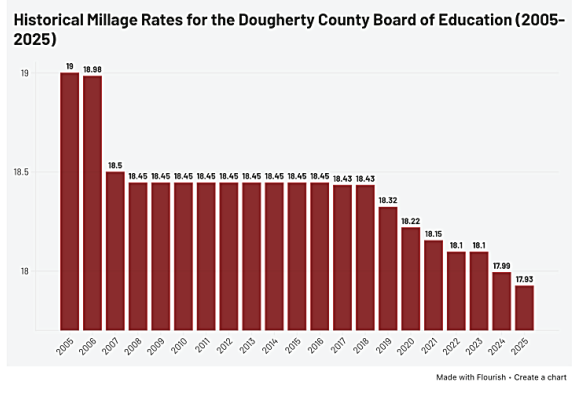




Millage (Property Tax) Rate



Graphic Courtesy of DCSS

Dougherty County School System millage rates have generally declined over the past two decades, falling from 19 mills in 2005 to 17.93 mills in 2025. District officials said Friday they expect another reduction in 2026 as property values increase.

As assessments climb, DCSS signals sizable millage cut

By Kathryn Crockett
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ALBANY — As Dougherty County property owners react to sharply higher reassessed values, school officials say the Dougherty County School System expects to substantially reduce its property tax rate for the ninth consecutive year. Superintendent Kenneth Dyer told members of the Dougherty County Board of Education on Friday that the district has not yet received the preliminary tax digest needed to calculate a proposed millage rate, but the significant increase in property values is expected to allow for a sizable reduction.

“I do anticipate a significant reduction in our millage rate because of the significant increase in the tax digest,” Dyer said. “What exactly that is, I don’t know.”

Dyer said the reduction could ultimately be the largest the district has made during its nine-year stretch of lowering the millage rate.

See **DCSS**, 2A

Dougherty County residents experience sticker shock with tax notices

By Alan Mauldin
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ALBANY — Dougherty County has completed a comprehensive reassessment of property tax values for the first time in more than a decade, and this week the notices to property owners started landing in the mailboxes of property owners.

Judging by the reaction online, the feeling

from many residents is anger, confusion and frustration. Dozens have commented on social media, and Dougherty County Commission members say they are receiving calls, texts and emails.

The volume got loud enough for Commissioner Russell Gray that he put his own response on Facebook.

“I think there’s initial outrage at seeing the magnitude of in-



VICTOR EDWARDS

creases in valuation,” he said. “I caution everyone to understand that it is not a tax bill.”

That linking of assessment value, such as the assumption that a 50% increase in value means a 50% jump in property taxes, is one that individuals commenting online are making.

Put simply, a higher property value does not equate to a bigger tax bill, the commissioner said. The amount on those bills will depend on the tax millage rates set by the County Com-

mission, Albany City Commission and the Dougherty County School Board.

Homeowners who have homestead exemptions also are further protected at the city and county levels because both governments opted into state legislation that will retain the 2024 base rate, keeping the values on those properties the same. Any increase in valuation would be limited to the amount of the

See **NOTICES**, 2A

Edreka Coleman named first female head drum major of ASU Band

Staff Reports
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ALBANY — Albany State University’s Marching Rams Show Band will make history this fall when Edreka Coleman, a senior music education major from Macon, becomes the university’s first female head drum major.

Coleman, who previously served as a drum major during the 2025–2026 academic year, will lead the Marching Rams’ three-drum-major team during the 2026–2027 academic year. Her appointment marks a significant milestone in the band’s history and builds on a legacy of women who have served as drum majors at Albany State.

Previous female drum majors include Chasity Johnson (2003–2004), the late Ashley Pickney (2006–2007), Fayola Braithwaite (2011–2012) and Desiree Wesson (2016–2017). Coleman now becomes the first woman to serve as the ensemble’s head drum major, taking on the lead role among the band’s three drum majors.

“Being the first female head drum major at Albany State University is an incredible honor, but more than anything, I see it as a responsibility and a blessing from God,” Coleman said. “I

understand that I am standing in a position that represents more than just me. I am representing every woman and every young girl who has ever dreamed of stepping into a leadership position.

“I hope my leadership shows that with faith, hard work, preparation and perseverance, there is no limit to what God can do through you.”

As head drum major, Coleman will serve as the student leader among the band’s drum majors, helping provide direction, coordination and leadership for the ensemble during rehearsals, performances and appearances. While all three drum majors serve as leaders and conductors of the band, the head drum major assumes the primary leadership role and works closely with the director of bands and other student leaders to help guide the ensemble.

Coleman’s appointment comes at a pivotal time for the Albany State band, which continues to expand its presence on the national stage. This fall, the Marching Rams will make history as the first HBCU band to perform in America’s Thanksgiving Parade



Special Photo: ASU

Edreka Coleman, a senior music education major from Macon, will become Albany State University’s first female head drum major this fall.

See **COLEMAN**, 2A

Federal government completes distribution of first-year grants to bolster Georgia’s rural hospitals



File Photo

Federal funding allocated in Georgia will be used to try and help rural hospitals stay open.

By Ty Tagami
Capitol Beat News Service

ATLANTA — The federal government has announced the delivery of the rest of a \$218 million award to Georgia to support rural hospitals.

The \$93.3 million in funding completes the first fiscal year of a five-year, \$50 billion national funding program approved by Congress last year.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services at the money will pay for technical innovations at rural hospitals, such as surgical robotics and telehealth, plus medical training and recruitment, maternal and behavioral services, and newborn screening.

It will also help 87 rural Georgia hospitals

prepare to provide what the federal agency is calling “value-based” care.

Dr. Dean Burke, the physician who leads Georgia’s Department of Community Health, said in a statement Thursday that the program will “have decades of positive impact” on rural healthcare.

Democrats had wanted to preserve funding for Medicaid, which the bill slashed by hundreds of billions of dollars. Democrats have blasted the GOP for their approach to healthcare, blaming it for rural hospital funding shortfalls.

For instance, the state Democratic Party asserted in late-July that Rep. Mike Collins’ vote to pass “massive Medicaid cuts”

See **HOSPITALS**, 2A

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