

We are about to see 2021 fade away and 2022 rise before us. Looking back, even though it had some challenging moments, 2021 was much better than the COVID dominated 2020.

Looks like the Omicron variant will spread this winter. We are better prepared now than in the past. Our vaccination and booster initiatives have been critical factors. Vaccinations are still available on Thursdays at the Highlands Recreation Department. I urge everyone to get vaccinated and get a booster. Being fully vaccinated increases a person's odds by 75% of not contracting the Omicron variant. Also, it exponentially increases the probability of booster folks not being hospitalized in break through cases.

Testing is another important factor in curtailing Omicron. Testing is still available at the Highlands Community Center on Wednesdays, and in Cashiers on Tuesdays at their community center. I was recently tested before running a road race. It was a simple and easy process.

There are several items in this current town budget that will not happen before the next fiscal year. Let me update the status of two projects.

First, the town had partnered with the county in replacing the existing old lights at the ball field with new LED lights which can be focused more on the field. In the spirit of the Dark Sky program the new systems would have reduced the spillover effect that the current lights produce.

The installer began the replacement process by digging holes for the new light poles. Workers hit solid rock a few feet below ground. The engineering specifications and codes required that the new light poles be buried about 12 feet. The rock prevented meeting that requirement. The alternative was to drill and shoot (dynamite) the holes into the rock. That process was a budget buster by doubling the cost of the project. It has been put on hold and may be reviewed again in the next budget cycle. I still want us to install a better lighting system for the ball field. Hopefully an alternative light system can be developed.

The other project that was modified had to do with the installation of more natural LED street lights. They too address the Dark Sky goal by focusing the lights downward onto a specific area. The old halogen street lights were replaced. There was one change. Originally, the plan called for lights that could be dimmed so certain areas could have lower luminosity. The manufacturer informed the town that they were experiencing a high failure rate with the dimmable lights. We decided to not purchase dimmable fixtures.

I have setup a new personal website. The address is Askmayorpat.com. It's not an official town website. I will be operating and personally funding it. I will answer questions from the website. Some questions may be addressed in this column or on my radio show. The person asking the question will not be identified. The website may also provide updates and weekly email blasts of my activities and ideas.

Happy New Year!