

Subject: More Like New York City  
November 20, 2022

On a plane coming back from a long weekend in New York City, I wrote down my insights from my visit there. As Highlands' Mayor, I always get ideas on how we can operate our town by visiting other cities. New York, arguably the greatest city in the world, is no exception.

The Big Apple gave me several insights for transforming Highlands into a great city. Please endure my thoughts for a moment. After reading this piece you may think a travel ban on this Mayor is in order.

First, Highlands might need to improve the way we pick up trash in the downtown area. Maybe we have too much of a "tidy cat" perspective with all those bear proof street cans and roll carts. Let's do it like New Yorkers and have businesses just pile up the bags of trash on the sidewalks just before evening closings. We could then have a night sanitation crew pickup downtown between 9 pm to midnight. I would insist requiring only black trash bags which would minimize their presence to our tourists staying in hotels and patronizing restaurants.

We also need to consider adopting the New York traffic, pedestrian, and sidewalk plan. Do we really need traffic lights and crosswalks? Cars have horns and people have loud voices, so like in New York, everyone could kind of workout their own mobility plan. And we need to stop worrying about parking. Let's do like New Yorkers and just park anywhere. It would foster a great towing industry in Highlands!

I also have a solution to the housing and hotel problem. Manhattan is a landlocked island. Highlands is landlocked too, surrounded by that pesky US Forest Service land. Let's do what New York did: go up! That 35-foot building height limitation could be changed. Just add a zero to the 35! Allowing 350-foot-tall buildings in downtown would solve a multitude of problems. We could create parking garages, workforce housing, STR condos and unlimited hotel rooms and restaurants. The only regulation I would want would be no building could be taller than Satulah Mountain. Absolutely, we couldn't compromise the view.

Highlands could add tables to downtown restaurants like New York by adding hut like structures with tables or bars in parking areas fronting the restaurants. For more lighting downtown we could allow those huge video screens that now cover Times Square.

Finally, in emulating New York, Highlands needs more arts venues. Just having the Bascom, the PAC and the Playhouse just isn't enough. We need art galleries everywhere and theaters on almost every corner. Those virtual Saturday opera broadcasts by the PAC could be replaced with our own Highlands Opera Company. We would also need to create the Highlands Philharmonic Orchestra.

We have to start thinking big and bigger! Or do we? On this holiday weekend maybe we should be thankful for Highlands, the way it has been, the way it is now, and the way it will be in the future, a small mountain village with wonderful people, businesses, and community organizations all residing within a unique mountain landscape.

Have a Happy Thanksgiving while being in a great place to live.