

Subject: Town Board Meeting April 16

On Thursday, April 18, the town board will hold its monthly meeting and workshop. Both sessions will be at the Highlands Recreation Center since the Highlands Community Center continues to be under renovation. That renovation project is going well, and I anticipate the meetings returning to the community center around June or July.

The workshop will begin at 6 p.m., followed by the business meeting at 7 p.m. At the workshop, the board will review several items, including the policy for holding events on recreation and town property. Specifically, an out-of-town company wants to hold a pickleball tournament at our recreation center courts. The board will discuss the pros and cons of such a plan. Another discussion will be about ice skating costs and fees.

The top item on the business meeting agenda will be a public hearing on a conditional zoning request from Our Lady of the Mountains Catholic Church. This hearing was scheduled last month but was postponed due to a procedural problem that our town staff discovered before that March meeting.

The board will also review several changes to the UDO concerning the zoning and planning board's terms. They will also examine noise ordinance changes to the code.

The Highlands Chamber of Commerce will present several agenda items. These include an update on the housing study, improvements to the dog park, and the formation of a proposed chamber business committee.

The board will also hold a closed session concerning the status of the lawsuit against the town brought by the Save Highlands group. All meeting proceedings except for the close session can be accessed at a YouTube link on the town website.

Last week my article concerning Hochatown brought me feedback. Some folks thought I was advocating such a development for the Highlands area. Quite the contrary, I am concerned that such a plan could pop up almost anywhere in Western Carolina, especially places with no zoning restrictions. Fortunately, Highlands has zoning restrictions.

One person sent me an article about STR development in another state. Instead of developing an entire town, folks there are just developing STR neighborhoods. In other words, all houses in the development are short-term rentals. With our ordinance concerning short-term rentals, that concept could not be done in the town limits. Still, in the surrounding township, it certainly could be done. In fact, similar concepts, albeit on a small scale, are already underway.

One person called me nuts for writing the article. They went on to say that I am in cahoots with the chamber in promoting more and more tourists at the expense of ignoring the needs of local people. I was accused of destroying Highlands, a charge that I have heard

before. At least the person didn't call for me to be tarred and feathered as some have in the past.

My response is that I am concerned about over tourism in Highlands and have expressed my position on numerous occasions. That said, we have always had tourists visiting Highlands and will continue to do so. Except for Native Americans, we can all say we have been tourists in some shape or form before deciding to settle and call Highlands home. Now, what I am about to say may alarm my friends at the chamber. However, I suspect if the chamber of commerce did no tourist promotion whatsoever, Highlands would still have a steady stream of tourists. Or we could witness a reverse psychology effect by creating a campaign declaring Highlands fully settled and no tourist should visit. Folks might think if the people of Highlands don't want me there, it must be a great place, and I'm all in and on my way.

As Highlanders, we can't stop the future and transform the Highlands into a Medieval castle replete with a mote and crocodiles. On the other hand, we can make good decisions about development that will ensure a bright future for the community we all love.