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| As of this past Tuesday the Highlands Town Board began a review of STR ordinance recommendations from the Highlands Planning Board.  The members of the Highlands Planning Board met a number of times to review proposed changes to town ordinances which town attorneys had drafted.   I again want to thank the Highlands Planning Board for their good work.  Going into that meeting on Tuesday, the staff, board, and I planned on reviewing the planning board recommendations, making edits and changes that the commissioners agreed to. After that process, a draft document would have been presented for a public hearing at the March 17 board meeting.  Meetings can change plans. Craig Justice, the attorney the town retained to review town ordinances related to STRs, informed the board at the end of the meeting that a hearing should be called for public response to the planning board recommendations. The town board voted to hold that hearing on Thursday, February 24th at 5 pm. After that public hearing the town board will review the recommendations and consider public comment.  I want to update everyone concerning the replacement of the Middle Creek bridge between Scaly and the Georgia state line.  I’m a member to the Transportation Advisory Committee of the Southwestern Regional Planning Organization.  The committee has been following the issues and problems facing NCDOT including scheduled bridge replacements.  The aging Middle Creek bridge is very narrow and needs to be replaced given the increase truck traffic using NC 106 to access the Highlands and Cashiers area.  The good news is that bridge replacement contract is scheduled to be let in mid-March.  The bad news is that the US Forest Service is supposed to do a consultation analysis before construction begins.  That analysis has not been done, and as a result the entire project may be delayed.  We are in the process of developing items for the town retreat scheduled for March 10.  While the primary focus of the retreat is developing budget priorities for the coming fiscal year, I also want us to review longer term issues.  I have asked the Mirror Lake Homeowners Association to make a presentation concerning their plans to dredge and restore Mirror Lake.  They have developed a specific plan for addressing the siltation problem.  I also want to review the town policy and plans for residents wanting to install solar energy units at their homes. There are emerging issues about designs that would safely interface with our electrical grid and how to meter solar systems.  We need to ensure that the town does not impede efforts to transition to green energy systems. A discussion needs to be had concerning how the proliferation of these solar units will, or will not, impact the existing contract that the town has with Duke Energy.  It is a very complex issue.  Folks with requests for items to be included in next year’s budget, please let me or your commissioners know.  By the June board meeting, budget priorities will be set.  Pat Taylor |

