

Clayton city council hears Forward Rabun pitch

By Megan Broome
Staff Writer

CLAYTON— Clayton council members heard a presentation about Forward Rabun from Rick Story, director of development for Rabun County, at Tuesday's meeting.

"I just wanted to come today and give you an idea of what Forward Rabun is," Story said.

Forward Rabun is an umbrella organization that consists of the Development Authority of Rabun County, the Rabun County Chamber of Commerce and Welcome Center and a tourism entity. It is a public-private partnership.

Juanita Shope, Chamber president, and Pam Thompson from Dillard development authority, were also present at the meeting.

"Personally, I think it's working well," Story said about all the organizations being under one roof. "The synergy is tremendous. The energy is tremendous. And we love it."

Story said he has been going to different cities to pitch partnering with them to funnel their hotel/motel tax to Forward Rabun for marketing and advertising.

Clayton Mayor Jordan Green noted at the meeting that the city has already approved this year's budget and have already committed their hotel/motel tax for this budget.

Story said that Sky Valley has already partnered with Forward Rabun and sends them 100 percent of their hotel/motel tax while the city of Dillard will split their tax between Forward Rabun and Dillard's downtown development entity.



Rick Story, Director of Development for Rabun County explains the Forward Rabun concept at Tuesday's city council meeting.

Green noted however that he sees this as beneficial for the city and wanted council members to know about it for future discussion.

"This is one of the things we have to look to in the future," Green said.

Story said that he understood and that any way the city of Clayton and Forward Rabun could work together would be worthwhile.

In his pitch to council members, Story discussed how development is coming to the county and that the city of Clayton has a lot to offer. He said that it is growing but that it can be beneficial if it is marketed correctly.

"We can allow that growth to happen for us,

instead of happen to us," Story said.

He said that the Forward Rabun transition team consists of Juanita Shope, Rick Story, Pete Halter, Stephen Arbitter, Claude Dillard, Jim Wallis and Robert Pittman.

"We're ready to start putting together a formal board," Story said. He said that the plan is to have a 21-member community board where every city, the county and businesses are represented.

"We need to make it as representative as possible," Story said.

He said that plan is to have one representative from each city, one from the Chamber of Commerce, the Superintendent of Schools, and five

for the county-at-large.

Private sector businesses and organizations will have eight representatives collectively, Story explained.

He said that he understands that it sounds like a lot of people and that the board would meet quarterly to make it manageable.

"[We] don't want to be exclusionary," Story said when he was questioned about the large size of the board.

Story also said that the hope is to have a "mayor board," where mayors from all of the cities can come together to brainstorm collectively about ideas for the county and that Forward Rabun would facilitate this council.

Council member Woody Blalock questioned why this 21-person board was needed and said that he feels like the Chamber is adequate in achieving this goal.

"I guess I'm shocked we need a board for this," Blalock said. He said that there should be a way to consult on these matters without creating another board because there are too many meetings already.

"It's really more for coordination," Story said, adding this way, more entities would be represented.

Story added that Forward Rabun has a greater chance of receiving grants since these different organizations are operating together.

In other business: Zoning Administrator John Bozeman discussed having a detailed code of ordinances that address businesses leaving materials on sidewalks in a manner that could obstruct the flow of traffic.

He discussed a request to amend Article II of Sec. 38 streets, sidewalks and other places, of the city ordinance.

He said that in particular he noticed that several real estate boxes, some even that are empty, are displayed in the middle of the sidewalks and he wanted to address this matter.

This would "give us a little bit of something to work with downtown," Bozeman said.

Chief of Police Andy Strait discussed installing a camera system at City Hall and the police department.

"There is a big need for a camera system for the whole complex," Strait said.

He said that an estimate from R&H Technologies quoted a camera

system for approximately \$16,000. Although he said that there is still some information he needs to obtain.

He said the department is looking at a 32-camera system but would only be utilizing a portion of it at first. This would leave "room for growth," Strait noted.

Green suggested Strait try and get at least two more quotes for the council to consider before making a final decision.

Strait also discussed a contract that was signed with Bail Buddy, a company that allows a safe and secure way for inmates to pay out their bond with a debit or credit card, rather than having to take cash to the police station.

He said that this is at no cost to the city and that the company takes an 8 percent charge on the fine amount.

Strait noted that the Sheriff's Office uses this system and has not reported any problems with it.

Kathy Ford discussed Celebrate Clayton and requested a road closure for the event Friday, April 23 at 5 p.m. and re-opening Sunday at 6 p.m.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, Celebrate Clayton was cancelled for 2020.

"We have our fingers crossed that we are going to have a festival in April," Ford said.

City Clerk Rhonda Lunsford discussed an application from Kitchen Collectibles (Rumor Haz-it) for a beer, wine and liquor license.

Lunsford stated they have received a temporary license until it is voted upon by council members at next Tuesday's meeting.

Early voting in runoff races will begin next week

By Megan Broome
Staff Writer

CLAYTON— The general primary runoff election is set for Aug. 11 in Rabun County.

Early voting starts July 20 and runs through August 7 from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Rabun County Board of Elections Office, with Saturday voting on August 1 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Election's Office.

Candidates on the ballot

June's general primary election yielded a runoff election between Democratic and Republican candidates for both congress and the senate.

Republicans Matt Gurtler and Andrew Clyde will face each other in the runoff election after gaining the largest percentage of votes out of a crowded field of candidates in the race to fill the U.S. House of Representatives District 9 seat being vacated by incumbent Doug Collins.

Gurtler finished first with 23,015 votes (22 percent) with Clyde receiving 18,857 votes (19 percent).

Also vying for a spot on November's ballot as a candidate for the District 9 U.S. House of Representatives are Democrats Brooke Siskin, who gained 9,654 votes (43 percent) and Devin Pandey, who received 7,002 votes (36 percent) in June's general primary.

A runoff will also take place for the State Senate District 50 seat between Republicans Stacy Hall and Bo Hatchett.

Both candidates received 25 percent of votes cast in June's election, with Hatchett gaining 8,169 votes and Hall collecting 8,080 votes.

The winner on the Republican ticket will run against Democrat and Rabun resident Dee Daley in November.

Preparing the equipment

Tammy Whitmire, Rabun County elections supervisor, said that her office completed logic and accuracy testing on the new equipment July 13.

"Before any piece of voting equipment is used, we test it all to make sure it is doing what it's

supposed to," Whitmire said.

She said that the equipment has to be tested prior to every election, so another test will take place before the November 6 election.

Whitmire said that poll worker training will be held August 10 if they decide to hire any new poll workers.

Absentee ballots Whitmire said that the first batch of absentee ballots have been mailed out so people should be getting those in the mail over the next few days.

The ballots are due "the Friday before election day," which is August 7 but Whitmire cautioned that voters should submit their ballot as soon as possible.

"You have to remember that the ballot has

to get to you by mail. And you have to get it back to me by 7 p.m. on election day," Whitmire explained.

She said that voters have to fill out an absentee ballot request form and turn them in, then the office has to process it and mail out the ballot. The ballot then has to make it to the election's office by 7 p.m. on election night, so the process takes time.

The absentee ballot application can be returned by email, fax, mail or placed in drop box 105 outside the Board of Elections Office.

However, the paper ballot itself can only be submitted via mail or placed in the drop box.

Whitmire said that voters should only vote by absentee if they are

certain they will not go to the polls to vote on election day.

Voters have to submit a request to receive an absentee ballot for every election, unless they meet certain criteria:

- Age 65 or older
- Disabled
- UOCAVA Voter- Member of armed forces or Merchant Marines of the United States, commissioned corps of the Public Health Service or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, spouse or dependent residing with or accompanying said member, or a United States citizen residing overseas.

Any person meeting any of these exceptions

will automatically have absentee ballots mailed to them for the rest of the year, Whitmire said.

If someone requests a paper ballot but does not submit their ballot and instead decides they want to vote on election day, they have that option.

Whitmire said that when the voter arrives at the polls, they should notify the poll worker that they received an absentee ballot but did not fill it out.

The poll worker would then contact Whitmire to double check and ensure the absentee ballot is cancelled before voting in person.

Please see VOTE, A9

The Rabun County Board of Education will hold a public meeting on July 23, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. at the Rabun County Board of Education Building, 963 Tiger Connector Road, Tiger, Georgia.

The purpose of the meeting is to receive public input on the proposed annual FY21 budget.

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