

# GDOT ...from Page 1A



GDOT plans are subject to change based on public comment, due Tuesday, March 7, for the Murphy Highway project. Tentatively, construction is slated to begin in 2023.

Copies of the plans are available at the websites above deadline, and hard copies can be found at the Union County Commissioner's Office through the March 7 comment

at 65 Courthouse Street in Blairsville.

Included in the hard copy information packet is a comment card that can be mailed to GDOT's Eric Duff, and the mailing address is listed on the card.

The widening project will cost roughly \$100 million to complete, funded with federal and state dollars.

Right of way funding authorization is projected to take place in 2020, and construction is slated to begin tentatively in 2023.

According to the preliminary plans, 237 parcels, or land lots, have been tapped as necessary for completion of the project.

GDOT will be inviting landowners to a property owners meeting three to six months prior to right of way authorization in order to get the acquisition process started, so sometime in 2019.

Since the plans are subject to change based on public comment, the above dates are also subject to change.

Currently, the project aims to relieve traffic congestion and improve safety along much of Murphy Highway.

The project will achieve these goals in the following manner, according to GDOT:

"The proposed project would widen the existing two



Katie Strickland, GDOT's District One Communications Officer, talking with colleagues at the Feb. 21 open house in the Blairsville Civic Center.

and three-lane roadway to a four-lane facility with either a flush or grassed median.

"A variable typical section is proposed in order to avoid or minimize impacts to identified resources, and would generally follow the existing roadway alignment with some minor new location to straighten out some sharp curvature.

"The proposed roadway would have 12-foot deceleration turn lanes for right turns at selected locations.

"Median openings will

also be provided at selected locations.

"Intersections would be improved to include additional lanes on side street approaches and turning lanes where warranted.

"Roundabouts are being considered as an alternative to signalized intersections at five locations: Blue Ridge Street, Pat Haralson Memorial Drive, Pat Colwell Road, Gumlog Road and Ivylog Road.

"The proposed speed limit varies between 45 and 55 miles per hour.

"The existing right of way varies from 80 to 130 feet. Proposed right of way varies between 120 and 300 feet.

"The project includes two causeways and a bridge over the impoundment areas of the Tennessee Valley Authority-operated Lake Nottely."

To get an idea of what the proposed roundabouts might be like, GDOT supplied the following link: [www.dot.ga.gov/DS/SafetyOperation/Roundabouts](http://www.dot.ga.gov/DS/SafetyOperation/Roundabouts).

Several attendees of the GDOT meeting told the North Georgia News that they wished to see the project completed, and that it was a need of the community.

However, several residents noted that GDOT projects generally take a long time to get off the ground, which they said leaves some property owners feeling stuck with property likely to be assumed by the right-of-way process, though without a firm timeline of acquisition.

Once a concept is approved, past this preliminary phase, there will be another Public Information Open House to inform residents of the approved plans.

Contact Project Manager Achor Njoku with additional questions at (404) 631-1550, or Elliott Robertson, environmental analyst, at (404) 631-1190.

# BOE ...from Page 1A

world of teaching, has a slew of experience to offer students, with a unique perspective.

Before coming to Union County, Duckworth taught and studied abroad in England and France, something that UCES Principal Patricia Cook says sets her apart from the rest.

"She graduated from the University of Georgia, and she's one of two students who was selected by the college of education to do this international study," said Cook.

"I went into her classroom today and interviewed some of her students, and this is some of the things they said to me: 'Mrs. Cook, Ms. Duckworth is totally awesome. I didn't get this math last week, and I came in early and she helped me with my homework, and I did great on it.'"

Adams has been working in education for 16 years, with a focus in theater

and drama. UCHS Principal John Hill said Adams' hard work and dedication bring the kids together the same way a coach would with his team, and that he could not be more pleased to have Adams on board at the high school.

"He's done a phenomenal job with our theater and drama program," said Hill. "The kids love his class. He brings them all together, kind of like a basketball coach, for the theater program. He does a fantastic job, and we're very pleased with what Mr. Adams does."

Woody Gap School Teacher of the Year Doug Roberts has worked 16 of his 17 years of education in Union County.

Roberts began as a band director at UCMS and as assistant band director at UCHS before moving to Woody Gap three years ago.

Woody Gap Schools Co-Principals Shelia Collins and Carol Knight could not speak enough of the tremendous program Roberts has brought to Suches with the Band of Steel.

"Only a teacher that has taught beside him several times can realize the miracle that he does every year," said Collins. "At the beginning of the year, you don't understand anything that's going on. By September you say, well, I recognize that song. In October you know it, and then we have the Christmas concert."

UCMS Teacher of the Year Dr. Hale was also selected as the System Teacher of the Year.

Dr. Hale has been working at the middle school since 2005, teaching English.

According to UCMS Principal Gwen Stafford, not only is Dr. Hale an excellent teacher, but she also has a special gift that allows her to connect with the kids unlike anyone else.

"I couldn't be more proud of our Teacher of the Year," said Stafford. "There are so many different things that makes her unique, but one that stands out the most, the one that kids tell me all the time, is she cares for them. The students know that. She can get them to do things that other people can't get them to do."

"She helps the students inside the classroom, outside the classroom. That is what makes her an awesome teacher. It is an honor and a privilege to have her at our school."

Before Union County Schools Superintendent Dr. Fred Rayfield offered a word of congratulations to the recipients, Rick Kruger, the schools' insurance representative, presented Dr. Hale with a check that goes to the System Teacher of the Year.

"I would like to express my appreciation to the committee and everyone who worked to select our teachers," said Rayfield. "I also want to express my appreciation to our winners."

"This is one of the highlights of any educator's career. To be selected by their peers, their students or a combination thereof to be Teacher of the Year is an outstanding accomplishment. You're to be congratulated."



Dr. Rayfield thanking Bradley Stover, a second-grade student at Union County Primary School, for his winning 2016 Christmas design for the system's holiday cards.



Dr. Rayfield with Kayla Duckworth, who was named Teacher of the Year at Union County Elementary.