

This past week, we had a long town board meeting that adjourned shortly after 10 pm. It was a long agenda, even with the last-minute removal of the noise ordinance review.

A special meeting will be announced soon to discuss the noise ordinance. At that daytime meeting, the police will conduct an outdoor demonstration of decibel readings, which are currently part of the noise ordinance. I asked the police to develop a demonstration of the actual sound levels currently in the ordinance. Commissioner Weller emphasized that such an experiment needed to be conducted outdoors, where decibel levels could be measured more accurately. After this meeting, the review of the noise ordinance will again be placed on a board meeting agenda.

The announcement of this special meeting will be made 48 hours prior to its occurrence. It will be posted on the town website and sent to those people on the Town of Highlands Sunshine List. If you are not on the list and want to be, call the Highlands Town Hall at (828) 526-2118. Ask to speak with Gibby Shaheen, the town clerk, and she will add your email address to the current list.

By the way, I wrote the Highlands Town Hall because we have a new restaurant that opened last weekend called Town Hall. I expect some ongoing confusion with the use of the name.

The first agenda item was Mike Hanson's report on McGill Engineering's work preparing for the dredging of Mirror Lake. His report has been posted on the town website. I sat in the meeting listening to the report and having flashbacks of some 25 or 30 years ago. Back then, Sallie and I would come to Highlands from Atlanta to visit her mother and Buck Trott, her newly married husband. Buck loved living near Mirror Lake in the home they had built in 1984. He would take me around the lake and talk about how they had revived the Mirror Lake Improvement Association. People would come up to us while on a lake tour and tell us how enthusiastic they were about an active improvement association working to upgrade the lake.

Buck would also show me the plans he had developed for dredging the lake. Those plans involved using a dredger to pump sediment to a site where trucks would transport it to a nearby farm or other land. It seemed to be very straightforward to carry out, although Buck admitted raising the million dollars or so would be a challenge.

But Buck had a plan for that, too; he would go to Washington, his old stomping ground as an Air Force staff officer, and find the money. He came so close but never got the money from DC. He passed away in 2015, never knowing that Mirror Lake would eventually be dredged 30 years later.

So, as I listened to Mike Hansen's report, I, along with others in the room, was once again reminded of the complexity of this project. That notion of depositing the dredging material on a farm has now transformed into an expensive plan to deposit it at the old landfill at Rich Gap Road. The county and town have entered into a comprehensive agreement to make the deposits in a safe and environmentally sound manner. That short travel distance will save a lot of time and money, resulting in more dredging of the lake.

The bid documents and construction plans are in the final stages of development. Mike will come back to the board sometime this summer to give an update and report. Once more information is available about the dredging operations, the board will hold a public information meeting about the start and completion of the project.

At last week's board meeting, the idea of doing this project quickly with minimal disruption was floated. Mike's response will be that we all want to work as fast as possible, but he believes the efficient use of resources, without hurried time deadlines, will allow as much dredging as possible for the 5-million-dollar grant funding the project. As with all construction projects, disruptions and inconveniences will occur, though efforts to minimize them will also be on the agenda. The NC Department of Environmental Quality will monitor all phases of the dredging process.

Now, about the dredging costs. If I could have foreseen the future and told Buck back in the 1990s that the dredging of Mirror Lake would cost five million dollars and be limited to only certain critical areas, I doubt he would have believed me. Me too, for that matter. Mayor Trott was always an enthusiastic, "can-do person," whether he was flying a combat mission or serving his beloved community. We should all give him credit for his vision and leadership as the dredging of Mirror Lake becomes a reality in the next couple of years.