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TOWNS COUNTY CIVIC ASSOCIATION (TCCA)



“Addressing the issues and concerns affecting the citizens of Towns County and its environs.”

Newsletter Volume 2/ Issue 2 Late Spring/Early Summer Edition 2023

Mission Statement >>>

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.

Some of What Your TCCA Is Doing:

- *Looking into the possibilities of renovating or building a new Post Office for both Young Harris and Hiawassee.*
- *Reviewing the Progress, or lack thereof, for the widening of Highway 76 to four lanes between Hiawassee and Blairsville which would include turning lanes coming into Hiawassee.*
- *Possible ways to ensure the main byway into the county, highway 76, respects the beauty of our county by way of regulations, ordinances, or zoning.*

TCCA Summer 2023 Membership Dinner

TCCA has scheduled their Membership Appreciation Dinner for **June 29, 2023, at 6:00 - 9:00 PM** at the Towns County Civic Center next to the courthouse. The theme of this event is **Important Issues affecting Towns County.** (See flyer on last page)

Our scheduled speakers are:

- **Ryan Snow, Administrator, Chatuge Regional Hospital**
Major Topic: General Healthcare issues in Towns County
- **Spokesperson from Georgia Department of Transportation**
Major Topic: Overview of GDOT Highway projects between Blairsville and Hiawassee

MESSAGE FROM ONE OF OUR CITY OR COUNTY LEADERS



Tax Commissioner - Michael Anderson: “Greetings everyone as we rapidly approach the half-way point of the year. I would like to touch on a couple of changes that will affect our customers this fall.

Starting July first, Towns County residents will be able to tag certain multi-purpose vehicles for use on roads throughout the county. This vehicle must meet certain standards to be registered. (Most side by sides will be eligible, they must meet a minimum speed of 25 miles per hour, have brake lights, taillights, head lights, must have safety belts, have steering wheel, no straddle seats, or handlebars, must be less than 4000 lbs. Less than 80 inches wide.) No golf carts or ATVs are eligible. These vehicles are for sub-division or county roads only. No state or federal highways!

Also, to let everyone know that the Homestead Tax Relief Bill was approved and signed by the legislators and Governor Kemp. The media has reported a 500-dollar credit will be given for every homestead. That number is the state average, though this credit is millage rate based however and with ours being one of, if not the lowest in the state, ours comes out to around \$210 per homestead.

You will not need to do anything as these will be automatically applied. The one thing I do recommend is to go over your assessments when they come late this summer from the Assessors Dept. to make sure that you do have homestead on it, because this will be the data that my office will use to apply the credits. Feel free to call or drop by our office on these or any questions you may have. Office hours are Mon-Fri. 8:30 to 4:30 and phone # is 706-896-2267”.

SUMMARY OF COUNTY MEETINGS ATTENDED BY TCCA BOARD MEMBERS

(Summary of meetings taken place since last newsletter)

City and County Government

City of Hiawassee: Larry Nelson, Owner of Berrong/Oakley house, just off Main St., finally agreed to sell after 6 yrs. of Mayor Ordiales asking. Signing contract for \$300K in June to use as an event center after some renovations. Mayor has Hiawassee as a Hikers Retreat w/shuttle to bring them into town; in April & part of May had 1,407 hikers. They shop and some spend the night, then are shuttled back to Appalachian Trail. City crew busy with trees brought down from the wind; First Friday Market for year was May 5th; Music on the Square starts Sat., May 28th. Prop. & Liability ins. discussed by Tim Barrett; GIRMA is lowest. 2023-24 budget discussed—Public Hearing prior to 5/22 Work Session. 4 quotes on City Hall cameras; lowest bid \$5,400+. Signed Ordinance, feather signs allowed for only 3 days before an event. Chief Parker wrote article on not getting in turn lane to turn left; Tracy James resigned. Paris building funding discussed; cost has increased substantially (\$1.2 mil. up to \$2+mil.)

City of Young Harris: Young Harris College President Van Horn complained that the franchise tax would put a burden on the college with a much higher EMC bill. According to the treasurer, Anna Hess, funds are "looking good" at this time. A line-by-line accounting is available from City Hall. The board has approved renewal of its GIRMA subscription for '23/'24. A SCADA system for the wastewater plant was approved. A purchasing (bank) card has been issued for employees and elected officials. Bidding is open for a Timberline booster pump. Proposal for the modernization of the water metering system continues with United Systems UPM.

Commissioner's Meetings: Harold Copeland was on hand to talk about educating the public on fire safety, especially yard brush burning. Towns County Firewise Coalition has a SSTAR program that citizens should follow. No permits needed now in GA, but citizens are responsible if fire gets out of control. John Bennett was appointed as a Democrat to T.C. Board of Elections. Methods Corp. contract renewed as life flight helicopter for county.

City and County Utilities

T.C. Water & Sewer Authority: The financial report is "on track" according to the treasurer. The staff are very satisfied with the new hire's performance to date. Frog Pond water problems still being worked on. They are changing their payroll company.

Health and Education

Board of Education: Voted to put a one cent ESPLOST referendum this November to raise money for needed capital improvement projects; this would raise sales tax to 8% in April 2024. This would add \$500K to the Ag building for a full cannery and commercial kitchen, flooring in the 3 schools and for the HVAC system at the Elementary School to be reworked.

Community Interest

Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce: The 2023 Made in Georgia Festival will be on June 24th and 25th. 70 vendors have been approved thus far (TCCA will be one of them). Three fishing tournaments have been confirmed for 2023 – Lady Bass Anglers on May 4th & 5th, Reel Money Student Trail on May 20th and the Boating Atlanta Skeeter Challenge Championship on September 29th – October 1. Chamber has gotten seven new members since March 16th. Chamber has 9 ambassadors who meet monthly on the last Thursday of the month.

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



From time to time, the TCCA discovers issues presented at various meetings our Board Members attend which may be of interest to our citizenry. Often there are state and federal regulations unbeknownst that would affect a segment of our population. This article deals with the function of the Board of Equalization and the criteria used to determine property tax appeals.

IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR ANYONE WITH TAXABLE PROPERTY.

Boards of Equalization are citizen panels that make determinations in appeals of property valuation (taxes). Boards of Equalization are managed by the Clerk of Superior and Magistrate Courts.

Boards of Equalization are comprised of property owners appointed by the Grand Jury of Towns County. In addition to being property owners, the appointees to the Board of Equalization (BOE) must also be qualified and competent to serve as grand jurors and be high school graduates. Each member must satisfactorily complete 40 hours of certified training before he or she can participate as a member of the Board. Each member must also complete an eight-hour continuous education class annually.

Each Board is charged by the O.C.G.A. §48-5-311 to hear appeals of property tax matters that include:

Value – What the property would sell for in a transaction between a knowledgeable buyer and a willing seller in a bone fide arm’s length transaction. Assessed value is the dollar value assigned to a home or other piece of real estate for property tax purposes. It takes into consideration comparable home sales, location, and other factors. Assessed value is not the same as fair market value (what the property could sell for) but is often based on a percentage of it.

Uniformity of value – Assessments values that are fairly equalized between individual taxpayers. Uniformity in taxation occurs when each taxing district applies a levy rate to the assessed values of properties within that taxing district and assessed values of those properties are at a similar level of assessment.

Taxability – All real property and all personal property shall be liable to taxation and shall be taxed, except as otherwise provided by law.

Denial of homestead exemptions – The homestead of each resident of this state actually occupied by the owner as primary residence and homestead shall be exempted from all ad valorem taxation for the state, county, and school purposes.

Denial of special assessments – Georgia law provides for special assessments of certain, property used for agricultural purposes (conservation use, agricultural preferential), rehabilitated and landmark historic properties, contaminated property (also known as Brownfields), certain environmentally sensitive property and storm water/wetlands.

APPEALS

Property owners who filed an appeal to the Tax Assessor within 45 days of the postmark date on their assessment notice are called an Appellant. The appeal is reviewed by the Tax Assessors. If the Assessors' decision is a “no change,” the appeal is forwarded to the Board of Equalization.

HEARINGS

Appellants (people who filed an appeal) will receive a notice of the date and time of the scheduled hearing. All appeal hearings are typically held at the county courthouse or at an assigned location.

To reschedule your hearing, you must notify the Appeal Administrator’s office a minimum of 48 hours in advance of

your scheduled hearing. To withdraw your hearing, you must notify this office in writing a minimum of 48 hours in advance of your scheduled hearing.

ATTENDANCE

An Appellant may appear before a Board of Equalization or with a representative or authorize a representative to represent him/her in their absence. However, the taxpayer shall specify in writing to the Board of Equalization the name of such agent or representative prior to any appearance by the agent or representative before the Board.

EVIDENCE


Documentation you may consider presenting to the Board of Equalization may include Evidence of purchase price; Appraisals; Photographs of the interior, exterior, and surrounding area; Evidence of sale Prices; Comparable property values in your area.

SUPERIOR COURT

The Appellant or the County Board of Tax Assessors may appeal decisions of the Board of Equalization. The notice of appeal shall be filed within 30 days from the date on which the BOE decision was mailed. Once an appeal is submitted to the Superior Court, the Appellant may wish to consider engaging an attorney. The appeal must be filed with the Tax Assessors by the owner or his/her attorney.

ADVICE ON PREPARATION FOR HEARING

PREPARE FOR YOUR HEARING! The Board of Equalization can only reach a decision on the evidence presented so please include any evidence (photos, official documents, or verifiable data) that can be used in support of your appeal. Also, the Board of Equalization's decision relies heavily on *Uniformity of value*. Make sure your appeal is based upon this primary criterion as the value is based up sales and property values in your properties like location. Additionally, meet with the Tax Assessor's office before the hearing to make sure you understand how the value was determined and if any agreement can be made before the Board of Equalization meetings.

  <p>CONTACT INFORMATION Towns County Civic Association PO Box 455, Hiawassee, GA 30546-0455</p> <p>TCCA BOARD MEMBERS <i>John Clemens Michael Courey Larry Dietsch Anna Denton David Best Joan Crothers Gordy Jones Jim Olson</i> Email: townscountycivicassociation@gmail.com Website: townscountycivicassociation.com</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">For Members to Know</p> <p>As a member of Towns County Civic Association, you are always welcome to attend our monthly meetings. They are typically held on the second Wednesday of each month (time and location may vary so please check with a Board Member before attending). If you, as a member, wish to share a concern or wish to make a presentation, please let one of our Board Members know to have time scheduled.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NON-PROFIT SUPPORT (recent contributions)</p> <p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Towns County High School Scholarship Fund• Mountain True (Formally Hiawassee River Watershed)• Enotah CASA• Music on the Square
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NOTICE: The TCCA desperately needs volunteers to be a part of our Board. If you are interested in knowing more about how the county and municipalities operate as well as those areas supporting our citizenry such as the Board of Education, Health Department and those agencies supplying us with water and power (Blue Ridge EMC), the TCCA is an ideal organization for you. We have a significant voice in how these entities serve us in Towns County. If you wish to join our Board, please let one of our Board Members know. We would love to have as part of our team.

GENERAL TCCA ENROLLMENT INFORMATION

TCCA membership is currently at 95 individual memberships, 1 HOA's and 2 businesses. 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 (2023-2024) or for a two-year membership, please do so right away. See form below.

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: \$ _____. Please print and cut out the form and send to address above.

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.

