

City Meeting...from Page 1A

Contained within the permit renewal is an increase in the amount of treated wastewater the city may discharge per day, from 400,000 gallons to 1 million gallons.

Mayor Jim Conley has stated that, while the city is many years away from having that much sewage to treat, he and his forward-thinking council have been planning ahead to accommodate future growth.

LNIA has questioned the need for such a large increase at this time, however, apparently wondering if the city has plans to dramatically increase the amount of out-of-county leachate it is being paid to process.

In his comments, Lively asked about the EPD's permitting process and how the city acquired permission to treat leachate, and why the June 2018 permit application that's just now concluding – as well as the renewal public notice – seem to exclude any mention of leachate.

Attempting to answer some of Lively's concerns,

Wastewater Plant Supervisor Jody Cook said that "every five years we have to renew our permit."

"That is an EPD requirement," Cook said. "It does not have anything to do with processing leachate. We actually sent our application in for renewal ... in 2018 because it was coming due in 2019, and EPD is just now getting around to getting the final draft to us."

"Again, it had nothing to do with leachate, but whenever we first started accepting leachate, that was the first thing I did, was contact EPD to make sure that we were legally doing something that could be done without harming the environment or anything like that or violating our permit."

"That's when they told us that we could do up to 25,000 gallons a day without having an industrial permit. We do not do that much, and we will never do that much. The permit that we're on has two parts – it has a B1 and a B2."

"The B1 is up to 400,000 gallons (a day). We have not reached that level yet, so we're not permitted to do a million gallons a day. And it'll be a long time before the EPD will ever require us to go up to that permit. At this point, we can't do any more than 400,000 gallons a day."

"We're running around 250,000 gallons a day right now, so we're just barely over halfway there. As far as the leachate goes, we will never do more than what we're doing right now, and that's around 11,000 gallons a day."

As previously reported, between August 2019 and mid-July 2020, the wastewater plant treated "approximately 3,680,440 gallons of leachate and has approximately 98,000 gallons in a holding tank waiting to be treated," which works out to roughly 10,400 gallons/day of leachate treated.

For that amount of leachate, The Water Authority paid the city \$188,922 as part of an ongoing revenue stream that Conley has said will be used to fund various improvement, maintenance and construction projects at the water and wastewater treatment plants in years ahead.

Lively concluded his remarks by asking the city to stop processing leachate "until a hearing for your permit can be held."

Moreover, he asked the city to team up with the county to plan the installation of "a pipeline from the wastewater treatment plant to below the Lake Nottely Dam," thereby preventing any long-lasting chemicals in treated leachate



The next step for the newly leveled parking lot at Blairsville City Hall is paving, which should begin soon. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

from appearing in the lake.

Cook said that the EPD is planning to hold a Sept. 23 public hearing on the permit, though there was no commitment to stop processing the leachate and no response to the pipeline request.

Comments from the EPD were not available at press time.

LNIA member Ross Malme also spoke in the meeting, saying he was a homeowner on the lake and a chemical engineer by training, "and in a previous life, I handled 100 percent of the hazardous waste that 3M Company generated all over the U.S."

Malme said that leachate is particularly difficult to treat for specific chemical compounds because its composition likely changes daily, though Mayor Conley said The Water Authority had furnished a list of particles in leachate.

Continuing, Malme revealed that he'd been with a FOX 5 Atlanta investigative news team filming at the wastewater treatment plant, and he wondered aloud about the "due diligence" the city had put into the leachate processing proposal before accepting it last year.

Resident Jeanne Link addressed the council as well, asking the city if it had any plans to incorporate "racial sensitivity training or guidelines over any areas the council has jurisdiction over."

Mayor Conley asked Blairsville Assistant Police Chief Shawn Dyer to speak to Link's concerns.

"The state has mandated some new training about two years ago, and in that training is what they call 'community policing,'" Dyer said. "And that deals with different races and nationalities and stuff like that. It's a state-mandated

requirement that we attend that training every year. We also have other training that we attend."

"The chief and myself, we watch the news, and we critique everything that comes on the news in these other (police) departments. We meet with our guys, and we explain to them what's going on, what's happened, and how they need to do their job in relation to what's going on in the world today."

"So, we are up to date on our training. We are actively seeking more training. Due to the COVID, the training has been pretty much extinct. The state is starting back providing a little bit of training right now, but they shut all training down and canceled all of our out-of-town classes and told us that we're not supposed to meet in large groups to have training."

Link thanked Dyer for answering her question, and City Clerk Kaye McCann expanded on Dyer's points by saying that, as a City of Ethics, all representatives of Blairsville, including councilmembers, the mayor, employees "and even volunteers," are required to "treat everyone equally and the same."

In other news, site preparation has begun at the Arby's lot on Georgia 515 and Bob Head Street across from Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, including dirt being hauled from the Arby's site behind City Hall to help raise the level of the eventual downtown parking lot.

Actual construction of the new restaurant could begin in the next two weeks, weather permitting.

Grading and gravel placement have been completed at Blairsville City Hall to even out the previously uneven parking area between City Hall and the Police Department, with paving to be completed soon.

Schools Prepare...from Page 1A

systemwide assigned seating on buses, in classrooms, at the cafeteria, etc.

Integrating seating charts in this way will help the schools and Health Department better perform contact tracing on students and staff to more accurately isolate people who come into close contact with someone who falls ill with COVID-19.

Masks are being advised at this time, though the Board Office is not mandating their use in the schools. Noting that "schools are not designed for social distancing," Hill said staff and students will be kept as far apart as feasible.

"We're going to maximize social distancing in every fashion that we can," Hill said, "but I don't want the misconception that we will have students 6 feet apart all day long, because it's impossible."

"We are implementing every mitigation strategy that we can to promote health and safety. But we all know from (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) guidance and from Department of Public Health guidance, the two biggest mitigation strategies are social distancing and wearing masks."

"Again, we have not mandated masks – we do highly recommend masks. From my personal experience being around a COVID-positive, I feel like the mask prevented me from catching COVID. But that's up to parents to decide what they want their students to do, and teachers are in the same boat."

Himself a Union County graduate who has been employed with the school system since 2004, Hill said the first couple school weeks are always chaotic, even in a normal year. Traffic is backed up, everyone is working to establish a routine, and it just takes a little time for folks to get into the swing of things.

And starting back during a pandemic, Hill said he understands that people will be particularly worried this year

– which is why it's so important to him that he be frank with the community.

"Full transparency to the public, no false promises from this school superintendent – Day 1 will be extremely chaotic," Hill said. "It will be nerve-wracking; it will be difficult. Day 1 for our staff will be the same. Say a prayer for our teachers, bus drivers and students as they re-enter for the 2020-21 school year."

Hill acknowledges that many people will worry about the risks associated with the kids returning to school, though he remains optimistic about the data, which shows that children rarely get the disease, and they die from it even more infrequently.

What's not rare is the virus itself, still actively circulating through the community and infecting people, including some school faculty and staff who are currently quarantined for COVID. For Hill, coronavirus has become a reality that the schools have no choice but to face in the best way they know how.

"There's going to be a COVID case in this school system and every school system in the state of Georgia every day for this school year," Hill said. "The community numbers are going up, and it's everywhere."

"COVID is in the school, it will be in the school, and it will be in the school until a vaccine is developed. And just like with influenza, we have a vaccine every year, you have multiple influenza cases in the school system."

The Union County Republican Party August meeting

The Union County Republican Party will have their monthly meeting on Saturday, August 15th, at The Skillet Cafe on 223 Wellborn Street, Blairsville.

The executive committee meeting will be held at 8:30am followed by the general meeting at 10 AM. Come to hear the latest report of the re-

cent activities and future plans for the party.

This coming election is so very important and we must all work together to support our candidates.

The public is invited to the general meeting. Come and have a cup of coffee or purchase breakfast and get involved! N(Aug12,21)CA