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Runoff election is Tuesday

A runoff election for a Braselton Town Council seat is coming up on Tuesday.

Incumbent Becky Richardson will face challenger Richard Mayberry in the

Tuesday, Dec. 3, runoff election for the Braselton Town Council District 1 seat.

Voting will be open Dec. 3 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Braselton Police and

Municipal Court Building, 5040 Hwy. 53, Braselton. See results from the Dec. 3 election in next week's paper and online at Braselton-NewsTODAY.com.

Richardson, Mayberry

and challenger Joy Basham faced off in the Nov. 5 election. No candidate earned 50-percent of the vote, forcing a runoff between the top two vote-getters, Richardson and Mayberry.

In the Nov. 5 election, Richardson got 86 votes (44.5 percent), followed by challengers Mayberry with 58 votes (30 percent) and Basham with 49 votes (25.4 percent.)

This isn't the first time Richardson and Mayberry have faced off in an election. In 2015, Richardson ousted Mayberry, who was the District 1 incumbent at that time.

Braselton leaders to revisit rejected request

Braselton leaders will hold a hearing in December on a development request previously rejected by the town council.

In August, the Braselton Town Council voted to deny a master plan change for HECE, LLC, for 230 acres around the Publix shopping center on Hwy. 211.

Developers initially planned to construct a massive commercial de-

velopment on the property, but those plans changed. HECE, LLC, requested a master plan change to allow 425 single-family homes, over 205,000 sq. ft. of retail/commercial space and five commercial outparcels.

On remand from the Superior Court of Jackson County, the council will hold another public hearing on the request on Dec. 9 at 7 p.m.

Jackson public safety communications lacking

Jackson County is considering ways to modernize its public safety communications system, but the price tag won't be cheap.

A communications consulting firm hired by the Jackson County Board of Commissioners that has studied the county's emergency radio needs estimates the cost of upgrading to a modern radio communications system will cost between \$13-\$21 million, depending on the exact configuration.

The county's radio communications network includes all public safety agencies and some other non-emergency agencies, such as public schools.

The consulting firm gave a brief presentation of its findings to the BOC at its Nov. 18 meeting. No action was taken by the board.

FINDINGS: The findings outlined in a 120-page needs assessment report from TUSA Consulting Services were largely critical of the county's existing public safety communications system.

"The DMR system used in Jackson County lacks many features that modern radio system have," the report said.

Among the specific problems found were:

- The county's current system is reaching the end of its life cycle and will soon need to be replaced. The current system is also outdated compared to other systems now available.

- The current system has inadequate radio coverage in some areas of the county, including some spots along I-85 and around the fast-growing Braselton area. That is espe-

cially true with the county's portable radios, the report said.

- The current system is unable to easily talk with surrounding counties or state emergency agencies because it isn't compatible with other area communities. TUSA said that although Braselton covers four counties, "Communicating with neighbors is nearly non-existent." Gwinnett, Hall, Barrow and Athens-Clarke counties all have modern 800 Mhz P25 systems while Banks and Madison use proprietary systems, all incompatible with Jackson County's existing system.

- The current county radios were designed for commercial markets, not public safety agencies which need more durable and robust units.

- Many of the county's nine communications link sites are lacking. Most have obsolete cooling and backup power systems and many are too small to expand to house a modern system. Some of the sites had not been well-maintained by the county. "Almost all of the existing buildings, and the compounds they reside in, cannot support the space needed for a modern public safety radio system without substantial cost..." the report said.

PROPOSALS: TUSA outlined two possible options for the county in upgrading its system to an 800 Mhz P25 system. One would be a stand alone system where the county upgrades all its radios and connecting systems on its own. The cost of doing that would be \$16.3 to \$21.3 million upfront with an estimated total cost over 15 years

See **Communications**, page 3A

'A little scary' and 'a blessing'



MASON SALDANA AND BRENTON RUARK

WJMS teacher, student share impact of classroom experience

The "three Rs" of education today — rigor, relevance and relationships — had a real impact on a local family and a Jackson County School System teacher.

Mason Saldana, an eighth-grader at West Jackson Middle School, and Brenton Ruark, his healthcare science connections teacher, recently learned more about the importance of both teaching and learning, and Mason's mom explained it best in a letter she recently sent to school officials.

Leah Saldana said she and her husband believe the skills their son learned from Ruark

saved her life after a scary incident the evening of Oct. 20 when she experienced a seizure, followed by vomiting and unconsciousness.

"My husband had no phone reception inside our home and had to go outside to call 911," she wrote. Her son "jumped right in, holding my head to the side, and ensuring I had a pulse and I was in a position as to not aspirate while I was having a seizure and in and out of consciousness/vomiting."

"Mason was calm and knew exactly what to do in the situation, even though he was watching this happen to his mother. He kept me safe, (us-

ing) his knowledge from the Healthcare Science class, until EMS arrived to take me to the hospital. Though he wasn't able to get much sleep that evening, he went to school the next day as usual."

Mason was calm and matter-of-fact in explaining his role when he and Ruark recently created a "JC Success Story" video, a feature of the school system's website that celebrates student accomplishments based on classroom experiences.

The young man admitted that the situation was "a little scary," but he said the fact that Ruark had taught his students

about basic lifesaving and first aid made it possible for him to help his mother, putting her in "the recovery position" he'd learned about in class.

There was no question that what Mason learned in school had relevance in his real life.

"I think teachers sometimes wonder if what they're doing makes a difference," Ruark said, acknowledging that the Saldana family's experience brought that home for him.

Hearing about Mason's experience "made my heart happy," Ruark said. "I know it was a blessing."

See **WJMS**, page 3A

Hoschton moving forward on trash/recycling bid

By Alex Buffington
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Hoschton is one step closer to securing a trash/recycling pickup contract following action taken last week.

The Hoschton City Council approved Nov. 21 allowing city administrator Dale Hall to move forward with negotiations for a trash and recycling contract. Hoschton residents have been serviced by an interim pickup company for months and there have been multiple attempts to get a contract in place throughout the year. The city issued a request for proposals in October and ultimately received four responses. The names of the bidding companies remained anonymous during the special called city council meeting on Nov. 21.

"(To) minimize any biases in the city council, instead of giving the names of the firms, I actually lettered each firm," said Hall.

The council voted to move forward with nego-

tiations on proposal "D," which offered a fee of \$13.16. An alternate — option "A" which offered a \$13.50 fee — was also chosen. (The vendor fees differ from the fee ultimately charged to the citizens since service fees will be added.) Hall said he will proceed with negotiations with the top choice, discussing topics from bin color to pickup date.

All of the proposals include two 96-gallon bins — one for trash, the other for recycling.

Hall said the vendor's latest start date is in January, with an anticipated start date in December.

Council members also had some discussion about the senior citizens' discounted rate. New council member Shantwon Astin argued it's not fair to have the (non-senior) citizens subsidize that discounted rate. Additional discussion on the topic could continue during future talks to set the fee schedule.

Hoschton pondering \$1.6 million budget for FY2020

Hoschton's general fund budget for 2020 is expected to grow around \$600,000 over the current year's budget.

A tentative budget of \$1.6 million is being considered by the town, up from its initial \$1 million budget in 2019.

The Hoschton City Council held a hearing on the proposed budget Nov. 21. Budget adoption is slated for Dec. 9.

Five new positions are expected to be in the budget, but two current positions are also being eliminated. Among the positions are a full-time city clerk, a public services coordinator and permits clerk, a part-time receptionist, a public development director and a public works director.

A new facilities department is also being added.

The proposed budget is making some changes in how funds are allocated for 2020, a move that makes year-over-year comparisons difficult. Department reorganizations are also included in the budget proposal.

Planning and zoning is the town's largest department

with expenses expected to be \$639,500 in 2020.

Among other items, the budget anticipates a significant increase in the town's planning and development fee income in 2020; an increased cost for professional services, including legal expenses; funds to complete work on a renovation of city hall; funds to pay for security officers at city council meetings; a digital billboard to display city news and events; and \$5,000 to plan for a city bike/hike trail.

WATER/SEWER FUND

In the town's water and sewer fund, Hoschton officials anticipate a large increase in expenses due to \$5.3 million in planned capital projects. Much of that is being offset by using \$1.8 million from reserves and a \$1.9 million contribution from developers.

Among the projects on the agenda are an upgrade to the town's waste water treatment plant (\$1.6 million), an expansion of sewer at the industrial park (\$1 million), and sewer upgrades at Panther Court (\$855,000).

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