

January 11, 2022

COVID Testing, waterline, street lights and Hotwire

Let me cover several current items. Some of this information comes from questions folks have sent to my website in recent days.

First, Optum is continuing COVID testing at the Highlands Community Building next to the ball field on Wednesdays and Fridays from 9 to 5. This state testing program is in high demand. Testing supplies are becoming limited, as well as testing personnel are being impacted by Omicron. We are fortunate that Optimum is providing this service, and I am hopeful it will continue. The Macon County Health Department is also conducting testing in Franklin. While the town has provided the site for testing, we are not directly involved in its operation. We open and close the building and sanitize the facility after each session.

Some folks have complained about having to wait outside during this cold weather. Given the spread of the virus and the confined space of the Community Center, having large number of potentially infected people waiting inside the testing area is not an acceptable protocol.

The testing process can be expedited by folks going to the Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation website and preregistering. Once on the website scroll down to COVID Testing to where preregistration into the Optimum system is accessible. Preregistration eliminates the need to enter basic information at the testing site and reduces wait times for everyone. If you have previously used Optimum testing services, preregistration is not required a second time.

The replacement of the waterline on Moorewood Road will be underway soon. A major delay has been a limited supply of six-inch ductile iron water pipe. The contractor has had search for and order the pipe from multiple suppliers.

Town electric crews are in the process of replacing the old sodium vapor street lights with new LED lights. The new lights are more in keeping with the dark sky initiative. They produce a natural light that is directed and focused down onto the street. Crews are getting 50 light units at a time and installing them asap. They are about half way through the conversion process.

I continue to get questions about when Hotwire will begin operations. Hotwire is in the process of setting up equipment, upgrading the headend building to meet their standards, and setting up an office. They will announce in local media very soon their plans for operation. For folks who live in neighborhoods with underground utilities, the process will take longer since Hotwire will have to install underground conduit. The underground portion of the network will involve about 18% of the residences, and it will be more expensive and challenging to install. Hotwire is committed to provide this service.

We are in the winter season where power outages are very likely with heavy snow and winds. Our friends in Macon County Emergency Services want to remind everyone not to call 911 if there is a loss of power. Outages during business hours can be reported to town hall at 526-2118. After hours call 526-4131, a nonemergency number. But my request is to be patient. During these winter storms our electric crews monitor the electric system and restore power as soon as it is safe to work. In these winter events, power failures invariably impact large sections of the town. If everyone immediately calls 911, the emergency system will be overloaded to quickly respond to life threatening situations.