

Subject: Scholarships and Much More  
May 16, 2023

On Monday, I had the honor of awarding town scholarships to the graduating seniors at the annual Highlands School Honors Day program. This year \$56,000 in scholarships were awarded to the graduates. College students who are still in school at colleges, universities, and technical schools are also given scholarships. I want to thank everyone in the community who supported this important program for our young people.

Contributions to the Town of Highlands Scholarship program can easily be made by including an extra check in your utility bill payment. Simply make the check-out to The Town of Highlands Scholarship Fund. Or deliver a check to Town Hall when you drop off a utility bill. Donations are tax-deductible.

Thursday is the May meeting of the Highlands Town Board of Commissioners. Our new town attorney, Bob Hageman, will be joining us by way of Zoom. Going forward, an attorney from Bob's firm, Poyner and Spruill, will be at all town planning board and zoning board meetings.

The agenda for tonight's meeting is rather robust. One item will be a budget amendment of \$500,000 as the end-of-the-year true-up bill from Duke Energy. At the end of each fiscal year, the town gets either a bill or a credit for electrical usage as a part of our wholesale contract with Duke. In the past several years, the town has received credits averaging around \$90,000. This year's soaring fuel costs have produced an additional bill. The money to pay this true upcharge will come from reserved funds, so there will be no increase in electric utility rates. Hopefully, energy-generating costs will be lower in the coming year.

Josh Ward, our town manager, presented a proposed budget for this coming year to the board. Josh's presentation is a culmination of staff and board meetings for the past several months in developing a new budget. After this presentation, the board will set a public hearing for the June meeting. A town budget has to be in place by July 1. Like always, this new budget will have some big-ticket items related to upgrades to critical infrastructure projects. The budget may look larger than usual because of several carry-over items. Due to supply chain and availability issues, a number of purchases and contracts will have to be carried over into the upcoming budget. The funds for these items were appropriated in past budgets but have to be shown in the new budget.

Finally, I hope everyone will come visit the new fire station on Friday between 4 and 6 pm. At 4, a dedication ceremony will be held, followed by tours of the new facility. The fire chief, Ryan Gearhart, tells me we are making very good progress in staffing the station with full-time personnel. In the coming weeks, shifts for the new firefighters will begin.

Parking at the new station is limited. I suggest parking at other nearby sites and using the sidewalk to access the facility.