

Subject: Making Progress  
August 24, 2022

At the board meeting last week, I did a rather long mayor's report concerning initiatives I want the board address in future meetings. Let me briefly review several of these items.

First, the master sidewalk plan needs to be updated to include several important projects. Sidewalks on the NC 106 and US 64 corridors need to be included. These corridor sidewalks are on the Macon County Comprehensive Transportation Plan, so inclusion in the town sidewalk plan is needed for consistency. How these very expensive sidewalks are funded will be a major challenge. Are there state funds available, or are will it be necessary to obtain town and private funding? I suspect, if private and town resources were available, the state would expedite their contribution and time table.

Second, I also believe we need to complete a sidewalk loop on the east side of town. This year's budget includes the completion of a sidewalk on 1st Street that will create a sidewalk loop for the west side of town. The east side loop would entail extending the sidewalk on Chestnut and possibly building a sidewalk on 6th Street.

Third, I also want the board to consider moving forward with the replacement of the recently demolished Houston House at the Highlands Recreation Center. The old, dilapidated Houston House was the site of the after school and summer camp programs that the recreation department operated. There is a critical need for after school programs for kids, and the town needs to build a new facility.

Finally, Our staff continues researching the installation of electric car charging stations in the downtown areas. Although the need for charging stations is currently limited, we can surely see the need will increase and increase rapidly. FORD Motor Company and General Motors are "All In" when it comes to electric cars and towns across America. Cities and states need to start embracing the idea of this change in cars and the resulting power grid requirement to support it. Like Duke Energy, in the future Highlands will have to upgrade our electric grid to handle this increase demand driven in part by electric vehicles and other usage factors.

The plans I have outlined above will take time to complete.

The public hearing concerning short term rental amendments to the Highlands Unified Development Ordinances is this afternoon, August 25. The hearing begins at 5 pm at the Highlands Community Center next to the ball field. On Tuesday, August 30, the town board will hold a work session at 6 pm at the Highlands Community Center to begin drafting the final STR amendments. This meeting will be open to the public, but

there will be no public comment. I anticipate this meeting be first of possibly several before a formal vote and adoption is made.