

County Meeting
December 19, 2024, 6:00pm
Minutes
Union County Courthouse

**Several items on this agenda did not meet the minimum legal requirements for acceptance by Union County. A footnote will be designated for each of these items for further explanation.*

Commissioner Paris stated the meeting was going to be long with a lot of items to go over. The previous County Meeting was cancelled due to sickness so there was a lot to cover.

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Lamar Paris at 6:00 pm. The invocation was given by Fire Chief, David Dyer, and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Bill Walker. Commissioner Paris added that he was sorry Bill's wife, Marilyn, couldn't make it. The minutes from the September 19, 2024 County Meeting and the October 17, 2024 County Meeting were approved as presented.

First, there was a presentation from Sid Turner from the Sons of the American Revolution to present awards to a Firefighter, Sheriff's Deputy and EMS Personnel. Mr. Sid Turner came to the front and his comments are summarized as follows: Mr. Sid Turner, Vice President Blue Ridge Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution introduced himself, Jared Ogden, the incoming President and Mr. Steve Weaver, the current President.

Mr. Steve Weaver's comments are summarized as follows: The Blue Ridge Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution are centered in Blairsville and cover Towns County, Union County, Gilmer County and Fannin County. They trace their ancestry to American Patriots that established the country. His ancestor was a Private in the Rhode Island Militia and only 17 years old in 1776 when he served for 21 months, being discharged in 1778. Mr. Weaver brought greetings from the fifty chapter members who collectively support the presentation of these Public Service Awards. The goals of the organization are patriotic, historic and educational. American values and principles are celebrated in public service, specifically first responders in Fire Service, Law Enforcement and Emergency Medical Service. Annually in the four counties, the Sons of the American Revolution choose one individual for each category which amounts to twelve awards and then any heroic efforts after that. These awards tonight show support for Law Enforcement and Emergency Medical Services and provide recognition to individuals who have served with distinction and devotion. The certificates and medals recognize that exceptional service in Law Enforcement and EMS here in Union County.

Mr. Turner called up Chief Deputy, John George. Mr. Turner's comments are summarized as follows: Chief Deputy, John George started his law enforcement career as a patrol officer in 1977. During his career his training, education and positions consisted of becoming a Certified Fire Fighter to participate in the Public Safety Program. He worked traffic on motorcycles, was a mounted patrol officer, a detective, and a criminal investigator. He was promoted to Sergeant and served as Patrol Supervisor. John was promoted to Lieutenant where he served as a Shift Commander and CID Commander supervising special operations which included traffic, mounted patrol, canine, etc. He was also a supervisor in the Support Services Division which oversaw the administrative components of the agency including community policing, crime prevention, budgeting and purchasing. John was promoted to Captain where he was the

Administrative Commander where he was primarily responsible for the business side of the agency. He became the Project Manager for a 50,000 sq. ft. new police facility and oversaw the design and construction as well as the equipment and relocation of the old building. In 1999 he was appointed as Chief of Police after competing for the position with 140 other participants. He served nine years before retiring after 30 years of service. At the time of his retirement, he served approximately 100,000 residents. The operating budget for the police department was approximately \$35,000,000 and had over 250 employees. John holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration, he is a graduate of Academy No. 189 and a graduate of the University of Louisville Southern Police Institute. His background and experience made him an asset to Sheriff Mack Mason. Chief Deputy, John George was presented the Law Enforcement Commendation Medal.

John George stated that Union County is his home, and he is honored to be here. He closed by saying, "if you ever need anything just call us, we make house calls."

Sheriff Mason closed with the following statements: Once he heard John's qualifications, he knew he needed to hire him. John has been a blessing from the Lord. The compassion that he has for people in this county is unparalleled. Those qualifications far exceed anything else around here. John has opted to stay on through the transition with Sheriff Dyer when he comes in on the 1st of the year. I could not be more honored or proud that God put him in my path to help serve the citizens.

Mr. Turner called up Debra Stancil and his comments are summarized as follows: Debra has been with Union General EMA since 2015 and has worked full-time since 2021. Debra is a very dependable employee with a positive attitude. She can be trusted to care for her patients with little to no supervision and always serves with respect and a smile. Her desire to provide quality patient care makes her a great EMT, a great person and an asset to the county and the people she serves. Debra Stancil was presented with the EMS Service Award.

Mr. Turner called up Mrs. Kendra King to present the Murray King Award that goes along with the EMS Service Award. Her comments are summarized as follows: Congratulations to Debra. She is receiving the Murray King Award in his memory for the fine job they did when I had to call for help eleven years ago. On behalf of his daughter Melanie, and his daughter Michelle, grandchildren Rylan, Cameron, and Caden, Debra we are very proud to have you receive this award because you exemplify many of the qualities that Murray took into his career, community and family. Thank you for your service and we are very proud of you.

Item number two on the Agenda is a Proclamation. There are more than 145,000 retired educators in Georgia, with 33,000 being members of the Georgia Retired Educators Association. The retired educators of Georgia donate thousands of hours of volunteer service and make invaluable contributions to the welfare of their respective communities across the state. It is appropriate that a day be designated for citizens to express their appreciation for the contributions that retired educators have made and continue to make for the betterment of human lives and for society. Commissioner Paris proclaimed November 3, 2024 as "Retired Educators Day" and called upon the citizens of Union County to observe that day in an appropriate manner honoring retired educators. This proclamation was signed in the Courthouse on October 21, 2024 with some of the retired educators.

Commissioner Paris adopted the Union County Government Financial Management Policy. This policy has an effective date of December 19, 2024. Union County has not had an officially adopted financial management policy in place but has and does adhere to all the policies as defined and described in this policy. These policies needed to be formalized in order for Union County to apply for grants, both state and federal, in the future.

The Commissioner approved an Affidavit of Appointment of Elizabeth Stevens to the Union County Board of Elections for the term of January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2028. The Election Board consists of five Board Members. Two appointments are made by the Democratic Party and two appointments are made by the Republican Party. The 5th appointment is made by the governing body. This is the appointment made by the governing body. **1. This item did not meet the minimum legal requirements for acceptance by the governing authority, therefore there was no legal authority to bind.*

The Commissioner accepted an agreement between Mallory & Evans Service Co., Inc. and Union County to remove and replace the existing heating and cooling rooftop units at the Union County Community Center in the amount of \$637,355.00. The estimated schedule to complete the work is 180 days from the delivery of the units. The units are currently 14 years old and do not heat or cool properly resulting in a needed upgrade. The amount of this agreement will be paid out of SPLOST.

Commissioner Paris accepted an agreement between Union County and the Blairsville/Union County Chamber of Commerce for the distribution of 70% of funds received from the Hotel-Motel Excise Tax. This agreement is effective from January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025. **2. This item did not meet the minimum legal requirements for acceptance by the governing authority, therefore there was no legal authority to bind.*

The Commissioner accepted an Agreement Amendment between CorrectHealth Union, LLC and Union County for inmate health services at the Union County Jail. This is a renewal of a 12-month contract effective January 1, 2025, for a contract total of \$192,431.60. This is only a 2% increase, or an increase of \$3,773.17, from the 2024 agreement. **3. This item did not meet the minimum legal requirements for acceptance by the governing authority, therefore there was no legal authority to bind.*

Commissioner Paris accepted an Agreement Amendment between S&L Integrated Systems, LLC and Union County in the credit amount of \$1,566.00. The original agreement was for new and updated equipment in all courtrooms, the Grand Jury Room and the Jury Assembly Room in the Union County Courthouse in the amount of \$449,999.01. This agreement decreases the total amount of the original agreement by \$1,566.00 due to change orders in the scope of work and materials needed. The funding for these upgrades was provided through the Judicial ARPA Grant and Union County will be reimbursed at 100% from this grant.

All attendees were provided a copy of the list of Business Licenses issued in Union County from October 14, 2024 to December 15, 2024 for the purpose of operating a Short-term Rental in Union County. The Commissioner approved all Business Licenses contained on the list provided and this list will be made a part of the minutes.

Commissioner Paris accepted a Deed of Easement between Cameron S. Hill & Cooper J. Hill and Union County for a nonexclusive perpetual easement for only the purpose of relocating Groundwater Monitoring

Well CWC-14 along with a limited easement of ingress and egress to maintain, monitor and repair the well on a certain tract or parcel of land located on 1159 Deep South Farm Road, Blairsville, GA 30512 specifically Deed Book 1125, Page Number 629. Union County is required to monitor groundwater wells located around the old landfill that was located where the Transfer Station is now. This is part of state and federal EPD requirements for post closure monitoring of landfills. Groundwater near closed landfills is required to be monitored for a minimum of 25 years after the closure. This particular well on the Hill Farm dried up and it is required that Union County dig another well for the purpose of monitoring on a semi-annual basis.

The Commissioner accepted an Easement between Windy Hill Y.H., LLC and Union County. This will be for a road easement between Union County owned property at the Farmers Market and the adjoining parcel owned by Windy Hill Y.H., LLC. found specifically in Plat Book 75, Page Number 84. The road that comes off Hwy 515 and gives access to Tractor Supply on the right, across the street from that road entrance, there is an opportunity to gain access for another road entrance should it be decide in the future that another entrance is needed into the Farmers Market. Because of the work that is being done on Hwy 515 between Blairsville and Young Harris, now is the time to make sure we can have access to that side of the property off Hwy 515. This easement is the first step in making sure this will be possible.

Commissioner Paris accepted the Accountability Courts Grant K25-8-014 for Local Law Enforcement in the amount \$5,135. The grant period is from January 1, 2025 to June 30, 2025. **4. This item did not meet the minimum legal requirements for acceptance by the governing authority, therefore there was no legal authority to bind.*

The Commissioner accepted the award of the 2023 Assistance to Firefighters Grant awarded to the Union County Fire Department in the amount of \$68,050.65 that requires a 10% match by Union County in the amount of \$6,805.07. The performance period for this grant is from August 19, 2024 to August 18, 2026. This grant will be used to purchase supply and attack lines for various fire trucks within the fleet.

Commissioner Paris accepted a Lease Agreement between Positive Pathways, Inc. and Union County for the use of office and meeting space located at 243 Hunt Martin Street, Blairsville, Georgia in the amount of \$0.00 per month. The duration of this lease will be from December 1, 2024 to November 30, 2025. Positive Pathways is an organization that provides recovery and mental health services for those in the recovery community. This is their 3rd year, and they keep growing and expanding their services to those in need.

The Commissioner accepted a Lease Agreement between Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park, Inc. and Union County for the property located on Patriots Way, Blairsville, Georgia for the purpose of displaying the Veteran's Memorial, its related monuments and continuous sidewalks as well as activities related to ceremonies, education and common public viewing. The term of this lease commences on December 19, 2024 and ends on December 31, 2034. The cost of this lease is \$1.00 per year. This lease is for the Veterans Memorial Park that is located next to the top ballfields in Meeks Park.

Commissioner Paris accepted a Lease Agreement between Union County Hospital Authority and Union County, a Political Subdivision of the State of Georgia for the 2.0 acres of real property and the facility as shown in Deed Book 189, page 584 with the address of 683 Ledford Road, Blairsville, GA 30512. The

cost of this lease is \$1.00 per year with an effective date of January 1, 2025. This facility has been operated as a childcare facility by the Union County Hospital Authority since 2014 providing a much-needed service to working parents in Union County. The Authority has invested over ½ million dollars in facility upgrades since then and has been solely responsible for the maintenance of the facility.

**5. This item did not meet the minimum legal requirements for acceptance by the governing authority, therefore there was no legal authority to bind.*

The Commissioner adopted a Lease Agreement between Medlink, Georgia, Inc. and Union County for the use of the commercial building and premises located at 56 Firewater Lane, Suches, Georgia in the amount of \$100.00 per month. The duration of this lease will be from January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025. **6. This item did not meet the minimum legal requirements for acceptance by the governing authority, therefore there was no legal authority to bind.*

Commissioner Paris adopted the County Meeting Schedule for 2025. Attendees were provided a copy of the meeting schedule and they are scheduled for the 3rd Thursday of each month.

The next two items on the agenda were 1st readings of ordinance revisions. Renee Deibert is going to present these to you as she has worked with the Alcohol Board on revisions to the Alcohol Ordinance and the Short-term Rental Board on revisions to the Short-term Rental Ordinance. Attendees were provided with a summary of the changes versus the entire ordinance. If you would like a copy of the entire ordinance with the revisions included copies will be available in the Commissioner's Office and the Clerk of Courts Office on Monday and will be posted on the website as well.

Renee Deibert's presentation is summarized as follows: The Short-term Rental Program as well as Alcohol Licensing is monitored and controlled by two individual boards. When it comes to making changes for these kinds of things the board goes through a process. Many times, those changes are a result of the suggestions from the community. The changes to the Alcohol Ordinance are highlighted in red. Some of these are grammatical changes. There were also some inconsistencies as can be seen with the changing of 30 seats to 16 seats. Additionally, the County Clerk no longer issues Alcohol Licenses, so in the ordinance mentions of the County Clerk were changed to County Agent. Section 10-83(j) this whole section should not be there. A few years ago, servers were required to have a permit to serve alcohol. The Alcohol Board did away with that requirement a few years ago and for some reason this section never made it out of the ordinance. Therefore, section 10-83(j) should come out of the ordinance. For the Short-Term Rental Ordinance there are just a few changes, and these changes came directly as a result of community suggestions. The word annually. When someone applies for a short-term rental license, they provide information. What the ordinance did not refer to was that when they go to renew, they have to provide the same information again. Just to make sure it is all accurate, the word annually was added to the ordinance. Additionally, under Section 60-8(4) we are adding the wording "The Good Neighbor Notification must be distributed to neighbors prior to the date of the first rental." We learned, that although the "Good Neighbor Notification" is required before the home is rented, some of those notices were going out late. The Good Neighbor Notification is a document notifying neighbors that a specific property is going to be rented as a short-term rental. Therefore, if someone is going to rent a home as a Short-term Rental, they have to notify neighbors within a certain distance from that home so they know what is going on in the neighborhood.

Commissioner Paris stated that he missed asking the representative from the Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park, Chuck Honaker, to come up and say a few words. Chuck Honaker then asked the Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park Committee to stand up to be recognized. The following people were thanked for their efforts on the project: Chairman, Ed Crenshaw; Treasurer, Jim Reeves; Fund Raising, Rob Mawyer; Media, Social Media and Website, Derek Nagel. Chuck Honaker stated he is in charge of Communications for the group. He further stated that Commissioner Lamar Paris has made significant contributions to the local veteran community during his tenure. The following is only a partial list of things he has done for Veterans: He dedicated meeting space in the old Chamber of Commerce that is the Major Leon Davenport Veterans Building. Through proclamations and resolutions, he has repeatedly shown his support of veterans. Along with Mayor Jim Conley, he named the road going to the Union County War Memorial, Veterans Memorial Drive and he also dedicated the bridge at Ivy Log Creek as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge. He authorized the use of land at Meeks Park for the display of the mobile Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, and he declared Union County a Purple Heart County on June 17, 2021. This recognition honors veterans wounded or killed in combat and connects the county to the National Purple Heart Trail, which is a symbolic network of roads and landmarks dedicated to those who received the Purple Heart Medal. This designation emphasizes Union County's respect and gratitude for its military community. Commissioner Paris played a key role in establishing the Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park by allocating a one-acre track of county land in Meeks Park. Because of its location in Meeks Park, it is highly visible to the youth in our community and will remind them that Freedom is not free. This park honors all military service members with branch monuments, a compass rose centerpiece, and VSO monuments. It is a tribute to local veterans reflecting his commitment to recognizing their sacrifices. Commissioner Lamar Paris has indeed demonstrated remarkable dedication to honoring and supporting the veteran community in Union County Georgia. His contributions highlight his deep respect for military service and his commitment to creating meaningful spaces as well as recognition for veterans. Mr. Honaker closed with the following: "On behalf of all veterans, I want to thank you for your unwavering support." He asked all veterans to stand for applause. "We salute you and wish you and Dinah the very best in your future endeavors."

The Commissioner adopted Resolution R-2024-19 appointing Courtney Waller to the Board of Directors of the Union County Development Authority for the term of December 31, 2024 to December 30, 2028. Mrs. Waller will be filling the seat on the Board that was previously held by Bill McGlamery. Mr. McGlamery was an excellent board member, and his dedicated service is appreciated.

Commissioner Paris adopted Resolution R-2024-20 re-appointing Dr. Elizabeth Wiles to the Union County Board of Health for a term of six years set to begin on January 1, 2025, and expire on December 31, 2030. The Commissioner mentioned that legal was checked with the legal people before doing these things. He was not trying to fit in a bunch of items prior to the new Commissioner coming in. The law says that if it stops on December 31st that is when you can renew it for next year. We are doing this to save the incoming commissioner a lot of work. **7. This item did not meet the minimum legal requirements for acceptance by the governing authority, therefore there was no legal authority to bind.*

The Commissioner adopted Resolution R-2024-21 re-appointing William Stone to the Union County Board of Health for a term of six years set to begin on January 1, 2025, and expire on December 31, 2030. **8. This item did not meet the minimum legal requirements for acceptance by the governing authority, therefore there was no legal authority to bind.*

Commissioner Paris adopted Resolution R-2024-22 authorizing the Sole Commissioner of Union County to execute on behalf of the County any and all documents necessary and proper to become a participant in the ACCG-IRMA Supplemental Medical, Accident, and Disability Fund known as the First Responder PTSD Program. Chief Dyer stated this is in reference to House Bill 451. It is supplemental insurance that the county is required to provide to all first responders. It is for mental health services beyond what their insurance covers, the best I can understand.

The Commissioner accepted a Participation Agreement between ACCG-Interlock Risk Management (ACCG-IRMA) and Union County for Union County to participate in the ACCG-IRMA Georgia First Responder PTSD Program in the amount of \$26,662.00 for one year of coverage. This program referred to as the ACCG-IRMA Critical Illness Lump Sum PTSD Diagnosis Benefit and Long-Term Disability coverage components are designed to comply with House Bill 451 (Commissioner said House Bill 431).

Union County held a Public Hearing on December 5, 2024 at 5:00pm to discuss and answer any questions regarding the proposed budget. Attendees were provided a copy of the proposed budget attached the agenda. The Commissioner then adopted Resolution R-2024-23 to adopt the FY2025 Budget in the amount of \$28,053,041. This was a 3.7% increase from the 2024 Budget.

Commissioner Paris adopted Resolution R-2024-24 authorizing Renee Deibert to perform all necessary enforcement functions and to issue and prosecute citations in relation to violations of Chapter 10, Article III of the Union County Code of Ordinances known as the Alcohol Ordinance. She will be filling the position held by Robert Head. I would like to thank Robert for his many years of service. He has held this position since 2011.

The Commissioner adopted Resolution R-2024-25 agreeing to the judge of the probate court and his or her successors in office whether by election or appointment to waive any payment due to him or her by the county treasurer for any services rendered as provided in O.C.G.A 31-10-8.

Union County determined that 0.103 acres of Dillard Chapel Road has ceased to be used by the public to the extent that no substantial public purpose is served by this portion of said road. This road has trees growing in it. Attendees were provided a plat of survey by Cleveland and Cox Land Surveying, LLC, dated 01/06/2022 and recorded in Plat Book 73, Page 15 showing this portion of Dillard Chapel Road. Commissioner Paris then abandoned this portion of road since it was determined to no longer serve a public purpose.

Union County determined that 0.039 acres of Old Dillard Chapel Road has ceased to be used by the public to the extent that no substantial public purpose is served by this portion of said road. Attendees were provided a plat of survey by Cleveland and Cox Land Surveying, LLC, dated 01/06/2022 and recorded in Plat Book 73, Page 15 showing this portion of Dillard Chapel Road. The Commissioner then abandoned this portion of road since it was determined to no longer serve a public purpose.

Commissioner Paris accepted the following three roads into the county-maintained road system: Floyds Way, from the beginning of the road where it intersects with Pleasant Grove Road to the end of lot 12; Anns Way, the entire road; Nathaniels Way, the entire road. All three of these roads are in the Pleasant Grove Subdivision. All required right-of-way was obtained and the property owners paid Union County to bring the road up to county specifications.

The Commissioner accepted the following roads into the county-maintained road system: Fiddlers Cove, the entire road; Wood Sleigh, the entire road; Cobblestone the entire road. All three of these roads are in the Fox Lake Subdivision. When the subdivision was built the developer built the roads to county specifications with the required right-of-way in the surveys and deeds. Through the years, once the roads within the subdivision have three full-time residents living there the roads can then be accepted as county maintained. All three of these roads now have three or more full-time residents.

**9. This item did not meet the minimum legal requirements for acceptance by the governing authority, therefore there was no legal authority to bind. The processes for road acceptance into the county-maintained road system were not followed or completed prior to January 1, 2025.*

Commissioner Paris accepted the following roads into the county-maintained road system: Beale Court Drive the entire road: Wesley Mountain Drive which is currently county-maintained to Brannan Lodge so the county is accepting the remainder of the road in its entirety; Mountain View Drive the entire road. All three of these roads are within the Wesley Mountain Village subdivision. All three roads are in great shape and need no work to be accepted so no funds were required of the property owners. **10. This item did not meet the minimum legal requirements for acceptance by the governing authority, therefore there was no legal authority to bind. The processes for road acceptance into the county-maintained road system were not followed or completed prior to January 1, 2025.*

Vince Peterson requested to speak regarding the county supplement in the budget. Mr. Peterson's comments are summarized as follows: The Union County Budget that was just approved by Mr. Paris. has a bit of a problem. It actually has a deficit of 2.8 million dollars that requires using county reserve funds in order to balance it. The budget for 2025 is composed of 5 different funds: the General Fund, the Special Revenue Fund, the Enterprise Fund, the Capital Project Fund, and the Internal Service Fund. All of these added together make up the total budget - not just the General Fund. Now, each of these funds can be looked at individually as having revenues and having expenses. The General Fund actually shows a surplus of about 3.8 million dollars. The Special Revenue Fund shows a deficit of about \$200,000. The Enterprise Fund shows a deficit of about 3.7 million and the Internal Service Fund shows a deficit of about 2.7 million dollars. If you add up the total deficit of those three funds it comes to about 6.6 million dollars. The surplus in the General Fund is used to offset that 6.6 million dollar deficit, but that still leaves us with a 2.8 million dollar shortfall in the budget for 2025. That money has to come from somewhere and it actually comes from what they show as a county supplement. At the budget hearing two weeks ago, I asked what the source of this county supplement was. I was told it was the General Fund. That is not quite correct. Over several years the general fund has had a surplus and that surplus has been in a fund that you could call a rainy-day fund or an emergency fund or just simply a reserve fund. What is happening this year is that we are going to take 2.8 million out of that reserve fund to pay that deficit in this year's budget. End of Vince Peterson Summary.

Lamar Paris replied, "We rely on and understand this is several times we have discussed different things. We feel confident that our people know what they are doing. Our auditors and everyone who works in finance are not hiding money or changing money. I don't understand it all, and I don't think anyone can understand it all. That is why we have people in the background looking and working and overseeing what we do. If we make the budget, then it is going to be accurate.

I just wanted to talk a little bit about the funds and the money that we have that we are going to be leaving to the next commissioner to use.

The County's General Fund balance on December 31, 2023 was \$9,454,476. This represents about 4.5 months of regular expenditure within the General Fund. Fund balance is the money an organization has left over after all its income and expenses are accounted for at the end of a period. It shows whether the organization is in good financial shape, with a positive balance indicating savings, and a negative balance indicating a financial shortfall. In addition to the good financial standing, the County has been out of debt since May of 2021. Union County has also received a clean or unmodified audit opinion for the past 24 years. We have had a balanced budget for the past 24 years. I feel confident we are leaving funds, not only in the reserve fund of 9 million dollars but also that in the SPLOST fund there is probably going to be close to that same amount. Projected SPLOST funds available on January 2, 2025, after December expenses are paid will be approximately \$8 million. Two important SPLOST projects that are ready to be put out to bid in January are the Roundabout at Pat Haralson Drive and Deep South Farm Road. This is the road to the hospital. We got a million dollar grant from the state DOT and we anticipate another 2 million will need to come out of the County to complete this project. The 911 Dispatch Center is under design right now. Projected SPLOST collections for the 2025 year are \$7 million. This project will cost in the neighborhood of 3-4 million dollars, but we don't have the exact number but in either case with the estimated collections being 7 million dollars we will not use all the SPLOST funds that we have now.


Brief additional information. I wanted to thank the public safety, sheriff, police dept in Blairsville, and the E911 center. We have one of the best groups of E911 operators, our fire dept. and ambulance service with the hospital. All of these do an incredible job of providing you - people that live here in Union County - some of the best safety services that you can find in any rural county in the state of Georgia, if not the whole country. We are proud of what we have. Our hospital is an excellent hospital. The county has worked with the hospital to try to provide funding to assist them. We paved the new road going to the backside of the hospital this year. We have done several other projects over there. We try to help the hospital wherever and whenever we can. We also donate some money each year toward an ambulance. I also wanted to mention the Union County School System. We don't have anything directly to do with it, you do. Two-thirds of your tax bill is for school tax. One-third is for the county operations. So, we do all this with one third of that. We have one of the best school systems in the state of Georgia as well. The teachers and faculty do a great job over there. We're always glad to work with them in any way we can. We are blessed that we have a school system as good as this one is and has as many great people working there. You may look at your bill and say "Gosh, 2/3 of that. That is a lot of tax money." It may be a lot of tax money, but those kids are our future, and taking care of those kids means you are keeping people out of jail. It means you are keeping the public excited about what we have here and it is just a great time to honor the school system and the hospital. Then you add our Rec Dept. They are incredible. Our numbers of kids have drastically gone up the last 3 years. A big part of my mission has always been making sure recreation is sound in Union County. We have the best staff, the best people, the best programs, and the best facilities. I am proud of that and what we have for those kids. That is why Union County has surpassed Fannin County with the number of students in school. Which means more of the younger folks are moving here or staying here or coming back here to work. The next thing we're working on is trying to find jobs through the Development Authority and through the Chamber of Commerce. Working with the kids and everybody to make sure we have one of the best counties. Are we going to have a little more traffic when we get to town. Yes, we are. The Mayor wants to see that town packed full because he knows that sales tax money is going to help save on property taxes. The same

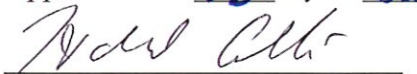
with the county. We appreciate all that these people do to work together. I have said this before, and I will say it one more time. What we see when we come to town - Blairsville is right in the middle and every road crosses right in the middle of the city. All your traffic is going to come into the city and that is where you are going to feel that compression. If you go on any road out in the county, most of those roads still look similar to what they did 40 or 50 years ago. You have the same houses and the same farmland. You may see a subdivision here and there. We have some of the most beautiful farmland that there is. Thank goodness to our legislature for giving a big tax break to farmers to maintain that property. Union County is unique. We have the prettiest place in the world to live and we can't blame if somebody else wants to come here. It is just going to happen. If I weren't here and I could figure out a way to get here, then I would be here.

The last thing I want to say is it has been my honor for the last 24 years to serve the people in this county - this community. We have all worked hard. It is going to continue to take a lot of hard work and dedication. For the people that come here who want it to be a good place to live and care about Union County and Union County people, we can't argue that. What we can argue is when we have people that come here and want to change it like where they came from. That is just something I don't go along with. I want to honor my wife. I can assure you that, Mr. Collins, your wife is going to have a tough time. You think your job is going to be hard, her job is going to be hard. She is going to have to put up with you getting chewed out by people when you get home in the afternoon, and somebody doesn't like what you did. It is so frustrating when you work so hard to do the right thing. There are people that are going to dislike whatever you do. You are going to have to be ready for that, and it's just part of the job. I have loved what I have done. I have loved this community. I will still be here, and I still want to help when I can and where I can. But politics is not one of those. But thank all of y'all for being here, coming to the meetings, participating, and finding out what's going on in this county.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:


Jennifer Mahan, County Clerk

Approved this 16th day of January, 2025

Harold Collins, Commissioner



**New Union County Short-term Rental Licensees
October 14, 2024 – December 15, 2024**

SUN, DAZHONG

47 That Way
Young Harris, Ga 30582

MARTIN, JONATHAN & JORDAN

507 Happy Hollow Cir
Suches, Ga 30572

DEAL, BRYCE & BRIDGETTE

359 New Water Way
Blairsville, Ga 30512

UMHOLTZ, ANTHONY

668 Arrowood Landing
Blairsville, Ga 30512

CARR, NANCY E

15 Marie Lane
Blairsville, Ga 30512

HIGHLANDER, MARIA WILSON

768 Rocky Top Heights Rd
Blairsville, Ga 30512

BRUNER, KIMBERLY

84 Knights Way
Blairsville, Ga 30512
