

This past week's town board meeting had a long agenda. Admittedly, some of us college basketball fans wanted to get home early to see the start of March Madness; nevertheless, we stayed the course and finished town business at the meeting.

We approved the inter-local agreement between the county and town concerning the disposal of Mirror Lake dredging materials. The county commission also approved the agreement at its March meeting. I want to publicly thank the Macon County Board of Commissioners for this agreement. It is a key part of the Mirror Lake Dredging Project and will provide major savings that can be directed towards dredging the lake.

Under the agreement, the town will spend several hundred thousand dollars on preparing a disposal site at the transfer station on Rich Gap Road. We will also build an additional access road to the transfer station so that trucks loaded with dredging material will not disrupt the transfer station's normal operations. This new road will remain under the county's operation after the dredging project ends. Both parties to the agreement will benefit from this cooperative effort.

Before dredging begins, the improvements to the transfer station and the new road must be in place. With that project ahead of us and more permitting from state agencies, the actual dredging will probably begin sometime next year. Like the Dog Mountain Project that was funded by a state grant, the preliminary paperwork and approvals from state agencies can take an exceedingly long time.

Another achievement at the board meeting was the approval of all the events in the park and town property that the Highlands Chamber of Commerce puts on each year. The approval process also clarified the park's alcohol policy for the 4th of July Fireworks event. For that event, folks can bring their own alcohol to the park just as allowed for the Saturday Park Concerts. In past years, the board has not allowed alcohol consumption in the park for the fireworks.

Because of the large fireworks crowd, the police will have extra officers on duty at the park. They will also keep an emergency pathway open in case of a medical emergency or disturbance. Like the alcohol policy for the Saturday Park Concerts, no one will be allowed to take open containers beyond the park boundaries.

The Highlands Motoring Festival requested permission from the board to extend the boundaries of the event on 5th Street to the intersection at Main Street. With the loss of display space due to the hotel construction, festival planners decided they needed this additional space. With this approval, the use of this other space may continue well into the future.

Another positive decision was the final approval of the contract for the construction of the new playground at the Highlands Recreation Center. This project was behind schedule, so it was important to get the contract approved without further delay.

Commissioners postponed one item on the agenda. A review of the proposed rules for conducting town board meetings will take place at a future workshop. All the commissioners and the mayor had lists of questions about procedures contained in the draft. We would have been in session well past 10 pm if the board had tackled this review. Nevertheless, it was after nine when I hit the gavel for adjournment.

We fans got home just in time to watch the last minutes of overtime, where the Tar Heels came up several points short. It was a sad night in Carolina, but a productive town board meeting. Oh well, we cannot have everything.