

County Budget...from Page 1A

medical and drug costs.

"Next year is election year with the presidential election going on and all the state elections, Paris said. "The state is requiring all counties to have new equipment, which means more election workers and more security for the elections.

"The state has provided funds for that initial equipment, the number of voting machines, but (the process) is completely different. We've added about \$50,000 this year for the election, and that's probably a conservative number."

Commissioner Paris noted that, with the economy doing as well as it is, "it seems like every service in the county is going up."

"The reason it costs more is because all your workers – well, with full employment, you've got to pay top dollar," said Paris, adding that the cost of materials is going up as well. "Our property and liability insurance, which is the insurance on the buildings themselves and the contents, has roughly gone up \$50,000 in the last four years.

"The cost of supplies continues to increase, as does the cost of services. Power, water, internet, sewer – all those things go up. Most of our business is done locally to try to give back to the community.

"Asphalt prices went ... from \$71.50 in 2018 to \$82.50 in 2019, an \$11 per ton increase," said Paris, adding that at times he saw \$86 per ton. "In 2019, we purchased around 9,300 tons of asphalt. So, just our asphalt cost went up about \$100,000.

"All court-related costs have been increasing over the last four years. Public Defender's Office is up \$50,000. Juvenile Court is up \$60,000. District Attorney's Office is up \$70,000.

"In order to retain our deputies and jailers we have had to increase salaries consistently over the last four years, and especially over the last two years, to be competitive. We feel comfortable that our pay is at or above several of the surrounding counties."

Paris said the Sheriff's Office budget is up more than \$200,000 in 2020, clarifying that he wasn't saying anything

negative, "it's just that costs are going up and the salaries are the biggest part of our costs."

"In January, the Sheriff's Office is trading in 10 of their highest mileage 2019 Ford Explorers for 10 2020 Dodge Durangos," he said, adding that he hopes to get trade-in costs down to between \$2,000 and \$4,000 per year in the future.

"Thanks to the sheriff and his staff," Paris said following his Dec. 27 called meeting. "They are doing a great job of maintaining expenses at a reasonable rate despite cost demands at the jail and for the law enforcement officers to continue to perform their jobs."

Without revenues, which are currently pacing expenditures and allowing the county to keep up with increasing costs, "we wouldn't be able to do all this stuff," the commissioner said.

According to Paris, building permits have increased \$130,000; title and ad valorem taxes have increased \$110,000; real estate transfer tax has increased \$35,000; Local Option Sales Tax collections have increased about \$300,000;

and transportation fares have increased about \$10,000.

Furthermore, insurance premium tax has increased \$400,000, which he said was really significant, and the county has experienced increases in other revenue sources since Paris set last year's budget.

"And this all helps to keep our millage rate lower as we use the revenue received in the calculation of our tax rollback," Paris said, noting that, based on last year's millage rates for all 159 counties in Georgia, "we're still third lowest in the state if you total our school and county together."

"If you pull just the county portion out ... we're at No. 6 this year," Paris said, adding later that "many counties are dealing with the same issues, and we are proud to be able to maintain our property tax rate so low."

"Without the cooperation of every county department head and elected official, and our hardworking staff, maintaining our property taxes at this low level would be impossible," Paris said. "It takes us all working together to make this happen."

EMC Meetings...from Page 1A

the needs of nearly 1,000 member-owners across 48 states," according to www.nrucfc.coop.

The two men presented findings from a "Key Ratio Trend Analysis," an annual report comparing performance and other characteristics of 814 co-ops around the nation, such as total kWh of electricity sold, miles of power line, number of employees, residential vs. small business, etc.

A key aspect of the presentation was a breakdown of how BRMEMC stacked up against other co-ops in the Tennessee Valley Authority, as well as co-ops of a similar size to itself in the state and nation.

The analysis showed that, while BRMEMC is larger than the median consumer-size of other co-ops in the TVA, state and nation, it's actually among the lowest in terms of power sales per consumer.

BRMEMC is last in power sales among the 42 local power companies in the TVA and second to last in the state. And with BRMEMC's customer base being primarily residential, the co-op is relying on below-average kWh usage to recover fixed costs.

Further complicating the picture is the fact that, when it comes to total miles of line, BRMEMC is higher than the median consumer-size in the TVA, state and nation with 6,000 miles of line, but it is near the bottom in terms of average consumers per mile.

According to BRMEMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms and the "Key Ratio Trend Analysis," low sales coupled with low consumer density have translated to lower fixed cost recovery on average per consumer compared to the median consumer-size for the TVA, state and nation.

Nelms said this low usage and low consumer density puts additional stress

on the electric rates paid by members of BRMEMC, as reflected in the co-op's total power costs per kWh being second highest in the TVA due to the infrastructure needed to keep people's lights on and low usage per consumer that is collected to pay for the 6,000 miles of line.

This furthers Nelms' position that BRMEMC is having to do more with less, which has proven increasingly tricky in recent years, especially given the \$105 million in debt for which the co-op is still on the hook.

Ultimately, the presentation concluded in a review of a special ratio that Nelms worked with CFC to produce, which is cost of service per consumer.

When reviewing what it takes to serve the EMC membership on a per consumer basis, Nelms said BRMEMC finds itself in the lowest 10 percentile in the nation and lowest in the Valley and state of Georgia.

Nelms contends this metric shows just how efficient BRMEMC operates day in and day out for its membership.

Also in the December meeting, Nelms reported that a letter had been sent out to the EMC's TV customers informing them of the discontinuation of TV services on May 20, 2020.

In November, the board discussed the possibility of providing Roku streaming devices free of charge to members whose service was to be disrupted, but board members decided they didn't want to incur the thousands of dollars in cost at the expense of members who aren't TV customers.

Instead, TV subscribers who have access to BRMEMC fiber optic internet will receive six months of upgraded services at no additional cost, which is in line with recent discussions the EMC has had about encouraging customers to use internet-based TV.

EMC Director of Engineering Daniel Frizzell said recently that the staff wanted to provide something to members who will be losing the longstanding service, both to

thank them for their patronage and to retain them as customers for the co-op's expanding broadband business.

The monthly board meetings continue to feature member guests, many of whom petition the board to speak.

Addressing the board in the December meeting were Carlos Gonzalez, Lucille Heil, Randy Mazie and Rosemary Walker.

Gonzalez, a retired Marine and Blairsville-based minister, asked that the EMC simplify the language surrounding the contract early termination fee for fiber service to make it easier for people to understand.

Heil of Towns County, a repeat attendee associated with the grassroots effort known as Families Against Inequitable Rates, continued her previously reported criticisms of how the 2019 annual meeting was conducted.

Mazie of Union County, also with F.A.I.R., called on the EMC to promote greater transparency by opening meetings to the general public, not just to members who petition the board. He also asked for an improved member comment experience, to include more substantive replies from EMC leadership.

Continuing, Mazie requested that the board lift the prohibition on photography and video recording by members in the board meetings, and he asked that the board be more open to sharing internal documents with the membership.

Walker of Blairsville thanked EMC employees, board members and Nelms, saying she believed they did a good job considering the circumstances they inherited. She went on to wish everyone at Blue Ridge Mountain EMC a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

In the November meeting, Walker asked the board to consider providing an indoor seating area to keep folks from having to wait outdoors or in their cars during the cold winter months. This request was repeated by Mazie in his December comments.

Weekly Patriot Reflection



Joshua 24:15

One of the two guiding scriptures of Joshua's Warriors is Joshua 24:15 which says, "And if it seems evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom you shall serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD!"

Joshua is at the end of his life and has called all the tribes of Israel together to recount the mighty works of God so that they would be encouraged to continue serving God. It was part history lesson and part rallying cry, but the intent was to glorify God and proclaim that He had not changed and would continue to guide them.

In our nation we have lost sight of all that God has done for us! We are quick to testify of all that WE have done, with no acknowledgment of God's work in sustaining this great nation.

It is time that we start giving credit, where credit is due, and proclaim that we will serve God in our country, and in our homes. We were created first and foremost, to glorify God with our lives.

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



Sons of Confederate Veterans
Defending History Since 1896

Are you the male descendant of a Confederate Veteran and tired of seeing American history maligned, reinterpreted and erased?

Consider joining the

David W. Payne Camp #1633, Sons of Confederate Veterans. Monthly meetings are held in the Community Room of the United Community Bank in Blairsville, across from Chick-fil-A, the second Thursday of every month at 7 p.m. Meetings are of a historical nature and the public is welcome to attend.