Thursday evening, May 16, the Highlands Town Board will convene at the Highlands Recreation Center. Progress is being made on the renovations at the Highlands Community Center next to the ball field, and I believe we will be there for the July meetings.

The monthly workshop meeting on Thursday will begin at 6 pm. The board and town staff will hear a presentation by another company that has software that tracks and can inform staff about STR activity in Highlands. The company also provides a 24-7 call service for any problem with a STR unit. Some residential folks have been requesting the implementation of such a system. The current provider has not been able to institute such a system.

At the workshop the board will have a discussion about how to proceed in setting up a liaison or committee system to address concerns of the business community, as well as the neighborhood folks. Even without such a system, concerned citizens can always contact me or the commissioners. I will say that I can't always address those concerns to everyone's satisfaction, but I do listen and investigate problems. Normally, I will discuss the problem with the town manager and staff, and on some occasions the town attorney is consulted. I try to make sure someone, whether me, the town manager, or a staff member, follows up with the resident.

At the formal business meeting at 7 pm, the town manager will present a proposed town budget for fiscal year 2024-2025. As I have stated before, this new budget will appear to be very large and expansive due primarily to the 13 million dollars the town has received in state grants as well as reserve funds that are being used to address critical infrastructure initiatives. The projects and budget carryovers will continue for several years.

For instance, we have received funding for the dredging of Mirror Lake. An engineering firm has been chosen to manage and oversee the project. Since the dredging will be done in phases, the funds for the project will be carried over into forthcoming budgets until the project is completed.

Another topic on the agenda will be a discussion and review of short-term rental legislation that may come before the state house and Senate in this short session. The word in Raleigh going into this short session was that there would be no action concerning STRs. My contacts at the NC League of Municipalities held this view also. But some sources indicate that STR legislation might not be a dead issue. Also, there are several bills that would also impact state building and development codes. Our staff and attorney will be tracking these developments as they unfold in Raleigh.

 I anticipate Representative Gillespie's bill to limit tractor-trailer trucks on the Gorge Road to pass the Senate. Senator Corbin is working hard to get that bill over the senate finish line and on to the governor for his signature.

Also, HB 246 is being considered by the Senate. That bill would guarantee fair reimbursement for local pharmacies in filling prescriptions. Without this bill, local pharmacies, like our independent pharmacy, will have a hard time making ends meet. Please go to the Highlands Pharmacy and sign a petition in support of the bill or contact Senator Corbin's office. His contact information is online and also at AskMayorPat.com.

I hope to see you at the meeting on Thursday, but if you can't be there, you can access the meetings by going to the town website and clicking on the meeting link.

MAYOR PAT