

Subject: State Legislation – a Horse Race
June 6, 2023

A furlong is a horse racing distance measurement of one-eighth of a mile. A typical horse race is a mile or eight furlongs. The North Carolina legislative procedures can be likened to a horse race, and this current session is in the last furlong of the race. The whips are out, and there is a mad rush to get budget bills over the finish line before adjournment. The race will probably be over in Raleigh sometime later this month or in early July.

Our legislative delegation has been in the front of the race trying to get legislation passed that will be beneficial for Western Carolina and for the Town of Highlands. I appreciate having advocates for our community and regions like Senator Corbin and Representative Gillespie.

Our staff and the North Carolina League of Municipalities are tracking legislation that may impact municipalities zoning ordinances. Nevertheless, let me pinpoint some pending legislation that could benefit the town.

Representative Gillespie and Senator Corbin have introduced legislation for funding the dredging of Mirror Lake. This project is long overdue and, if funded, will have a very positive impact on the Highlands watershed, which also includes the county. The Highlands Plateau is the originating source of groundwater for many people in this area. We have our fingers crossed that it will cross the budget finish line, and work can begin this coming fiscal year.

Our legislators are also working to secure funds for major upgrades to the Highlands water plant. The town continues to invest in the water system, but I hope state funds for this critical project can get over the finish line in Raleigh.

In the past several years, I have worked with other officials to address the problem of large tractor-trailer trucks getting stuck on the Gorge Road. Flashing warning lights have been installed, and the size of the trailers permitted have been reduced from 50 feet to 30. Frankly, while these measures have helped to some extent, more needs to be done. Representative Gillespie has taken on this problem at the state level. He has introduced a piece of legislation that will get the attention of truck companies. Currently, a violation on the Gorge Road is a fine of a few hundred dollars. Some companies pay the fine when cited and continue to repeatedly use the road. Representative Gillespie's bill increases fines for repeat offenders. A second violation would be \$2,500, and the third or more would be \$5,000. If that bill passes the finish line, it will get the attention of truck companies. A \$5,000 fine would negate any benefit of continuing to ignore the law by using the Gorge Road. Representative's bill would also facilitate the truck companies to post on their GPS routing software a warning not to route drivers to the Gorge Road.

Sometimes problems can only be solved by working with the folks in Raleigh. On behalf of the town, I thank Representative Gillespie and Senator Corbin for their advocacy for the needs of Highlands. Let's cheer their efforts to the finish line. We could have a photo finish.