

Subject: Legislation Delayed  
July 18, 2023

Before July, I was optimistic that the North Carolina Legislature would pass a budget and adjourn sometime in July; however, when the legislators reassembled on July 11, things went south very fast. Out of the blue, SB 90 was introduced. If passed, this bill will make major changes to public education in the state. Also, funding issues like pay increases for state workers and teachers emerged.

Now, I am hearing that the legislature could remain in session through August and even into September. The state budget may not get final approval until the end of the session, so there are a lot of unknowns in Raleigh as we go into late summer. State funds for Mirror Lake and the water plant will not be confirmed until a final budget is passed, and it seems the entire budget process is very fluid until the session ends. Also, during this time, other pieces of legislation, such as limiting towns to regulate STRs, could re-emerge or be attached to a budget bill.

I suspect a number of now weary legislators wish there were a state statute similar to the one requiring towns and counties to pass a balanced budget by July 1. Such a statute would also help state agencies and schools plan for the coming year.

The July meeting for our town board is Thursday at 7 am at the Highlands Community Center. It can also be accessed on YouTube at a link on the town website.

A major item will be a review of the easement request of the Shelby Place Homeowners Property Association for the sidewalk on NC 106. The town presented the association with a memorandum of understanding concerning the required easement. I anticipate several possible adjustments to the MOU before both parties enter a formal legal agreement.

The town needs to move forward with this easement process in order to secure possible grant funding that would help make the sidewalk project a reality. The Town staff and the Southwestern Regional Planning Commission staff have identified grant funds for the project, and it is incumbent that the board commits to move forward with the project in order to qualify for these funds. The total cost for the sidewalk will be somewhere between 1 to 1.3 million dollars. Funds will come from private resources, the town, and hopefully, this state grant.

Our town attorney has drafted a new lease for the Highlands Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center building on the corner of 1st Street and Main. The board will review the latest draft lease before sending it to the chamber for their review. I anticipate final action on this lease at the August meeting.

At the town board meeting this Thursday, our town attorney will present a report on his assessment of our town board committee structure. For many years the board has had work committees to address specific issues such as public safety, land use, recreation, and finance. These committees meet and then make recommendations to the full board. Mr. Hagemann will identify options and modifications for the board to review and consider.

I hope to see you at the Town meeting this Thursday night.