

Thursday is the August Town Board of Commissioners meeting at the Highlands Community Building next to the ball field. It will begin at 7 pm with public comment first on the agenda. You can also view the meeting on the YouTube link on the town website. No workshop session is scheduled for this month.

A major item for the meeting is a public hearing concerning a one-year moratorium on data centers within the town. This moratorium will give the board time to review and strengthen current ordinances that may limit and prohibit such high impact uses in the business and residential districts.

Realistically, it is highly unlikely such an operation would be financially workable in Highlands given the limited space and prohibitive cost of land in the town. Nevertheless, the board always needs to look ahead and plan for all eventualities.

Now some folks on Facebook have circulated the notion that the mayor and board are having this hearing to approve data centers for Highlands. That idea is wrong; the opposite is true. I speak for the board when I say we do not want disruptive uses in the Town of Highlands, a community that has always been seen as a retreat from such high-impact activities.

The state mandates a public hearing for citizens to express their concerns about a given issue, as will be the case with data centers. I will say that there really is no need to convince commissioners that data centers are not a good fit for our town. I expect the board to approve the moratorium on data center construction once the hearing closes.

I also urge the Macon and Jackson County Boards to take similar steps to limit or prohibit these kinds of uses in our counties. The problems data centers create with power consumption, air pollution, and incessant noise far outweigh any economic benefits.

The board will also hear a report from McGill Engineering concerning critical issues of the Mirror Lake Dredging project. Several decisions remain about the project's scope and direction. The good news received this week is that the NC Department of Environmental Quality has approved the alternative disposal site. This approval will generate savings that can be directed toward additional dredging.

I encourage residents near the lake to come to the meeting or view it remotely to hear the report and discussion. Also, the Mirror Lake Improvement Association has a tentative plan to hold an on-the-lake site meeting on Thursday, September 10 at 6 pm. Mike Hansen and I will be at the meeting to answer any questions and to provide an overview of the dredging plan. We will confirm the meeting before Labor Day.

Another agenda item will be a board discussion about reviewing the Highlands Comprehensive Plan. The discussion will focus on how to work with the Highlands Planning Board to determine where the town is in implementing the comprehensive plan.

Finally, I will not be at this board meeting. Sallie and I have the opportunity to have a family vacation in Maine, and this week was the only time everyone in our family could be there. Mayor Pro Temp Jim Tate will preside over the meeting. Jim will also host the Community Coffee with the Mayor on Friday at 11 am at the Hudson Library. Please come to the coffee, where Jim will take questions about town plans and issues.