

Subject: Predictions for the Coming New Year
December 29, 2022

At the beginning of the new year, it is always good to look ahead. What does the new year portend for Highlands? I'm not that good at predicting the future but let me take a shot at predicting what will happen and what needs to be done, if not this year, in years to come.

Mirror Lake. I optimistically predict that the Mirror Lake Improvement Association will garner the support from the community and state to begin Phase 1 of the restoration of Mirror Lake. Beginning this initial phase involves the critical dredging of areas near the bridge. With external support the town could partner with the folks living around Mirror Lake to help restore this community asset.

STRs. After passing an ordinance last September 15 limiting the proliferation of STRs, some folks believed this STR issue was finally over. It is not. First, there will be enforcement issues that will come into play very soon. Second, on behalf of the majority of the board, I stated at the time of adopting the September 15th ordinance that the board would review the issue of amortization, also known as the sunseting STRs, at a later date. I expect the STR issues to be back on a board agenda sometime at the start of the new year.

Full Time Fire Department Staffing. I predict the town will move forward in staffing the new fire department with firemen on a 24/7 schedule by the middle of the year. The full-time staffing will be accomplished without a fire tax increase for the next several years. Full time staffing will ensure response times of 1 to 2 minutes rather than the current 6 or 8 minutes. Another large benefit to this staffing plan is insurance rates should be held down because of faster response times.

Big Bear Pen Road. I anticipate NCDOT will begin work to pave Big Bear Pen Road from Upper Lake Road down to Chestnut. Right-of-ways have been secured and the design is nearing completion. The road will be widened to permit cars coming from both directions to pass without one vehicle having to pull over into the ditch. Several of the blind curves will also be improved. Some folks may be upset when they see trees, which are now in the roadway, being removed, but this project will improve safety and curtail the current heavy runoff of sediment into our waterways.

Macon County Tourist Development Authority (TDA). This past year the town board has engaged with the chamber of commerce about TDA spending for tourist related initiatives. I predict there will be changes in the local TDA legislation that will be endorsed by a coalition of the county, chamber and town that permits a more flexible spending model to address tourist related infrastructure projects.

After School Program at the Recreation Department. With the demolition of the Houston House, our recreation department doesn't have a workable facility for after school and summer camp programs. I hope the board will begin plans to build a facility that addresses that

growing need. The town may need to partner with other organizations in meeting this need, which is connected to broader childcare needs in Highlands.

A Highlands Recycle and Convenience Center. There is a growing need to provide options for recycling and disposing household garbage here on the plateau. I hope Highlands can work with the county in addressing this long-term need. A new facility inside or close to town would go a long way in solving the growing garbage problem.