

Rabun County Alliance

formerly West Rabun Property Owners ~ Est. 2001



Spring 2019 Newsletter

“Seeking Leadership and Accountability in Government”

RABUN COUNTY'S NEW SPLOST APPROVED

Rabun voters passed the New Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) on March 19 with a positive vote of 63% versus 37% negative (1,329 positive, 754 negative). Out of 11,848 registered voters in Rabun County, only 2,093 cast their votes, a 17% turnout. Thus, approximately one of every six voters in the County made the decision for the other 83% who chose not to participate in the election. The 1% sales tax thus approved will be collected on sales over the next 6 years and used for various defined categories of projects put on the ballot by the County.

RCA did not support this SPLOST for several reasons as noted in previous newsletters. Two key reasons for our “no” recommendation to members were due to Roads *and* SPLOST transparency. First, we believe the County needs to develop a strategic roads program that includes paving of unpaved roads (which, according to 2016 DOT information, represent 42% of all County roads). RCA believes that, while SPLOST funding approved in past SPLOSTs has been encouraging, actual roads activity has not been as encouraging: monies have been transferred out of the Roads category to other projects, and large balances built up as activity progressed slower than one would have expected, given the amount of money budgeted. Also, paving activities were largely, if not totally, repaving, as opposed to paving the County's unpaved roads.

Second, we strongly felt that the County needed to increase transparency with regards to SPLOST expenditures. In this regard, the RCA (in conjunction with the Rabun County Coalition for Good Government) put forth the idea of a Citizen Advisory Committee to the County's Commissioners at the SPLOST Town Hall Forum. Unfortunately, the Commissioners rejected this idea. It's worth noting that, after the SPLOST vote, a Clayton Tribune editorial supported the idea of a citizens advisory group and agreed that better citizen communication is needed to be sought by County officials.

Recent actions we have seen by the County Commissioners has been encouraging, and suggests that a new positive level of transparency may be emerging, *and* the County has outlined several roads projects that might indicate it is placing greater focus on the roads category. It is our hope that County officials will continue to move in the direction of more transparency and project initiation with ongoing County budget and SPLOST expenditures.

COUNTY ROAD WORK ACTIVITY

As long-term RCA newsletter subscribers are aware, for years the RCA has been a staunch advocate of paving many unpaved roads and quickly repaving roads with fissures and potholes. The County recently posted an article in its online E-Newsletter reporting on its paving activities. Since 2012 through the end of 2018, the County indicated it had paved a total of 14 miles of previously unpaved roads, and in the same period had achieved 32.3 miles of repaving. This computes to an average annual paving activity of 2.3 miles of new paving, and 5.4 miles of repaving each year. Given that \$7.5 million and \$5 million were budgeted in SPLOST 5 and SPLOST 6 for Roads, Streets and Bridges respectively, the speed of paving did not seem to match the availability of funding.

HOWEVER, we are delighted to report on two separate articles that appeared in the Clayton Tribune recently which indicate significant plans for road work in the near future. One article reported that the Road Department “requested capital outlay for a mini excavator” to replace the nonfunctional current one, and also “began working on spring paving projects around the county...” Lake Burton residents will be gratified to know that “Projects around Lake Burton specifically are a high priority.”

And, an ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS also appeared in the paper (you will also see reference to these projects printed in this newsletter in the report from the County's Roads Director). The projects being offered to bidders totaled 9.3 miles of paving, all of it repaving, and consisted of:

COMMUNITY CALENDAR: Visit the Chamber of Commerce at gamountains.com for Rabun County events.

Visit georgiapowerlakes.com for helpful lake information from Georgia Power.

Visit lakerabun.org, lbca.net, and seedlake.org for the various Association events.

Men's Christian Fellowship meets every Friday, 7:45-9:00am (706-782-7425 for more info).

Visit rabuncountyalliance.com for items of importance you may hear or wonder about between newsletters.

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- Warwoman Road: A total of 4.2 miles. To start at last paving joint and end at the intersections of Archery Circle.
- Laurel Lodge Road: A total of 2.0 miles. To start at the north intersection and stop at the two mile mark.
- Boggs Mountain Road: A total of 1.1 miles. Start at the intersection of Longview Road and end at the DOT Row marker and end just past the last school entrance.
- Persimmon Creek Road: A total of 2.0 miles. Start at the intersection of Persimmon Road and end at the new paving just past Blueridge Road.

Let's all hope this is the beginning of an ongoing focus on significant improvements to the County highway system. Note: the report from the County's Roads Director immediately follows this article, and do note the difficulties his department has experienced due to weather.

RABUN COUNTY ROAD INFORMATION

As the first four months pass by and spring arrives, we have had a total of 35.25 inches of rain this year and more than 150 inches in the past 16 months. With that amount of rain, everything has slowed down due to the number of rainy days and the problems that have occurred due to the rain. We are continuing to work on many of the mud slides around the County. As the wet weather continues, many of the slides are still sliding and sloughing off, and the Road Department will continue to watch them and repair as needed.

Along with our everyday jobs of grading, replacing and cleaning out culverts and ditches, the mowing crews have begun to make their rounds. They appreciate your patience and please use caution when passing. We recently finished re-grading the front of the PAWS For Life building and pouring a new sidewalk to make it ADA compliant. Other projects include the grading at the Golf Course, widening of Bidly Mountain in preparation for paving, a 9.3 mile paving packet that includes sections of Warwoman, Laurel Lodge, Boggs Mountain and Persimmon Creek Roads. Other upcoming projects include the widening of Boykin Road and Claude Smith Road. *Copied from a Facebook post by Scott Provance, County Roads Director*

ELIGIBILITY TO RECEIVE GRANTS RESTORED

RCA is delighted to report that the judge who oversaw and levied the sanctions placed on the County, which prohibited it from receiving outside grants, has lifted those sanctions due to the impending mediation between the City of Clayton and the County. This means that the County may once again obtain grants to assist funding of County activities. As readers might remember, the sanctions were placed as a result of the unfortunate disagreement that built between the County and the City of Clayton, and those sanctions certainly complicated the funding of County activities. Our sense from what we have learned from the County is that both the City and County will enter their next round of negotiations with firm desires to work together to achieve agreement.

RABUN COUNTY STARTS 2019/2020 BUDGET WORK

The County budget meetings began April 9 with Department Heads presenting their budget to the County Commissioners and County Administrator. These are not public hearings; however RCA representatives and members of the Rabun Coalition were invited to attend and observe this process. This process was completed on April 22. The preliminary budget will be voted on May 22 and public hearings are set for June 13th at 5pm. The final budget will be voted on June 25th.

RCA representatives attended all these preliminary meetings. The RCA thanks the Board of Commissioners for this new transparency and we will continue to follow this process.

RABUN COUNTY 2019 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The County will begin work soon on a new Comprehensive Plan for Rabun County and surrounding cities. The plan, done every 5 years was last done in 2014. The 2014 plan can be viewed on the RCA website. This plan is used to coordinate capital improvement projects and ensure compliance with state policies and programs. The plan process takes about 8 months and is supported by the Georgia Mountain Regional Commission or (GMRC). GMRC is an organization that assists with monitoring and implementing local comprehensive plans. These plans set an important tone for Rabun's future planning for growth. The RCA plans to continue monitoring the progression of this plan.

UPDATE ON KENNESAW ROAD PROBLEM (PARTIAL SOLUTION!)

In 2017, we published two articles regarding a problem situation on Kennesaw Road, a gravel road which begins near Highway 76 and runs southeast to a northwestern cove of Lake Burton (and includes a short section at the southeast end named Dicks Creek Road). The bottom third or so of the road is a County Road, and the remainder is on U.S. Forest Service property. The road parallels Dicks Creek to the intersection with Highway 197.

The problem was that organizers placed ads in newspapers and magazines offering to attract and guide joyriders interested in traversing the road in four-wheel drive vehicles, where they occasionally would veer off the roads into Dicks Creek or adjoining meadows, in the process dislodging large amounts of sediment into Dicks Creek. The sediment would then wash down the river and spill into Lake Burton and create sandbars. Left unchecked, this problem could well make boat traffic in this incoming area of Lake Burton impossible due to sediment build-up. Home owners where Dicks Creek empties into the Lake are left to deal with the difficulties in entering and leaving their boat houses due to the buildup of silt entering the lake from Kennesaw Road. Additionally, real estate agents report the situation has hurt property values in the area because of the silt build-up, affecting tax collections and thus affecting taxes somewhat for all other residents.

We are delighted to report that the U.S. Forest Service undertook an effort to mitigate this problem and installed gate barriers at the northwest and southeast borders of its properties. This is a great step forward in mitigating the problem and we commend the Service for its efforts. Unfortunately, it is a partial solution to the problem, which the barriers will help reduce but not eliminate.

The County portion of the road will remain unblocked, and that creates two problems. First, Dicks Creek crosses the road in the County section, and this has been a jump-off location for vehicles wanting to rip through the Creek. While sediment wash from the creek does not dislodge nearly the sedimentation that comes from ripping through banks to get to and from the Creek, it is still very disruptive and harmful to the environment. Plus, it is possible to bypass the southeastern Forest Service barriers via the creek and enter the banned portion of the U.S. Forest Service Road. Thus, the volume of irresponsible traffic creating excessive sedimentation wash would be lower but not eliminated. Evidence of this problem can be found on damaged creek banks and in numerous mudholes above the USFS gate.

The only true and complete solution is for the County to also erect barriers at the intersection of the road with Highway 197, permitting only residents to enter the gate. While this would prevent responsible drivers from enjoying the magnificent beauty of this road, the damage

to the environment has dramatically more impact on the area than the loss of one of hundreds of viewpoints of the area's majesty. And, foot traffic is always possible at either end of the road.

RCA promises to stay attuned to this issue and urge the County to consider matching the action of the U.S. Forest Service, and we encourage our readers to also communicate their concerns to County officials.

THE TALLULAH RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

The TRWC was formed several years ago when the Lake Burton Civic Association asked one of its Board members to address allegations of pollution coming downstream into Lake Burton from the Waterfall Golf Course operation. Tom Fischer gladly accepted this assignment and recruited a few others to assist in the process, and this group over time became the TRWC. Level of pollution was measured, found to be fairly minimal, not all of it coming from Waterfall, and changes were made to reduce the problem and help protect one of the treasures of this area. The TRWC then undertook other ventures that threatened the beauty and purity of our beautiful landscape.

Unfortunately, a combination of issues affected the priorities of some of the participants, and the TRWC efforts to rigorously guard the quality of the environment became a bit sidetracked. Tom Madison, the current leader of the group, voiced a strong desire to rededicate, repurpose, and to the extent needed, reconstruct the group, and called on several folks to meet to generate a strategy to re-energize the TRWC. That meeting was recently held, with good discussion and great focus on purpose, and the regeneration of the TRWC is underway. Included in the discussion were several topics, such as should the group remain the same and continue to focus on the entire watershed, or should it split into several groups and focus specifically on specific regions (e.g., a group for each lake, one for the non-lake portion of the river, etc.). While no decision was reached, the leaning of the group was that, because of the interconnectedness of the entire watershed, it might want to retain its full focus on the watershed instead of subdividing.

The group plans to meet again as often as necessary to formulate specific plans to ensure that the TRWC again becomes the primary and most deeply focused organization dedicated to preserving everything about this treasure in which we live/recreate/soothe ourselves.

Also, the group would be interested in any individuals who might have strong passion about the protection and preservation of our treasure, and who would be interested joining the group. Not yet determined is the meeting frequency, which would be no more often than monthly and no more infrequent than quarterly. If you would like to deploy your passion on this issue, please advise Mike Walters at waltersfam@mindspring.com, or by calling and either speaking to him or leaving a message at 404-872-5649.

PROBLEMS AT MTN. LAKES MEDICAL CENTER

RCA is saddened to report problems identified in a FOX 5 (TV station) report regarding a number of problems at the Mountain Lakes Medical Center located west of Clayton. It reported comments from an attorney who represented hospital employees who claimed failure to pay their insurance premiums and one who reported the hospital's failure to pay all its outstanding bills. One employee recommended taking paychecks quickly to the bank "before it bounces."

Clayton Mayor Jordan Green verified the employee's accounts and noted payment failure had started years before. Also, hospital debts dating back to 2013 from one supplier as well as an independent medical practice for a total of \$230,00 that had to be settled with lawyer involvement in lawsuits before the bills were settled. And finally, hospital employees reported they were instructed by someone at the

hospital to use the ID of a physician affiliated with the hospital to bill insurance for patients he never saw or procedures he never performed. According to the Fox 5 report, the physician was incensed when he learned of the scam and filed a legal complaint against the Center and ended his affiliation with the Center shortly thereafter.. The report did not indicate who gave the employees those instructions, but the false billing continued even after the physician ended his practice there. The dispute had not been resolved at the time of the report.

This is troubling information regarding the only hospital within a reasonable driving distance of Clayton and the northern lakes, and would be of concern to locals who need emergency services but wonder if they should consider going elsewhere. On the other hand, several locals have indicated they have received very satisfactory treatment by the Center. Some of the problems identified in the Fox report were internal to the Center, and others affected a relatively small number of employees or patients, so apparently many patients are treated well. For more details, go to www.fox5atlanta.com/news/i-team/doctor-sues-hospital-claims-billing-done-for-patients-he-never-saw.

CLAYTON DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

The City of Clayton has hired TSW, an Atlanta firm to guide a master planning process for Downtown Clayton. TSW, a planning, landscape architecture, and architecture firm specializing in downtown planning and public engagement has a strong portfolio of these types of projects and recently completed a Downtown Master Plan for the City of Tucker.

The planning process will take about 5 months and will involve stakeholders, the Public, the City, and others to shape the vision for Downtown Clayton to encourage future development and to reflect the needs and values of the City of Clayton. A public kick-off meeting is planned on May 7th.

PREVENT AND REVERSE PROSTATE DISEASE (from Dr. Guy Gober)

A patient gave me a new release from "Worst pills. Best pills." The publication represents an internet-based review of current medications. Volume 25 addressed the use of finasteride (trade name Proscar). This is one of the most commonly prescribed medications by urologists. Ten million prescriptions were filled in 2016. The drug is intended for long term use, and sustained results have been reported by the manufacturer. The publication recommended against the use of Proscar. They cited side effects and lack of efficacy in their review. "I must" I thought "re-read the literature."

Proscar was first introduced in 1992 by Joe DiMaggio on Good Morning America. Merck decided to bypass the usual provider (the physician) and go directly to the consumer (the patient).

The mechanism of Proscar action is reduction of active testosterone metabolites. The studies were based on a Caribbean Hammock Island population with a genetic absence of the reduction enzyme necessary for intra-cellular testosterone activation. The study population had minimal prostate enlargement from Proscar use and reduced prostate cancer risk. Subsequent studies have confirmed the reduction of bladder obstructive symptoms, less catheter dependent urinary retention, and, yes Virginia, a reduced prostate cancer risk.

So why aren't all men on Proscar? Dr Turner, my Rabun mentor and friend, rest his soul, said it best. When it was first released, he asked me about taking Proscar: "Are there side effects?" I did inform him there could be a 17% reduction in libido and erectile function. "Seventeen percent?" he mullied. "Well, Guy, that's all I got left anyway!"

Is Proscar for you? Ask your physician. Or better yet, ask your urologist.



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(Above) Caused by recent, extraordinary rainfall levels, this mudslide on Murray Cove Road is one of many that Rabun County is actively repairing. (Below) The U.S. Forest Service has installed four barrier gates in the Kennesaw Road area to restrict off-road traffic that is damaging Dicks Creek and Lake Burton.



SHERIFF'S REPORT

As the weather begins to warm and we look forward to the summer season, many begin planning summer vacations. It is important to be mindful of several tips while you are not home. If you have a home monitoring/security system, make sure it is working properly by contacting your service provider before leaving. If you do not have a monitoring/security system, wild game cameras have become more affordable and allow private photo and video surveillance. In the unfortunate case that you might become a victim to a crime, pictures and/or videos are extremely helpful to law enforcement.

Publicize that you have a monitoring/security system even if you do not. Stickers and signs can be purchased at various retail locations. Remove all hidden keys from the outside of your home, and give them to a friend or neighbor in case of an emergency. Contact the postal service to hold your mail to keep your mailbox from overrunning. Schedule packages to be delivered upon your return.

With the increased use of social media, it is important to be mindful of information you share while away from home. Although everyone loves to share their adventures, it becomes an open invitation to burglars and thieves.

Hopefully, some of these tips can be useful and help in allowing you to enjoy this summer season. For more tips and information, please visit our website at rabunsheriff.org. Follow us on Facebook under "Rabun County Sheriff's Office." *Sheriff Chad Nichols*

FIRE DEPARTMENT REPORT

Rabun County Fire Services has responded to approximately 530 incidents since the beginning of the year. We finished having all of the

fire hoses (55,925 feet) in the County tested in March. May is turning out to be a busy month with several school functions to attend as well as all of our personnel attending Emergency Vehicle Driver Training. This class will hopefully keep our personnel and the citizens we serve safer as we respond to/from calls and training exercises.

The 100 Club of Rabun County graciously donated the funds to purchase a gear washer and dryer. Having this will help us keep the threat of cancer down in our department. Did you know that firefighters have a 9% higher chance of getting cancer and a 14% increase in cancer death than the general population? (National Institute Occupational Science and Health, 2017). We took delivery of two new rescue trucks that are replacing ones that were 25+ years old. They will be housed at Stations 5 and 6 which are Valley and Chechero respectively.

We hope all of our citizens and visitors alike have a safe and enjoyable summer! As always, I am a phone call or email away. 706-782-2751 or jupchurch@rabuncounty.ga.gov.

RECYCLING REPORT

The annual Community Clean-Up Day was well-attended, with approximately 120 people participating, and very effective. Approximately 50 tons of garbage was retrieved and properly disposed, including around 200 tires! Many thanks to all who participated to help maintain the natural beauty of our environment. And thanks to all of our residents who bundle garbage and recyclable materials and take them directly to the recycling centers. Fairly moderate effort is required to collect and properly dispose of those materials, so thanks to all who mindfully do so! *Alan English*