

The state and Western North Carolina are in a state of drought. In Macon County, a large area of the western part is in extreme drought. Here on the Highlands Plateau, we are in a severe drought category and are headed to the extreme level any day.

Due to these dry conditions, a statewide outdoor burning ban is in effect. That declaration means no burning - period. We have had multiple wildfires across the mountains in recent weeks. Seasonal high winds add to the dangerous conditions. Please be on the lookout for any violations, such as burning materials at construction sites. If you see such activity, please call the Highlands Police Department at (828) 526- 9431 or the nonemergency dispatch number at (828) 349-2061. A firefighter or law enforcement officer will respond.

Our town's water department is also monitoring the drought situation. The state requires our water plant to have a drought response plan in place. Our plant operators are following the plan's protocols and are in contact with state officials. While we have not implemented the first voluntary stage of the plan, we are very close to doing so.

Unfortunately, no significant rain is in the forecast at the time of this writing. By significant, I mean, a period of rain that delivers multiple inches over an extended period. A spot shower of a half inch or less will not break the dry conditions. Do not get me wrong, those showers help in the short term, but they do not remove the drought condition we presently face.

The town board meeting and workshop session are scheduled for Thursday, April 16. The workshop will begin at 5:30 instead of the usual 6 pm start time. We have two items to cover at the workshop that may take some time. The board will be reviewing a format for reestablishing town committees to research issues. Each committee will consist of two board members, the town manager, the town clerk, and the relevant department head.

Another workshop item will be a Q&A session with the town attorney regarding the proposed procedures for conducting town meetings. Our attorney has drafted an extensive set of procedures that the board will review prior to approval. I have a list of questions, and I am sure board members do as well.

At the town board meeting at 7 pm, there will be several agenda items of interest. Changes to the noise ordinance and parking are on the agenda. Also, the town attorney has proposed an amendment to the ordinance concerning drinking in public places.

The board will also be going into closed session at the end of the meeting. The purpose of the closed session is to receive an update and give instructions to the town attorney concerning the Willoughby Zoning Board of Adjustment Appeal.

Hope to see you at the workshop and or the town board meeting. The meetings will also be accessible remotely via the YouTube channel on the town website.