

The town board meeting will be on Thursday, January 15, at the Highlands Community Building next to the ball field. The first meeting will be the workshop session beginning at 6 pm, followed by the monthly board meeting at 7 pm. Both sessions will be available to view remotely on the town website's YouTube channel.

The workshop session will be a discussion of security issues and concerns for the Highlands Food and Wine Festival. Chief Holland will start the session with a report of security concerns, especially at the Main Event, where Main Street is closed for the Main Event from 4th to 5th streets. A discussion and comment period on the concerns and ideas will follow.

At the monthly board meeting at 7 pm, several items are on the agenda. Leading off is a presentation by Louis Davis of UTEC concerning proposed amendments from Duke Energy concerning the town's wholesale electricity contract.

Progress Energy and Duke Energy of the Carolinas are merging their two companies, which both fall under the umbrella of the Duke power system. This merger has been in the works for a while and will eventually be approved sometime in the coming months. For this merger to take place, approval from state and federal agencies must be obtained.

The amendment to our contract is required by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The town manager and I have met with a Duke representative to discuss the contract amendment. My big question was whether this amendment would cost Highlands more money. The representative for Duke said no, that we would even get some reimbursement because of the amendment.

We expect Mr. Davis of UTEC to confirm that the town will receive assistance from this amendment during his presentation to the board tonight. Ironically, this amendment occurs near the end of our wholesale contract with Duke. By 2029, the town will have to enter a new contract with either Duke or another provider. Our consulting company will conduct a shopping experience for us in the coming years to secure the best possible contract.

The board will also hold a discussion concerning the appointment of a new commissioner. The appointment of a new member of the town board would be for two years which is the remaining term of Commissioner Dotson who resigned from the board as of December 31.

The board will also hear an update from a non-profit consortium on their emergency support plan. This plan was developed in response to concerns raised by Hurricane Helene.

Bill Futral will be making a request for a rezoning request for a property on Dillard Road. The parcel is near Dusty's and across from the shopping center on Dillard Road. The board will also make appointments to the Highlands Tourist Development Committee and the Macon County Economic Development Commission.

Hope to see everyone at the meetings tonight, or folks being on YouTube.

Also, the entire agenda packet for every board meeting is available to the public. Simply contact town hall at (828) 526-2118 and ask to speak with Gibby Shaheen, the town clerk. Gibby will place you on the sunshine email list that receives agenda packets.