

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Paris catches earful in tax increase hearings; third hearing Thursday

By Shawn Jarrard  
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More than 80 residents combined attended a pair of millage rate public hearings held by Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris on Thursday, Aug. 20 – and most attendees were clearly displeased with the impending tax increase.

As previously reported, Paris plans to raise the millage rate to cover major budget shortfalls ahead of Fiscal Year 2021, and state law requires him to hold three public hearings prior to adoption of the increased rate.

The rate is rising 19.98 percent above the current rollback to 7.361 mills. Paris was quick to note that, while it may be a 20-percent increase in county taxes, due to the

school district's higher share of property taxes in the combined tax bill, total taxes are only going up about 7 percent from 2019.

He will hold a third public hearing on the proposed tax increase on Thursday, Aug. 27, at 6 p.m. in the Union County Courthouse, and he will set the new millage rate in a called meeting immediately following the public hearing at 6:30 p.m.

The increase will result in about \$1.7 million in additional taxes levied in the county, though Paris said his staff originally came to him with a nearly \$3 million budget shortfall that he was able to whittle down to the lower amount.

Paris listed multiple reasons for the tax increase, including significant property

tax revenue shortages for 2020, necessary salary increases, reserve fund depletion with a need to build back up, greater health care costs for the 160 county employees, the potential local match funds for the upcoming public gun range, state budget cuts and more.

Doing nothing, he said, would result in the layoff of at least 35 employees and dramatically impact services in the county.

Due to physical distancing required by a judicial order signed earlier this summer, the morning and evening public hearings on Aug. 20 both featured standing-room only crowds inside the courthouse.

The most repeated tax hike complaints were the sudden sharp increase, especially in a pandemic; Paris' judgement in  
*See Tax Increase, Page 2A*



This courtroom at the Union County Courthouse was standing-room only for the commissioner's two public tax increase hearings last week. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Workman headed 'across the pond' to prestigious Irish university

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

High School Union County graduate Jordan Workman will continue her education next month in "The Land of Saints and Scholars" when she attends University College Cork in Ireland.

With aspirations of practicing international law, the 2020 graduate's lifelong ambitions were confirmed after completing a senior-year internship with the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office in Union County.

"For as long as I can remember, that's all I've wanted to do," Workman said. "Then I worked in the District Attorney's Office to see if it's actually something I still



Jordan Workman

want to do, and I loved every bit of it."

When the time came to prepare for higher education, like most teenagers evaluating their future, several local schools topped her list.

A journey to the Emerald Isle wasn't even on her

radar, but during an in-depth conversation with an educator at a nearby college open house, Workman expressed a desire to someday visit Ireland. And surprisingly, the professor's advice combined the best of both worlds.

"Going to Ireland has always been a dream, and (the professor) asked why I wasn't doing a direct entry into an Irish school," Workman said. "And I thought to myself, 'Why aren't I doing that? That's a great idea.'"

After researching, Workman discovered she could earn a degree in Ireland and become a practicing attorney in just five years.

"If I stayed home (in the States), I would've taken pre-law," Workman said. "But going over there, I'm going to do law. I would like to  
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## School board members hear budget talk; Hill welcomes guests

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Members of the Union County Board of Education gathered – three in person and two virtually – for their first regular meeting back after the official start of the 2020-21 school year.

The meeting took place in the board office on Tuesday, Aug. 18, and was preceded by a budget public hearing that featured no members of the public attending to offer comment.

School districts around the state have been facing unprecedented financial challenges ahead of the current school year due to the many economic impacts of COVID-19.

In Union County, the schools have had to absorb a \$1.5 million cut to state "Quality Basic Education" funding, plus about \$1 million in coronavirus mitigation costs, i.e. face masks, various cleaning equipment and supplies, etc., to



Superintendent John Hill

keep the schools and buses safe for in-person instruction this year.

Fortunately, Superintendent John Hill said that, thanks to CARES Act monies, staff attrition and fund reserves, his office has been able to make the FY21 budget work without having to increase the millage rate.

As advertised, the 2020 millage rate for the upcoming budget will be 11.74, as it has been since 2018. That millage rate will be set in a called meeting on Aug. 26 at 8:30 a.m. inside the board office.

Hill said the tentative budget would be available for the school board's review  
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## Landfill leachate saga continues in packed county meeting Aug. 20

By Shawn Jarrard  
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The local leachate saga continued in last week's well-attended county meeting, as Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris welcomed three guests to talk water quality at the Union County Courthouse Aug. 20.

First up was Carole Lively of the Lake Nottely Improvement Association, or LNIA, which has been petitioning Paris to influence the City of Blairsville to stop processing landfill runoff, aka leachate.

Leachate is known to contain manmade chemicals called per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, that have been shown to be harmful to the environment and people. PFAS exist in many imported goods,



Callie Moore of MountainTrue attended the Aug. 20 county meeting to set the record straight on E. coli in Butternut Creek. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

and they are not currently regulated in water treatment.

Since summer 2019, the city's sewer plant has been

legally processing about 11,000 gallons a day of out-of-county landfill runoff from a business  
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## Educators, students optimistic after smooth first week back



Union County middle schoolers letting out of classes to load the bus at the end of school last week. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County staff and students returned to campus Aug. 17 – with COVID-19 precautions in place, of course, including mask wearing, social distancing where possible, and good hygiene to limit the virus' spread.

Woody Gap Principal Carol Knight said she was happy with the willingness of students to follow these new guidelines to help make the year safer and allow students wanting in-person instruction to return to the classroom.

"It is going very well here, we got off to a good start," Knight said. "Our middle school and high school students were already familiar with the

online format because we had started that last year. We haven't missed a beat, really. We have everything up and running, and the kids are working on their academics.

"We have done a lot of training on the safety protocols for the kids, like handwashing, social distancing. We have reduced furniture in the classroom so that we can maximize the students' space.

"We already had low enrollment, and a third of our students selected online learning, which was very good in terms of having fewer kids physically in the building."

For Woody Gap students such as sophomore Molli Tritt, being back in the classroom is great, and she considers that other students are following the

new guidelines well.

Additionally, the use of Google Classroom is helping students attend virtual classes on the main campus while remaining in Suches.

"It has been a little stressful trying to figure out all our classes because we are limited to a certain number of students per classroom," Tritt said. "We have had to change schedules a lot, and a couple of our classes are completely online because our teacher is on the other side of the mountain."

"Other than that, it is pretty great. The classes are fairly simple, and we all know what to do. The masks are a little annoying, but we have a few teachers that are high risk, and we have to wear a mask for  
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## Community encouraged but determined to keep COVID-19 down

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Many people in the area are remaining vigilant in the face of COVID-19, even as new cases, hospitalizations and deaths appear to be declining around the United States, including in the South.

While enjoying a game of 10 pins at Galaxy Bowling Saturday, Jake Gladich of Murphy, North Carolina, was happy to hear that COVID-19 seemed on a downward trend in many areas.

"It is wonderful news to hear that it is on the decline if it actually is," Gladich said. "Last time I heard it was on the  
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Union Countians and visitors to the area enjoying a day on the town last week. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

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