

At last week's town retreat the discussions tended to stress conservative spending. With all the unknown variables at the national, state and county level, the feeling among staff and board members was caution about large expenditures, except for those projects that are necessary.

One big positive was the recent securing of state grants to replace aging waterlines and upgrades to the water plant. Also, there are critical needs to replace aging fire trucks that the department purchased in 2004 and 2006. Also, there is a need to continue to keep and even increase the full-time staffing at the fire station.

The result of the fire department needs came to the need to increase the fire tax for the coming budget year. This increase will have to be approved by both the town and county boards of commissioners. Before that review by the boards, there will be a public meeting on Tuesday, March 31 from 5:30 to 6:30. It will take place at the Highlands Community Building next to the ball field.

The fire chief and county and town officials will be at the meeting to discuss the need for the fire tax increase with residents in the fire district. The meeting will be a drop-in session where folks can come at any time between 5:30 and 6:30 pm. Resident input will be noted by the leadership present.

This Thursday, March 19, the town board will be meeting at the Highlands Community Building for both a workshop and board meeting. Both sessions can be remotely accessed on the town website using the YouTube link.

The workshop will begin at 6 pm with two items to be. First, the police chief wants to review enforcement issues concerning some parts of the current noise ordinance. Also, the chief and Captain McCall want to address the issue of vehicles parked in the roadway at construction sites, especially in residential areas. Many times, it becomes problematic for traffic to pass in a safe manner.

The first item on the board meeting agenda at 7pm will be a public hearing concerning the rezoning of a property on NC 106. The property in question is next to Dusty's Supermarket.

The board will also review several contracts and agreements. The county board recently approved the inter-local agreement for the improvements of the Macon County old landfill on NC 28. These improvements will allow the dredging materials from Mirror Lake to be deposited at that location. The town board will now have to approve the agreement which involves the town providing funds for the project. After the inter-local agreement is approved the McGill engineers will continue to complete the final design and engineering documents necessary to begin the dredging. These completed documents will be shared with the public.

Also, the board will conduct a second review of the proposed Town Board of Commissioners Rules and Procedures. Our town attorney developed this document to codify and clarify how town meetings are conducted. The board may approve the document or continue the review process.

Hope to see you at the workshop and board meeting, or you can tune in online.