

Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., Feb. 4, 2021

Discussions over 'Hillside' continue

By Brian O'Shea
Plateau Daily News

Cashiers Area Community Planning Council met once again on Jan. 25 for a quasi-judicial hearing to discuss a special use permit

for Cashiers Hillside, the proposed 57-acre development on the south-eastern corner of the intersection of Highways 107 and 64, a.k.a. the Crossroads.

Council members spent eight

hours in The Village Green Commons hearing from parties seeking standing, disclosures, the staff report from the Jackson County Planning Department, and an ex-

•See HILLSIDE page 10

New open enrollment for ACA

Contact Mountain Projects before May 15 to enroll in HealthCare.gov insurance

Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon and Swain Counties – In a surprise move, the Federal Government has created an extra open enrollment period for health insurance in 2021, and counselors at Waynesville's Mountain Projects are jumping into action to help residents of North Carolina's seven western-most counties take advantage.

Mountain Projects' application counselors are certified through the Health Insurance Marketplace and are located in every western county. Their services are free. The new open enrollment period, triggered by the COVID-19 crisis, starts on February 15, 2021 and ends on May 15, 2021.

As job losses continue to mount and with millions of peo-

• See ACA page 8

Highlands Fire & Rescue Fireman of the Year



Though the annual Awards Banquet has been postponed due to COVID restrictions, the annual Fireman of the Year was still selected by department volunteers. The department selected Roger Lee Wilson, who has been on the force for 32 years and who is consistently commended for perfect attendance at the weekly Tuesday night meetings. Pictured with him from left are Chief Ryan Gearhart and Assistant Chief Robbie Forrester.

– Photo by Kim Lewicki

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Gov. extends stay-at-home order until Feb. 28; urges in-person instruction

COVID death toll in Macon County now at 19
Vaccine shortage halts first-dose injections

Governor Roy Cooper and NC Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mandy Cohen announced that NC's Modified Stay at Home Order, requiring people to be at home from 10 pm – 5 am, has been extended.

Face covering requirements and restrictions on individuals gathering in both indoor and outdoor settings are still in place both through at least Sunday, Feb. 28, 2021 at 5 p.m.

The extension of Executive Order No. 190 which allows for the sale of "to-go" or delivery of mixed beverages and the evictions moratorium both received concurrence from the Council of State.

Furthermore, since research continues to show mitigation measures allow safe in-person learning, low transmission among students and teachers with few clusters in public schools, Governor Cooper,

Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt, State Board Chairman Eric Davis and Secretary Cohen sent a letter to local school board members and superintendents encouraging in-person instruction across the state.

"We know that to equitably and fully address the needs of the whole child in every student, it is imperative that schools reopen for in-person instruction," said Davis. "Since August, public school leaders have proven the merits of the safety protocols that have kept our schools safe for students and staff."

Today, Macon County Schools had a special called board meeting to discuss the issue.

On January 23, NCDHHS reported the first identified case of B.1.1.7 COVID-19 Variant in NC. Early data suggest that this variant may be more contagious

• See EXTENDS page 8

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

How events can change everything

I give folks my cell number, (828) 506-3138, and tell them to call me if they have questions or concerns. I have been receiving several calls in the past week about the relocation of the upcoming Bear Shadow Festival. The questions center around why did the town allow this event to move and be held in Horse Cove?

My response is that the town didn't approve the change. Actually, Highlands has no oversight over the Horse Cove community since it is outside the town limits. If the concert had been held in Founder's Park, the town would have had an approval role. But organizers of the event decided to move it from Highlands to Horse Cove.

The county may have some limited role in approving the event, but there are no zoning limitations outside the town limits. The county does have building code and land disturbance ordinances but not designated zones. Highlands, on the other hand, has zoning ordinances designating certain areas in the town as either residential or business zones.

About a decade ago, the town adopted an extra territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) that



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

included Horse Cove. As a part of ETJ, zoning districts were developed, including residential zones. As some will recall, ETJ was not well received by many people, especially residents in the ETJ. I was not the mayor at the time of the creation of the ETJ but was a member of the planning board that recommended its adoption. Folks in Horse Cove and other areas let everyone know they did not want to be in the ETJ, and that there were no worries about zoning and development, especially in isolated areas of the county like Horse Cove. The Town Board rescinded ETJ.

Flash forward a decade and there are really no isolated, unknown areas in Western North Carolina. Some people have expressed a concern that such an event being held in Horse Cove may be a prelude of further expansion in this small community, with even the location of commercial enterprises. Is a "Woodstock for Boomers" next for this beautiful valley? Or maybe a residential development with shops and amenities?

I really don't have an answer for those concerns, but the recently proposed 57-acre Cashiers Hillside development may really be a marker for future developments throughout the area. I hope regional, county and

• See MAYOR page 8

• CORRECTION •

In last week's story "Confidentiality of Town Board Closed Session was Compromised," there were two statements that need clarification.

"Hotwire is offering \$10,200,000 over 25 years – far more than the \$4.6 million loan with interest the town took out to build the aerial portion of the highway – which Mayor Pat Taylor said will be paid off in about 13 years (not six years). The Town will receive a slight profit after four years, with the profit increasing each year thereafter.

And ...

"As consideration for its network lease, Hotwire proposes to pay the Town of Highlands \$425,000 per year to be paid on a quarterly basis beginning in 2022 through 2045," reads the contract – not \$425,000 in quarterly payments.





We regret the error and are happy to set the record straight.

• HIC'S VIEW •



"Tonight's specials are mouse tenders, bug gumbo, and fresh leg of hiker in a red wine sauce."

• WEATHER •

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• LETTERS •

Bear Shadow 'Neighed' by Horse Cove

Dear Editor,

I am writing re the serious concerns I and other Horse Cove residents have about a planned "Bear Shadow Music Festival" billed as a Highlands event but to be held in Horse Cove this April over 3 days. It may not be obvious, but the Cove is not just remote pastures but includes many full-time Macon County residents. The festival planners or sponsors had not contacted Cove residents re their plans for here. As such, we were not aware of this plan until announced recently in a newspaper.

Aside from important COVID-19 concerns for the attendees and city/county residents, there are problems for traffic on Horse Cove Road, the only direct way into the Cove from Highlands, notorious for its curves and cutbacks. Advertisements give no indication of the road profile and suggest it's easy access from Highlands, "just 4 miles." Attendee vehicles are not prohibited, despite alcohol served.

There are also understandable concerns for the 3-5 days' congestion and reverberating sound impact on residents (animals and humans).

More importantly, the festival puts the plant habitats and creeks at danger despite the property being under a Conservation Easement with the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust. The land contains 3 rare species, 1 rare plant community, 9 other suspected rare species, and trout waters part of the Chattooga River watershed. The property is meant to be protected for all. This is not just one person's remote pasture in Horse Cove.

Considering COVID-19, there is a state-mandated 100-person limit on outdoor venues <10,000 or 50-person limit on mass gatherings. There is no guarantee this will be lifted at the time of the festival. COVID-19 state restrictions are applicable to Horse Cove. It's not clear what county approval was given. Planners say the event will be limited to

1,000 attendees plus 100 staff. This is obviously above a 100-person limit, "COVE" seating or not (no pun intended). At a music festival with alcohol, it's likely attendees will not stay masked or in their "COVE" and thus create a super spreader event in the county.

It is disappointing that The Highlander newspaper (the subscription paper) so prominently published its Jan. 21, 2021 festival article accompanied by a glowing editorial without consideration of Horse Cove and its residents. This is not a "winning formula of safety" for the land or people. I doubt there would have been glowing acceptance for a 1,000+ person event for one of the residential country clubs or other communities during a viral pandemic.

The lack of considerations for Horse Cove property and its residents does not speak well for the Highlands Chamber of Commerce, the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust, or the many other local company sponsors.

I implore the festival major sponsors, Macon County and local sponsors to reconsider their support of the Horse Cove location and move the event elsewhere more appropriate.

Michele Mangum
Horse Cove, Highlands

• HIGHLANDS DINING •



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'Crucial Moments' indeed

Dear Editor,

As someone who has vacationed in Highlands for almost 30 years, I enjoy keeping up with the local news in your newspaper. It's nice to read about what is going on and how community activities benefit the residents in both good times and bad. Often there is news that reflects the very best of humanity and makes me admire those who are able to call Highlands "home".

However, the Jan. 28 edition contained an article in the Spiritually Speaking column entitled "Crucial Moments" that struck me as ironic, at best.

I don't know who penned this piece, there was no name, just a photo of an old white man in clergy vestments. Probably best his name wasn't included, as I found nothing spiritual about the words he spoke which would bring any honor his way.

Perhaps the article was lost in some time warp, because from reading just the first paragraph I was certain he was speaking of the opening days of the Trump administration.

He went on at length about all those who have been "emboldened" and of course the end days of the Trump dictatorship -- particularly scenes from January 6th where Trump and his minions hoped to overthrow the election and our democracy -- hit me like a pan of scalding water.

Exercise your 1st amendment rights, speak freely and think deeply about all the issues of our day, but don't trot out ludicrous opinions like these and proclaim it is Good News.

I've read the Bible, as many of your other old white readers have, and this man appears to have missed the ominous signs therein that I see for those who twist the truth and manipulate the vulnerable to maintain their own positions of power.

Christians are not being muzzled any more than Donald Trump was muzzled, except by the consequences of his

• BUSINESS / ORGANIZATION NEWS •

Bear Shadow spring music festival adds famed keyboardist Chuck Leavell, exclusive music and nature excursions to weekend lineup

HIGHLANDS, N.C. — An intimate Earth Day evening with keyboardist Chuck Leavell, whose music has been part of songs by The Allman Brothers Band, Eric Clapton, the Rolling Stones, and more, has been added as a kickoff to the weekend of the Bear Shadow spring music festival near Highlands, North Caro-

lina. The event will take place on Thursday, April 22, Earth Day, and will be a fundraiser for the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust.

The main festival takes place April 23-25, 2021. In addition to the three-day lineup of musical headliners, exclusive excursion activities have been added to the list of weekend activities, including acoustic

performances on top of Satulah Mountain, a guitar clinic and a drive-in film festival.

Tickets for Bear Shadow are available at <https://bearshadownc.com/>.

Bear Shadow, produced by Highlands Festivals, Inc. and Eleven Events, is a music festival named in honor of the bear-like shadow that appears behind the region's Whiteside Mountain and will feature a variety of live musical acts for nearly any musical taste, from bluegrass and blues to folk and soul, including Mandolin Orange, St. Paul & The Broken Bones, Drew Holcomb & The Neighbors, The War & Treaty, Jamestown Revival, Devon Gilfillian, Love Canon, Shelly Colvin, and Robert Ellis.

The Bear Shadow music main stage, called "Base Camp," will be held at Oakleaf Home Farm in Horse Cove, less than four miles from Main Street in Highlands.

Ticket holders will view headlining acts at Base Camp from inside of 6- to 8-person COVEs, or Contained Open-Air Viewing Environments, spaced at least six feet in distance from other coves, per social

distancing guidelines. Six-person General Admission COVEs are \$900 per day and eight-person COVEs are \$1,200 per day.

There will be three concerts each day from 5:30-10 p.m.

Food and beverages will be available.

Additional protocols, such as mask requirements, temperature pre-screening and increased hand sanitizer stations will also be in place at the Bear Shadow event. FAQ's and information on the Base Camp experience can be viewed at www.bearshadownc.com/information/.

The Chuck Leavell event will include a viewing of a portion of the rockumentary, Chuck Leavell: Tree Man a Q&A session and musical surprises. Leavell is a conservationist and sustainable development advocate whose commitment to the environment has been recognized worldwide, including being named Honorary Ranger by the U.S. Forest Service.

For more information, including COVID safety protocols, visit <https://bearshadownc.com/information/>.

About Oakleaf Home Farm

The Highlands-Cashiers Plateau contains such natural mysticism that it has been beckoning travelers to explore its cool streams, flowing waterfalls, and lush forests from cities throughout America for over a hundred years.

Scientists and artists alike have flocked for exploration and enlightenment. Today, there are few properties available outside of the area's country clubs and private neighborhoods that allow visitors the freedom to intimately experience the awe firsthand during their stay.

A long champion of the intersection of history, nature, the arts, and horticulture, Oakleaf Flower & Garden has partnered with a forward-thinking landowner in Highlands to create Oakleaf Home Farm.

Situated on 17 acres at the base of Blackrock in beautiful Horse Cove, this experiential development will create a backdrop for elopements, weddings, sportsman's weekends, and cherished family gatherings.

Enjoy a combination of pristine pastureland, historic apple orchards, ponds, streams, and flora and fauna so rare that a Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust Conservation Easement protects the property.

— submitted

... LETTERS continued from page 4

hatred and violence.

Whether you want to Make America White Again, or Make America Christian Again, you are not pursuing a world that Jesus would have been a part of.

Karen Hartzler
Highlands

Note:

The author of last week's spiritually speaking article was Rector Jim Murphy of Christ Anglican Church in Cashiers.

Say 'no' to Bear Shadow

Dear Editor,

I'm sure you know about the Bear Shadow event scheduled to take place in Horse Cove. Does our town really think the people will stay separated just because they made them little cubicles? Eating and drinking without mask? Spraying in between events? There is a trout stream that runs through the property and also red salamanders on that property. Is everything always about money?

Diane and Michael Levine
Highlands

The social and economic impact of the vaccine on our plateau

Dear Editor,

The Covid 19 virus has effectively shut down America. Now there is hope because the vaccine is slowly going in arms. But 37% of Americans say they do not want to take the vaccine.

The effects of the vaccine are clear. First, of course, is personal safety from the virus, and the chance of spreading to someone you love. The vaccine in arms means a reduction in deaths and fewer people with the horrific after-effects of this wretched disease. There will be a reduction in health care costs, and families who are forever financially scarred by a prolonged hospitalization from the virus.

The bigger picture also includes an improved economy, and an increase in the tax base for our towns. Lost jobs come back, productivity increases, restaurants can

• See LETTERS page 6



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... LETTERS continued from page 5

operate at full capacity and make money again, stores have more customers, hotels are full, our towns alive again.

For me, the most important effect of vaccines in arms is the ability to gather with friends, to hug someone I haven't seen in a while, to be able to visit my Mom in Assisted Living without fear.

Many of us on the plateau are at a time in our lives when travel is our plan, some of us still travel for business, or to see family. Can you imagine a time

when we can do that without fear, without restrictions, quarantine, documentation? I dream of a time when cruises are again happy respites, Italy is not ravaged, and especially, when Australia will let me go to hold my grandbaby for the first time.

So now is our time to work hard to get as many people vaccinated as possible as quickly as possible, so life can return to a new normal. Everyone must do their part to encourage friends and

family to get vaccinated to help our country and people thrive again.

This is what the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau Vaccine Initiative is about...helping our magical plateau get back to a full life, bustling with fun, energy and activity. Call 526-1310 to get your family, your neighbors registered for a vaccine appointment. Do your part in this challenge. Help us to achieve a big percentage of immunization on the plateau so this is a safe haven for us again.

**Robbin Austin
Highlands**

Plan for Bear Shadow festival is a travesty

Dear Editor,

Commercial interests in Highlands in the guise of a non-profit organization are attempting to hold a three-day music festival in Horse Cove in April. According to their website, the promoters are hoping for 1,000 attendees each day. For an event of this magnitude to be held in a small purely residential neighborhood would be a travesty.

It is with much sadness that

we have watched the accelerating decline of Highlands in the 20 years since we first visited, the 12 years since we bought our home in Horse Cove, and the eight years since we moved here full time in our retirement. An unpretentious small mountain-town ambience, pace, and sense of scale have passed away.

Fortunately, Horse Cove has, at least thus far, remained largely immune to the changes that have

befallen Highlands. However busy, congested, or unpleasant it might be in town, and that is now close to a four-season phenomenon, it is quiet and peaceful in Horse Cove.

It is trite, but true, that change in the wrong direction always seems to start with some small well-intentioned misstep. Undoubtedly, one festival will become two and then three and then more. Noise, traffic, and trash will be unavoidable and will steadily increase. And one day we will look around and what we once loved, and took for granted, will be forever lost.

The Town of Highlands appears powerless to stop this event, because Horse Cove is outside the town limits. Macon County may have the power to stop this nuisance and that will be pursued.

But, in the meantime, we can and do say to the people promoting this misuse of Horse Cove: Have you no sense of restraint or understanding of what you are doing and the harm you will inflict?

**Frank and Ruthie Oliver
Horse Cove, Highlands**

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...ACA continued from page 1

ple having lost their job-based health insurance, the new administration will reopen HealthCare.gov to give people who need health insurance an extra opportunity to get covered.

Health insurance is more affordable

than many people think. Nine out of 10 North Carolina customers used financial subsidies through the marketplace to lower their monthly health insurance premiums last year. The average premium statewide was \$61, and customers in Western North

Carolina paid below \$50 per month on average.

"Many people can find good deals on HealthCare.gov and receive financial assistance to help lower their monthly health insurance costs," said Plummer. "We help guide our clients through that process."

Consumers enrolling in a plan on HealthCare.gov are guaranteed to receive comprehensive coverage, with no pre-existing condition exclusions or markups. All plans cover essential benefits, including doctor and hospital visits, prescription drugs, mental health treatment, and maternity care. In addition, consumers receive free preventive care services, such as immunizations and health screenings. Testing and treatment of COVID-19 are considered essential health benefits and are covered by all HealthCare.gov plans.

Consumers should avoid insurance plans offered outside of HealthCare.gov that seem too good to be true. "Junk insurance" products pose huge financial risks to consumers. These products can refuse to pay for care for pre-existing conditions, charge consumers more based on their gender, and impose annual coverage limits. "HealthCare.gov is the only website where North Carolina consumers are guaranteed to get comprehensive coverage," said Plummer. "Consumers buying junk plans will be exposed to serious risks."

To learn more about access to affordable healthcare and to speak with Certified Application Counselors in seven western counties of NC, please call Mountain Projects, 828-452-1447 or visit our website, www.getcoveredwnc.com/get-in-touch to find your local contact.

...EXTENDS continued from page 1

than other variants and state health officials continue to recommend staying at home when possible and practicing the 3 "W's": Wear a face covering, Wait 6 feet apart and Wash your hands.

North Carolina continues to administer Covid-19 vaccines across the state. Almost all of the first doses received by the state were reported as being administered. Vaccine supply continues to be very low and the state is hopeful for more vaccine to be on the way. On a call with Governor Cooper and other governors, the Biden Administration committed to increase vaccine shipments to the states by 16% over the next 3 weeks.

Macon County will be receiving 300 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine from the state each week for the next three weeks. This number is based on population size in Macon County.

However, due to inadequate supply of COVID-19 vaccine from NC DHHS, MC Public Health must reschedule first-dose appointments. Those who have already scheduled appointments for their first dose of vaccine have been moved to the front of

MC Public Health's COVID-19 Vaccine Wait List. Macon County Public Health will contact those on the waitlist as vaccine becomes available to reschedule your appointment. There are about 3,000 people on the MC Vaccine Wait List.

Regardless of which group people fall under, they can register for the COVID-19 Vaccine Wait List at <https://gis2.maconnc.org/VAX/VAX.html>. When the group you fall under is eligible for vaccination, a member of the COVID-19 Vaccine Call Center will contact you to schedule your appointment.

Go to YourSpotYourShot.nc.gov to determine group eligibility.

— Kim Lewicki

...MAYOR continued from page 2

municipal leaders are reviewing and even implementing policies to address these trends. The Highlands Community Plan is coming at a critical moment for Highlands' future.

Years ago, a strategy was to entice businesses to locate in Western North Carolina. Having few regulatory impediments, such as zoning, was intended to promote economic development and growth. Under current circumstances those incentives for development and growth may not be needed. I anticipate towns and counties of Western North Carolina are going to be growing at astounding rates. The question is how will this exploding growth be shaped and developed?

Yes, growth brings economic development and more money. It may also have unintentional consequences, like losing a natural paradise.



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The 2021 Housing Market Blast Off

Steady mortgage rates, a recovering economy, the work from home trend continuing and the law of supply and demand all point to a crazy 2021 for residential real estate sales. Buyers are anxiously awaiting the spring inventory to hit the market as there are many more buyers than sellers of homes right now. Sellers, do not wait until spring to list your home!! With buyers accustomed to searching and even buying on-line during the lockdown, the traditional seasons of selling are gone. Buyers are swarming the web to buy immediately.

Many real estate prognosticators believe that the rise of remote workers with flexible schedules will keep home sales booming in 2021. If a Seller prices their home correctly with the help of a local real estate broker, the home will sell in 2021!



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considered "red hot." Home inventory in North Carolina is down statewide as it is locally. Buyers must act quickly if a home checks the majority of their boxes.

Housing predictions only give a general view of setting expectations. Only your personal situation and finances should dictate your decision to sell or buy. However, don't be left behind in the blast off for home sales this year if you are either a seller or a buyer. The local market is up 68% in volume and 72% in unit sales over this time last year. May 2021 be a positive year in many arenas for you and your family! Thank you for your support of this wonderful community which continues to prove its strength and fellowship during the struggles of COVID.

- Jody and Wood Lovell own Highlands Sotheby's International Realty, the top producing firm in Highlands for the seventh year in a row with 30 brokers spanning the Plateau to assist you with your real estate needs. The company sold over a quarter of a billion dollars in real estate in 2020, and Jody personally closed 165 million in sales shattering a record for an individual broker on the Highlands/Cashiers Multiple Listing Service. They are closers! Call them to get you over the finish line this year at 828.526.4104.

National Housing Market Predictions for 2021

Existing Homes Sales – Up 9%
Newly Built Home Sales – Up 21%
Home Prices – Up 8%
Mortgage Rates – @3%
Inventory of Homes Down – 22%

Buyer traffic in the local market is robust. North Carolina is one of the in-bound states where buyer demand is

HCHF continues free COVID-19 testing

The Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation (HCHF) continues to sponsor local COVID-19 testing initiatives on the plateau. On Feb. 9 and 15 the format will be drive-through at the Village Green in Cashiers from 11am-1pm and the Highlands Recreation Center from 2:30-4:30pm. On Feb. 22 the drive-through times will be 11am-1pm at the Highlands Recreation Center and 2:30-4:30pm at the Village Green in Cashiers.

Please note there is an updated process for registration. Pre-registration is required through the following link <https://cov19.health/#/> by noon the day prior to testing. You will choose "register as a new patient" and the office location code will be: MTNPKUCR. Negative results will be provided through this online link as well. Saliva testing will be administered while monthly supplies lasts and

then the nasal swab collection will be used.

Participants will be asked to present a photo ID and insurance information on site. Uninsured participants are eligible to participate without cost, however a photo I.D. is required.

The tests will be administered by Mountain Park Urgent Care (MPUC), Sylva, NC in full compliance with CDC, FDA, and NCDHHS guidelines. The County Health Departments are provided COVID-19 test reports as required by NCDHHS. Anyone testing positive will be contacted directly by MPUC.

Please note a COVID-19 test is a one-time indicator. Frequent hand washing, covering your face, and social distancing at least six feet apart are also important to protect yourself and others and to slow the spread of COVID-19. Please refer questions to info@mtnparkuc.com.



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... HILLSIDE continued from page 1

pert witness for the applicant Macauley Investments.

No decision was made regarding the SUP's approval and hearings will pick up where they left off with more testimony from experts on Feb. 22.

Hearing Highlights

The hearing began with the Council approving a couple more parties either with standing or as witnesses, both designations

allow parties to ask questions throughout the hearings.

Disclosures

Jackson County Attorney Heather Baker said that all parties during these hearings are entitled to an impartial decisionmaker, so before moving on to witness testimony, Council members must disclose any conflicts of interest that would recuse them from further proceedings. Conflicts may include Council members with a fixed opinion, financial interests, or undisclosed communication with other parties involved.

All Council members disclosures went off without a hitch, until Attorney John Noor who represents several parties opposing the development, asked Council Chair Michael Cox about an offer to purchase a property that abuts the proposed project shortly before hearings over the Cashiers Hillside project began.

The owner of the abutting property is also a party with standing in these hearings. Cox said he approached her two days before the first hearing for the Cashiers Hillside project back in November 2020, and that the project and the offer to purchase her property were unrelated.

Noor said this shows a clear conflict of interest and asked Cox be recused.

"I think that meeting with one of the

parties with standing who is an abutting property owner on behalf of clients he [Cox] owes a fiduciary duty too, to offer to purchase the property within two days prior to the first hearing on this matter and being aware of the application that was pending at the time creates a conflict of interest," said Noor. "We ask that he be recused from this matter just so it doesn't taint any of the decision the board might make."

It turns out the property owner was present at the hearing and told the Council she told Cox her land was not for sale, no numbers or prices were discussed, there was no contract, and she threw away Cox's business card after he left.

Representing Macauley Investments is Attorney Craig Justus who said Cox did not receive any direct benefit from his offer to purchase the abutting property and does not constitute a conflict of interest.

"This is a Hail Mary attempt to have the Chairman recused," said Justus. "The COI statute is a common sense one that deals with direct financial interest. If Mr. Noor wants to argue that some future benefit is possible is speculative and would essentially excuse most of you from being able to hear something like this."

Baker agreed with Justus and said it does not seem to be a conflict of interest. Council members voted not to recuse Cox.

Fatal Flaws

Noor then contested the project saying the proposal had two "fatal flaws" that do not adhere to Jackson County's Unified Development Ordinance and are beyond the Council's jurisdiction to approve.

Noor said the first flaw is that plans include 5 access points to the development along both Highway 107 and Monte Vista Road, the JC UDO limits access points to 2 per development.

"These proposed access points violate that provision of the code," said Noor. "Those aren't things the board can wave, these are absolute requirements that must be met by the development."

Secondly, Noor said some of the buildings in the proposed plan exceed the maximum size limit of 5,000 square feet set by the UDO.

Justus said this was another Hail Mary from opposing counsel.

"The application has been out for months and we received the objection this morning," said Justus. "What this means is that the application has been vetted by staff. We would not have gotten this far if the application was not complete and compliant on its face."

He added that the UDO's definition of development was anything that requires a building permit, and with the number of buildings and components in the plans for Cashiers Hillside, the 2 access points is a nonissue.

JC Senior Planner John Jeleniewski testified and said the 2-access limit in the UDO was in regard to driveway access points, not to road construction or existing roads.

JC Planning Director Mike Poston said there is no limit to building size, but anything larger than 1,500 square feet requires a SUP. He added the 5,000 square foot size limit Noor mentioned was from an incorrect infographic on the County's website.

Poston said the staff report recommendation to approve Cashiers Hillside was based on the technical standards reviewed for the three phases of the project, and they were all compliant with the UDO.

Cox said he did not think he heard sufficient evidence to dismiss the proposal.

"They had quite a bit of time to make this motion and presenting it at the last second, it seems Mr. Noor has found an interesting technicality, but I think we've come all of this way to let these people have their day in court," said Cox.

The Council voted unanimously not to dismiss the project.

Density Reduction

Toward the end of the 8-hour session, Macauley Investments Principal Stephen Macauley told the Council he was committed to reducing the density of the development from 726 residential units to 581.

"We did what we thought was best. I directed my team to follow our philosophical principals and adhere to the Small Area Plan at every step; they did that," said Macauley. "However, over the last 2.5 months I've met with a lot of people who have concerns about the density of the project and the impact it would have. I listened."

Noor then made the motion to dismiss the application and have the developer begin the process over again because changing the density of a project changes everything.

"We're not just talking about cutting back," said Noor. "We're talking about a totally different rearrangement on the site that would impact virtually every expert opinion that has been given."

Justus said he was shocked at the level of objection from Noor after offering to reduce the density.

"This is being offered not to increase, not to change anything from access or materially other than to reduce the density as a result of dialogue," said Justus. "If a developer had to start that process over, they would be less inclined to offer up changes to reduce density."

The Council voted unanimously to accept the amended plan with reduced density as long as it meets the technical standards of the UDO, and that a revised staff report be made available with updated numbers no later than two weeks prior to the Feb. 22 meeting. It's expected that experts will address concerns over water/sewer, traffic, erosion, etc. at the next hearing.

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• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

Who did Christ come for?



Rev. Sam Forrester
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And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard it, He said to them. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Mark 2:16-17

What we hear in this is that the Spirit of God glorifies His Son, Jesus Christ, by revealing what Christ is to the lowly, dried up, penitent soul. How does He do this? He does it by opening the Bible to show that Jesus died for sinners. He didn't die for the righteous nor for the worthy. He died for sinners, those who are unrighteous, for those who are not worthy, for those who are lost and filled with guilt.

There can be no greater moment when the Eternal God and the Holy Spirit glorify Jesus by bringing this truth with power into the heart. It is a real tragedy that so many Christians have the false idea that Jesus came to save those who are worthy because of their own good works. They look only to themselves to meet the price required because of their guilt. They are hopelessly lost in the eternal darkness of a dead spirit.

Jesus in these verses shows that He provides a salvation for the vile, the penniless and the helpless, for all who are trapped in spiritual darkness.

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 5:6 "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." He goes on in verse 10, "For if we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son." In I Timothy 1:15, Paul follows this line of thought "This is a faithful saying and worthy of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." In Isaiah 55:1 the prophet declares this salvation for sinners will be "without money and without price."

Paul points to this concept again saying in Ephesians 2:5 "by grace you have been saved." He says in Romans 4:15 that this salvation is "of faith that it might be according to grace."

The Gospel, this glorious good news, these wonderful and joyful tidings, this marvelous message of free mercy for sinners, for the vile and reprehensible appears in an instant when believed, received and welcomed.

In a moment the guilt, the pain, and the uncertainty is taken away. You can know the glory of the face of God shining on you. You can relish the luster and light and joy of God's grace and mercy. You can lift your hands and voice in praise and gladness, taking all your weakness to Him. You can stand in the face of opposition and in your stand bring glory to His name. It is only to those that see their sin and the depth of it that Jesus came to save.

• See SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING page 14

Proverbs 3:5

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John 3:16

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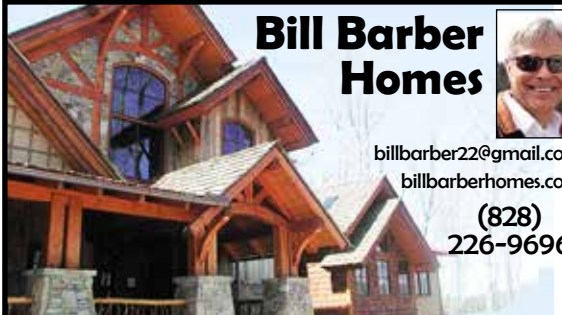


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• OBITUARY •

Patricia Anderson Pittari

Patricia Anderson Pittari died on January 7, 2021 in her home on Amelia Island, FL. She is survived by her beloved husband of 64 years, John Joseph Pittari, M.D., and her five living children: Carolyn, John, Jeanne, Tricia, and Michael. She is preceded in death by her eldest daughter, Mary, and her youngest child, Natalie.



Patricia “Patsy Ann” Anderson was born on Nov. 1, 1932 in Bronx, NY, the daughter of Catherine Kelly and Joseph Anderson. She had two older brothers, Joseph and George, and is survived by a younger sister, Caryl. Patricia studied nursing at the College of Mount Saint Vincent, graduating with highest honors in 1954. Her concern for helping others led Patricia to join the Visiting Nurse Service of New York City, where she worked until her marriage to John on May 26, 1956, at Saint Simon Stock Church in the Bronx.

The couple moved frequently early on but settled in Reading, PA, in 1962. They moved to Fort Lauderdale, FL, in 1974, where Patricia was a highly valued member of Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church as a member of the choir and later as a lector and Eucharistic minister. She was committed to social causes, especially the right-to-life movement. In the mid-1980s, she renewed her nursing certification and volunteered at a local hospital.

In 1982 they bought a second home in

Highlands, NC, where Patricia was a devoted member of Our Lady of the Mountains Catholic Church and a supporter of the Highlands Biological Center, the Hudson Library, and the Center for Life Enrichment. They relocated from Florida to Bainbridge, GA, in 1987, where Patricia was a member of Saint Joseph Catholic Church and a volunteer for adult literacy. In 1996, they established their primary residence on Amelia Island, where Patricia was a parishioner in Saint Michael's Catholic Church and was active in Respect Life and the Theresians.

A devoted mother, grandmother, and, most recently, great-grandmother, Patricia loved to sing and was equally committed to sacred music and folk songs. She was a voracious reader and book collector and travelled frequently to expand her knowledge. Patricia was a deeply compassionate person whose selflessness was an integral part of who she was and how she will be remembered by all who encountered her generosity of spirit. In addition to her husband and children, Patricia is survived by eight grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

A funeral Mass was held on January 14 at Our Lady of the Mountains Catholic Church in Highlands, NC, followed by the Rite of Christian Burial at Memorial Park Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Maryknoll Sisters.

... SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING from page 11

Have you seen your sin and the darkness it causes you to live in? Have you opened your heart and called out to Jesus acknowledging your lost and helpless estate? Have you repented of your sins? If you have, then He hears your plea and will save your soul.

Please, don't wait for your time is limited. Open your heart and call out to Him, for He alone can save the soul of a sinner. He came to those who are helpless and without hope. Let the gospel and the message of

grace it brings fill your heart and show you the mercy of God.

Nothing else in this world will change your life like this good news will. Nothing else will bring you into this eternal joy and peace with God. It is only in Jesus Christ and in Christ alone that you can find this soul changing salvation.

Jesus said in John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from Jan. 18. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or public officials have been used.

Jan. 18

• At noon, officers responded to a report of unauthorized use of a motor vehicle where someone drove a vehicle that didn't belong to them to Georgia without returning it.

Jan. 24

• At 7:55 p.m., Wesley Bruce Pearman, 68, of Highlands, was arrested for DUI when pulled over on N. 4th Street for driving left of center. He was issued a \$500 unsecured bond. His trial date is Feb. 10.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Jan. 26.

Jan. 26

• At 1:09 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm on S. 4th Street.

• At 7:19 a.m., the dept. responded to a structure fire on Woodland Hill Dr.

Jan. 27

• 10:11 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Moorewood Circle.

Jan. 28

• At 2:51 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm on S. 4th Street.

Jan. 29

• At 5:03 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Center Dr.

• At 11:18 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on BigView Dr.

Jan. 30

• At 12:01 p.m., the dept. provided mutual aid to Cashiers FD.

Jan. 31

• At 11:17 a.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on Horse Cove Road.

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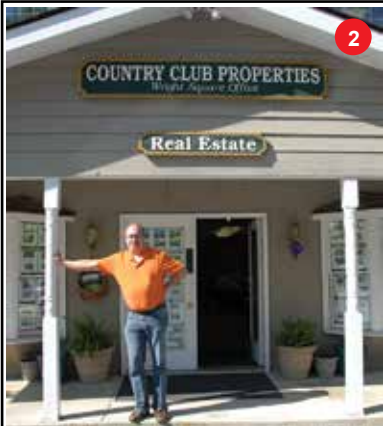
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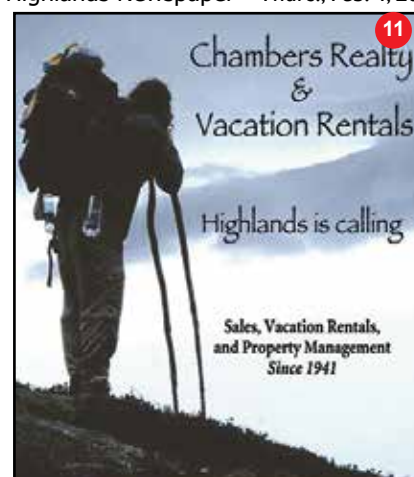
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