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| 19 November 2023Despite the recent drought triggering water and burning restrictions, Highlands has a lot to be thankful for.  Our economy is very strong, and our citizens prosper and are engaged in community life while supporting one another.  On the weather front, I am optimistic that weather patterns are about to change, which may end the drought situation—a needed blessing.  So, as we pause to celebrate our blessings, friends, and families, I wish you a Happy Thanksgiving. Let me update everyone on a couple of situations—first, the status of the Big Bear Pen paving project.  NCDOT had a contractor clear the new right-of-way of trees and vegetation over the last several weeks.  They did this work now since the bat moratorium was suspended during this time of the year.  However, NCDOT must cease this activity now as they cannot remove trees during the designated period when the bat's endangered habitat won't be disturbed. Big Bear Pen Road will continue to be open to normal traffic flow during the winter months. Some periodic delays may occur as utility crews relocate power and communication lines onto new poles on the edges of the planned road widening.  This spring, a contractor will begin grading and paving the road. Second,  NCDOT will hold a meeting in Raleigh next month to review the town's request to take over sections of Wingina and Upper Lake Roads.  Currently, these small road sections are state roads.  I expect NCDOT will give them to the town so we can pave those sections and tie them into our currently owned road system.  It makes sense that the town owns all aspects of the roads and provides continuous maintenance. Finally, the new design for the sidewalk on NC 106 from the post office to North Cobb Road is in process.  When the engineer completes the preliminary design, it will be shared with the public.  No acquisition of private property will be required. Let’s not forget the Annual Christmas Tree lighting at Kelsey-Hutchinson Founders Park this Saturday at 6 p.m.  I have it on good authority that Santa Claus will make an appearance.To one and all, have a safe and Happy Thanksgiving.  |

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