

County Meeting
May 16, 2024 6:00pm
Minutes
Union County Courthouse

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Paris at 6:02pm. The Commissioner welcomed everyone to the meeting. The invocation was then given by Fire Chief/EMA Director, David Dyer and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Bill Walker. The minutes from the April 18, 2024 County Meeting were approved as presented, and attendees were provided copies.

The first item on the agenda was the Presentation of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce Person of the Year Award. Commissioner Paris asked Steve Rowe, the President of the Blairsville/Union County Chamber of Commerce to come up and present the award. Mr. Rowe explained that each year the Chamber of Commerce presents the Business of the Year and the Person of the Year awards. Several of the people of the year have been Jenny Gurley, Mayor Conley, and Julia Barnett. This year the person of the year was not able to make it to the Chamber's annual banquet so the award will be presented now. Steve Rowe asked Mr. John Hill and his mother, Kathy Hill, to come to the front. Mrs. Kathy Hill, retired Director of the Union County Senior Center, was presented the Person of the Year Award. Commissioner Paris said that Kathy is an amazing lady and is so proud she has received this award.

The Commissioner then had County Clerk, Jennifer Mahan, read a short biography of Mrs. Kathy Hill and announced that Jennifer would then read some other items on the agenda.

Mrs. Kathy Hill's Biography reads as follows: Kathy Keith Hill was born in 1954 to Robert and Carmen Keith in Oliver, Tennessee. Robert's family farmed in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He joined the Army following the loss of the family farm to the nuclear power plant and he served in both fronts of WWII. After leaving the Army, he met Carmen while mining mica in Union County with his brother Simon Keith. The story goes that Robert threw his hat in the front door when he came to court Carmen to ensure he was not shot by her father. Carmen's family came to Blairsville in 1837 with the land grants. The young couple eventually married and moved to Oliver, Tennessee where they had three children: Bobby, Rosella, and Kathy. They did move back to Union County in 1957, and Kathy graduated from Union County School in 1972. Upon graduation, Kathy moved to Cleveland, Tennessee and attended business school. From 1974 to 1978, she worked at Union County Bank. On a June morning in 1975, Kathy woke up to her father Robert sitting in the dark with a deer rifle. She laughed at him, but he said a car had pulled down the driveway in the middle of the night. No one knew at the time that Robert's faithful dog Trouble had stopped an attempted kidnapping. When she arrived at Union County Bank later that morning, Kathy was greeted by a man with a sawed off shot gun that placed the firearm to her head and told her if she did not comply, she would be killed. Kathy was able to keep her cool and keep everyone in the bank alive during this robbery. The robbers had successfully kidnapped one of the other employees who was already in the building and were holding her coworker's husband hostage at gun point. As the other employees began to arrive, including the bank's President, they were all tied up and gagged. The bank robbers eventually got away with a large sum of cash. Thankfully, due to the quick thinking of several dedicated employees including Kathy, no one was injured. Kathy continued serving at the bank until 1978 when she went to

work at Young Harris College in the business office. During her time at YHC, she made many lifelong friends, including Drs. David & Luisa Franklin, Dr. Bob Nichols, and Dr. John Kay. Dr. Kay would go on to become a long-time pastor of Providence Methodist Church, which was the church Kathy's family attended. Kathy served at Young Harris College until 1981 before going to work with her husband Steve at their family run business, Tri State Claims, from 1981 until 1996. Kathy was one of the key components to the success that the business had during the 42 years of operation until 2023. In 1996, Kathy began working for Judge Dwain Brackett in the Probate Court until 2001 when she left to work at the Union County Health Department. Kathy worked at the health department until 2005 when she took over as the Director for the Union County Senior Center. During her tenure as Director of the Union County Senior Center from 2005 to October 2023, Kathy's dedication was extremely admirable. During this time, she was able to increase attendance, raise over \$100,000 per year for Meals on Wheels, and, most importantly, care for hundreds of seniors within the Union County community. The Senior Center is more than just a place to come get a meal; it was and is a place that folks can gather. This was not a job for Kathy; it was a calling. During her 18 years as Director, Kathy worked seven days a week going well-beyond the 40-hour work week. She worked late into the night completing the paperwork and running the business side of the center so that during the day she could focus on the care of the seniors. She always took calls from the seniors when they needed her, and she even took several shopping, and she sometimes did their laundry for them at her house on her days off. As one can see, her care for others truly exemplified a servant's heart. Through rain, snow, sleet, and shine the center operated and cared for the seniors. They had birthday celebrations, and all of the holidays were made special for those folks who attended the Senior Center. Kathy created many activities for the seniors and secured several grants to procure the resources needed to serve this amazing group of people. The Senior Center was a family atmosphere where the seniors knew someone really loved them and was there to serve them. In 2023 Kathy retired from the Union County Senior Center. It's easy to see why so many will forever remember and be grateful for Kathy's selflessness and dedication to her community. Despite her lasting legacy within the Union County community, the thing that we know Kathy is most proud of is her family. In July of 1975, Kathy married Steve Hill from Murphy, North Carolina. They had two boys, John and Michael. Her sons both live and work in Union County today.

Mrs. Kathy Hill stated that she appreciated the award even though she felt like she did not deserve it as much as other people. She appreciates all her friends for coming and, stated that it was amazing. She then thanked Commissioner Paris for all his support in the years that she worked at the Senior Center.

Commissioner Paris then turned the podium over the Jennifer Mahan to read items two, three and four on the agenda, which were all proclamations.

The first Proclamation established April 26th and 27th, 2024 as Mountain Community Chorus Appreciation Days and reads as follows: **Whereas**, The Mountain Community Chorus was formed by James Carly, adjunct professor at Tri-County Technical Institute in Peachtree, NC, in 1974 under the name "The Choral Society" and was later relocated to the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, NC under the name "The Community Choir"; and **Whereas**, The Community Choir then moved to Young Harris in 1986 when Bill Fox became the director and it was then that the

group became Mountain Community Chorus; and **Whereas**, Mr. Fox was the director of the chorus from 1986 to 2012 and his wife Mary Ann Fox is the longest active member who was an accompanist for many years and still sings with the Chorus; and **Whereas**, The membership cost to join the Mountain Community Chorus is twenty dollars with weekly rehearsals starting twelve weeks prior to each concert and the auditions are held at the first rehearsal of the season; and **Whereas**, Throughout the 50 year history of the Chorus, more than 600 singers have been members of this organization that serves as a medium of artistic outlet for choral performers; and **Whereas**, Mountain Community Chorus holds to the premise that choral singing is a noble group activity that strengthens social bonds and creates a feeling of togetherness for persons of all ages; and **THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED** if an individual in Union County or the City of Blairsville would enjoy trying something different by exploring a new skill or to enhance their sense of community by joining in song with others, the Mountain Community Chorus could offer these opportunities to individuals who become members. **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER PROCLAIMED**, I, Lamar Paris, Commissioner, Union County Government, and Jim Conley, Mayor, City of Blairsville, do hereby proclaim April 26th and 27th as **MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY CHORUS APPRECIATION DAYS** in Union County and in the City of Blairsville and urge all citizens to recognize the contributions the Chorus has made to the citizens over the last 50 years, both chorus member and audience member alike. This proclamation was signed and presented on April 22nd, 2024 at the rehearsal of the Mountain Community Chorus.

The second Proclamation established May 2, 2024 as Union County Day of Prayer and reads as follows: **WHEREAS**, civic prayers and national days of prayer have a long and venerable history in our constitutional republic, dating back to the First Continental Congress in 1775; and **WHEREAS**, the Declaration of Independence, our first statement as Americans of national purpose and identity, made “the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” the foundation of our United States of America and asserted that people have inalienable rights that are God-given; and **WHEREAS**, in 1988 legislation setting aside the first Thursday in May in each year as a National Day of Prayer was passed unanimously by both Houses of Congress and signed by President Ronald Reagan; and **WHEREAS**, the National Day of Prayer is an opportunity for Americans of all faiths to join in united prayer to acknowledge our dependence on God, to give thanks for blessings received, to request healing for wounds endured, and to ask God to guide our leaders and bring wholeness to the United States and her citizens; and **WHEREAS**, it is fitting and proper to give thanks to God by observing a day of prayer in Union County when all may acknowledge our blessings and express gratitude for them, while recognizing the need for strengthening religious and moral values in our state and nation; and **WHEREAS**, the 2024 theme, “**Lift up the Word – Light up the World**”, is based on 2 Samuel 22:29-31 which says, “**For you are my lamp, O lord, and my God lightens my darkness. For by You I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall. This God – his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true; He is a shield for all those who take refuge in Him.**” **NOW, THEREFORE**, we, Lamar Paris, Commissioner of Union County, and Jim Conley, Mayor of Blairsville do proclaim May 2, 2024 as a **DAY OF PRAYER** in Union County and the City of Blairsville. Given under our hands and the great seal of Union County, Georgia, this 2nd day of May in the year of our Lord two thousand twenty-four. This Proclamation was presented and signed at the National Day of Prayer event that was held on May 2, 2024 at First Baptist Church.

Commissioner Paris thanked First Baptist Church for organizing and hosting the National Day of Prayer event.

The third proclamation established May 24, 2024 as National Poppy Day in Union County and reads as follows: The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary Ira Weaver Post/Unit 121 submit the following proclamation for your review and approval.

PROCLAMATION: Expressing support for the designation of May 24th, 2024 as National Poppy Day in the City of Blairsville, Union County, Georgia and recognizing the importance of honoring those who have worn our nation's uniform and; **WHEREAS** poppies are worn and displayed as a symbolic tribute to our fallen, the future of living veterans, and service members and; **WHEREAS** at the end of World War I, the American Legion Family adopted the poppy as a symbol of freedom and the blood sacrificed by troops in war time. The symbolic use of the poppy comes from the poem "In Flanders Fields" which movingly begins, "In Flanders Fields the poppies blow, between the crosses, row on row," referring to the poppies that sprang up in the churned-up earth of newly dug soldiers' graves over parts of Belgium and France and; **WHEREAS** the American Legion Family has long utilized the red poppy as its official flower, symbolizing the blood shed by those who have served in our U.S. military and; **WHEREAS** wearing a poppy will unite citizens from across the country who decide to show their patriotism and; **NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the City of Blairsville, Union County, Georgia (1) supports the designation of May 24th, 2024 as National Poppy Day (2) encourages all citizen, residents, and visitors in the City of Blairsville to join in observing this day to honor every service member who has died in the name of liberty, freedom and democracy while also showing their support for living veterans, service members and their families. This Proclamation was signed on May 15, 2024 at City Hall. Ms. Mahan advised attendees that she included the Symbolism of the Poppy and the Poppy Story in their agenda packets.

Commissioner Paris thanked Jennifer Mahan for reading the proclamations and stepped back up to the podium to introduce Marcus Lindsey, with Air Methods, LLC. Air Methods, LLC is the company that offers the free medical helicopter service to the citizens of Union County. Prior to Mr. Lindsey speaking, Commissioner Paris accepted an agreement between Air Methods, LLC and Union County, Georgia for emergency air medical transportation services for the county's citizens and their household members from June 1, 2024 to May 31, 2025. The amount of this agreement is not to exceed \$65,975.00 and the county will only be responsible for half of that amount.

Marcus Lindsey's comments are summarized as follows: Air Methods, LLC/Air Life Georgia is an air ambulance service based at Union General Hospital here in Blairsville, Georgia. Our company's goal is to provide Union County citizens with the same access to health care as the citizens in larger urban areas. Through a partnership agreement with the county, this service is provided to all Union County citizens with no out-of-pocket expenses to the patient. This is a great program for the citizens here and we are proud to be a part of this community. We are about to wrap up our seventh term with this program and our fifth term under this pay as you go model. There is no upfront cost to Union County. We only assess a fee to Union County if there is an out-of-pocket cost to the patient. In many cases, depending on the patient's insurance, there is no out-of-pocket expense, so the county is not charged anything. If there is an out-of-pocket expense, the maximum billed to the county will be \$800 per transport. This per transport maximum used to be \$700 and had to be increased to \$800 for this agreement. This is the only price increase in the history of this agreement. The county is billed quarterly, and we are approaching the end of the fourth quarter under the current agreement.

The maximum agreed upon annually for this agreement is \$65,975.00. Currently to date, we have only assessed a little over \$13,000 under the current agreement. We expect to close this year at only one-third of the annual cap.

The Commissioner adopted the revised Drug and Alcohol Testing Policy for the Union County Transit System. These policies are based on federal and state guidelines for testing of safety sensitive employees. This policy is generally required to be updated every three years by the FTA. The main items that were added and addressed in the revisions were in relation to oral fluid collection for drug testing. This is now an option, and some labs already have the capability to test oral fluids. The FTA required these policy updates prior to any testing. Commissioner Paris stated that this means now instead of peeing in a cup, you can spit in a jar. Some other revisions were related to pre-employment, specimen authorized drug testing, and refusal behaviors. Attendees were advised to request a copy from the Commissioner's Office if they wanted to review the policy.

Commissioner Paris accepted an agreement between the Georgia Department of Corrections and Union County for three work details for the period of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. The cost for these details is \$49,318.00 per detail totaling \$147,954.00 for the term of this agreement. The cost of this contract only went up \$7.00 from last year. This is for the detainee crews that are used for repairs and maintenance throughout the county. If all three details are not available to work, the cost to the county is adjusted according to the agreement. So, the county is only required to pay for the crews that are provided throughout the year. Detainee crews provide valuable labor to Union County Government. They are utilized to perform jobs that Union County would otherwise have to hire full-time employees to do. Some of these things are mowing and weed eating at county facilities, building maintenance supervised by the maintenance department, litter clean up along county roads and road maintenance supervised by the Road Department. Currently the detainee crews are working on minor bridge maintenance, debris clean up at Poteete Creek Campground and clearing sight distance on county roads. Clearing sight distance is where the crews go out on the roads and clear vegetation that is impacting your sight distance when pulling out on the highway. Utilizing detainees really does save Union County a lot of money. It provides a good service for the detainees as well since they would normally be in the jail all day.

The Commissioner accepted an agreement between Tyler Technologies and Union County for annual software and hardware consisting of the purchasing module and four credit card readers for the Union County Transfer Station. The one-time fees included in this agreement are \$7,006 and the annual recurring fees are \$4,865. The effective date of this agreement is May 6, 2024 (Commissioner Paris misspoke and said 2004).

Everyone was provided a copy of the list of Business Licenses there were issued in Union County from April 15, 2024 to May 12, 2024 for the purpose of operating a short-term rental within Union County. The Commissioner approved all Business Licenses contained on the list provided, and the list will be made a part of the minutes.

Commissioner Paris adopted Resolution R-2024-10 declaring 18.94 acres as an Urban Redevelopment Area or a "pocket of blight" and authorizing transfer of title to the Urban Redevelopment Agency. This property is described as all that tract or parcel of land lying and being in Land Lot 269, 9th District, 1st Section, Union County, Georgia and being shown as: "Tract", containing 18.94 acres, more or less, as shown on a plat of survey for Union County by Blue Ridge Mountain Surveying, J. Jason Henson, G.R.L.S. #3007, dated February 14, 2024 and filed of record

on April 19, 2024 in Plat Book 74, Page 340 in the Office of the Clerk of Superior Court, Union County, Georgia. This is the property adjacent to the Farmers Market.

Fisher Field Bridge is the bridge that is being replaced. It is currently ready for the concrete surface to be poured next week. It then must sit approximately 23 days before the bridge can be used. The bridge was completed off site and delivered in two pieces. The pieces were lifted off the trailers by backhoes and set in place over the river. The Gun Range is practically ready on Highway 180. The Commissioner said the contractor should release the facility to the county the following week. Staff will then need to be trained and it will hopefully be ready to open in 30 to 45 days. The new gym is going up next to the new Election Center. This gym will also serve as an additional voting facility on election day in the future. This could result in the county being able to consolidate some of the precincts, which could save the county money. The next election is May 21st, and if you did not early vote, go vote on election day. Right now, there are eleven precincts across the county. Each facility on election day has to be staffed with poll workers and an officer for the entire day. Union County has been working with GDOT to get either a red light or roundabout at the intersection of Glenn Gooch Bypass and the Gainesville Highway. GDOT first said they would do a roundabout and they would do all the work to get ready for that. After six months, GDOT called and said they needed the county to do the roundabout design due to changes in funding. Now they have said they will take everything back over, but it might be another year before they get started on the roundabout again. In the meantime, GDOT is discussing and will hopefully put a red light at this intersection because something is desperately needed. Mowing is in full force by both the county and the state. There is a shortage of people to mow, so if anyone would like a part time job mowing the side of the roads there are spots available. Commissioner Paris closed by saying that his daughter just had her 40th Birthday. She has her own veterinary practice in Lutz, Florida where she takes care of cattle, goats and pigs.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:49 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Jennifer Mahan, County Clerk

Approved this _____ day of _____, _____

Lamar Paris, Commissioner



**Union County Short-term Rental Licensees
April 15, 2024 – May 12, 2024**

136 Madison Avenue, LLC
136 Madison Ave.
Blairsville, GA 30512

PLACE LIKE HOME LLC
118 Mountain View Ln
Blairsville, GA 30512

**William Johnston and William
Nevin Johnston, Sr**
748 Brannon Ridge Rd
Young Harris, GA 30582

ABEL EDWARD J & QIAN LI WANG
198 Butternut Lane
Blairsville, GA 30512

**Tracey Harrity and Michael A.
Goode**
1572 Highland Trace
Blairsville, GA 30512