Recently, a resident told me, "Someone with your clout should get the US Post Office here in Highlands to do a better job in postal delivery." My response is that it is not a town function. We have made inquiries before concerning these issues, but the post office is a federal agency that works autonomously from the local government. I have suggested in the past that any postal concerns should be sent to our congressman, Chuck Edwards.

My other suggestion regarding package delivery or shipping is to use a private provider. I ship the pottery that I sell from my studio by way of a local business that provides choices as to what provider to use. I have used the US Post Office to ship my work, and in most cases, it arrives at the customer in pieces. Not so much with other shippers.

Another thing I can not control is where commercial trucks travel in town. The town has no authority to limit truck travel on public vehicular byways. For instance, we can not pass an ordinance to prohibit trucks on 5th Street from Carolina Way to Chestnut, as one resident insisted we do. Deliveries of packages, building materials, and contractor trucks loaded with equipment travel throughout town constantly. Having our police enforce such highway restrictions would be problematic and most likely would not hold up in court if challenged.

I suspect that the expectation that the town can restrict certain vehicles on specific highways stems from the prohibition against trucks with trailers over 30 feet using US 64 between Highlands and Franklin. This law, which we actively campaigned for, was not enacted by the Highlands Town Board but rather by the North Carolina legislature, which passed a bill last year. The state, not Highlands, regulates highways and roads.

Another recent inquiry by a resident was about our town ordinance concerning the flying of drones. Currently, the town does not have drone ordinances in place, except policies on how we fly the town drone that is used for mapping and other land use purposes. The FFA controls the airspace, and the operation of drones, and the state of North Carolina has additional rules. The FAA has many restrictions on the use of drones. In regard to permitted use, recreational drone pilots should not fly directly over people, public events, or moving vehicles. Flying at a low level near or next to homes or businesses, especially near windows, can be considered trespass offenses.

A license or a TRUST certificate is required for drone operations. Recreation drone users must pass a Recreational UAS Safety Test (TRUST), and commercial drone users must have an FAA Remote UAV Pilots license.

I also sometimes get inquiries about rulings by the Highlands Zoning Board of Adjustment. Some residents may think that the mayor can overrule or influence the zoning board's process or decisions. By law, the mayor can not influence or overrule a zoning board decision. The zoning board follows a quasi-judicial process and is charged by state statutes to make an impartial decision based on the evidence provided. Macon Countyan oversees the board, and to ensure impartiality, I do not talk with zoning board members about impending cases they may hear.

Finally, neither the town nor the mayor has the authority to control the cutting of trees in residential areas. Such a tree ordinance would require state-enabling legislation. The big question would be what restrictions would be in such an ordinance. Potentially, tree-cutting restrictions could limit what a property owner could do on their property, and some may think that could be an overreach on the part of the town. Others counter that over-cutting trees impacts the environment in this special place. The point I will make is that currently, the town has no authority to regulate the number of trees that can be removed on residential lots. I tend to be very reluctant to impose such limits in residential areas. On the other hand, the town does have enabling legislation from the state concerning tree removal in commercial zones.

After reading this piece, some may think I am unwilling to take a stand and quick to pass the buck of inaction. The opposite is true. When an issue is presented, I, along with the Town Board, make every effort to determine how, and if, we can be involved to resolve the situation. If it is an area outside of our jurisdiction, we do not just pass it by; we endeavor to determine the correct solution and work with Macon County and the state to find the solution. The truck issue on the Franklin to Highlands road is a prime example.

Governance is a complex process of negotiating chains of authority, conflicting federal, state, and local statutes, and court rulings. I continually find the old saying correctly that one person's rights stop when they crossover into the rights of another person. This principle creates the challenging waters that elected officials must navigate to steer an outcome for the public good. I, and the town, continue to aggressively pursue the causes that affect our town.