

Thursday is Highlands Town Board of Commissioners' January meeting. A board workshop will begin at 6 p.m., followed by the business meeting at 7 p.m. Both meetings are at the Highlands Community Building, next to the ball field. The meeting can be accessed remotely through a link on the town website.

Two items will be discussed at the workshop session. Commissioner Patterson has requested a review of current town and county ordinances concerning septic systems, especially the requirement for new septic systems to have a repair area. Another item will deal with town policies concerning the use of the park and other recreation facilities. At the last meeting, a question was raised as to whether the town had written park use policies. There are written policies that were developed when Founders Park first opened. The board and staff will discuss these policies to determine if there should be changes or additions to these existing policies. It is good we are going through this process since the original policies are now a decade old.

The 7 p.m. board meeting will review the chamber of commerce lease that the board requested the town attorney change after the December meeting. If approved, the lease will then be sent to the chamber for their signature.

On the agenda will be a request for conditional zoning for several residential homes on the corner of Maple and Oak Streets. This request has been reviewed and approved by the zoning board of adjustment and the planning board. The decision for tonight will be for the town board to call for a public hearing concerning the zoning change at the February meeting. After the public hearing, the board will vote on the matter.

Let me address the power outage that occurred on Saturday morning in the midst of the snowstorm. The problem was that the Duke transmission line that fed power to the town went down. A transmission pole fell in the high winds early Saturday morning. Duke had to bring specially trained linemen from outside the area to work on a major transmission line.

After the loss of power during Helene, both Duke and Highlands knew there were potential problems on this critical line that runs down Hicks Road. In fact, some upgrades had just been completed, but more work was needed. A contractor that can work on or near energized transmission lines was being sought. Unfortunately, this outage occurred before critical work could be completed.

Also, Duke Energy and Highlands are working together to bring another transmission line into Highlands from US 64 near Highlands Falls Country Club. We are progressing well and expect the line to be active by the summer. In addition, our consulting electrical engineers are developing more transmission feeds that will help the town manage and distribute the load in circumstances like the one experienced this past weekend. The problem is that developing such a system will take several years to implement. The town board has already made the financial commitment to do so.