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Board Chair Steven Phillips emceed the annual meeting as promised, and he honored longtime Director Ronnie Burch with a plaque and recognition for his 22 years of service on the board, as well as Greg Owenby, who went off the board at the conclusion of the meeting, for his term of service on the BRMEMC Board of Directors.

With the election of Mason, Payne and Cook, combined with the past two elections, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC now has a completely new board of directors compared to just three years ago, when the EMC faced turmoil over unpaid power bills of former director Terry Taylor and his company, and the subsequent cover-up by former general manager Matthew Akins.

During the Q&A portion of the meeting, a member asked about the unpaid balance of the Taylor & Taylor Construction Inc. bill.

The Blue Ridge Mountain EMC was awarded a little more than \$47,000 in a consent judgment following a civil suit dating to May of 2014, and has been attempting to collect on that debt ever since, which has been partially

paid down to about \$12,000 according to court documents out of Clay County, North Carolina.

Board Vice Chair Mickey Cummings addressed this debt in response to the member question that Saturday.

"Taylor & Taylor now owes Blue Ridge Mountain EMC \$12,343.06," said Cummings. "The bill started out at \$47,850. We've done all we can do to collect what money is owed us at this point."

EMC attorney Larry Ford spoke to the crowd, many of whom were shouting that Taylor & Taylor should finish paying the bill.

According to Ford, Taylor & Taylor Construction Inc. was a separate business account, which according to the membership agreement for businesses, kept Taylor from assuming any personal liability for the business account.

Taylor & Taylor Construction Inc. dissolved at the end of 2015 and no longer exists as a business entity, and Ford said that unless new assets are uncovered – and there's currently no evidence that such assets exist – it is unlikely that the remaining \$12,343.06 will be recovered.

Furthermore, Cummings and Ford said that continued collection efforts could end up costing more than the EMC could hope to recover.

"I have personally recommended to the Policy Committee that the membership agreement for businesses be changed to make a principal of the business personally responsible for any accounts associated with that business, with the EMC. I think that's sound business policy," said Ford to applause.

During his Manager's Report, new EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms, who comes with a decade of EMC experience and a background in electrical and wireless engineering, alerted the membership to an upcoming TVA rate hike.

"Shortly after arriving at the EMC five weeks ago, I was made aware of a small rate increase planned by the TVA, our wholesale power supplier," said Nelms, adding that the average increase for a residential account would be about 1.25 percent beginning Oct. 1.

"I want to emphasize that none of the increase will be retained by Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, and all of the increase will be sent to TVA to cover their increase in rates to us. If you have questions about this increase, please feel free to contact me later, and I'll be happy to provide additional information."

Next, Nelms went over his strategy for taking the EMC into the future, singling out continuity and stability in his delivery.

"When I first addressed the workforce of our EMC, I explained to the group that I'm ripping down the rearview mirrors to ensure there's no looking back," said Nelms. "What is in the past is the past, and we must move forward."

According to the June 2016 BRMEMC board minutes, Nelms was extended a salary offer of \$225,000 a year, with a \$25,000 discretionary bonus, plus a negotiable benefit package "that will include vacation, insurance, moving expenses, etc."

Director and Board Secretary Roy Perren of Towns County once again went over the findings of the recently completed \$75,981.47 forensic audit, which went a long way toward clearing the air and finances of the EMC.

In an effort to highlight the new board's commitment to transparency, Vice Chair Cummings went over a number of policies that have changed since the Steve Minor Report – a 2014 internal report that cost \$30,000 and studied the overdue debt of former director Terry Taylor.

Thanks to these policy changes, the directors no longer get health insurance through the EMC, a whistleblower policy has been revised, Town Hall Meetings have been established, and new policies have been created to make it easier to be nominated as a board candidate in future elections, among other changes.

As for the sole referendum on the ballot at the annual meeting this year, it passed by a margin of 66 percent, which will allow for notices of director's meetings to be sent out via email instead of by actual mail.

Perren also read from the 2016 Annual Report, which is available on the BRMEMC website. Some figures from the financial report from Fiscal



BRMEMC bucket trucks hoist a giant American flag ahead of Patriot's Day and the 9/11 anniversary

Year 2015 include: total current assets of \$12,108,905; long-term debt of \$116,588,384; total equities and liabilities of \$191,708,361; total operating expense and interest of \$81,185,986; and net margins of \$5,622,123.

"Fiscal Year 2016 ended June 30, and those data are over with the auditor right now, and that report should come out probably in October," said Perren.

One question from the membership dealt with why the EMC doesn't pay capital credits to members every year, which came with an answer that the TVA contract, with origins from the 1930s New Deal, doesn't allow for the paying of capital credits.

Another person asked about the ever-pressing "Customer Charge" from the bill, which new General Manager Nelms said was actually less expensive than other EMCs he was familiar with, and it went toward the fixed costs of the EMC, such as upkeep of the physical poles and lines that provide power.

As for fiber optic internet, the BRMEMC

answer seems to be to just have patience, as it was made clear in the annual meeting that there is no clear timeline for total fiber saturation.

"We are currently pursuing financing that will allow us to expand our fiber network," said EMC Director Chris Logan. "We are experiencing some problems with the legislation that prevents us from doing this in some ways, but we are currently working on trying to expand our fiber network as fast as we can."

"And we realize it's a big need in this community, and will be a big economic development for this community. That's pretty much it – we're looking at the finances to expand it."

Just prior to the start of the business portion of the meeting, EMC Director Charles Jenkins of Union County was loaded onto a stretcher and taken away via ambulance. Jenkins was reportedly feeling nauseous, though he smiled and waved to people as EMTs wheeled him from Anderson Music Hall.



Ronnie Burch attended his last EMC annual meeting as a director on Saturday, which was just one of many meetings over the 22 years he has served as a director