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| Thursday, December 12, is the last town board meeting of the year. The board meeting will begin at 7 pm at the Highlands Community Building next to the ball field.   You can remotely access the meeting via the portal on the town website.  No workshop session before the board meeting is scheduled for this month, but they will resume at the beginning of the new year.Normally, the board meeting in December has a light agenda. This time, there are some major items to be reviewed before the end of the year.The most important item will probably be a request from Highlands Festival Inc. to move this year's Bear Shadow event to Founders Park at the start of May. For several years, Bear Shadow has enjoyed a successful run at a farm property in Scaly Mountain. That property is no longer available, and the organizers have not been able to locate a comparable venue in the area. A few years ago, a proposal was floated to hold the event in Horse Cove, but that idea was not well received by the residents of Horse Cove.I am sure the board will have several questions and issues about allowing Bear Shadow in Founders Park.  For instance, how many tickets would be sold, 1,000, 1,500 or more? How would sound levels be controlled? How would parking and facilities be managed?Another issue would be how the sale of alcohol would be handled.  First, the board would have to grant permission. The town also has an alcohol policy that generally allows folks to bring their own alcohol to designated music events in the Park. That limited alcohol policy has worked well.As mayor, I like the policies of no alcohol sales in Founders Park and always being open to the public; going forward, I believe we should affirm and continue these policies. Since the Park opened over a decade ago a policy evolved not to allow ticketed events like concerts. It has worked well, although there has been a recent shift or creep toward allowing some ticketed events in Founders Park. Nevertheless, the Highlands Car Festival, the Rotary Art Shows, the Twilight 5k, the Dahlia Festival, the Farmers Market, and SnowFest are all public events requiring no entry fees to Founders Park.My concern is that Bear Shadow would be a major, ticketed event in our public Founders Park. I have also had similar concerns about the recent Truckin event,where the entire Park was cordoned off, and folks without tickets, including myself, were not allowed in the Park. One resident came to my office the morning of the event complaining Truckin staff told her she could not use the public restrooms. She was in my office because they said the mayor ordered the restroom closure. Town staff corrected the misunderstanding immediately, and the restrooms we opened to the public.I’m sure the town board will thoroughly review the Bear Shadow request and make the best decision for the community. I am also sure that they have received a lot of feedback about the request, pros, and cons.The board will also hear a presentation and summary of the recently completed town audit filed with the North Carolina Local Government Commission. I have been informed that the town has a clean audit with no deficiencies cited.Hope to see you at the meeting or tune in with the video link. |

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