



Titans' Kinsey visiting home before next minicamp

The Northeast Georgian

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County budget projects no millage increase

Commissioners split on rollback discussion

BY MATTHEW OSBORNE

Habersham County has posted its preliminary budget for fiscal year 2023-24 after receiving a general idea of its potential tax digest growth Friday. The digest is expected to grow

somewhere between 10 and 12 percent, according to tentative figures presented to county leaders by the tax assessor's office at the end of last week.

The projected general fund budget posted on the county's web site is \$36,742,122, up 10.55 percent from 2023. The county plans to hold budget hearings the next two Mondays at 6 p.m., June 19 and June 26.

County CFO Tim Sims said he was not sure how much of the projected growth was new construction and how much was via

reassessment.

Chairman Ty Akins said he was told to plan on a 3 percent new growth before being told that the total increase could be as high as 12 percent.

Sims said he was hoping for final numbers this week.

Akins said the preliminary budget included some money being shifted around so that there would potentially be no need for a millage rate increase this year.

"We came in a little under budget overall, but we have to do some things like maintenance on

our buildings that have been put off," Akins said. "We included only the new positions that were absolutely necessary and cut back capital projects some."

Akins said the proposed budget does include six new firemen and a risk management officer.

Commissioner Bruce Palmer said the six new emergency services employees are not enough, noting that the county really needs around 40.

"We are so short-staffed that we are going to end up getting one of them hurt or getting a citizen

hurt," Palmer said.

Palmer added that he believes Habersham County Schools should be paying 100 percent of the salaries for the school resource officers. The county is scheduled to pay 20 percent of their salaries this year.

As for the digest, Palmer said he wanted to see the final numbers, but he noted that it is hard to compare Habersham County to surrounding counties.

"The schools get 100 percent

BUDGET ON 2A

Feds round up missing fugitive

BY MATTHEW OSBORNE

Wanted fugitive Leticia Erika Perry, 28, of Summerville was transported to Habersham County Detention Center on Friday night after being arrested in Floyd County.

Perry has been on the run since a May 24 incident where she allegedly threw drugs over the wall at Lee Arrendale State Prison, then tried to escape a Department of Corrections security officer by running him down with her car.



PERRY

Perry escaped on foot after wrecking her car and had not been seen since leaving a bloody jacket and her identification behind at the scene.

Her alleged accomplice - Devonte Eddie Donald Jenkins, 26, of Dalton - was captured later on the day of the incident near the Cornelia-Baldwin border by a DOC K9 officer.

Late last week, U.S. Marshals helped in the investigation and knew of an address in Floyd County where Perry may be staying. They arrested her there without incident, Floyd County Sheriff's Office PIO Corey Bowers said.

When she was discovered by the prison guard after triggering an alarm early that morning, Perry tried to escape by ramming the officer and then his car. But she wrecked the car on a concrete culvert and fled on foot. In the bag with Perry's identification were suspected quantities of cocaine and marijuana. According to the sheriff's report, Jenkins was dropped off to deliver an unknown quantity of drugs over the wall while Perry waited for him as the driver.

Perry was arrested on charges of aggravated assault, interference with government property, driving while suspended, possession of a controlled substance, possession with intent, hit and run and no seatbelt.



SUBMITTED

Jason and Cissy Carroll have made it their goal to support other families while fighting their own battles and supporting their son, Jackson (center).

A foundation of selflessness

Non-profit helps folks take an awesome Trip

BY JOHN DILLS

Take The Trip Foundation, a new non-profit this year, has taken the first steps to become established. Take The Trip was founded by husband and wife, Jason and Cissy Carroll, after taking their own trip.

In 2015, Cissy was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer and brain metastases. The

original diagnosis gave her a slim chance at living for an additional five years, but Cissy beat the odds and has been living every day with the same motto that founded Take The Trip Foundation.

Recently, Cissy was given 3-6 months to live, and has been under the care of Hospice, but continues to have high hopes that other families will receive the gift she was once given - a trip.

Jason, despite the troubles, keeps rooted in Habersham County. The business owner and Habersham graduate said, "(Habersham) will always be home and it will be where my headstone will rest one

day when I'm gone. Next to my father and most recently, my sister in Hillside Cemetery. Habersham and the upbringing from my wonderful family is what has made me who I am to this day and with the values I have carried over into Take The Trip Foundation."

For Cissy, "Take the trip, buy the shoes, eat the cake," is the motto she embraces to keep pushing forward despite the hurdles coming her way. Jason now dedicates a large portion of his time to the foundation in hopes that he can help other families

TRIP ON 2A



MATTHEW OSBORNE/Staff

Adam Hazell of the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission makes a presentation in Demorest on Monday night.

Comp plan meeting sees sparse attendance

BY MATTHEW OSBORNE

It has been said that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. After two public meetings to discuss Habersham County's comprehensive plan, it seems the few will have far more input.

Meetings in Clarkesville last week and Demorest on Monday night drew a total of six residents who were not public officials. The meetings are part of a larger process that includes online surveys and other planned focus groups for later this summer. The goal is to identify what residents of Habersham County and its municipalities

want their community to look like a generation from now.

Adam Hazell, the presenter from the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, gathered what data he could from the paltry crowds, explaining that the comprehensive plan focuses on systemic operations, not specific individuals or politics.

One theme carried through the meetings was a fear that Habersham County would lose its rural identity through coming growth.

"We need controls on the amount of building that is going on," Dennis Short said at the Clarkesville meeting. "I am concerned there are a lot

more on the drawing boards."

At the Demorest meeting, Jimmy Davis said he would like to see single-family homes built rather than large apartment complexes that drastically increase traffic.

Hazell said the county would need somewhere around 4,000 additional acres on which to build single-family homes between now and 2040.

Amanda Mason said she wanted to see more locally-owned businesses rather than large chain stores.

Elizabeth Boss added that the county needs to maintain its

PLAN ON 2A

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Weddings, engagements, birth announcements and death notices are published free of charge for the community. Information about area residents and their achievements is also welcome.

Submissions should be typed or printed, and a name and phone number to call for more information should be included.

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The Northeast Georgian strives to produce error-free news reporting. When mistakes occur, it is our policy to correct them as soon as they are brought to our attention.

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- 350 words or fewer; only one letter per writer in any 30-day period;
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Jason and Cissy Carroll started Take The Trip Foundation to help other families spend time together during what can otherwise be a very troublesome period.

SUBMITTED

TRIP

facing terminal illnesses.

Upon Cissy's diagnosis, the family was gifted a trip of a lifetime, to be able to spend time together and have fond, bright memories during what otherwise could have been a darker time. In remembrance of this time, Take The Trip Foundation was born.

"Months ago I never had plans to start a nonprofit," Jason said. "It has never crossed my mind. I never wanted to do anything that felt like it was exploiting my wife's condition. When Cissy got her prognosis, a lot of people thought she was in remission. When she released her prognosis, one of her contacts in Myrtle Beach said, 'I would love to send this family on a trip and pay for all of the costs. At first my wife said she didn't feel comfortable and we can afford our own trip. I said 'Yes, but if someone is

trying to do something nice for you, that's their way of showing compassion. Let's just say yes, do it and see where it leads.' We decided to do it. Took the trip, and the night after that, I was praying with my son, Jackson, and debriefing as we typically do. I told him, 'Jackson, how I've gotten through the last eight years is I always pray to God for opportunities to bless others in the world.' When I take advantage of those blessings to give other people opportunities, it gives me joy."

Jason lives with Cissy's motto, and has made Take The Trip Foundation an integral part of his life. "It's been tough because when she was diagnosed, she had less than a 1 percent chance of making it five years. Until very recently, one of the things that triggers anxiety for me is not

having control of the future. I'm a planner," Jason said. "I do everything to put my wife in the spotlight and enable her to do all of the things she wants to do before she dies. A lot of times my needs, and what might be on my bucket list, aren't really acknowledged much by some people. ... Being a caregiver is totally opposite of being a cancer patient. We have different emotional needs, where she is trying to live as much as she can before she dies, I'm trying to make sure that the right resources and plans are in place, and we are financially stable enough that when the day came, I can be in the position to be more present and full time to support my son."

Jason has been facing the reality of Cissy's illness, and although it is difficult, he still wants to help others. "Projects help me

get through tough times. Projects such as this foundation have been a place for me to hide from the reality that awaits us. If I don't, I'm in my head overthinking things. I've got to be strong for my family, strong for my son. I've got to be positive for the one's around us, and the ones that love her and our family."

Jason said that the next step for Take The Trip is to take a look at two families who could benefit from the trip. "We've established relationships between two major hospital systems in North Carolina," Jason said. "We are developing patient experience networks in Charlotte, Miami and a family in Delaware we will be supporting. We're creating very special experiences for when we deliver the news to them, services they can use while on the trip."

From Page 1A

PLAN

zoning balance and "not turn into Hall County."

From the comments in person and the survey results so far, it is clear the residents who have taken the time to respond to the comp plan's requests for feedback are saying they want things to stay rural in Habersham County.

Demorest Councilman Shawn Allen and Habersham County Commissioner Bruce Palmer attended the Demorest meeting on Monday and offered skepticism that having little to no growth was the best path for the

county.

"The tax base will still be upside down," Allen said of push for higher home ownership, noting that the county will have an increasingly older population.

"You have 500 kids graduating from the high school every year," Palmer added. "They need a place to live and work."

There was a consensus that higher population leads to more crime and a higher volume of illegal drugs coming into the county.

"I don't want to see traffic counts go up," Boss said. "I used to see one car between my house and 365. Now I see 20."

There are two other community meetings set on the topic, one for 7 p.m. Thursday at Mt. Airy Town Hall and the other at 6 p.m. Tuesday, June 20, at Alto Town Hall.

Those will be followed by some walk-in interactive meetings that will be scheduled in July at the Ruby Fulbright Aquatic Center in Clarksville, the dates and times of which are still being finalized.

From Page 1A

BUDGET

of the Local Option Sales Tax (LOST), which is about \$10 million a year," Palmer said. "And then there's the homestead exemptions, which are digest killers for us in this county."

While there will likely be no millage increase, the commissioners are split on whether to roll the rate back.

Palmer and Akins do not believe the county should roll the rate back.

"At some point, we have to decide what level of service we will provide," Palmer said. "It is pointless to roll the rate back, only to get to next year and find out that we might need to go back up on it, not that it will definitely go up, but if we roll it back, we might need to increase it in the future."

Vice-Chairman Bruce Harkness has often spoken

out against any kind of tax increase.

Although we will not have to vote for a millage increase, the simple fact that the tax assessor's office has raised the values of the properties by an average of 12 percent will in effect be a property tax increase," Harkness said. "I would hope that we could work to try to balance our budget without a tax increase at this time. Peoples' wages are not keeping up with the cost of living. The cost of living is rising rapidly along with inflation, and I think we as leaders must do all we can to try to protect our citizens and also balance our budget and live within our means. Therefore, I would certainly be in favor of a rollback of the millage rate so there won't be such a large increase in people's taxes and we can

still live within the budget by doing that in my opinion."

Commissioner Dustin Mealor agreed that there should at least be a discussion of a rollback when the official numbers are in.

"I am in favor of some sort of rollback," Mealor

said. "I don't think it will be a full rollback but one of some sort may be warranted."

Commissioner Jimmy Tench did not respond to a message left for him seeking his insight on the budget.

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