January 26, 2022

Town Ordnances, Snow Removal, Report Outages

On Monday night the Highlands Planning Board completed a review of the draft proposal for amending town ordinances related to short term rentals. Their recommendations have now been sent to the Highlands Town Board for review. I anticipate board holding several special work sessions to process the planning board’s work and recommendations.

I want to thank all of the Highlands Planning Board members for the hard work and diligence that they put forward in addressing this critical issue. I, along with the town board, appreciate their extraordinary effort. Now, the town board will have to get to work in moving the process forward without delay.

The town should always continue to review and strive to improve what is done in the public interest. We are now in a period of review concerning the response to the recent heavy snow event. Izzy was not a normal snow storm. Some areas of the town got as much as a foot of snow, which made the response from our employees a major challenge.

This week our road crews have been using excavators and dump trucks to remove the mounds of snow in the downtown areas. This time-consuming process is a challenge but needs to be done. The loads of snow will be transported and downloaded at town sites such as the sewer plant. It will be a while before it all melts, but it is better to have it melt off location rather than in the business district.

At the January town board meeting I asked the public works committee and pertinent staff to review our schedule and protocols for plowing roads. Some folks, especially those on private roads, were concerned that town crews were late in plowing their roads. The huge volume of snow aggravated the situation. I look forward to the staff and committee reporting to the full board on how the town can improve snow plowing practices.

Another area of improvement is in how residents can report power outages. In this storm we had no major outages that impacted the entire town. I had asked folks not to call-in after-hours outages to 911 since a heavy call load could affect emergency response times. But we do need to develop a better system for folks report power outages, not just in snow storms, but throughout the year. I have asked staff and the public works committee to also review options to address this problem. May be the public safety committee will also review this issue since it does impact county emergency services and how the town interfaces with that system.

There are systems and services that the town can use to handle after hours service problems. It will cost the town money, but the improvements to the reporting system will outweigh the incurred additional costs. The staff is looking at options and will work with the committee to develop a proposal to the full board. I want the town to move forward to address this issue without delay.