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Cory Kirby handing out copies of the ESPLOST V resolution for discussion during the Jan. 16 board meeting. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

penny for current ESPLOST IV collections.

Since the schools are already collecting ESPLOST money, if residents decide to renew the ESPLOST, the sales tax rate within the county will

remain at 7 percent.

Should residents choose not to renew the ESPLOST, the sales tax rate will drop to 6 cents on the dollar.

ESPLOST V would have a collection cap of \$21 million

over its five-year collection period, just like ESPLOST IV, and the board has retained the ability to sell bonds for up to \$13.5 million in the event of an emergency.

This would give the board quick access to ESPLOST-backed revenues should the school system suffer a catastrophic loss due to weather, fire or other unforeseen disaster, though the board has publicly declared its intent to continue following a "pay-as-you-go" model.

Cory Kirby of Harben, Hartley & Hawkins, the law firm that represents the school board, addressed board members in their Jan. 16 pre-board work session.

"As you all know, there's no requirement that you issue these bonds," said Kirby. "It's just, if you don't seek the authority now with the SPLOST, then you would have to do some other type of financing afterwards if it comes up that you need to actually issue bonds."

"My understanding from

Dr. Rayfield is that's not your idea, that's not your intent, but you had the forethought to at least include that on there."

State law dictates next steps to include the board office submitting the adopted ESPLOST V resolution and ballot question to the Union County Election Superintendent, who will make sure the question gets in front of voters in time for the May 22 election.

The ESPLOST V project list includes the following areas of concentration:

Transportation and maintenance equipment, including 10 new buses over five years; technology innovations and system upgrades; roof renovations and repairs; parking lots and roads; cafeteria renovations and expansion; Athletic facilities and renovations; HVAC renovation and repair; a teaching greenhouse at the middle school; systemwide kitchen equipment replacement; CTAE building and shop expansion; and

miscellaneous maintenance and system upgrades.

The current ESPLOST collection has paid for a variety of big projects and upgrades, including the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center, the Union County Schools

Agriscience Center, classroom additions at the schools, 10 brand new Blue Bird school buses and other items.

Also appearing on the ballot in May will be three posts on the Union County Board of Education.

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as superintendent.

"I'm very optimistic and excited about the future of Union County Schools and what kind of services we can provide the students of our county," said Hill following the Jan. 16 board meeting.

When he takes the reins as superintendent in July, Hill said his first order of business will be to kick start the rebranding and development of the system's strategic plan, which will cover the next five years and involve both the vision and mission of Union County Schools.

"That process will include stakeholders from every part of our community," said Hill.

"It'll include the staff, it'll include students, parents, community members, businesses. It'll be a very large undertaking.

"That falls right in line with our reaccreditation, which will happen in February of 2019. So, we're doing all this, and there's basically no wasted effort, because it all needs to be done and has to be done for reaccreditation, and just to provide our staff with the direction of the school.

"We all need to be rowing the boat in the same direction for the kids, and this process is very involved and very difficult, but the end result

is something that everybody will have had their hand in, and that we all developed together.

"I think it will help unify us even more and guide us in the direction we need to go to serve these kids in our county."

Another major goal for Hill, one that is likely to play a significant role in the upcoming strategic plan, will be a continued emphasis on employability in the schools and preparing students for their next stages in life, be that technical school or college, the military or straight to the workforce.

Since joining the school system in 2004, Hill has been a teacher and coach, a school principal and board administrator, and on July 1, he'll be the superintendent of Union County Schools.

"I'm very thankful and appreciative of the community's support," said Hill. "They've supported me for my whole career. I'm very proud that I'm a Union County High School graduate and a lifelong resident, and I plan on remaining in the community for the rest of my life.

"I hope to retire from the Union County School System. I have no desire to leave our community, I care about it deeply. My mother



Hill and Odom share a hug in the Jan. 16 board meeting, after signing Hill's contract to become the next superintendent of Union County Schools. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

was a Union County High School graduate, my wife was a Union County High School graduate.

"The school system's not just a job for me, it's my life, and it's extremely important to me to do right by the kids, to do the right thing for the students of our community, and our employees and the community at large. All three of those things are critical.

"If you don't take care of the community, if you don't take care of your employees, if you don't take care of your students, you're ineffective."

The board began its search for a new superintendent in November 2017, after Dr. Rayfield announced his decision to retire at the end of the 2017-2018 school year, following a long career in

education.

"I am very confident that John Hill will continue the tradition of excellence in education that Union County Schools is known for across the state of Georgia," said Dr. Rayfield previously.

Continued Dr. Rayfield: "John has a huge heart for all of our students and employees. He has the work ethic and integrity to be successful in educational leadership. John Hill has earned my respect and will be a great leader for this community."

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registered to vote in Union County, the deadline to do so ahead of the May 22 primary is April 24.

Also in the meeting, Commissioner Paris amended the Association County Commissioners of Georgia 401(a) Defined Contribution Plan for Union County employees.

"The details of those plans were discussed in detail here (in the) July 18, 2017, county meeting," said Paris. "Everything has just been finalized, and the plan should go into effect Feb. 1, 2018.

"This plan basically increases the county retirement match for employees who contribute part of their pay for future retirement benefits."

As previously reported, the county will match up to 2.9 percent employee wage contributions with an equal match, but if an employee contributes 3 percent, the county will match with 5 percent.

If an employee contributes 4 percent, the county will match 6 percent; 5 percent,

the county will match 7 percent; and a 6 percent contribution or more will receive a maximum county match of 8 percent.

"Union County does not have any type of Defined Benefit Retirement Plan," according to the July 18, 2017, meeting minutes. "In other words, the county has no future liability to pay a retirement for the employees.

"Their retirement, if any, is a combination of a percentage of wage contribution by the employee (457 Plan) and a match by the county (401A Plan)."

Continued the minutes: "These funds are then invested with ACCG retirement funds and are available for employees in the future as they retire or when they leave their employment."

Commissioner Paris amended the original plan, which provided an equal match for contributions up to 6 percent, to retain employees in the current healthy economic climate, and to encourage employees to save for retirement.

In his Commissioner's Comments, Paris touched on Winter Storm Inga's impact locally the week of Jan. 16.

"I would suggest that the only information that has been of interest to the public in the last few days has been the weather and the temperature," said Paris. "As difficult as this has been, it could have been so much worse.

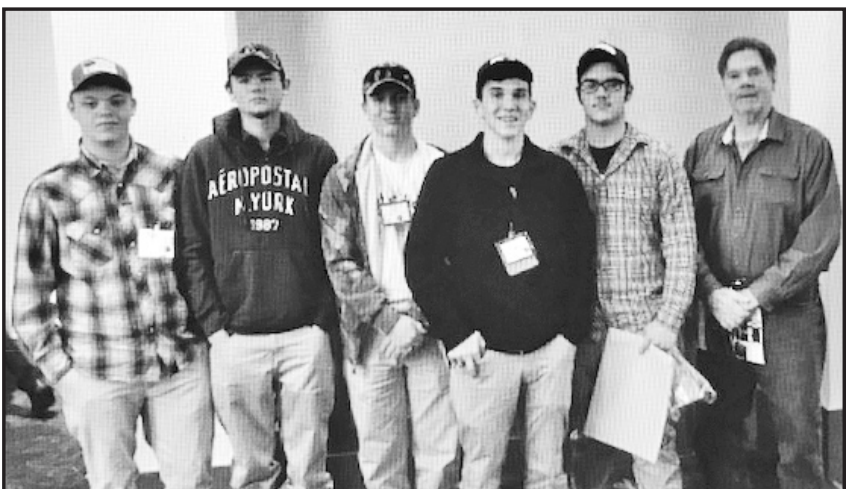
"We are thankful that, during the period of extreme cold weather, we have not had a single structure fire - which is very unusual - other than a couple of chimney fires, and they did minor damage. With this type of cold weather, we are very thankful for this.

"We also had several traffic accidents, probably 30 or 40 through this period of time, scattered throughout the county. And although a couple of cars got beat up pretty good, we had no serious injuries during that time from accidents."

Attendee Jac McKechnie delivered the invocation to start the Jan. 18 meeting, and the commissioner himself led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Woody Gap to compete in Skills USA

It's that time of year again when Woody Gap School students are getting ready for the Skills USA competitions to begin. This year we are hoping to have the highest number of students so far participating at the regional and state levels of the competi-



Skills USA competitions here we come.

tions. This event has proved to be an important learning experience.

Students compete at Regionals in: Electrical Wiring, HVA, Plumbing, Welding & Welding Fabrication, Cabinet Making and Brick Laying.

The 1st place participants will advance to the state competition including: Dry-

wall, Welding Scripture, Firemen Contest, Crime Scene Investigation, Wood Working Display and Tile Work.

In the past we have relied on the funds brought in from the Indian Summer Festival, however was lost due to rain. We are asking for a helping hand to help cover the expense of travel to and accommodations in Atlanta,

GA. A donation of any amount would be helpful. To show our appreciation, we would love to build you a small keepsake wood project.

Please send a check to: Woody Gap Skills USA, 2331 State Hwy 60, Suches, GA 30572. Any questions call (706) 747-2401 ext. 1616.

Thank you,
Coach Gary Butler