

Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., Feb. 18, 2021

Comp Plan heading into phase 3

Late summer of 2020 the town recruited the help of Stewart, Inc. to develop a Comprehensive Plan which the state has required of all municipalities that have zoning by 2022.

Stewart started the process with an online public survey to see what Highlands full- and part-time residents, as well as business and property owners who don't live in Highlands want Highlands to look

like in the future.

The survey was available online mid-October through mid-January in the second of four phases of the Comprehensive Plan time-

•See COMP PLAN page 10

MCSO makes two child porn arrests

Highlands PD assisted in investigation & arrest

The Highlands Police Department assisted the Macon County Sheriff's Office last week in making two arrests stemming from months-long investigations launched in the Fall of 2020 involving child pornography allegations in Macon County.

On October 16, 2020, detectives from the Macon County Sheriff's Office Special Victims Unit received an Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Cyber Tip. The Special Victims Unit, which is also part of the NC State Bureau ICAC Task Force, receives information in reference to crimes of possession, manufacture, and distribution of child pornography. Because of this tip, detectives made contact with the

• See MCSO page 6



Highlands Danny Lopez gets rid of the ball under pressure from BREC Carsen Williams

HS boys soccer wins season opener against BREC

By Brian O'Shea
Plateau Daily News

Highlands travelled to Cashiers last week to take on rivals Blue Ridge Early College for the season opener and walked away

with the win, 3-2. The Bobcats didn't go quietly and rallied in the final minutes to score two goals back to back, but couldn't clinch the win.

• See SOCCER page 7

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McPhails pledge matching gift to benefit Pisgah Legal Services

(Highlands/Cashiers) – Ray and Diane McPhail have generously pledged to match up to \$25,000 in donations to sustain free civil legal aid for local people through the work of nonprofit Pisgah Legal Services (PLS). All gifts made to the PLS' Plateau Poverty Law Initiative, which benefits residents with low incomes living throughout Macon and Jackson counties, will be matched dollar for dollar until February 28, 2021 or until the \$25,000 goal is reached.

Ray says he supports Pisgah Legal Services coming to Highlands and Cashiers "to help those in need who cannot afford a lawyer." He added, "I grew up among good people who were poor. Because many did not have access to education, others took advantage of them, and they did not know where to turn. A sick family member or a loss of a job precipitated a disaster, maybe an eviction or foreclosure. Pisgah Legal is now

here to stand up for them. I hope others will join us in helping provide a champion for people who are in need."

Pisgah Legal Services, a nonprofit that provides free, civil legal aid in Western North Carolina (WNC), expanded to join the network of resources available to people with low-incomes in Macon and Jackson counties in early 2020, just as the pandemic began. In its first year in the area, Pisgah Legal helped more than 400 people locally with protection from domestic violence, homelessness prevention, income security and access to health insurance.

"Our presence in the community continues to grow as people are learning about who we are and what we do," says Megan Quattlebaum, Highlands/ Cashiers Community Engagement Manager. "It's important that we continue to offer these services to individuals and families who

• See PLEDGE page 4

Congratulations on a successful 2020,
Molly Leonard!
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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

Paving Main Street and more

Tonight, is the February Highlands Town Board meeting by way of ZOOM. The access codes are on the town website. The meeting begins at 7 p.m. with public comment.

The board will hear from several groups concerning events planned for the spring and summer. Community event planning is still a challenge since uncertainty remains concerning the spread of COVID in the coming months. Availability of vaccines, virus mutations, following basic protocols, and the governor's emergency orders are all unforeseen variables. Nevertheless, I appreciate the plans and contingencies that community groups will develop.

A major topic of the meeting will be an update on the NCDOT plans and schedule to repave Main and 4th streets in the business district, plus all the way to Clear Creek and Buck Creek roads.

The plan calls for the work in the downtown area to begin on March 15. The contractor has developed a block-by-block plan. A street section, for instance from 2nd



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

to 3rd, will be closed for a 24-hour period. Detours will be in place. The milling of the closed section will be done at night and the paving done in the day. After the paving is completed that section of the street will be reopened to traffic. DOT will be announcing a projected final schedule any time now.

With good weather, the paving of downtown could be completed by the end of March. Bad weather conditions would inevitably delay the schedule.

DOT will paint the parking spaces ASAP after the paving. We have been informed at a previous meeting that the parking will be done according to the state parking standards. Also, ADA handicap spaces will be created that meet current federal requirements.

The town staff has had two very good planning meetings with DOT officials and the contractor. State officials have been very understanding of our special situation in the downtown area. With that said, they also have emphasized that Main and 4th streets are state highways and that the work will meet current state, not town standards. Later in the year there will be work done by the state at intersections to improve the curbing and walkways to meet handicap requirements.

Some folks may note that there have been changes to earlier plans. The initial plan was to pave one side of the street and keep the other side open. The original completion date was Memorial Day. This new plan accelerates construction so downtown should be paved and striped sometime in April.

In a crisis, such as COVID communities are stressed. On the other hand, the best in people comes out.





The Highlands Cashiers Community Vaccination Clinic vaccinated over 1,400 people this past weekend. It was only possible because of the 200 volunteers and over 20 nonprofit agencies that have worked together to make it possible. The clinic serves both Macon and Jackson counties. Clinic volunteers have been motivated by love and kindness toward others. This special effort reaffirms that we are truly a caring community.

• HIC'S VIEW •



"Don't worry about it. They think they are training you but in reality you are training them. It will all work out."

• WEATHER •

Thu, 18-Feb	Fri, 19-Feb	Sat, 20-Feb	Sun, 21-Feb
			
42°F 31°F	42°F 20°F	40°F 27°F	42°F 30°F
Downpours in the a.m.; cloudy	Mostly sunny and chilly	Plenty of sunshine, but cold	Sunshine, but chilly
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• LETTERS •

A Few Questions

Dear Editor,

I'm confused. Is it a requirement to have an annual income of at least \$320,000 in order to attend one of those Highlands Festivals/Events commercial promotions like the Bear Shadow music concert we've been reading about lately? If so, do the hopeful attendees have to provide proof of income in order to be eligible to attend? And if so, what proof is acceptable; bank statements, brokerage accounts, income tax returns? And assuming you're accepted and allowed to participate in the fun, then what happens? Do the attendees compare bank

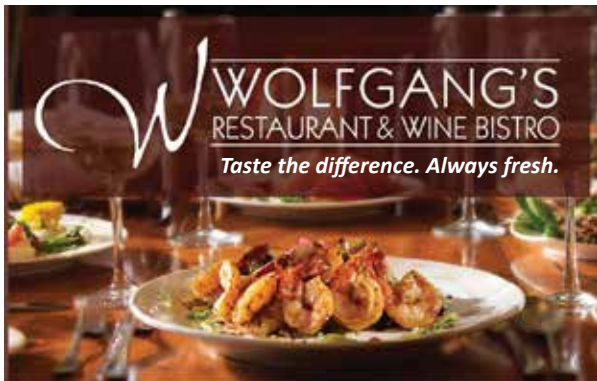
account balances in between dancing to the music and enjoying the fabulous food?

If you don't have an annual income of at least \$320,000, are there any other fun music and food commercial promotional events the Events people offer?

If so, where? Also, does Covid care how much money you have?

Alice Nelson
Highlands

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...PLEDGE continued from pg 1

are struggling now more than ever during this difficult and unprecedented time. We are so grateful to the McPhails for their incredibly generous gift and opportunity to raise the funds needed to continue this life-changing work."

In addition to the ongoing legal work that is happening for the most part remotely in order to limit the spread of COVID-19, a new Pisgah Legal office has been established 209 Hospital Drive, Suite 203 in Highlands.

Since 1978, nonprofit Pisgah Legal Services has provided free civil legal aid to struggling people so they may seek justice and meet their basic needs. PLS provides a broad array of legal services in 11 WNC counties and offers health and immigration law services in 18 counties. Last year PLS served more than 20,000 people across the WNC mountain region.

Pisgah Legal Services, continues to operate during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak. The staff is working remotely, helping clients and taking new applications for assistance with critical needs.

Want to Help?

Giving online is fast, easy and secure at www.pisgah-legal.org/give or contact Community Engagement Manager Megan Quattlebaum by phone at 828-575-1353 or via email: megan@pisgahlegal.org. Checks may be mailed to Pisgah Legal Services, P.O. Box 2276, Asheville, N.C. 28802

If you or someone you know needs help, call Pisgah Legal's Highlands/Cashiers office at 828-210-3424. Online applications are also being accepted: www.pisgahlegal.org/free-legal-assistance. Pisgah Legal staff and volunteer attorneys will be in touch via phone and/or email.

Coming to PAC Sunday

On Sunday, February 21 at 3pm the PAC will present the National Theatre of London's production of No Man's Land starring Sir(s) Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen. Tickets available online: www.HighlandsPerformingArts.com



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...MCSO continued from page 1

suspect and an investigation began and soon expanded to other states.

On February 4, 2021, Paul Vatalaro, age 56, was arrested at his residence on Gilmer Russell Road in Franklin, NC on four felony counts of 3rd Degree Sexual Exploitation of a Child.

Vatalaro was found to be in possession of nude photos of prepubescent females on his phone. Vatalaro has several images in his possession. The origins of the photos were not included on the arrest warrant.

Mr. Vatalaro was released the same day after making the bond set by Magistrate Justin Stamey of \$100,000. He is scheduled to make his first court appearance on April 15.

In addition, on November 16, 2020, Detectives with the Macon County Sheriff's Office Special Victims Unit received another Cyber Tip from ICAC. The Cyber Tip was in reference to Michael Allen Jones, age 56, of Macon County.

Jones had worked most of his life in the Information Technology (IT) field. An investigation was initiated by the MCSO.

On February 9, 2021, MCSO, Highlands Police Department and Franklin Police Department conducted a search warrant on Jones' Lakeside Drive residence in Franklin and seized multiple electronic devices.

The Juvenile Detective with the Highlands Police Department assisted MCSO and Franklin Police Department in the investigation and arrest of Jones when requested to assist in the investigation as partner members of the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force.

Jones was arrested on three felony counts of 3rd Degree Sexual Exploitation of a Minor.

According to court records,



Paul Vatalaro

Jones was in possession of visual representation of "two unknown prepubescent Caucasian female children," completely nude. He was also in possession of visual representation of a female between the ages of 13-16 who was sitting on the bed nude. Both images were from an online website. Jones was in possession of additional similar photographs as well.

He is currently being held on a \$200,000 bond and is scheduled to appear in court on February 25.

"Our investigators immediately followed up on tips and were able to conduct interviews and secured enough digital evidence that showed Mr. Vatalaro and Mr. Jones to be involved with child pornography," said MC Sheriff Robert Holland. "These two cases were not related and were separate investigations but serve as a great



Michael Allen Jones

example of the importance of our agencies working together to protect and serve our community which includes the youngest of its members."

The investigation is still ongoing and involves the MCSO, HPD, FPD, and the NC State Bureau of Investigation.

Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings are on-line

Highlands/ Cashiers Alcoholics Anonymous "Open Meetings" are for anyone who thinks they may have a drinking problem or for anyone interested in the A.A. recovery program. Due to Covid 19, In Person open A.A. meetings are suspended, but On Line meetings can be found @ www.aawnc80.org or to speak with a member of A.A. call (828) 349-4357.

...SOCCER continued from page 1



Highlands James Earp kicks the ball to the outside with BREC CJ Jennings on his heels.

Highlands Coach Caleb Brown said it took about 10 minutes to fall into a rhythm, but as soon as the boys strung together a few passes and moved the ball effectively, they were able to create more chances and take some shots on goal.

“Given our lack of many substitutes, the boys certainly were playing hard and tired from all of their great effort,” said Brown. “BREC showed some great determination and was able to score back two goals on us quickly. They cut the goal deficit to one, which did make us a bit nervous, but we were confident that the boys could pull through. Through their determination and will to give it their all they were able to make some great stops and even create a few chances on goal during the final minutes of the game.”

BREC Coach Nick Pressler said the Bobcats played well for their first outing.

“We possessed the ball the majority of the first half, just couldn’t find the net,” he said. “They never gave up and put two good goals together late.”

The first goal of the game was scored by BREC against themselves after a deflec-

tion off the keeper. Highlands Jeffrey Olivera scored the second goal, followed by a score by Highlands Win Dyleski.

BREC’s first goal was scored by Jacob Pressler, the second was a header by Korbin Walters with an assist from Pressler.


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While they had the momentum with them, it wasn’t enough to take the win.


“With basketball and soccer going at same time we have not had a full team practice,” said Coach Pressler. “We will get better and I think we can contend well with the other conference teams. Silly mistakes and lack of focus in the first half put us behind on the score.”

Athletes playing multiple sports with overlapping seasons is affecting teams throughout the state, and Brown said he’s proud of the players’ dedication.

“For a team that has not had a great deal of time practicing together, the players played their positions excellent,” said Brown. “They created chances, moved fast on the ball, and really showed their impressive conditioning by playing a full fast paced 80-minute game without walking or gassing out. I am exceptionally proud at the work ethic these boys have shown to play two sports at the same time and give it their all in every game. I could not be more pleased with their performance on the field and the final result.”

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ALL ABOUT BOOKS

• INK PENN •

A sneak peek

Is it any surprise there's a book club meeting in every one of my Dickens & Christie cozy mysteries? If you are subscribed to my newsletter, you recently got a sneak peek at the meeting in book four: "Collectors, Cats & Murder." Hint, hint, you can visit my website (kathymanospenn.com) to sign up.

If not, here's your opportunity to attend the meeting held in the Book Nook, the book shop in the Cotswold village where my heroine lives.

Thursday evening was crisp and cool, and Dave and I decided to walk to the Book Nook. Turning right out of the driveway, we strolled up Schoolhouse Lane past the gates to Astonbury

Manor, and I commented we'd get to see Ellie tonight.

I noted the parking spaces on the High Street were filled—all the way down to the Village Green and the lot in front of the Village Hall. We had a big crowd tonight. Trixie, Beatrix's niece, greeted us when we entered the bookshop. "Good evening. Can you believe how many people are here tonight? Good thing Aunt Beatrix brought in extra chairs."

I waved at Belle, seated with Ellie in the front row. They pointed to the three empty seats beside them, and I took that to mean they'd saved two for me and Dave. Wendy

must be parking the car. I spied Gavin speaking with a portly blonde man who sported a bow tie and Harris tweed vest—or waistcoat, as the Brits called it. He was on the short side, perhaps 5' 7", with a blonde mustache and long sideburns. This had to be Gilbert Ward, our guest speaker. Dave had told me Gilbert spoke like someone out of the pages of an Agatha Christie novel, and his attire seemed a nod to that affection.

Gilbert motioned to Dave so we made our way through the crowd. "Hello, Gilbert. Let me introduce Leta Parker, my . . . my girlfriend." I could tell he found the word awkward. I felt the same way about boyfriend. They seem such odd terms for couples our age. I never imagined I'd have a boyfriend in my 50s.

Gavin smoothed the awkward moment. "And quite a girl she is. Leta is our resident American, a Greek cook, and on occasion, a regular Nancy Drew."

Gilbert looked amused. "You don't say? Then I imagine you quite enjoyed The Sherlockian, with an amateur detective as the main character."

I glanced at Dave, hoping this joking reference to my sleuthing wouldn't put a damper on our evening. I answered Gilbert truthfully. "I was much more intrigued by



Kathy Manos Penn

the tale that came to life in the fictional diary—Doyle's friendship with Bram Stoker, the fact he wrote a story that Stoker produced as a play—all of that is fascinating. Will you be shedding light on the facts behind the fiction?"

"To the extent that's possible, young lady. You know the missing diary has never been found, which means I can only piece together disparate facts to arrive at a probable explanation."

As I was chuckling at Gilbert's manner, someone tapped me on the shoulder. It was Beatrix, accompanied by an elderly gentleman whom I assumed must be the owner of the Chipping Camden bookshop. "May we interrupt, Leta? I'd like to introduce you all to my friend Teddy Byrd."

She made the introductions and thanked Gavin for delivering Teddy safely to her door. Teddy must have been an imposing figure in his prime. Even stooped over his cane, he was taller than Dave and Gavin, and he dwarfed Gilbert. With his bald pate, surrounded by fuzzy white hair, his wire-rimmed spectacles, and his rotund figure, he could have been a character from an Agatha Christie novel—I could imagine him as the vicar of Miss Marple's church in St. Mary Mead.

What ensued was a lively conversation among Gilbert, Teddy, and Dave about Doyle, Stoker, J.M. Barrie, and Robert Louis Stevenson. Gavin and I exchanged glances and smiled. It was like being a fly on the wall at a gathering of Victorian and Edwardian literary scholars. Tonight's book discussion coupled with Gilbert's presentation promised to be entertaining.

Check back soon for the conclusion of this sneak peek, or order your copy now from Amazon.

- Award-winning author Kathy Manos Penn is a Georgia resident. Find her cozy mysteries locally at Books Unlimited in Franklin and on Amazon. Contact her at inkpenn119@gmail.com, and follow her on Facebook, www.facebook.com/KathyManosPennAuthor/.



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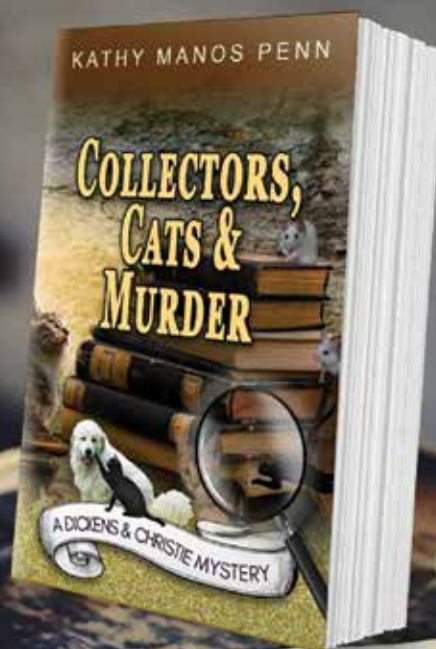
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Patience Is Your Friend

"Patience is not simply the ability to wait – it's how we behave while we're waiting" – Joyce Meyer

No matter where you live (except California and New York City) we're all reading and hearing the same headlines; "inventory is at all time lows". Meanwhile, Buyers are hovering and hurriedly calling their Brokers the moment they get a hit on Zillow, only to find that the property is already under contract. Many of us have Buyer Clients who have "missed out" due to the pace of the Highlands-Cashiers market. FaceTime showings are fairly prevalent, but if you sell your mountain home to a FaceTime Buyer who's never seen it, have you really sold it?

In what may be the most "non-Realtor" sounding advice you've ever heard from a Realtor, I would encourage Buyers and Sellers to exercise a little patience in these times. Beginning last Spring a "panic to buy" mode set in, which led to prices spiking and the bidding wars began. Rather than employing a level of patience, many were tempted to waive inspections or skip other due diligence steps they would normally perform before buying. It became a race to the Closing table vs. a let's look deeper process (septic tanks and crawl spaces included). I believe there are some risks that come along with a hurry-up mentality that we need to be aware of. Here's the proof.

According to HomeAdvisor report, "Americans did an average of 1.2 emergency home repairs in 2020, up from 0.4



Pat Gleeson
Owner, BIC
White Oak Realty
Group
828-782-0472

in 2019, while emergency home spending jumped to an average of \$1,640, up \$124 from the 2019 average." Let's face it, overlooking the risk being thorough may seem like a good idea at the time especially if you're in a hurry to scoop up a property in Highlands or Cashiers before someone else does. I read a quote recently in the Wall Street Journal who put it this way about rushing into a home purchase; "a lack of awareness coupled with a lack of time, is not a good combination".

Unlike that expensive outfit that doesn't quite look the same when you get home, a house cannot be returned if a buyer is unhappy. As Brokers, our mission and the basis of the Client/Broker relationship is pretty simple. We have a fiduciary responsibility to you, and we work with you for one reason; to help you make the best possible investment on the buyer-side and to find you a ready, willing, and able Buyer on the seller-side.

In closing, I'll share from a guy named Paul said it much better than I can centuries ago; "I urge you to have a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be humble, gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4, 1-2).

• Pat Gleeson, Bee, Tom, Christal, Michael, Susie and their dog Gemma are Helpers and Brokers of White Oak Realty Group, in downtown Highlands (4th Street across from the Old Edwards Inn). Since 2009, White Oak Realty Group remains one of the leading boutique brokerage firms on the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau. You can reach all of us at 828.526.8118.

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The Dry Sink Main St. Highlands, NC

...COMP PLAN continued from page 1

line – Analysis & Visioning.

Having analyzed the survey data, Stewart planners are about to move into Phase 3 – Planning, but now they want to hear specifically from businesses in Highlands.

One last part to analyze is input from businesses in town.

The business survey is available at <https://www.highlandscommunityplan.com/> and takes about 10 minutes.

Stewart says local businesses are an invaluable asset to Highlands, and for the Comprehensive Plan to be complete they want to know about priorities important to businesses.

Responses will be used to guide economic development recommendations in the final Highlands Community Plan.

Meanwhile, the public survey responses have been gathered and are currently being analyzed.

There were 1,015 responses from a mix of full-time and part-time residents and employees. A large percentage of respondents were 55 and older and were high earners.

Jake Petrosky, planning manager with Stewart said they had

hoped for more input from Highlands' younger, less affluent demographic.

"But we are still processing this information and developing recommendations. There is a lot to digest. We had a lot of really thoughtful comments," he said.

The first public survey question asked "How do you relate to Highlands?" and got 1,006 responses. 449 said they live in Highlands year-round; 468 said they were part-time or second-homeowners; 64 said they own property in Highlands but don't live in Highlands; 39 said they were frequent or long-term tourists; 119 said they work in Highlands and 52 considered themselves "other."

When querying the age of respondents, 1,007 people answered: 451 were 65+; 244 were 55-64-years old; 140 were 45-54; 106 were 35-44; 58 were 25-34; 7 were 18-24 and one was under 18.

The household income question got 964 responses.

The highest income bracket – over \$150,000/year had 511 respondents; 168 people reported making between \$100,000-\$150,000; 119 reported making between \$75,000 and \$99,000; 48 respondents said they made between \$30,000 and \$49,999 and 20 reported making under \$30,000.

When asked what they valued most and were most concerned with, the majority of people – 532 out of 1,012 respondents said Highlands environmental preservation topped their list. Next came maintaining a vibrant downtown at 340; expanding or upgrading infrastructure (water, sewer, internet) at 334; historic preservation and cultural resources at 329; controlling short-term rentals at 326 and workforce housing got 263.

When asked which pictures of downtown development were best, of the 895 answers, 538 liked shops and restaurants downtown; 506 liked small-scale shops; 339 liked 2-3 story mixed-use buildings; 211 like the mix of 2-3 story buildings with step-backs; 178 liked 3-4 story mixed-use with balconies with only 156 liking mixed-use with parking in front.

When asked about housing in areas close to downtown, of the 895 respondents, 613 liked the

pictures of smaller homes with shared open space; 448 liked live/work units; 211 like the townhome look; 142 liked house-scaled multi-family units and 72 like the traditional apartment building look.

As to the most appealing downtown improvements, of the 926 respondents, 408 wanted more open spaces and parks; 303 wanted new shops, businesses and restaurants; 288 wanted more parking; 223 wanted more activities and special events, 190 wanted sidewalks and crossings improved; 155 wanted more residential options and 83 had "other" concerns.

When asked how parking could be improved throughout the business district, 555 people suggested wayfinding signs to parking; 387 said more parking needed to be built; 280 said better parking enforcement was needed; 181 suggested time restrictions; 124 suggested valet services and 88 wanted paid-parking meters.

As to pedestrian elements most needed downtown, 535 said more trees and landscaping, 391 said more wayfinding signs; 351 said more signal countdowns for crossing; 214 want new sidewalks and 94 want more streetlights.

When asked what was the biggest barrier to "active" transportation – walking or bicycling – 470 said lack of sidewalks, bike lanes or trails; 225 said unsafe road conditions; 58 said destinations were too far apart and 32 said existing infrastructure doesn't accommodate people with disabilities.

Housing was a big topic with 547 saying they wanted to see more single-family homes with smaller yards and access to shared open spaces; 509 wanted more live/work units (condos above commercial or office space); 253 wanted more townhomes; 249 wanted more small-scale apartments or condos; 234 wanted more single-family homes with larger private yards; 113 wanted more duplexes or triplexes; and 38 wanted larger-scale apartments or condos.

Residential development was also brought up.

Priorities were making new development fit the character of the town at 674; requiring protection for natural resources got 662; discouraging high-density development came in at 554; regulating architectural design got 337; side-

walk connectivity got 335; landscaping beautification got 333; access to trails, parks and greenspace got 295 and other concerns were about requiring larger lots, and amenities.

For recreation, nature areas and trails topped the list at 497; 337 were satisfied with what is now offered, 192 wanted more playgrounds and 135 wanted more indoor recreation opportunities.

Short-term rentals were an issue with 562 of the 906 respondents saying they had concerns about them; 344 said they didn't have concerns.

Short-term rental concerns centered around improperly stored trash, traffic, speeding, impacts on housing supply, length of stay and illegal parking or affecting shared parking. Decreasing long-term rental options was cited as well as only allowing short-term rentals in certain areas.

Generally, those who answered survey questions said they valued the communal, friendly feel of Highlands; its people, beauty and small town nature.

"It has a small town feel but with a big picture attitude. Great dining and shopping and tight community feel... It is just a magical place. It is not perfect, far from it, but about as close to perfect as any place I have ever lived," summed up one respondent.

Another said "Highlands offers us a peaceful getaway from the city, including beautiful scenery, minimal traffic, a walkable downtown and many opportunities for dining and shopping."

Other themes that surfaced from the survey were transportation, walkability, access to hiking trails, not widening streets, walkable streets, trees on Main Street, more sidewalks and bike trails.

Of survey respondents 57% want to see more shade trees downtown and 1 in 3 respondents seek parking improvements.

"At our next steering committee meeting in early March, we will be discussing draft recommendations with the hopes of having a draft plan for review in April along with a public meeting to present recommendations," said Petrosky. "We would make edits to the plan after that and shoot for adoption in May or June."

– Kim Lewicki

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• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

The Unity We Seek



Dr. Mark Ford, Pastor
First Baptist Church
Highlands

Psalm 133:1 says, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity." We are hearing a great deal about unity in our land today. Unity is defined as being joined together in a single mind and coalescing in agreement on mutual goals and purposes. It is a valid and worthy agenda to seek but is difficult considering the multitude of differing opinions, ideological, political, and institutional persuasions of today. It is my humble opinion that such unity will never be achieved in light of history and the fragmented realities of the present. But nonetheless, unity is a worthy goal to seek.

The problem as I see it is that everyone talks about unity, few people talk about any degree of genuine compromise, and those who even seek compromise want others to move predominantly in their direction, use their language, adopt their values, and get onboard with their agenda. Unity means, "Join us." That's not the way it usually happens. Sin makes all people self-centered and selfish. Unity comes at the expense of the other. So, given the realities of our sinful world driven by selfish agendas and entrenched values, how can we even hope to "dwell in unity" – as communities and even churches? As a Christian I believe it starts with love in Christ.

When we attempt to move toward unity among ourselves, we automatically run into those self-oriented opinions, values, agendas, political and institutional foci. But if we focus on love – and God is love (1 John 4:7-8) – then we are naturally drawn closer together as we move toward Him in love. The two great commandments are to love God, love our neighbor, and love each other (Mt. 22:37-39; Jn. 13:34-35). It was Jesus' high priestly prayer before going to the cross that asked the Father that we His people have unity and love just as the Father and Son are one in love.

Now understand, the community of God's people and the world will never congeal in our values and worldviews. But we have a great gift to bestow upon the world. We have our confession – Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Lord and Savior. But John made it clear – the world will know the validity of our faith not by what we say as much as what we do in love (1 Jn. 3:16-18). They will know we are Christ followers by acting in love, for God is love.

My point is this. As we draw near to God in love – love for Him, love for our fellow believers and love for neighbor – people will be drawn to God through this love and our simple confession of faith (read Apostles' Creed). All other demarcations will be settled in Him. God as love is the great unifier. We should argue less and love more with the love of God. His Word is true, and His truth will be

• See SPIRITUALLY page 14

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

John 3:16

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• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from Jan. 30. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or public officials have been used.

Jan 30

• At 4:30 p.m., officers responded to a 2-vehicle accident on NC 28 near South Street.

Jan. 31

• At 11:30 a.m., officers responded to a 1-vehicle accident on Horse Cove Road near Bowery Road.

Feb. 3

• At 10:03 a.m., officers responded to a 2-vehicle accident on S. 3rd street at Helens Barn Ave.

Feb. 6

• At 6:55 p.m., officers responded to a 1-vehicle accident on NC 28 south at S. Old Walhalla Road.

Feb. 8

• At 10:50 a.m., officers responded to a 2-vehicle accident at Oak and 3rd streets.

Feb. 9

• At 8:14 a.m., officers responded to a 1-vehicle accident at Holt Knob and Keener roads.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Feb. 10.

Feb. 10

• At 8:32 a.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on the Cashiers Road.

Feb. 11

• At 8 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Big View Drive.

Feb. 12

• At 6:03 p.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on the Cashiers Road.

• At 7:28 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Cobb Road.

Feb. 14

• At 11:48 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Blue Valley Road.

...SPIRITUALLY continued from page 11

made clear to all who draw closer to Him. Our main job is to point them to the Eternal Love found in Christ. And I can only love in my actions, while my debates should be limited to a loving purpose of restoration to Truth in Christ.

This brings me to a final word of thanks. These last few weeks I have witnessed among many of the volunteers for the COVID-19 Clinics this essence of love. Working with them has been one of my greatest joys as together we have assisted over 1500 of our neighbors to receive the vaccine (first and second dose). I saw people crying for joy and raising hands of thanks to God. Most all expressed their profound thanks for the

volunteers. But what came out the most was not just getting the vaccine, but their joy and love because others were showing love and compassion for them. I also witnessed the power of a community coming together with a single-minded goal of making a difference in our community and helping neighbors and friends. Love made these volunteers give hours and even days to touch the lives of anxious souls. What drew dozens of volunteers together and even the recipients of the vaccine? It was love. It was not politics, institutional or ideological differences that motivated us – just our love of God exercised as love for neighbor. Now that's unity.

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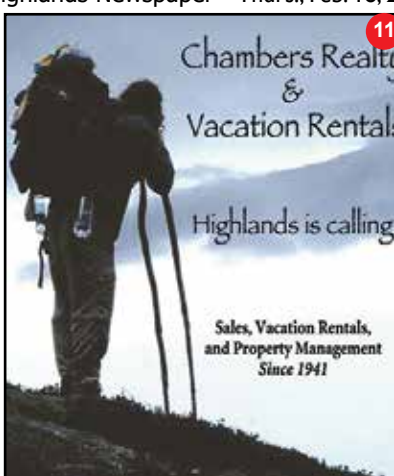
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