

February 1, 2022

STRs, Middle Creek Bridge, Mirror Lake and Solar

As of this past Tuesday the Highlands Town Board began a review of STR ordinance recommendations from the Highlands Planning Board. The members of the Highlands Planning Board met a number of times to review proposed changes to town ordinances which town attorneys had drafted. I again want to thank the Highlands Planning Board for their good work.

The Highlands Town Board is now in a similar process of reviewing those recommended changes and clarifications. At the time of this writing, I anticipate calling for another special meeting this coming week to continue this review process. The goal is to have a final document complete as soon as possible, possibly by the Highlands Town Board meeting scheduled for Thursday, February 17. If final revisions are complete by that date, scheduling of a public hearing concerning change to the ordinances would be set for the March 17 board meeting.

But I emphasize the schedule and plans are tentative at this point and subject to change.

I want to update everyone concerning the replacement of the Middle Creek bridge between Scaly and the Georgia state line. I'm a member to the Transportation Advisory Committee of the Southwestern Regional Planning Organization. The committee has been following the issues and problems facing NCDOT including scheduled bridge replacements.

The aging Middle Creek bridge is very narrow and needs to be replaced given the increase truck traffic using NC 106 to access the Highlands and Cashiers area. The good news is that bridge replacement contract is scheduled to be let in mid-March. The bad news is that the US Forest Service is supposed to do a consultation analysis before construction begins. That analysis has not been done, and as a result the entire project may be delayed.

We are in the process of developing items for the town retreat scheduled for March 10. While the primary focus of the retreat is developing budget priorities for the coming fiscal year, I also want us to review longer term issues.

I have asked the Mirror Lake Homeowners Association to make a presentation concerning their plans to dredge and restore Mirror Lake. They have developed a specific plan for addressing the siltation problem.

I also want to review the town policy and plans for residents wanting to install solar energy units at their homes. There are emerging issues about designs that would safely interface with our electrical grid and how to meter solar systems. We need to ensure that the town does not impede efforts to transition to green energy systems. A discussion needs to be had concerning how the proliferation of these solar units will, or will not, impact the existing contract that the town has with Duke Energy. It is a very complex issue.

As I have said before, if any one has any concerns about what needs to be included in next year's budget, please let me or your commissioners know. Between now and the June town board meeting, budget priorities will be determined.