

At the past town board meeting, changes to the town noise ordinance were reviewed. The public weighed in on the issue with various points of view. One speaker asked me to provide a complete review of the ordinance and explain its details. I will not go to that extreme, but I will share my overall views about our current ordinance.

First, some would like for Highlands to be a noise-free community. If one were living on the side of an isolated mountain or in a country club community, one might experience this noise-free environment. However, Highlands is an incorporated community with a population density and business activities that will generate some level of noise from time to time. And, in general, the closer one lives to the business district, the more noise one can expect.

Living in a neighborhood will generate sounds from everyday life, such as children playing, lawnmowers, building projects, and neighbors doing routine tasks, which is to be expected. The town has ordinances that address such activities and when they can occur. For instance, no commercial activities by builders and professional landscapers are allowed on Sunday, and on Saturday they are limited to between the hours of 9 am and 4 pm. If someone suspects such activity is taking place in violation of these times, they can report it by calling 828-524-2020, the non-emergency dispatch number. These rules apply only to activities within the town limits; outside of Highlands, there are no such restrictions.

If a person lives in incidental residences in business districts, noise frequencies and levels are expected to be higher than in a residential area. Living downtown is not a primary function for a business zone. These areas are more densely populated, with trucks and heavy traffic moving through these areas, plus the normal operation of business activities.

Throughout the town, there are periods when music can be heard, which is not necessarily a violation of the noise ordinance. Our police will investigate instances of music being played at specific times and at specific decibels.

The town board and the police will continue to review the noise ordinance and make adjustments where necessary. But I am certain the town will not reach a point where everyone is happy with the noise ordinance and its enforcement. And yes, our police have looked at other ordinances in many other cities. There is no magic bullet for this issue.

On Thursday, April 30, the final town budget workshop will be held. It will take place at 3 pm at the Highlands Community Building. The staff will share another iteration of the new town budget with the town board. After receiving feedback from the board at this session, the town manager and financial director will present a proposed budget to the board at the May town board meeting. At that time, the board will vote to hold a public session budget meeting at the June Town Board meeting. As always, this budget workshop is open to the public. Hope to see you there.