

Subject: Town Board Meeting & Duke Energy
June 14, 2023

Congratulations to the Highlands Motoring Festival for again putting on a wonderful car show this past weekend. Mark Chamar and all the volunteers of the Motoring Festival are to be commended for all their hard work in coordination, planning, and delivering this nationally acclaimed event. The community payout is over \$100,000 in support of REACH, the Literacy Council, and the Community Care Clinic.

Last week, I was at a recent meeting of the Southwestern Regional Planning Commission, where a representative from Duke Energy made an important presentation concerning the electric grid in Western North Carolina. Lisa Leatherman, Duke Energy's Community Relations Representative, coordinated the presentation. This past winter, Highlands and other area communities lost power due to a failure of key components in the Duke Energy system. Duke Energy is addressing this problem by building a self-mending grid network. In the immediate future, they will have installed a system where if one service area loses power, an automated system will reroute the grid to restore power to the affected area. This will contain areas where power is lost, and their crews will focus work there to reconnect the grid. This new system will benefit the Highlands and Cashiers areas.

Thursday is the June meeting of the Highlands Town Board of Commissioners. The meeting will begin at 7 pm at the Highlands Community Center. The first item on the agenda will be public comment, but we will also have a public comment period when the board reviews the proposed budget for fiscal year 2023-2024.

The budget includes a 5% cost of living adjustment for town employees. The town is now in a recruiting war with other municipalities to attract and retain qualified, highly trained employees. A critical area that underscores this situation is in law enforcement. Just in the last few weeks, we have lost an officer to another jurisdiction that offered a higher salary. To be competitive with other agencies, our police chief will be asking for an additional \$4,200 increase for all current officers. While Highlands was at the top of the salary scale two years ago, other law enforcement agencies have eclipsed our pay scale in order to attract qualified law enforcement officers, who are in short supply across the nation.

In addition to the budget review, the board will hear a proposal from the town manager for hiring a new electric consultant. Our previous consultant, Kevin O'Donnell, tragically passed away several weeks ago. Our town manager and our public works director have been searching for a new consultant, and as a result of their efforts Louis Davis of UTEC will be introduced to the board. He has a broad background in all phases of electric utility services.

The board will also review an amendment to the parking ordinance pertaining to the forthcoming electric charging stations. Simply put, it will be illegal for any vehicle not using the charging system to park in those designated spaces.

See you at Thursday's meeting, whether it be in person or by way of the YouTube feed on the town website.