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| Thursday, March 20, is the annual Highlands Town Retreat, starting at 9 am in the arts and crafts room of the Highlands Recreation Center. The retreat has been rescheduled twice now, but it is a go for Thursday. The retreat is open to the public.We will also have our monthly town board meeting tonight at 7 pm. This meeting will be at the Highlands Community Center next to the ball field. I anticipate the meeting being short with only a few items.At the board meeting, commissioners will hear an update from Ted Orwell of UTEC concerning our wholesale power contract. We have had a 20-year wholesale power contract with Duke Energy. It expires in the next 3 years and the town will have to enter a new contract with a wholesale electric provider.When I first became mayor over a decade ago, I thought the Duke contract was very long, and maybe we had a bad deal. I have changed my mind now. Way back 20 years ago, the town locked down a very good pricing scale for electricity. My friends at Duke frequently remind me that we have had very good rates. The bad news is two-fold. The new electric provider will not want to commit to a 20-year contract, given the electric power demand is now constantly changing. And those low wholesale prices will probably be off the table.﻿In the last few years electric power demand in this country has constantly increased. It isn't because of electric vehicles, although they will be part of the equation in the future. More and more homes have increased their demand for electricity. A few years ago, a 200 amp breaker system for a regular home was considered adequate. Now, new homes are installing 400 amp systems.Another driver of higher electrical costs will be bit-coin mining factories and AI centers. These technologies require ever-expanding use of power that will drive up costs for all consumers. The electric power industry is scrambling to meet this constantly growing demand by building new generator plants across the nation.In short, our new wholesale electric contract will have higher wholesale rates. While the town has not increased customer rates in nearly a decade, that line will not be able to be held in the coming years. Electric power generation and access will be a major national issue in the near future.The board will also review the chamber lease at the meeting. I hope this issue will come to an end Thursday night.The Highlands and Mountain Top Rotary Clubs will present a design for a peace pole to be located on the campus of the Highlands Community Center. Rotary International has installed several thousand peace poles over the last decade.A discussion concerning the floor area ratio in B-1 will also be discussed. The question is whether to change the ratio to allow more space flexibility in the zoning district.The board will also appoint a new mayor pro temp, and go into closed session to get an update concerning the Huff v Town of Highlands lawsuit. A superior curt judge recently issued a ruling, and our attorney, Bob Hagemann, will brief the board. I will also hold my first community coffee of the year at the Hudson Library this Friday at 11 am in the library meeting room. I will review the items of the town retreat and items covered at the monthly board meeting. |

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