicassociation.com

### 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.

- Towns County High School Scholarship Fund
- MountainTrue (Formerly Hiawassee River Watershed)
- Enotah CASA
- 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.**