

Tax Increase...from Page 1A

property purchases; potential 2021 impacts with ongoing countywide property re-evaluations; a lack of community input and transparency in budgeting and property decisions; and perceived fiscal mismanagement.

Many attendees voiced concerns over the \$750,000 Hill Property purchase, deeming it inappropriate during COVID-19 economic uncertainty. Some thought the deal looked bad due to its proximity to former owner Mike Gowder. Others had problems with the property's life estate arrangement.

Regarding the \$800,000 purchase of the Old Shoe Factory property, critics asked why the deal couldn't wait until economic certainty returned. After all, the property last traded hands in 2006, so what's the rush when a new jail SPLOST vote is, at the very least, several years away?

In response, the commissioner appealed to his five-term track record of buying land for future purposes, saying the two recent acquisition announcements were nothing new for his office, which has consistently utilized property purchases to create recreational and other opportunities for residents, "making this a better county" where people want to come to live.

He also said both the Hill and Shoe Factory properties were previously budgeted items – one earmarked using property taxes, the other SPLOST funds – and that even without the purchases, he'd still have to raise taxes.

Furthermore, Paris said

that Blairsville Motel Properties Inc. – a company co-owned by W.C. Nelson and the late Bob Head Jr. – was in the process of offloading many of its holdings in the wake of Head's 2018 passing, including the Shoe Factory property, and that now was the time to act.

In terms of the countywide property re-evaluation that's currently ongoing, Paris said he did not believe longstanding properties with minor additions would see any big increases when the new assessments are implemented in 2021, and that mostly new construction would be captured.

Generally, Paris said he'd worked hard over the years – perhaps too hard – at keeping the millage rate "one of the lowest in the state," and that maybe he should have been increasing property taxes little by little over the years to avoid the current situation.

Multiple people asked Paris to get spending under control, and one resident, Vern Von Feldt, proposed he open the processes for budgeting and property purchases to residents for transparency's sake, and to prevent the perception of closed-door dealings that take place before being sprung on the public.

The commissioner said his office was looking into forming a community committee to garner public input moving forward.

Others noted how fixed-income seniors would likely struggle with the increase, and resident Hunter Partridge said the extra taxes would be tougher to absorb after having

lost his live entertainment job – perhaps for the long haul – due to COVID-19 restrictions on public gatherings.

Several people defended Paris Thursday, such as Lanny Plott, who said he'd known the commissioner since they were children and understood him to always want the best for the county.

Paris said his job was to "look down the road" when it came to operating the county, even during a pandemic, and resident Jack McKechnie said that, though he disagreed with the Hill Property purchase, he thought Paris was right in always planning ahead as commissioner.

In a particularly tense exchange in the evening hearing, as resident Doy Lively delivered comments unfavorably comparing Union County property taxes to those of other sole commissioner counties, Paris cut him off before he could finish, asking that a deputy be nearby to potentially remove Lively.

Many attendees vocally objected, and Paris later apologized, saying he'd been "out of line" and that he would "try to do better in the future," while noting that Lively's remarks implying he was responsible for high property taxes on Union County families had offended him.

The commissioner also alluded to an established contentious relationship with Lively, who is a board member for the Lake Nottely Improvement Association, which has been petitioning his office to pressure the City of Blairsville into stopping landfill leachate processing.

Workman...from Page 1A

be an international attorney for a European company and help them communicate, settle arrangements and contracts.

"Ideally, I'd like to get into a U.S. Embassy. I don't quite know where I will end up, I just know what I want to do. But I think I'll stick with Europe, just because I've always wanted to travel Europe, and why not do what you've always wanted to do?"

When the dust settled, she'd narrowed her college choices to a pair of highly respected law schools, the one in Cork and the University of Dublin. But ultimately, the edge went to Cork, thanks in large part to its location and academic prestige.

"I've never been to Ireland, so I didn't want to jump headfirst into a big metropolitan area," she said. "Cork is a

smaller city. It's still a city, but it's small enough that people know you're there.

"It's also a top 2 percent college in the world, and the reviews were outstanding, so that was a big factor. I talked to some of the kids after I joined the (Cork) Facebook group, and they were all excited for me."

Workman knows she'll have to go through an adjustment period, as she's never visited Ireland and her only exposure to the school has been via photographs. And when she starts missing home, she'll be able to look forward to returning for Christmastime and summers.

Making the transition easier is the fact that her dorm – a student-only apartment – will be fully furnished, alleviating some of the stress surrounding the upcoming move.

"I'll take sheets, a comforter, pillowcases, clothes, and a few supplies, and that's it," she said. "The (apartments) come with everything you need in a typical dorm room."

With only a few weeks to spare before moving across the pond, Workman has a special message for her family, friends and the people of Union County.

"There were lots of people in the community that helped me get where I'm going," she said. "None of this would've been possible without the community, especially Dr. (Jill) Olson, my school counselor. She helped me with everything, from making my schedule work with dual enrollment to writing me recommendation letters."

"I'm also very lucky to have parents as great as mine. They've been so supportive throughout this entire journey and have supported all of my dreams."

This past week we visited the farms of Clyde Woody and Don Clark both of which live over on the Morganton Highway. Clyde grows sweet corn, cabbage, collards, kale, tomatoes, peas, onions, squash, melons, potatoes, okra, butter beans, pole beans, cucumbers, peppers, beets, turnips, mustard sorghum cane, and field corn. His field corn has ears that are at least m1 ½ feet long! His family has been farming their bottom lands for generations. He and his wife Janine are some of the friendliest people you'll ever meet. You can find them in Building A in stall #10.

Don Clark produces tomatoes, okra, cucumbers, various squash, pepper, candy roasters, field corn, green beans and he specializes in producing honey. Many of the vegetables he grows are very old varieties. For example, the field corn he produces comes from seed that has been handed down to generations of Cherokee Indians. He also has some green beans that has been saved for generations. But, he is not limited to heirloom vegetables. He loves trying different types of squash. You can find Don in Building C, stall #63.

The Farmers Market Staff works diligently to keep the Market as a safe place during this pandemic. We have implemented many strategies during this pandemic all in an effort to keep the Market a safe and viable place to shop. As you know we have marked each booth 3 feet back from the center isle and asked vendors to keep their wares behind this mark. This strategy keeps the center isles from becoming to crowded with shoppers. We are also placing all walk-up

distance.

We have also asked our vendors to wear masks and we are giving away masks to those which want them. Driving around the pads of the Market is prohibited at this time for safety reasons. Entrances through the fence have been created at certain places where you can quickly enter the Market. If you have trouble walking that distance we can take you and your purchases back to your vehicle. Finally, we take each vendor's temperature each Saturday and Tuesday before the Market opens. If we find any vendor with a temperature greater than 100.4 that vendor will be asked to go home. Once again we are doing everything possible to keep the Market a safe and viable place for you to shop.

Get your back-to-school vaccines now

District 2 Public Health reminds all parents that children entering kindergarten, middle school and high school are required to have certain vaccinations and not all children are up-to-date on their shots. To help ensure all children get their vaccines, District 2 Health Departments will hold special clinics for school immunizations these dates:

Union County: September 8 – 11; Mon., Wed., Fri.: 8 AM to 5 PM; Tues. & Thurs.: 8 AM to 7 PM.

Towns County: September 14 – 18; Tues., Wed., Fri.: 8 AM to 5 PM; Mon. & Thurs.: 8 AM to 7 PM.

Glenda Gooch House available

The Glenda Gooch House is now available for use by families, from the tri-state area, of patients in Union General Hospital as well as local nursing and assisted living homes. For more information please contact Leslie Daniel at 706-745-2050, or log on to glendagoochhouse.org.