

Census...from Page 1A

This means that, should Georgia's population show a big enough increase between the 2010 and 2020 censuses, the state could actually pick up additional House seats moving forward, which would mean greater representation on the

national stage.

The census is important for other reasons, too, as an accurate count reflecting growth, for example, could influence the economic decisions of entrepreneurs looking to decide where to start

their businesses.

Understandably, people are sensitive about surrendering their data. In this age of identity theft and financial hacking, who wouldn't be? Fortunately, folks can relax when it comes to filling out the census.

Yes, the Census Bureau collects detailed information about individual households, including headcounts and personal income figures, but it only publicly releases aggregate data.

Aggregate data about communities and groups helps officials, leaders and businesses react to changes occurring at the local level, and on a larger scale, guarantees fairer distribution of federal funds and congressional seats.

Of course, the data is most helpful if it's accurate, which means people must actually complete the census to more fully realize the potential benefits for their communities.

"In 2010, 85% of Union County was counted and 87% of Towns County was counted – you're missing 10-15% of the county that didn't get counted," Malone said, adding that the missing data was filled in using local averages. "Some \$675 billion federal dollars are allocated based on the census.

"And that's to states, that's to counties, that's to individual cities, all on the basis of the census. If your city is not represented with the full and complete count, you're getting shortchanged on the federal

dollars that come to you.

"Secondly, the 2010 census showed the population increased in Georgia, and that's the reason we got a 14th congressional seat."

Starting in March 2020, people will begin to receive census packets in the mail. Each packet will feature a paper census and detailed instructions on how to complete it, including how to fill the census out online or over the phone.

Malone and the Complete Count Committee of Towns and Union counties are an outreach effort by the local communities and will not have anything to

do with the administration of the census.

For his time, Malone has contracted with Union County to lead the committee for the next year, with Union, Towns, Blairsville, Young Harris and Hiawassee all contributing for a total of \$12,000.

Local service groups, churches and business organizations in Union and Towns can contact Malone for more information about requesting a census presentation.

He can be reached at his office, 706-835-1308; his cell, 404-630-7504; or by email at

ptm4936@gmail.com.

In other census news, there has been much tension surrounding the potential inclusion of a citizenship question on the 2020 census, including a successful Supreme Court challenge.

Including the question would provide a more detailed and accurate picture of the U.S. population, though the census is tasked with accounting for the total population regardless of citizenship status, according to the Census Bureau.

As it stands, the 2020 census will not contain the citizenship question.

Haralson Property...from Page 1A

It is the 2.04-acre area currently containing the downtown gravel parking lot, and parcel E is a 0.263-acre greenspace behind City Hall.

The DDA purchased the Haralson Property about seven years ago using loan money, after which the city paid off the loan to prevent further interest from accruing.

However, this caused the DDA to owe a debt the city of about \$1.9 million initially, which the DDA has been paying down over time as it sells off pieces of the Haralson Property to developers.

To date, the DDA has sold two Haralson Property parcels for a total of \$949,000: the Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen parcel on Georgia 515, and the parcel facing Foodland on Pat Haralson Memorial Drive that will hold the Cockerham Building.

Across from Popeyes at Bob Head Street and Georgia 515 is the 0.9-acre parcel B that's now under contract with the unofficially announced Arby's Restaurant.

But why is the city council able to transfer DDA-owned land to the city?

The DDA is classified

as a component unit of the city of Blairsville, which the State Accounting Office defines as a "legally separate organization for which the elected officials of the primary government are financially accountable."

Since the DDA owes a debt to the city, in light of its financial accountability over the DDA, the council is exercising its authority to transfer parcels D and E to the city, according to City Attorney David Barrett.

When finalized, the transfer will result in a \$650,000 reduction in debt owed to the city, with a remaining debt balance of \$300,000.

And following the expected sale of parcel B to Arby's, the DDA will be able to pay off the remainder of its debt to the city with plenty left over for future development.

Also in the meeting, the council made decisions regarding the five unsold Haralson Property parcels A through E, voting 3-2 to take the remaining undeveloped Haralson Property parcels off the market, with the exception of parcel B that is under contract.

So, moving forward, the DDA will be holding on to parcels A and C as undesignated

land for future development purposes, including potential greenspace and parking, and only the projects currently on the table will be developed.

These include the Cockerham Building, the downtown parking lot area, Popeyes and potentially Arby's.

Parcel A features a 1.13-acre greenspace behind the new Blairsville Police Department that was once combined with the 0.9-acre Arby's parcel before the entire lot was subdivided about a year ago.

Parcel C is the 0.8-acre lot across from Cook's Country Kitchen on Pat Haralson Memorial Drive, which the city hopes to expand into parking eventually.

David Goodspeed of Goodspeed Architects, Inc. attended the joint meeting last week to talk about proposed parking lot plans for parcel D, which would include a projected 100 paved downtown parking spaces, with construction costs yet to be determined.

A set of public bathrooms is also in the works for the area behind the Hole in the Wall restaurant, as well as a public stage for outdoor entertainment to be built on parcel E behind City Hall.

Reece...from Page 1A

indictment to refine the charging language and add the additional charge, but that it "should not delay" the cases any further.

"The defense has raised some interesting legal challenges under the current Georgia statutes, but we will be prepared to go forward with our case," Langley said.

Next steps are likely to include pre-trial hearings to decide motions in the cases before they can be scheduled for trial in superior court, though there's no set timeline moving forward.

Reece was initially arrested on Aug. 14, 2017, on charges related to an alleged sexual relationship with a 15-year-old student in 2013, when Reece was 36 and a middle school gym teacher, according to the Georgia Bureau of

Investigation.

The day after her initial arrest, the school district issued a statement saying that Reece was "no longer employed with the Union County School System."

About a month later, on Sept. 21, 2017, authorities took Reece into custody for a second time "after the discovery of an additional victim," the GBI said at the time.

The continued investigation into Reece revealed that she engaged in sexual conduct with an 18-year-old student in 2015. The student was a high school senior at the time of the incident," the GBI said.

Subsequent to her 2017 arrests, Reece's bond conditions specify that she can only be on school grounds if supervised and attending an event involving one of her own children, such as a

parent-teacher conference.

As previously reported, Reece began her career at Union County Schools in 2004 working as a paraprofessional at the middle school, where she later became a physical education teacher, school officials said following her arrest.

She continued to work at the middle school until the 2016-2017 school year, when she transferred to Union County High as a gym teacher and the school's new track and field coach.

Reece lost her teaching job at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year, which would have marked her second year at the high school.

Her arrests made international headlines in 2017, having been held up as yet another example of a teacher allegedly having sex with a student.

Towns County Sheriff's Office finds fugitive hiding in Hiawassee home

News Special North Georgia News

HIAWASSEE – The Towns County Sheriff's Office received information on July 9 that a subject with warrants from multiple surrounding law enforcement agencies was hiding out in Towns County.

Acting on the information received, deputies searched a Hiawassee home and located the fugitive hiding in a closet within the residence.

The female suspect was

identified as Stephanie Elaine Hamilton, 40, of Hiawassee, and deputies confirmed that Hamilton was wanted on six warrants before taking her into custody without incident.

All of the warrants were theft-related along with one probation warrant, and they were issued out of Union, Fannin and Rabun counties in Georgia, as well as Oconee County in South Carolina, which is the westernmost county in the Palmetto State.



Stephanie Elaine Hamilton

Veterans offices closed July 22 - 26

Offices of the Georgia Department of Veterans Service will be closed July 22-26.

The closure affects all GDVS veterans field service offices, whose employees will spend the week participating in annual training.

"This training is necessary to ensure our employees maintain certification and stay updated on the latest changes to regulations governing veterans benefits," said George Canavaggio, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations & Appeals.

GDVS service officers will participate in training led by senior department personnel and supported by subject matter specialists from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

"This will be one of the most thorough and intense training weeks the department has ever held," said GDVS Commissioner Mike Roby. "We have focused our efforts on meeting VA standards to maintain our accreditation.

According to Commissioner Roby, "Our goal is to continue offering the excellent service our department

is known for."

All GDVS offices will reopen Monday, July 29.

Contact information for GDVS field service offices is listed at veterans.georgia.gov/field-offices; veterans

may also call 404-656-2300 for directory assistance.

In case of an emergency, veterans are advised to call VA directly at 800-827-1000.