

The Highlands Town Board of Commissioners will meet on Thursday, September 19th. At 6 p.m., there will be a board workshop followed by the official monthly meeting at 7 p.m. Both meetings will be at the Highlands Community Center next to the ball field. The meetings can be accessed remotely by a link on the town website.

The 6 p.m. workshop agenda includes three items. First, the board will immediately go into a closed session to consult with the town attorney about the handling of the Huff lawsuit against the town. Last year, both parties to the suit agreed to a court-ordered stay of the suit. This agreement ends at the beginning of October, and the suit may move forward.

After the closed session, the open public session will address two items. The town has received several requests from area facilities for our sewer plant to receive sludge from their small sewer package plants. Currently, this sludge is trucked a substantial distance for disposal. If the board grants permission, these entities would dispose of their sludge into our sewer plant. Since they have treated the sludge in accordance with state standards at their package plants, our plant operators would know exactly what was entering our system. Prohibitions of septic companies depositing their waste in the plant would continue.

The town would consider accepting sludge because we now have a new, very efficient belt press for processing sludge quickly. These agreements to process sludge would net the town about \$40,000 a year. The board will have to weigh the benefits of such a program against potential problems.

The board will also review a proposed NCDOT crosswalk at Hickory Street and North 4th Street near the ball field. Since North 4th is US 64, NCDOT would oversee the project by designing and painting the actual crosswalk. The town would have to commit to altering the sidewalk curbing to be ADA-compliant for the crosswalk. There may be a couple of other areas where crosswalks could be installed.

On a related matter, in recent weeks, NCDOT has been repainting existing crosswalks in town with specialized, long-lasting paint. The town has also paid NCDOT extra funds to paint town street crossings.

There will be one major item at the 7 p.m. town board meeting. That item is the final action on the proposed amendment to amortize short-term rentals in R1 and R2 zoning districts. A public hearing was held on September 5th where speakers on both sides of this issue had

the opportunity to address the board. Prior to this final action tonight, and in accordance with state statutes, the town has been taking written comments before and after the public hearing. Our town clerk has sent these comments to our Sunshine List in several batches. She has also made sure the comments are sent to the commissioners.

The 7 p.m. board meeting will open with public comments. I request that those who have spoken at the hearing and/or submitted written comments consider not speaking again during the public comment period. On the other hand, if someone feels they have a new point on the issue that needs to be stated, by all means, do so.

Finally, I want to lend my full support to our playground initiative, which is being spearheaded by Commissioner Stiehler and Commissioner Weller. We are in the middle of seeking private funds for the project. I encourage everyone to donate by going to www.highlandsplay.net.