

Subject: Local Government Process and Town Update
January 8, 2023

Part 1 – The Local Government Process: I am not the Kim Jong-il of Highlands. Nor am I “Boss Hogg” directing town employees and the police to follow my commands. I sometimes suspect a few folks on social media and others who send me emails might have that impression.

In reality, I am a mayor with limited authority by North Carolina statute law. I work with the Town Manager that was hired by the Board. The Town Manager oversees town operations, budget development, finances, and hiring and firing of employees, to name only a few of his duties.

I have to work with the five elected town board commissioners. The town board sets priorities and directs the town manager to implement their governing policies and decisions. Any major decision must be approved by the majority of the board members.

As Mayor, I advocate for what I believe is in the long-term best interest of the town. I bring issues and proposals before the board in the form of agenda items and make a case for adopting certain initiatives. On the other hand, town board members have to review certain plans, proposals, policies, and budget items to make final decisions as the governing body. It is their role to ask staff and presenters questions. Board members debate the issues at hand before the Mayor calls for a vote.

I review the process described above to underscore how our local government operates as we begin a new year. I also acknowledge the sobering reality that as the highest-paid elected official in the town, the final responsibility for the town’s effective administration falls on my shoulders. If there is a problem, I am the official who has to explain what took place and how corrective action will address the issue. The buck does stop with me.

I can be contacted by sending an email to: Mayor@highlandsonc.org, or by going to AskmayorPat.com. My phone number is: (828) 506-3138.

As the town board and staff begin the process of developing a budget for FYI 2023-24, please feel free to let me or any board member know your ideas about what the town should fund and/or address in the new budget. The new budget goes into effect on July 1st. Starting around February and continuing to May, the board and staff will conduct an ongoing review of proposed budget items. This process will begin with the Highlands Town Retreat in March, followed by a series of afternoon budget workshops. All budget meetings are open to the public.

Part 2 – Post-Freeze Town Update: Our water system is at full capacity following the “big freeze.” The only problem the system had was a leaking 6-inch main line. Thankfully our crews

got out in that freezing cold on Christmas Eve to make the repair. No significant loss of service was incurred.

The “big freeze” event underscored the need for every residence to have a street number clearly displayed at the entrance to the property. Clearly marked house numbers were helpful for water crews cutting off service to houses with leaking pipes. Whether from the town, law enforcement, the fire department, or EMS, responders need clear information when determining an emergency location.