

March 10 Highlands Town Retreat

I want to thank everyone for a very successful and civil public hearing last Thursday night that addressed the Highlands Planning Board's recommendations concerning short term rental amendments to the UDO. Over thirty people spoke at the hearing and expressed positions both for and against the recommendations being considered.

The Highlands Town Board of Commissioners have been given written public comments submitted for the hearing. Everyone on the Highlands Sunshine List has been sent a final agenda with those comments included. To join the Sunshine List contact Gibby Shaheen at 526-2118 or email her at Gibby.shaheen@highlandsonc.org.

I want to thank Gibby and our staff for organizing the hearing. The YouTube telecast that staff setup was free of the audio problems they had experienced at the recent town board meeting.

I also want to thank the Highlands Planning Board, and especially their chairperson Brad Armstrong, for developing the STR recommendations. They were given a draft proposal from the town attorneys who were working on the short-term rental issue. Members of this board spent many hours reviewing the draft. The planning board made some difficult decisions as community volunteers. I speak for the town board in expressing our appreciation for their service.

I want to express my gratitude to all who attended and participated in the hearing. The hearing was a candid airing of different views. In the great community spirit of Highlands, we had a civil and respectful meeting. I came away from this meeting with the affirmation that the people of Highlands love this community and respect their fellow citizens.

The next step will be for the town board to begin addressing the recommendations. I anticipate holding special meetings as part of this process. The board's next scheduled meeting is the March 10 Highlands Town Retreat. The STR is will not be on the retreat agenda. The retreat agenda is reserved for budget and annual planning issues.

The retreat will be held at Coleman Hall at the Highlands Presbyterian Church this coming Thursday, March 10. The session will begin at 9 am and continue into the afternoon.

There will be a lunch break where staff and commissioners will enjoy a locally catered box lunch. I say this jokingly that the box lunch is the one big perk Highlands elected officials receive yearly.

The retreat is open to the public. Folks can come listen to the staff reports and discussion during the retreat. The retreat is not a time where public comment is taken. During the sessions no final budget actions are made. The retreat is a preliminary planning session for developing the town budget for fiscal year 2022-2023.

There will be several budget workshops this spring as the town manager and staff develop the new budget. At these workshops final priorities and adjustments will be set. At the June town board meeting a public hearing will be held concerning the proposed new budget. The new budget will go into effect on July 1.