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| I had the honor of speaking to the American Legion Post 370 on Saturday about the electric grid and future plans.  I started my talk by paraphrasing the late Robert Plant's hit song that has the lyrics, "You might as well face it.  You are addicted to love."  Here in Highlands, like all communities, we might as well face that we are addicted to electricity.  It powers everything we do in our daily lives.  And when it goes out, we become very concerned about when it will return, as in the recent winter storm outages.I told my American Legion colleagues that when I first became mayor, it took about 10 megawatts to fully energize the town's needs, but now in peak periods, that number is about 16 megawatts and climbing.  That is why the town is investing several million dollars in electric grid upgrades to address future demand. I was in my pottery studio just this weekend thinking about electric demand.  As a potter who operates two electric kilns on a routine basis, I am one of those people addicted to power.  I cut off the lights and shut the glass entrance door as I left my studio.  I looked back into the blackened studio and noticed all the little indicator lights that were on.  My router light was glowing, as well as several battery charger lights.  The light switches were still on while my two pottery wheels were not running.  In other words, power is being used throughout a building or home unless we throw the main electrical breaker.  I am not advocating that but just making a point.   Even though we use more efficient appliances than what our grandparents used,  our increasing use of those addicting, alluring, and convenient electric appliances offset to some degree any conservation efforts.  However, efficiencies do help hold power bills down.Finally, let me address some of the sudden outages we incur in Highlands.  Many times they are acts for God and nature, as the legal term is sometimes invoked.  Other times, it is caused by human missteps.  I am referring to the multiple times we have had high-speeding, out-of-control vehicles hitting electrical utility poles and knocking out power to a segment of the entire town.  Especially with larger and heavier vehicles on the road, a utility pole is vulnerable to being downed by a car.  Usually, it takes a crew hours to replace the pole and reconnect the lines.  My point is that everyone should be aware of the dangers of driving fast in town and this potential consequence, not to mention all the other problems such actions may cause.Finally, Duke Energy has tentatively identified Friday, March 7, weather permitting, as the date they will cut power to Highlands to remove about 28 trees on the transmission line right of way on Hicks Road.  That date is the next time the Highlands School will not be in session.  The power will be cut off early in the morning and remain off into the late afternoon.  The town and Duke will provide specific information before that date approaches. |

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