

I will be hosting a community information meeting to discuss district alignments and the process by which county commissioners are selected by voters. Earlier this year, the Macon County Board of Commissioners held a public hearing about districts and voting. There was a strong response from citizens who attended the hearing, with many expressing ideas about the proposal.

From that hearing, it was clear Macon County residents wanted a careful study before any changes occurred. In that spirit, I invite all county residents, of whom Highlanders are, to come review these issues at this meeting. At the previous public hearing, several ideas were presented by Macon countians. These discussions need to continue. I would advocate bringing in consultants, for instance, NC State Board of Elections staff and NC School of Government experts, to identify options for county voters to consider.

The community meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 9, at the Highlands Community Center. It will begin at 6 pm. I want to encourage all elected officials and residents to attend and take part in discussions.

Let me update you on several pieces of legislation currently in process in the North Carolina short legislative session. First, a proposed constitutional amendment has been passed by both houses to enable legislators to control how towns and counties can levy property taxes each year. There are other constitutional amendments on the floor. One would limit the state income tax rate to no more than 3.5%. The current limit is 7%. There is also a constitutional amendment that may appear on the November ballot that declares life begins at conception. If a supermajority in both legislative bodies pass the proposed amendments, the governor's signature is not necessary for the amendments to appear on the November ballot for voters to approve.

There are several proposed rule changes to the 160-D General Statutes. These statutes enable towns and counties to implement development, zoning, and building codes.

One change would come from the HB 369-Parking Lot Reform/Stormwater Control bill. It would preempt local governments from having any off-street parking requirements. The concept behind the change is to encourage more diverse, available housing options. On the other hand, many local officials worry about increasing parking congestion if the legislation becomes law.

SB 445, the Regulation Reform Act of 2026, would be a statewide statute to permit building heights up to 60 feet in commercial areas. Highlands currently has a 30-foot height ordinance. With the recent approval of the hotel on the Bank of America site, some residents have been upset that the hotel has a 30-foot entrance side and a 45-foot back side. If this legislation

were to pass, it may preempt our ability to regulate heights, as we currently do.

And finally, GS 160-D-917 would permit accessory dwelling units in all residential areas. These units would be small cottage-type dwellings, sometimes referred to as “grand mama houses.” The rationale for this change is to expand workforce units in a given area. I am open to this legislation passing. We desperately need more housing for workers in Highlands. My caveat is that without a prohibition on these units being used as STRs, the goal of increasing workforce housing would be negated by the allure of high rental fees generated by short-term rentals.

We will continue to track the progress of these changes, as will the North Carolina League of Municipalities. It is hard to stop a train and the North Carolina legislature.