

Tax Rate Hearing...from Page 1A

decrease the budget shortfall.

He said he understood people's concerns, but that his office spent countless hours working the angles to figure out how to make Union the "best county to live in," adding that he'd take the input to heart moving forward, which may include the formation of a community committee.

As with the first two hearings, Paris garnered support as well, including from a woman named Pat Shaffer, whom Paris credited with inspiring the idea that ultimately led to the county's controversial \$750,000 purchase of the Hill

property recently owned by disgraced former hospital CEO Mike Gowder.

Shaffer, who is older and widowed, approached Paris several years ago to ask about local living arrangements for retirees like herself who can no longer care for their property but wish to live on their own in a retirement village of sorts that currently doesn't exist in Union.

This prompted Paris to think of 580 acres off Old Blue Ridge Highway – "the most beautiful piece of property in the county" – to potentially serve as a place to build just such a retirement development, private or otherwise. Further, the request for this kind of living was becoming more common in his office.

Once owned by longtime hospital board member Charles Hill, the acreage came into possession of Union General Hospital Inc. back in 2014 following foreclosure of the property, which the hospital board bought with the idea of eventually developing it into retirement living.

Paris defended purchasing the 3,382-acre piece of property carved out of the middle of the hospital's larger piece, despite the life estate for Jackie Hill, saying it had been about to go on the market,

and was necessary to unite the land for future development purposes.

He also said he'd do anything to help the hospital, reaffirming his belief that Union General – the top employer in Union – is the most important thing to the county, both as a medical resource for all, including the disproportionate number of retirees, and as an economic recruitment tool.

The meeting got out of order several times, with people shouting objections, talking over one another, and making political statements, and Paris had to ask two deputies to stand inside the courtroom, admonishing that if order could not be maintained he'd have people escorted out of the hearing.

Ultimately, Paris ended up accepting the new millage rate of 7.361 in a called meeting that took place immediately following the hearing, which went longer than planned, though most people had already cleared out of the room when he did it.

"It's a room full of people, but it's a very small portion of the population," Paris said afterward. "Are there other people out there that's going to be mad that their taxes were increased that didn't

come to the meeting? I'm sure there are.

"But I think there's also a significant number of people in the county who realize that, not only me, but our employees, our elected officials – everybody – works so hard to try to make this the best community anywhere.

"And I think most people understand that if a tax increase is coming along every few years to keep this place at the level it is, then so be it. Can you get mad at people that don't agree with you raising taxes for any reason? No, I'm not mad at them. I understand.

"Some people, that's just the ultimate negative for elected officials, if you raise my taxes. But in our case, we spent so much of our time for so many years trying to keep our taxes so low that, now, like I've said before, this came up and hit us. I hated it worse than anything I've had to do, but in the end, it's what we had to do."

After much consideration following the three public hearings, Paris decided over the weekend to lower the increase from 19.98% to 17% over the rollback rate, and he set the new millage rate in a called meeting that occurred after press time Monday.

Reduction...from Page 1A

rates in Georgia out of 159 counties since I have been in office. In trying to help the public with low taxes and provide the best facilities and services possible, this very low rate is just not sustainable any longer.

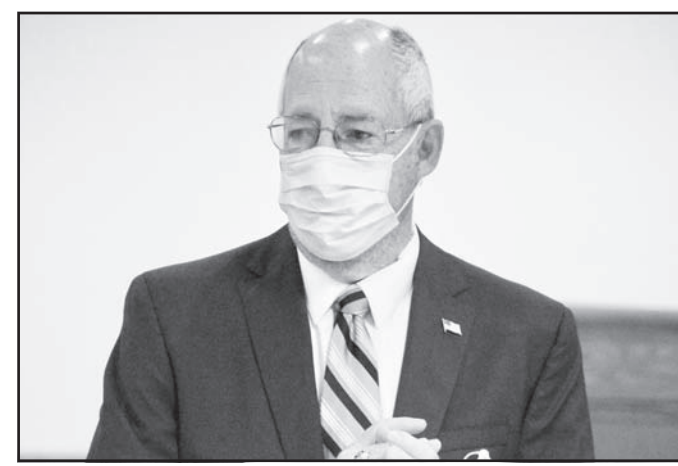
2. Increase of salaries for Sheriff and Jail deputies in order to maintain staff and not lose them to other counties.

3. In order to keep property taxes low, we have had to utilize the reserve funds to help balance the budget and need to replenish them.

4. Our medical insurance rates have increased each year, with 2018 increasing \$750,000, which we are still trying to make up for and are going up \$100,000 next year.

5. We are being required to have all property reevaluated in the county by next year and the cost is \$380,000.

6. Our commitment to a new gun range that has been in the works for nearly five years will be approximately \$500,000, and it is too late to change. Thanks to the Sheriff, 75% will be paid by grant



Lamar Paris

funding.

7. The State of Georgia has cut their budget 15%, which is estimated to impact the county library, drug court, health department, etc., by approximately \$70,000.

8. Vehicle maintenance and equipment repairs are up \$40,000.

9. Paving (LMIG Funds) from the Georgia Department of Transportation will be decreased \$104,000.

10. While the county

is being reimbursed for some of the COVID-19 funds, we have no idea what our cost and expense will be in 2021. We are just holding our breath with the huge amount of new infections we are now experiencing in the county and not sure what the future holds.

Thanks for your understanding, as we are all working very hard to keep our budget as low as possible, and we will all continue that process. Thank you!!

Weekly Patriot Reflection



Defense of Liberties

Two hundred and forty-two years ago, in 1777, Samuel Adams encouraged the Colonist to persevere against England. He said, "The liberties of our country, the freedoms of our civil Constitution are worth defending at all hazards; it is our duty to defend them against all attacks. We have received them as a fair inheritance from our worthy ancestors. They purchased them for us with toil and danger and expense of treasure and blood. It will bring a mark of everlasting infamy on the present generation – enlightened as it is – if we should suffer them to be wrested from us by violence without a struggle, or to be cheated out of them by the artifices of designing men."

Shortly after this he wrote: "Nil desperandum, -- Never Despair. That is a motto for you and me. All are not dead; and where there is a spark of patriotic fire, we will rekindle it."

It would be easy to despair when we realize the deterioration of our liberties and the dismantling of all that our ancestors fought to preserve and protect. If we call ourselves patriots we must stand and use every means possible to protect what almighty God has bestowed on our great nation.

A Patriot Reflection is presented weekly by www.joshuaswarriors.org.

Sons of Confederate Veterans meeting

David W. Payne Camp #1633, Sons of Confederate Veterans, continues to meet the second Thursday of each month at 7 PM.

Our new meeting location is the Davenport Veterans Building, across the 4-lane from Longhorn.

Outbreak...from Page 1A

the resources that we are able to lend to them from the hospital setting, with what we've learned in dealing with it at the hospital. That's been huge for us.

"I really can't say, in all honesty, that there's anything we could have done differently. Of course, we all wish that we wouldn't have had an outbreak, but I don't know that there's anything more that we could have done differently to have prevented it."

Added Barnett, "They have just worked so hard trying to keep it out. And they did a great job for over six months

keeping it out, but I think the prevalence in the community is what caused our issue in the end."

The number of cases at Chatuge Regional Nursing Home has fluctuated in the state data recently, going from five to two total positive residents and one employee, with full recoveries all around.

Barnett said the families of all nursing home residents are alerted each time new cases crop up in one of the system's long-term care facilities.