

Subject: Business Concerns
November 28, 2023

On election night, I went to a couple of parties for the candidates awaiting election results. Needless to say, these kinds of events can be exuberating for some candidates and very disappointing for others. Regardless of whether their candidates won or lost, everyone was relieved to some degree that the election was over and that they were free to return to normal community life.

I attended these election night parties to support and congratulate all the candidates, regardless of the results. As I have said before, I respect and appreciate folks who are willing to run for public office.

As I was leaving one of the parties, a friend of mine, who is also a local business person, had a very candid message to deliver to me. The gist of his communication was that, as mayor, he thought I did not support or understand the business community. That basically, I had no clue how a business was run and all the hard work and stress that business owners faced daily.

My friend went on to say that the current board also did not support the business community. His position was that commissioners did not have to operate a business as a livelihood and had no concept about meeting payrolls and dealing with employee issues.

I could tell my friend was very frustrated and probably had a list of grievances against me and the board. Given that it was election night, I decided not to defend myself, nor the board, or to enter what would probably be an unproductive defense or argument about supporting business.

I simply acknowledged him and said in passing I hope we could continue addressing his concerns. Over the next few days, I pondered how I should respond. I did share with several commissioners his concerns about the board not supporting businesses. A couple of the commissioners, who are themselves business owners, took issue with his assertion of their not knowing about business.

As mayor, I should be open to other perspectives. Maybe the board and myself are missing something about how the business community feels or how we can provide more support. Perhaps there are things that the town can do to support businesses and the economy better. Sometimes, organizations arrive at a time where review and re-evaluation of a situation is very much in order.

So, rather than just keeping the dialogue between me and my business friend, I invite feedback from the entire business and merchant community. How can the town government do more to improve the business climate in Highlands? If you are a company, business, or merchant in Highlands, please feel free to send me your concerns and ideas at my email address: Mayor@highlandsnc.org.

I look forward to getting the community input and presenting it for your review and comment.

As a follow up I would like to have a public meeting sometime at the beginning of the year to discuss these ideas and concerns. I know it is a busy time of the year, but I hope folks will make time to respond before January 1. I will do a follow-up with details at a later date.