

Subject: State Legislative Dinner
March 1, 2023

Last Wednesday, our town manager Josh Ward, and I took the five-hour drive to Raleigh to attend the North Carolina League of Municipalities Town and State Dinner for 2023.

This event always takes place at the beginning of the legislative session, and at the reception and dinner municipal officials had an opportunity to meet with their legislative delegations to discuss local needs and requests.

The event is multi-purposed in that elected officials such as mayors and town managers can meet and discuss common interests and concerns. It is also a time for municipal officials to meet with the North Carolina League of Municipalities staff in an attempt to get the “low down” on what the legislature will do in this long session. During the reception before the dinner, questions abound about the budget and potential laws that will impact towns and cities.

At the reception and formal dinner, we all get a chance to talk with our representatives and senators about more specific needs. Those moments are the opportunity to express our hopes and concerns.

I appreciate the legislators who attend and are willing to listen to their constituents. As I sat at the table with Senator Corbin, I realized the mayors from Murphy and Andrews were at the table also expressing their needs and concerns. That’s the way the system works at the state level. The other mayors made some compelling cases for support for their communities. Hopefully, I did the same for Highlands.

Let me share with you some of the requests I made. First, I put in a good word for some level of state funding for the Mirror Lake restoration project. I am optimistic that this funding request will happen.

Second, I reported to Senator Corbin that we did not receive the water plant pre-clarifier tank grant. Both Senator Corbin and Representative Gillespie endorsed our application. Unfortunately, Representative Gillespie had a death in his family and was not at the dinner, but I will keep him posted on our requests. I asked Senator Corbin to let us know and assist us if any other potential state funding sources become available in this year’s state budget. Any level of state support will help the town advance construction of this important item. I also asked about any impending STR or zoning legislation. Senator Corbin told me he would keep us posted.

After the dinner, several town officials gathered at a local watering hole and met with a staff member of the legislature. The staff really knows the skinny. In this long session, he informed the group that a lot of money would be allocated for statewide, regional, county, and municipal projects. The challenge for legislators is to track down and find the money for their constituents. He likened it to a mad scramble to find funding that matches the needs of a particular community. The representatives in little, remote, lightly populated Western Carolina face big competitive challenges in both the house and senate.

On Thursday morning, Josh and I departed Raleigh for that long ride back home. I don't know how our representatives make that trip almost every week when the legislature is in session. My favorite thing about the trip is that we get to eat lunch at Chick Filet!