

# Commissioner Paris talks tough on trash in monthly meeting

By Lily Avery  
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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris addressed a countywide trash issue during his monthly meeting on Thursday, Feb. 15.

Commissioner Paris has long abstained from strict rules and regulations regarding trash and litter, not wanting to tell residents what they can and cannot keep in their yards within public view.

However, after much consideration and thought, Commissioner Paris has decided that, with the increased amount of trash, litter and unsightly garbage around the county, it is time that Union County has garbage regulations.

"We are having a problem that's gotten so large recently," said Commissioner Paris. "We've had this problem sporadically over the years, but there is a significant amount of garbage, trash and debris around homes in the county.

"I've always been a proponent of property rights and trying not to tell folks



Photo by Lily Avery  
**Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris in his Feb. 15 regular county meeting.**

what they can and cannot do with their property. This is the reason we do not have zoning in the county.

"However, we have a problem countywide that people are not caring for their property or homes. The problem is that they are in the process of ruining neighbors and negatively impacting all of those around them."

While the county does regulate trash on and to the

sides of county owned roads, with regular cleanups from detainees, this is a separate problem entirely.

The county does not manage private land, and in recent months, Commissioner Paris noted that there have been numerous complaints about various properties throughout the county that have become unsightly with no indication that they will be cleaned up.

"This is something that I've fought with in the past over the last 17 years that I've been in office, but it's never been like this," said Commissioner Paris. "We would have a complaint maybe once every six or eight months where someone would come in and complain about a neighbor's house.

"We'd send someone from our building inspection office over there to look at it and talk to the homeowners, and that would be that. We've been doing that for several years and it worked, and people would clean up after we visited.

"But now, I don't know what's happened over the last six to nine months, but we

Paris. "We're going to try and do something about it. I know it's going to be difficult, but I've started talking to other counties and cities to see what they've done, and try to come up with a guideline that's fair and reasonable.

"We don't want to make things outrageous. I'd like to set up a fund to where we can help, because sometimes you have a person that wants to keep their property clean but just aren't able to.

"And we want to be able to help them, but we have to start cracking down on this. That's what we're going to be working on, to come up with the right regulations and the right rules."

Commissioner Paris hopes to continue the discussion of countywide garbage regulations in the next monthly meeting on Thursday, March 15, at 6 p.m.

# Harper discusses advertising opportunities with DDA board

By Lily Avery  
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The Blairsville Downtown Development Authority Board discussed expanding advertising for the downtown area during the board's monthly meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 13.

During the January meeting, DDA Program Manager Darren Harper proposed the idea of a downtown kiosk to the board.

This kiosk, or community board, would advise visitors on places to eat and shop, and would highlight any upcoming event that may be of interest.

Harper thinks that it would be beneficial to downtown, especially as development continues and more businesses move into the area.

"This is something that came out of inquiries into the Facebook world regarding what is needed downtown and what people would like to see," said Harper. "And out of all of the responses and suggestions, the thing I saw the most of was a need for a community board."

After seeking approval from the Blairsville City Council and the DDA board, Harper will be moving forward with the project and hopes

to have it completed by the spring.

This project will only cost the DDA roughly \$400, and the kiosk will be placed in between the Hole in the Wall and King's 5 & 10.

"This is going to be a huge asset for downtown," said Harper. "We've needed something like this for a while, and I think it's going to make downtown more accessible and tourist-friendly.

"We want people to feel at home when they come to visit, and this will help them do that."

Another advertisement avenue that the DDA will be pursuing this year is taking advantage of the new digital billboard that the city, county and Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce will be utilizing as a way to share important area information with the masses.

The billboard is on Georgia 515, between the Pat Haralson Memorial Drive overpass and United Community Bank, and it is a reconvered westbound billboard that has been out of use for some time.

As soon as the billboard is in operating condition, Harper hopes to see it used as a major promotional tool for the downtown area, as well as for



Photo by Lily Avery  
**DDA Program Manager Darren Harper**

the community as a whole.

"This is something that Tobie (Chandler) and I have been working on to promote downtown," said Harper. "Everything on this billboard is completely customizable, and it costs the chamber and the DDA absolutely nothing. We get use of the board for the lifetime of the board. It's a very sweet deal."

Harper presented to the board a list of possible ideas to advertise on the billboard, such as festival countdowns, winter advisories, Union County High School sports home games, Farmers Market promotions and basic downtown publicity.

"It's very flexible for us," said Harper. "I think this is going to be a huge asset for downtown, and I'm excited to see how this is going to effect our tourism and economy for downtown. It's nice, and we need to take full advantage of it."

The billboard will be in working order in the coming months.

The DDA meets on the second Tuesday of every month at Blairsville City Hall beginning at noon. All meetings are open to the public.



Photo by Lily Avery  
**DDA Board Members Daniel Davenport and Judy Jolly in the Tuesday, Feb. 13, board meeting.**

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under the door.

As law enforcement worked to escort students and staff to safety in the aftermath of the carnage, the sisters were met with tragic images of violence that underscored the evil that shot through their school that day.

"There was blood everywhere," a visibly shaken Mady told reporters on the scene.

Mady and her sister moved away from Union County after last school year and started the current year down in Parkland, though they still have friends in Georgia.

Megan Kerr, a junior at Union County High, is one of those friends, and she has been keeping tabs on the sisters since learning of the shooting.

"We are really blessed to have all the security and locks on our doors, so we can prevent a gunman from coming in," said Kerr. "It really makes you wonder if this is going to happen to us or not.

"We shouldn't feel unsafe at school, or out of control or scared. I can't imagine what Mady went through."

Many people are feeling the same way as Kerr following the shooting, from her fellow students to parents to law enforcement officials, and

there's a lingering question about what can be done.

And while it's impossible to completely safeguard against what can seem like random acts of violence, administrators at Union County Schools feel confident that they have taken all the steps available to create safe environments for the children in their care.

The schools have resource officers, security guards, cameras, emergency panic buttons, buzz-in doors and a safety plan approved by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency.

Furthermore, the system regularly partners with local first responders, from the sheriff's office to police and fire, to conduct walkthroughs to keep law enforcement officials apprised of school layouts.

"Every time one of those incidents happens, whether lives are lost or not, I think everybody that works in public education is saddened, and I would say traumatized by that to some extent," said Union County Schools Superintendent Dr. Fred Rayfield. "Educators have got really three main responsibilities.

"The first one is to teach students, the second is to protect students, and the

third one is to do that ethically, morally and responsibly right. That second one, to protect students, whenever something like this happens, everybody's thrust into that mode of trying to protect each other.

"Every educator goes to work every day knowing that they are responsible for the children in their care and supervision. That's part of what we do. So, any time that's violated or put at risk, I think it upsets all of us.

"From that standpoint, our hearts go out to those families, and all families that have been involved in school shootings, for that matter. We would try to support them in any way that we could if that opportunity presents itself."

John Hill works at the board office now, but he was the high school principal when the sisters attended Union County Schools.

"My heart goes out to those kids, because I knew them and spent some time with them the last few years," said Hill. "It's very sad for me and heartbreaking to see them on TV.

"That was terrible, because I can remember many conversations with them. They had an older sister that graduated from our high school, and I wish they had been able to stay in Union County."