

Let me give you an account of the worries of a mayor. Recent worries started at the first of last week with a vague forecast of an impending winter storm. National forecasters were talking about a low-pressure area in the Pacific that would cross the US dumping large amounts of snow in the South and Northeast.

At first, I thought those projections were exaggerations, but as the week progressed I, along with town staff, grew concerned. Nevertheless, Lamar Nix, our public works director, started preparations for a winter storm. By Friday plowing equipment was attached to the trucks. Electric crews had chains on line trucks and were ready to respond to outages. Our fire department had chained up too, and the police had secured hotel rooms so officers could maintain shifts around the clock.

On Friday morning my worries increased after meeting with our town manager, Josh Ward, and Lamar Nix. They informed me that weather forecasters for Duke Energy were predicting heavy snow for all of Western Carolina. Duke forecasters were predicting as much as 18 to 20 inches in areas at or above 4,000 feet. Since Highlands is 4,118, I became very worried.

If Highlands got 20 inches, the town would be in a disastrous shutdown similar to the blizzard of 1993. We all worried about potential risks to the health and safety of many residents. I worried that nothing could mitigate such a disastrous event.

I began going on the radio warning folks. I declared a state of emergency, a declaration that is essential for getting outside help and assistance. I started posting updates as events developed on my askmayorpat.com website.

The storm was to begin on Saturday night, but I didn't sleep well Friday night. I had worries about what was facing Highlanders in the coming hours. I really worried about massive power outages where utility poles would snap under the heavy snow loads. Lamar was concerned about that prospect too. If poles were destroyed, power restoration would take much longer.

On Saturday I continued to communicate with Josh and Lamar about preparations and the latest forecasts. I saw a Saturday forecast calling for 5 to 8 inches. It sparked my optimism that the storm would not be that bad. But then I looked further, that was the forecast for Saturday night, the forecast called for another 5 to 8 inches on Sunday. I went back to worry mode. My hope for this being a "weather nothing burger" faded.

Saturday night I waited for the power to fail. On Sunday morning with the snow continuing, I waited for that massive power failure. I worried about the power all Sunday and into the night. On Monday I worried about the power, but Josh and Lamar continued to report nothing more than minor spot outages.

We were all amazed by the good fortune Highlands had, at least 11 inches of snow yet the power grid held. We were lucky this time.

I want to thank everyone for their patience and understanding during the storm. Plowing roads and clean-up will continue for some time. I now have other worries, like more snow tomorrow. I am also now free to worry about the 7 pm ZOOM town board meeting tonight.

One thing I do not worry about is our town workers. They are fully committed to keeping the town operating. I can't say enough about their dedication and support.