

Subject: Playhouse, Electric Cars, Ordinance Changes
October 26, 2022

The town board meeting last Thursday was a marathon session, with almost every item on the agenda taking longer than anticipated. Let me hit some of the highlights, or rather the “longlights.”

We had a request from Dave Healy, the Chairperson of the Mountain Theatre Company, concerning the Highlands Playhouse. The theatre company has had a tremendous season. The plan is for the theatre ensemble to relocate and merge efforts with the Performing Arts Center by the end of May. Until then, they will remain in the Playhouse and produce several important youth theatre programs. The board agreed to extend the current lease until they transition to the new PAC Performing Arts Center. I know they will deliver outstanding productions in this new venue. It is a win for everyone.

The board also heard a presentation from EnviroSpark concerning placement of electric charging stations in parking spaces in our downtown area. The Highlands Chamber of Commerce proposes to partner with EnviroSpark and the town in delivering this emerging service. The folks from EnviroSpark will meet with our town engineer, Lamar Nix, and the public works committee to address issues that board members brought up during the presentation.

The board also had an involved discussion concerning the renewal of the lease for the building the houses the Chamber offices and the Highlands Visitors Center. There were thorny issues raised about the payment of rent versus the Chamber’s financial support for maintaining public restrooms. These facilities are used primarily by visitors. No decision was made. The Chamber will consult with the county attorney about whether room tax revenues can be used to maintain the bathrooms. The town directed our attorney to draw up a proposed lease after receiving the opinion from the county attorney.

The board also reviewed proposed ordinance amendments concerning outdoor burning, grubbing and noise. Grubbing occurs when contractors burn logs and other debris for a continuous time to clear a building site. Board members discussed this issue as well as the burning of leaves and other vegetation by homeowners. More research by the staff and fire chief will be done before a final decision.

Another amendment change centered around the noise ordinance. The board did change the time when music and noise has to stop from 11 pm to 10 pm. But this was just an initial change to the noise ordinance. Other issues will be addressed in forthcoming meetings.

The board approved the purchase of a new fire truck that will be delivered hopefully in about a year and a half.

The policy on the use of credit cards was also reviewed. The decision was to direct the staff to implement a system that will allow folks to use credit cards to pay at venues such as the swimming pool and ice-skating rink. Also, there will be changes in the fee structure for folks using credit cards to pay for utility bills. The staff will publish these changes before they are implemented in the coming weeks.

Finally, Lamar Nix presented a review of policies concerning minimal maintenance of private roads and policies for plowing roads after snowstorms. Private roads will be plowed after all town roads are cleared. There is a list of about six steep private road sections that will not be plowed due to worker safety concerns. In the event of a medical emergency, town crews will work with EMS staff to insure emergency access to these sections. .

The board tabled a review of auditor recommendations until the next meeting. It was felt that more time was needed to carefully consider these recommendations. The presentation of the annual audit findings may also be on the agenda at the November meeting.