

Highlands Newspaper

Masks now optional in town and at school

FREE Every Thursday

Volume 18, Number 43 Real-Time News, Weather & WebCams: HighlandsInfo.com Thurs., Oct. 28, 2021

Lawsuit against town halted with 'stay'

Coward suggests grandfather status for vested STRs

After being served with a lawsuit by Save Highlands regarding the town's Aug. 24 decision to ban Short-term Rentals in R1 on Jan. 3, 2022, the commissioners agreed to enter into a "stay of proceedings" as suggested by Town Attorney Jay Coward. A "stay of proceedings" is a ruling by a court to stop or suspend a proceeding or trial temporarily or indefinitely. A court may later lift the stay and continue the proceeding.

•See LAWSUIT page 15

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Carving out time for Halloween festivities



Community kids turned out for a pumpkin carving party at The Secret Garden Cafe & Market in the Village Square Sunday night. The town's annual trick or treat on Main Street is 6-8 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 31.

— Photo by Brenda Lopez

Highlands Town Board candidates line up for final Q&A question

This is the last week in our five-week Candidate Q&A. Each candidate was asked the same question.

There are two candidates running for the mayoral seat — incumbent Mayor Pat Taylor and Commissioner Marc Hehn.

There are six candidates running for the two open seats on the Town Board — Incumbent Amy Patterson, Pat Allen, Mary Bynum, Thomas Craig, Nick McCall, and Eric Pierson.

This week, the candidates'

• See Q&A page 6

WHLC thwarts Verizon's attempt to upgrade service

WHLC's 10-year lease expired in 2019; Lease payments are in arrears

Over the last few years, the town has spent \$8,000 to expand the Big Bear Pen tower 20 feet so Verizon can upgrade its service in Highlands.

However, since July, according to Verizon contractors their attempts to install their equipment on the tower have been thwarted by Chuck Cooper owner of WHLC.

"This is an issue that needs to be resolved," said Mayor Pat Taylor. "People want reliable cell phone service here and we worked very, very hard to get Verizon to put a lot of expensive equipment up there to improve cell phone coverage."

At the August 19 Town Board meeting, Cooper said Verizon was in arrears on lease payments.

•See WHLC page 10

It's official: Hotwire Communications will manage Highlands' fiber highway

At the October Town Board meeting, commissioners voted unanimously to accept Hotwire Communication's contract as the closed system provider on the town's broadband highway known as Highlands Smart Cities Network.

It's taken seven years from inception to completion which included building the infrastructure highway, picking a provider and finalizing the contract.

"It has been a long and major

•See HOTWIRE page 8

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

The deal is finalized with Hotwire

We now have an approved contract with Hotwire Communications to lease dark fiber on the Highlands Fiber System. The town will be paid \$425,000 a year for the 25-year duration of the lease. The total income will be 10.2 million dollars for the town. We will have spent 4.6 million in building the fiber system. With Hotwire's first payment, the town will be taking in more from the lease than it is paying out for the construction loan. The loan will be paid off in about 12 years.



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

So, what does this all mean? I have been getting numerous questions.

First, Hotwire will also invest several million dollars in extending the fiber network to about 18% of the residents in town that have underground utilities. Hotwire will install underground conduit which is not an inexpensive process.

Second, Hotwire as part of the contract with the town has bought Altitude Broadband. The town had been operating this small service to residents for a number of

years. With the sale of Altitude to Hotwire, the Town of Highlands is now out of the broadband business. We will retain a bundle of fibers in the network to manage our utilities and electric system.

Third, Hotwire in the coming weeks will open an office in Highlands and begin operations. It will take them several months to activate the network and sign up customers. Folks interested in becoming a Hotwire Customer should not call the town to sign

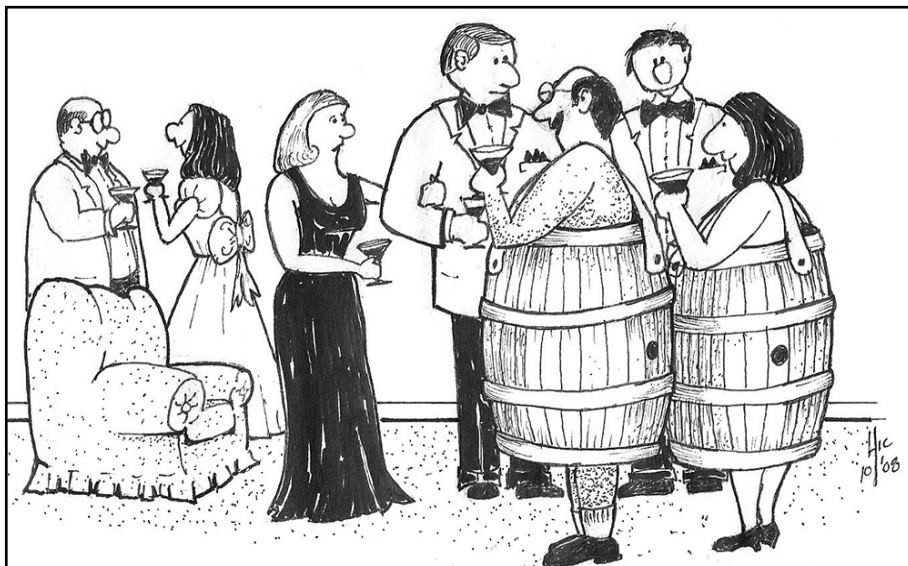
up. I repeat, the town will not be managing Hotwire customer accounts. Look for Hotwire advertising in the newspaper and radio to learn how to access their services. Hotwire will offer an array of packages starting with basic broad band and also offering many options for TV, telephone and home management systems. But, if someone is happy with their current provider, by all means continue with them. Like any communications provider, Hotwire will be competing in the open market place.

Finally, if you are a current Altitude Broad Band customer, that service will now be operated by Hotwire. The service will continue without any changes in the coming weeks. When Hotwire begins operations in Highlands, Altitude customers will have a seamless option to continue with Hotwire, or they can change to a provider of their choice.

After seven years of working to build this world class system, the Town Board and town staff are delighted to have a private provider operating the network. I believe it is a strategic event in the life and future of Highlands. While many communities still struggle with the broad band issue, Highlands is now a fiber optic community. The possibilities for residents and businesses are transformative.





I hope that young professionals who are now transitioning in the post pandemic world to telecommuting and working from home will come to live and work in Highlands. We need a diverse economy that is not just built on tourism. The new fiber optic system might just be a game changer for our town.

• HIC'S VIEW •



"So this is not a costume party?"

• WEATHER •

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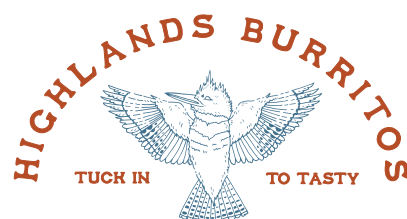
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• OBITUARIES •

Roger William 'Bill' Hicks Sr.

Roger William "Bill" Hicks, Sr. passed away peacefully at his home on October 17, 2021. Born in Macon County to the late John Raymond and Olive "Ollie" Calloway Hicks. He was also preceded in death by his first wife, Geraldine, son Roger William Hicks Jr., and infant sisters Mary and Bennie Hicks.

Bill was a master trim carpenter who loved fishing, working in his garden and cutting wood. Bill was a Mason with the Blue Ridge Lodge #435 for over 50 years. Bill also loved mission work and was a member of Windy Gap Baptist Church.

Surviving Mr. Hicks are his wife of 17 years Joan Keener Hicks, of Franklin, daughter Beverly Kemnitzer (Uve) of Williamston, SC; brother Thomas Hicks (Irene) of Crystal River, FL.; Stepchildren; Marlan Keener of Franklin, and Cheryl Anne Keener (Jason Santangelo) of Otto. Also surviving are four grandsons: Tyler Hicks, Till Kemnitzer, Jack-

son Caldwell, and Riley Caldwell.

Funeral services were at 2 pm, Thursday, October 21, 2021 at Windy Gap Baptist Church. The Rev. Mark Bishop, Rev. Brian Browning and the Rev. Carson Gibson officiated. Burial was at Buck Creek Baptist Church Cemetery Highlands NC.

Pallbearers were Charles Tritt, Gary Holland, Mark Holland, Jimmy Hall, Devin Hicks, and Ben West. Honorary Pallbearers will be Terry Tritt, Algie Bolick, Tommy Hicks Jr. and Bobby Watts. Masonic Rites were given by Blue Ridge Lodge #435.

In lieu of flowers memorials can be made to Buck Creek Baptist Church Cemetery Fund in care of Algie Bolick at 3659 Buck Creek Rd. Highlands, NC 28741

Online condolences can be made at www.maconfuneralhome.com Macon Funeral Home handled the arrangements. **• See OBITUARIES page 18**

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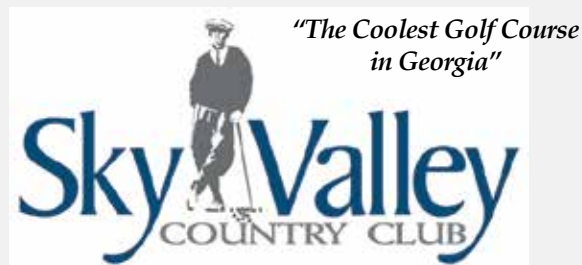
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...Q&A continued from page 1

answers will be displayed in alphabetical order.

Final question:

Should the town increase the minimum wage paid to town employees to \$15 per hour? Please explain your answer.

Pat Allen

Yes, we should increase the minimum wage here. Everything in Highlands costs more than other areas. Now with inflation the cost of living is up tremendously. Gas alone for those making minimum wage is cost prohibitive. Employers in Highlands need help and I'm sure they understand. Everyone is affected by this and all prices, including food, necessities, and rent are going up. Minimum wage needs to also.

Mary Bynum

No. In general when you artificially elevate wages, businesses have to trim staff to maintain and preserve any existing gross profit. And ultimately the most vulnerable will suffer because of less opportunity.

Currently in Highlands there is a shortage of workforce which is pushing wages upward. As new affordable housing becomes available it will attract more employees and that's when the free marketplace will decide what the going rate is.

Thomas Craig

Yes, and I didn't know you could get good employees for less than \$15/hr. The town of Highlands has always presented itself as a quality town that provides good services to residents and visitors. We are fortunate that the town has been prosperous, and the financial condition is very good. Employees are the public face of most businesses and towns are no different. Hiring good people and paying good wages while requiring them to do their best should be the norm, not an exception.

Marc Hehn

Yes, the Town Manager tells me we pay all of our full-time employees over \$15 an hour after they complete their probationary status. It is not possible to fill part-time positions in the Recreation Department without raising the minimum to \$15 per hour. It bothered me greatly when during initial discussion of the Town 2020-2021 budget the decision was made to increase the cost of health insurance and deny our employees a salary increase during the height of the pandemic. My wife and I were safely at home and our Town employees were working. Fortunately, this was corrected in December of last year.

Nick McCall

Town employees should be paid a competitive wage based on their qualifications, and time in the job.

Amy Patterson

One of the most important assets of any town is the town's employees. Their experience, knowledge and dedication are all essential to provide good service to the citizens. Local government should be fiscally responsible with their citizens' money, but they also have an obligation to provide good service to the citizens (which can only be done with good employees) and an expectation to treat town employees fairly.

With the recent difficulties of businesses finding enough workers to fill their needs, it is incumbent for the town to have a pay and benefits level that will retain and recruit employees. That is a market-driven factor in the minimum wage decision. But there is another factor to be considered: a conscious driven one. A full-time employee at \$15 per hour makes \$31,200 per year before taxes (40 hours/week x 52 weeks x

•See Q&A page 22

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Highlands Town Board of Commissioners



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Pat

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...HOTWIRE continued from page 1

effort in developing the Highlands Smart Cities Fiber Optic System. Staff, commissioners, attorneys and experts have been working on this project for seven years. In many respects it has been a learning experience that caused the town to rethink plans and adjust strategies, especially as this technology and industry has at times witnessed rapid and unforeseen changes," said Mayor Taylor in a submitted statement.

For the last two years, each time various aspects of the project were voted upon by the Town Board – Feb. 27, 2020, March 3, 2020, December 17, 2020, January 21, 2021 – Commissioner Marc Hehn logged the one and only dissenting vote.

However, with the contract hammered out by Highlands' and Hotwire's attorneys, when presented at the Oct. 21 Town Board meeting, Hehn voted with his fellow board members to unanimously make Hotwire the provider on Highlands broadband highway.

With the broadband highway nearing completion, in October

of 2020 the town issued a Request for Proposal (RFP). On October 26, 2020, three proposals were received. Of those three proposals, the Town Board chose Hotwire communications.

Since that time, staff along with the town's legal counsel formed a legal team with Jim Baller and Sean Stokes of Keller and Heckman LLP in Washington DC, and Gabriel DuSablón of Cauley and Pridgen of NC to develop and negotiate a contract that followed the RFP issued by the town.

This was to ensure the town's goals would be accomplished now and into the future while following all state and federal applicable laws and the contract was agreeable to Hotwire communications.

"I want to thank our attorneys who helped the town navigate and negotiate all the legal issues related to developing this network, Jim Baller and Sean Stokes at the national level, Gabriel DuSablón at the state level and Jay Coward our Town Attorney," Taylor said.

Mayor Taylor said he appreciated all the time and effort it took

to culminate the deal.

"I want to thank the companies that town staff and board members met with as a part of this effort, and those companies who took the time to submit proposals. We had very good responses, and we believe we selected the best proposal for the town," he said.

Based on its offer, Hotwire was chosen to lease the highway from the town, guaranteeing a profit for the town of \$10,200,000 over 25 years – far more than the town's 15-year \$4.6 million loan through BB&T with interest.

"I want to thank the folks at Hotwire for their willingness to invest and serve the community of Highlands. We appreciate Johnathan Bullock of Hotwire and his determination to bring their extensive services to Highlands. We look forward to a productive and mutually beneficial relationship," Taylor said.

Hotwire is expected to begin connecting customers early 2022. For residential customers it will offer Internet up to 10 Gps, voice, television, home automation and home security; and within three years will build underground portions of the network where needed as long as customers commit to hooking on. About 18% of neighborhoods in Highlands have underground utilities and the fiber will have to be underground in those areas.

Hotwire's fees for various residential and commercial packages are very competitive.

Altitude is now part of Hotwire and early on it said it would honor those prices and packages if that's what customers want.

"I believe this network and lease agreement with Hotwire Communications will have a lasting impact on the future of Highlands and how we all live, work and enjoy this wonderful community," said Taylor. "Our businesses, homes, town utilities operations, educational and medical services will all be transformed because we have this state-of-the-art system. While other communities continue to plan for such fiber systems, Highlands now has a world class network in place and operational."

Finally, Taylor thanked the

• See HOTWIRE page 10



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...HOTWIRE continued from page 8

Highlands Town Board of Commissioners for their support and hard work over the past years in developing the fiber network, as well as town staff.

"I also want to thank our town staff for the many hours that they have devoted to this project, especially Josh Ward our Town Manager, and Matt Shuler our Information and Technology Director," said Taylor. "Matt has spent countless hours as our representative to the various groups involved

in the project. He has had the patience and endurance to see the project to its completion. Josh and Matt will now move into new roles as making sure the administration of the contract is implemented in a smooth transition."

Meanwhile, after discussion with J.K. Coward, Coward Hicks and Siler issued a letter to V1Fiber on behalf of the Town as a notification that liquidated damages would be calculated for the Fiber Deployment project effective Aug.

...WHLC continued from page 1

rizon was mounting too close to his Radome antenna, which is at the prime location at the top of the Big Bear Pen tower.

According to MIS/GIS Director Matt Shuler, WHLC's Radome is mounted at 107' COR AGL (Center of Radiation Above Ground Level) on top of the tower.

Staff asked Cooper to submit documentation verifying the level of interference he may be receiving due to Verizon, but the docu-

mentation hadn't been received by the time the Town Board convened Thursday, Oct. 21.

Upon inspection, Verizon was found to be mounted in the correct position on the tower per its contract with the town, which is 100' COR AGL.

To try to expedite the process, town staff asked Verizon to lower its antennas two feet, which they agreed to do but according to the contractors working for Verizon, Cooper refused to decrease

11, 2021. This is due to time overtures.

Since that time, all construction items have been completed and the final inspection was performed successfully.

Engineers along with Coward will calculate total liquidated damages as the final closeout package is completed.

Highlands will not make the final payment to V1Fiber contractors until the liquidated damages are finalized.

— Kim Lewicki

his antenna power so the contractors could safely scale the tower and do their work without getting fried by radiation.

Verizon and its contractors said since July they have contacted Cooper numerous times to coordinate the lowering of his power so they could do the upgrade. They said Cooper finally turned the power down a bit, but not enough for the crew to scale the tower safely.

• See WHLC page 24



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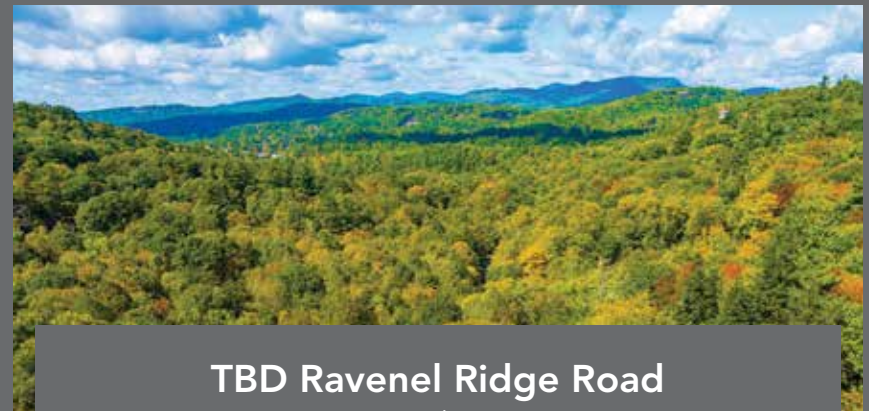
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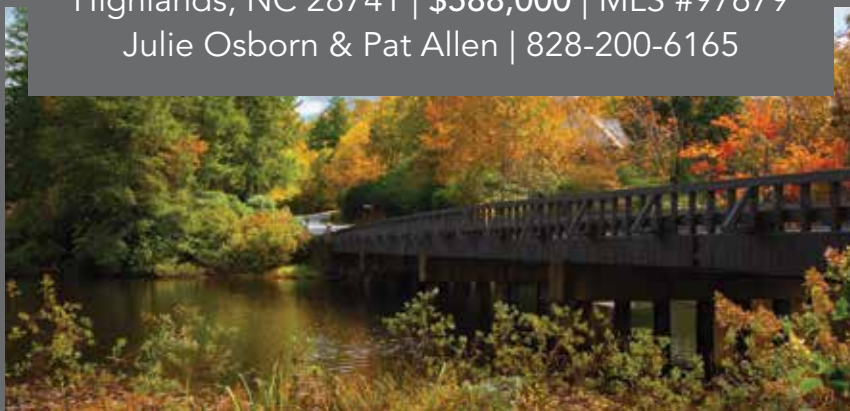
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Dear Neighbors,

I acknowledge that Pat Taylor is a nice man who has served our community for many years. But, I also acknowledge that personality does not solve problems.

Despite the recent rhetoric of our current mayor, there is no way that Highlands will magically return to a quaint, quiet town. The truth is that the population growth, the density growth, the skyrocketing cost of living is real; and much of it happened during the tenure of our current mayor.

Rhetoric versus record.

That appears to be the biggest theme of this election. I am hopeful that the residents of Highlands can look past the smooth, double-talk of the incumbent and acknowledge the reality at hand.

During Taylor's tenure, bad deals have been made and bad policy has been pushed that have the potential of costing the Town and its taxpayers millions of dollars.

Look no further than the recent short-term rental debacle. **It is a fact that, when the new policy was brought before the Commission, I was the only one who expressed the informed and unemotional opinion that the policy was not within the law and that it could cost taxpayers significant money.**

Fast forward to today, after a major lawsuit was filed against the Town, we have too much bickering, and our community is divided. We need to reach a compromise. This could have been avoided if the mayor would have paused our August 24th meeting and obtained expert legal advice from the best land use attorney in North Carolina, as I recommended.

Even more mismanaged by the current administration is the Town's broadband service. Beyond the extremely wide gap of actual service being delivered or not being delivered, the administration nearly cost taxpayers more than \$3 million with bad deal-making. Over my objection, an initial contract was approved that would have generated roughly \$2.8 million. Fortunately, the company backed out; and I voted to approve an agreement with a second provider to pay \$6 million – meaning **I worked to save taxpayers more than \$3.1 million.**

The broadband issue presented an even more alarming problem than money – government transparency.

LETTER CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

I believe strongly that taxpayers deserve to know all that they desire as it relates to government operations and that providing transparency leads to a better government. As James Madison famously stated, “A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or, perhaps both.”

When I objected to the contract process, I requested the entire broadband file and construction documents to review. Even as duly elected Commissioner, the administration only provided the requested information after I hired an attorney to write three letters and waited 21 months.

You read that correctly – in order to review public documents, I had to hire an attorney and wait nearly two years! This is not what I consider, and likely not what you would consider to be, a government for the people and by the people.

It appears to me to be a good ole boy political machine that must be broken up to empower and best serve the people.

And, that is why **I am running for Mayor – to give our neighbors in Highlands the efficient, effective municipal government they deserve, led by an experienced government manager with the expertise to tackle the issues our Town faces.**

I get it – I am not part of the good ole boy network who has done things the same way time and time again. The truth is I never will be because I know we can do things better.

WE CAN DO BETTER ON SHORT-TERM RENTALS – addressing residents’ concerns while protecting investments and following the rule of law by rewriting our zoning regulations. And, I will demand our staff enforce our zoning regulations equally, so the time of ignoring violations by the good ole boys will be over._

WE CAN DO BETTER ON BROADBAND – stopping with the promise after promise approach and actually expediting the project with a proven utility manager at the helm.

WE CAN DO BETTER ON GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY – ensuring full disclosure of financial and contractual information while insisting on same-day staff responses to residents’ calls.

WE CAN DO BETTER ON PEDESTRIAN SAFETY – installing modern technology and better signage, while enhancing enforcement.

WE CAN DO BETTER ON WORKER HOUSING – partnering with local organizations and corporations, honoring our commitment to provide water and sewer service, and seeking the necessary grant funds to make this plan become reality.

WE CAN DO BETTER ON INFRASTRUCTURE – stopping the “kick the can down the road” approach, repairing and upgrading where necessary, and following our water, stormwater, and parking plans. And, yes, as I stated during the October 19th Mayoral Forum, the Macon County Environmental Health Supervisor has confirmed there is raw sewage coming from a spring at the base of Satulah Mountain.

WE CAN DO BETTER.

With a real vision and detailed plan for Highlands’ future. With a common-sense, business-minded approach to tackle the biggest issues before the Town. With a Mayor who has refused political contributions and is beholden only to you, not the good ole boy network or special interests. We can do better.

I humbly ask you to join me in the effort to better Highlands for our residents, our businesses, and our future.



Marc Hehn

Highlands

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...LAWSUIT continued from page 1

At the October 21 Town Board meeting, Coward requested authorization to enter into the "stay" after he and Attorney Craig Justus with the Van Winkle law firm, talked to Attorney Derek Allen of Allen Stahl & Kilbourne which is representing the Save Highlands group.

"We talked about how a lawsuit would divert the good efforts the town is making to address the situation and cause us to spend an enormous amount of energy in litigation and very little in trying to address the problem itself," said Coward. "Allen agreed there would be very little movement of any positive nature whatsoever if we had an ongoing lawsuit that would require us to be in court rather than a conference room to work this out."

Allen agreed to a "stay" order that will be signed by a judge with the consent of the two parties — the town of Highlands and the numerous other plaintiffs in the lawsuit.

The town's good efforts, which Coward referred to, is a working group that has been meeting to discuss STRs — particularly to reexamine the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to see what the UDO needs in the way of revisions to address STRs.

The working group is made up of Commissioners Brian Stiehler and Amy Patterson and attorneys Coward and Justus.

"We need to draft some language that addresses STRs because there is nothing in the UDO at all that addresses STRs," said Coward. "So, we don't have a good UDO that we can refer to while trying to decide how to move forward."

Coward said he anticipates having a working document for the Town Board and the Planning Board in November to

show what their final conclusions are, and he believes the process can be completed by Feb. 1.

"This group is very functional and we are working real hard trying to address the dilemma we have that has caused so much controversy," said Coward.

During this stay, which would last until Feb. 1, there would be no requirement from the town to answer the complaint, for discovery, depositions, or requests for documents; there will be no hearings at court, no presentation of evidence or testimony, everything would be stayed until Feb. 1 — including the ban on STRs effective Jan. 3, 2022.

Coward said the town will not enforce anything against STRs until the group makes a decision about what the UDO actually says and that would be by vote of the full board to amend the UDO.

The Town Board voted unanimously to rescind the action it took Aug. 24 to enforce the order of Jan. 3 and authorized the group to work on the UDO until it reaches the point where it can be revised possibly before Feb. 1.

"This isn't saying that we are conceding that we can't enforce the R1 STRs, we are simply delaying the whole process until we have a chance to come up with a new response by Feb. 1," said the mayor.

Commissioner Marc Hehn reminded the board that the Russell v. Donaldson case in regards to Blowing Rock, NC seems to indicate that STRs are residential in nature, and the town's regulations are vague and even state law isn't straight.

"Also, I don't think you can put a deadline on this, there is a lot of work to do, a lot of input. I think July 1 is much more reasonable. I don't think we can get all this

• See LAWSUIT page 30



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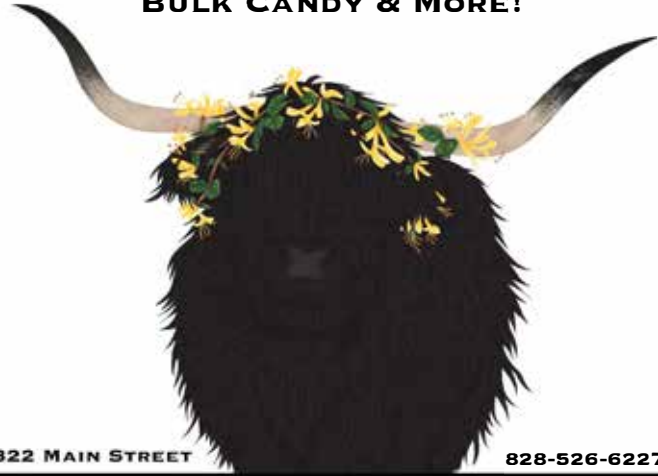


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...OBITUARIES continued from page 5

Marvin Gaddy Carmichael

Marvin Gaddy Carmichael, 73, of Seneca, SC, husband of Felicia Young Carmichael passed away Friday, October 15, 2021 at Greenville Memorial Hospital.

For service information please visit www.robinsonfuneralhomes.com or contact Duckett-Robinson Funeral Home, Central, SC, (864) 639-2411.

Thelma Allmon Petrone

Thelma Allmon Petrone, 95, of Highlands, NC passed away on Wednesday, October 20, 2021. Born in New York on January 30, 1926, Thelma was the daughter of the late George D. Allmon and Anna Handlir Allmon. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her son, Kevin Michael Petrone.

She is survived by her husband of 71 years, James Petrone; and daughters Lee Ann Pearse of Chattanooga, TN, Susanna Murray, Anna Wilson (Roger Lee), and Lisbeth Petrone Leschen of Highlands, NC. Eight grandchildren: Jimmy Petrone (Jessica), Vince Petrone (Jackie), Leslie Pearse Lyons (Mat), Lindsey Pearse Greiner (Jamie), Ryan Bryson (Kayla), Matthew Wilson (Ashley), Alana Wilson Fisher (Chris) and Jacob Leschen; and her pride and joys – 18 great grandchildren. She is also survived by several nieces and nephews



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and a special caregiver, Delores Jones.

Thelma will be remembered as a loving wife, mother, grandmother, and “Great Great.”

The family will gather for a Celebration of Life on Saturday, November 6, 2021 at 1 pm at the Wilson Barn, Wilson Gap Road, Highlands, NC, and would love to invite everyone to attend.

James ‘Jim’ Shipman Munger

James “Jim” Shipman Munger, 83 of Franklin, passed away on Sunday, October 24, 2021. Jim was born in Macon County to the late William and Lona Crane Munger. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his siblings, Gene Munger, Martha Owens, Anne Holley, Fred Munger; and son-in-law, Steven Nylund

Jim was a member of the Macedonia Baptist Church and enjoyed Bowling and Golfing.

He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Peggy Smith Munger; children, Cindy Nylund of Highlands, Barbara Ann Hedden (Gene) of Lafayette AL, William Jess Munger (Michelle) of Highlands NC, Lila Shearl (John) of Franklin NC, and Matthew Sheffield of Franklin NC; Siblings, Andy Munger of Seneca SC, and John Munger of Sataloch GA; 13 grandchildren; 14 great grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews.

A service was held on Wed. October 27, 2021, at Blue Valley Baptist Church. Rev. Dale Cannon officiated.

Pallbearers were Joshua Nylund, Jason Wilbanks, Adam Hedden, Alex Heddin, Tyler Munger, Allen Shearl, Michael Shearl and Jared Shearl.

Honorary pallbearers were Gene Hedden, John Shearl, Dennis Perkins, Thomas Cummings, and Tim Dietrich.

In lieu of flowers, memorials can be made to WNC Hospice House Foundation Hospice House Foundation of WNC, PO Box 815, Franklin, NC 28744 Online Condolences can be made at www.maconfuneralhome.com. Macon Funeral Home handled the arrangements.

Patrick “Pat” Franklin Moore, III

Patrick “Pat” Franklin Moore, III, 77, of Aiken, SC, passed away peacefully with his family by his side Saturday, October 23, 2021. He was a beloved husband, father, grandfather, and friend.

Pat was born September 22, 1944, in Northfield, MN, a son of the late Patrick F.

• See OBITUARIES page 20

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SHORT-TERM RENTALS

MYTH | FACT

MYTH:

If the current ban on STRs stands, Highlands will lose millions of dollars in Occupancy Tax and it will bankrupt the Town!

FACT:

Nonsense! The Occupancy Tax is collected by Macon County and paid to the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is required by law to spend these funds on Tourism. They are not paid to the Town. In fact, STRs cause a dramatic increase of activity in our neighborhoods – think 10 to 12 people in 5 or 6 cars checking in and out of their STR every other day and the impact of this exceptionally intensive use on the Town's roads, our septic systems, and the volume of trash generated. The STR investors aren't paying anything extra for the intense commercial use they've introduced into our neighborhoods, in fact they're getting a free ride from the residents and Town in order to line their pockets.

MYTH:

Short Term Rentals are good for renters.

FACT:

Not for long term renters! The transformation of houses and apartments into short-term rentals has led to higher rents and made permanent housing more difficult to find.

STRs have all but eliminated the supply of affordable housing, dramatically increasing rental rates and making it even harder for people to live and work in our town. Every home that's being used for illegal hotel activity is a unit that's not on the residential housing market.

MYTH:

Short-term rentals are good for real estate values.

FACT:

Not in the long run! The demand by STR investors may initially drive up the price of affordable housing. But what happens when a peaceful neighborhood is inundated and is nothing more than a collection of mini hotels? These neighborhoods become less desirable, driving good neighbors out and prices down.

MYTH:

You can do whatever you want with your property

FACT:

False. The Town of Highlands has zoning laws in place to regulate land use, direct appropriate growth, and protects its neighbors and neighborhoods. There is a vast array of things you can or cannot do with your land depending on where it is sited. This is particularly important in our single-family neighborhoods. This is why our Code has always defined "Overnight Accommodations" as a commercial use, and why commercial uses are prohibited in our neighborhoods.



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...OBITUARIES continued from page 18

Moore, Jr. and Marie Whatley Moore. His father was a store manager with Woolworth's, and they moved frequently while growing up. His family ended up in Anderson, SC, where

he met the love of his life, Kitty Welborn. Pat and Kitty were married at St. John's United Methodist Church in Anderson on October 9, 1965, and recently celebrated 56 years together. They honeymooned in Highlands, NC, a community they hold dearly in their hearts.

Pat attended the University of Alabama where he pledged Delta Tau Delta. He was elected as social chair – a role that suited him perfectly. Pat must have found time for his studies, as well, earning a BS degree in Chemistry. He worked with Owens-Corning Fiberglas after college and later became the youngest plant manager in company history. His career took Pat and his family around the globe with years-long stints in Athens, Greece, and Brussels, Belgium. His focus centered on the Middle East and Africa but later expanded world-wide, gifting him with friends around the world. Pat concluded his exceptional career as President of the Pipe Division.

A lifelong philanthropist, Pat dedicated his time to many organizations, including the development of the PAC in Highlands. He served as president of the HCCMF; as an elder of First Presbyterian Church in Highlands, serving during the expansion phases including the Memorial Garden. He was an active member of the Rotary Clubs of Highlands and Aiken. He served two terms as president of HCC, and one of the highlights was winning the Member-Guest with his high school best friend. A dear friend referred to his gift of the "forward reach," always moving towards people with curiosity and intentionality. He leaves behind a legacy of generosity, integrity, thoughtfulness, and dedication.

He is survived by his wife Kitty; daughter Shanon M. (Richard) Cheney of Rocky Mount, NC; son Patrick F. (Angie) Moore, IV, of Morrow, OH; grandchildren Catherine C. (Alex) Fleming, Alexandra Cheney, Quinn Moore, Jake Moore, Grace Moore, and Charlee Moore; sister Sunnie Smith of Atlanta, GA; and several nieces and nephews. He will be deeply missed. In addition to his parents, Pat was preceded in death by a brother, Tim Moore of Anderson, SC.

A Celebration of Pat's life will be held at 2 PM, Thursday, October 28, 2021, at St. John's United Methodist Church in Aiken with the Rev. Dr. Tim McClendon and the Rev. Dr. Lee Bowman officiating. A second memorial service will be held in Highlands, NC, in the summer of 2022.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be directed to St. John's United Methodist Church (www.stjaiken.org/give), Trinity Hospice of Aiken (690 Medical Park Drive, Suite 200, Aiken, SC 29801) or the Highlands Community Child Development Center (www.highland-communitychildcare.org/giving).

Pat Moore's online guest book may be signed by visiting www.shellhousefuneralhome.com

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- If you want a leader who will listen to all sides of an issue and talk straight...
- If you want the leader who was endorsed by every Town Board member except the challenger...
 - If you want the leader who was endorsed by the current Chairman of the Macon County Board of Commissioners...
 - If you want the leader that has the most experience with Highlands government and the community...

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Book 'Memories of Highlands' Early Years' is now available at area stores

Booksinging at Shakespeare & Co. on Saturday, Nov. 6, 2-4 p.m.

Seventh generation Highlander Angela Lewis Jenkins' new book "Memories of Highlands' Early Years" is now available. The 205-page book contains stories of growing up in Highlands by 18 story authors. The stories date as far back as the early 1900s, and are accompanied by photos from Highlands' early days with over 250 images included. The book is dedicated in memory of Jenkins' late parents, Arthur Alan and Jane Anderson Lewis (a sixth generation Highlander), and in honor of her children and grandchildren.

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...Q&A continued from page 6

\$15). In today's economy, that is hardly adequate for a single person much less for anyone providing for a family. Annual COLA (cost of living) adjustments are percentage-based and continue to widen pay disparities between the highest and lowest paid employees without addressing a minimum living wage. So, yes, I believe the town should have a minimum wage of \$15/hour.

Eric Pierson

There is more to it than a blanket \$15/hr. wage. Benefits, such as insurance, are also part of the issue. However, I think the town should always be vigilant in keeping on top of pay scales, along with benefits, in order to recruit and maintain a great group of employees that all work together to keep Highlands running.

Pat Taylor

With the exception of two new hires in the town sanitation department, the Town of Highlands already pay employees \$15 an hour. The two new employees are making about \$14.75 an hour, plus they have health-care and retirement benefits which are significant benefits for a total salary package. Once they pass the 6-month probationary period, and secure commercial drivers' licenses these two employees will make over \$15 an hour. The town is now paying part-time workers at the \$15 an hour level also.

Market forces require it, and it is the right thing to do.

I think most businesses in the town are already paying \$15 an hour in order to attract workers. That \$15 an hour translates roughly into a \$31,000 annual salary. This number is not very high, especially if fringe benefits are not included as a part of the salary package. Given the high cost of living here on the Highlands Plateau, and the need for workers to commute to work, a living wage of \$15 an hour has become a beginning salary norm.

I am not for a town ordinance or initiative to require a minimum wage of \$15 an hour like some municipalities have mandated. I believe economic determinants will drive the minimum wage number in this community to \$15, or even higher.

— Get Out and VOTE! —

Early Voting ends Saturday, Oct. 30.

The hours are 8 am to 5 pm Monday-Friday. The only Saturday for early voting is Oct. 30, 8 am to 3 pm.

Polls in Highlands are at the Highlands Civic Center, 600 N 4th St.

Election Day is Nov. 2, 6 am to 7:30 pm.

Schedule

Saturday, October 30

*Mr. Pickle's
Howl-o-Ween
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The Park on Main Hotel
6 - 7:30pm



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10pm

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Fellow Lovers of Highlands,

As you are all well aware, Highlands is an inclusive family of year-round residents, seasonal homeowners, visitors, restaurateurs, artists, landscapers, retailers, housekeepers, entrepreneurs, builders, realtors, plumbers, electricians, and many others. All these groups are inter-woven into the fabric that makes this town so special, and while some may not realize it, all of these groups benefit from vacation rentals.

For four decades the Town of Highlands communicated to countless property owners and visitors that there were no restrictions on vacation rentals. The Town has happily accepted rental tax revenue and welcomed renters for decades. That changed this summer when a small but vocal HOA voted to bring legal action against the Town of Highlands. On August 19th, the Town meeting opened with the statement “this is the beginning of a long discussion on vacation rentals.” By the end of that meeting, the Board had voted to ban them. The people and the businesses of Highlands were blindsided.

In response, Save Highlands was created. Sadly, we are being positioned as faceless investors. The truth is that we have been part of the community for decades and many of us are full-time residents. One member has had property and family rooted in the town since the 1920s, another since the 1880s. We are not a group of faceless investors. We are your neighbors and, just like you, we want what’s best for this Town.

On October 13, the Save Highlands group of homeowners took the first legal step to retain personal property rights in the Town of Highlands. To be clear, this is not an action we wanted to take. Unfortunately, neither Mayor Taylor nor anyone from the Town of Highlands have come to the table with negotiations or made any attempt to find common ground. In effect, all remaining options for cordially protecting the rights of property owners and saving Highlands have been exhausted. We firmly believe the law is on our side regarding this issue.

Banning rentals will not only have a crippling financial effect on Highlands, but also fracture its people unnecessarily. In fact, it’s already happening. This action has created an artificial divide between neighbors when together we could address the issue thoughtfully, taking the entire community’s input into consideration.

A vacation rental ban will have a substantial negative effect on tax and business revenue and lead to a devastating loss of income for countless Highlands residents. Banning rentals could mean a loss of \$13,500,000 direct income and a \$115,000,000 total economic loss. These financial implications are far reaching and affect us all.

While the Town is currently booming - fueled by the travel dynamics of the pandemic and a recovering economy - the financial effects of a vacation rental ban will be felt this winter and exponentially when the economic climate isn’t so strong. We want balance. Vacation rentals are a complicated subject for any town, which is why they were specifically addressed in the Draft Community Plan.

And while loud voices have stated that vacation rentals are “simply against the law,” that is simply false. The Town of Highlands Use Regulations do not even mention vacation rentals. Even the State of North Carolina defines vacation rentals as “residential use.” But more than that, we feel that who we invite into our homes should be in our hands as the property owners - not the decision of the government.

We love this town and its people. And we believe if we come together as a community, we can create an inclusive, well-planned future to save Highlands for generations to come.

Sincerely,
The Save Highlands Committee

• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from Oct. 12. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or public officials have been used.

Oct. 12

- At 11:30 a.m., officers responded to a one-vehicle accident on Laural Street.
- At 6:18 p.m., officers responded to a one-vehicle accident on Keener Road.

Oct. 20

- At 1:50 p.m., officers responded to a two-vehicle accident in the Post Office parking lot.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Oct. 18.

Oct. 18

- At 11:42 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on the Franklin Road.

Oct. 19

- At 7:54 a.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a residence on Flat Mountain Road.

- At 11:45 a.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a residence on Holt Cottage Lane.

- At 3:35 p.m., the dept. performed an animal rescue on Horse Cove Road.

- At 4:13 p.m., the dept. was first-responders when alerted by a medical alarm at

a residence on Chestnut Hill Drive.

Oct. 20

- At 2:23 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on the Dillard Road.

Oct. 21

- At 8:55 a.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a residence on Paul Walden Road.

- At 4:40 p.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on Blue Valley Road.

- At 7:35 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Clubhouse Trail.

Oct. 22

- At 1:13 p.m., the dept. was first-responders at a residence on the Franklin Road.

- At 2:56 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Clubhouse Trail.

Oct. 24

- At 11:42 p.m., the dept. responded to a Co2 alarm at a residence on Big Bear Pen Road.

Oct. 25

- At 9:05 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on Main Street.

- At 7:41 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Bonnie Drive.

Oct. 26

- At 8:03 a.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on N. 4th Street.

...WHLC continued from page 10

Half-way up the tower they checked the RF detectors which registered at 100% and then at 200% at the centerline of the Verizon equipment. Cooper allegedly refused to turn it down any further.

Verizon can't complete its work until Cooper turns it down

"Is there any way you can assist; possibly coordinate a time so everyone is on the same page so we can get this done?" Verizon and its contractors asked the town.

Mayor Taylor said it's imperative that the town, Verizon and Cooper get together and figure out the best time to facilitate Verizon's upgrade.

"I am worried Verizon is going to get frustrated if they can't get to their equipment and do the work they have to do," said Taylor.

Shuler and Town Manager Josh Ward said there are two issues.

One, Cooper has to help facilitate Verizon's ability to do their upgrades which means Cooper has to turn his power down.

"So, we would ask the board to direct Cooper to do so and to coordinate a date with Verizon so it can make its upgrades," said Shuler.

Two, Cooper is supposed to pay \$529/month to lease his spot on the tower.

Thursday night the board learned that he is \$4,761 in arrears and his 10-year lease expired in 2019.

"WHLC's contract is dead," said Shuler. "It was a 10-year contract, and it went out in 2019. So, there is no WHLC contract."

"So, next we would request the board to direct Attorney Coward to redraft a new contract with WHLC," said Shuler

Commissioner Donnie Calloway said he didn't think the contract was ever written to the town's benefit.

Commissioner Amy Patterson said the town owns the tower and it needs to take control of it.

"Let's get everyone in the room and tell them exactly what is going to happen and when. If they don't want to do it that way, then we don't have to give them another lease offer on the tower. At this stage, if WHLC is in arrears and he doesn't have a lease anyway, we are the authority on the tower," she said.

Commissioner Calloway agreed and said before the town pays the Attorney Coward to draft a new lease for WHLC, Cooper needs to bring his payments up to date.

— Kim Lewicki

VOTE

Thomas Craig

★ ★ ★ Highlands Commissioner ★ ★ ★

Nov. 2nd, Early Voting Oct. 14 – 30

VOTE THIS TUESDAY - NOV 2nd

PAT TAYLOR



HIGHLANDS MAYOR

KEEP the MAYOR on DUTY!



Refurbished Sequoyah Dam



Broadband!



Sidewalks and Walls



Bearwise!



Pickleball Courts



Paving and Road Projects



Weight Room Upgrade



Renovated Ball Field



Pool Enclosure



Expanded Recycling

"These are a few of the accomplishments since I've been Mayor of Highlands. All of these projects were a collaborative effort between the Mayor's office, the Town Board, and our incredible staff. We've worked well together and always have the best interest of Highlands in mind when making decisions. Thank you for the outpouring of support and I would appreciate your vote on Tuesday."

Pat



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A Time for Letting Go

Pastor Randy Lucas
Highlands United Methodist Church

We find ourselves in a magnificently beautiful season. The brilliant autumn colors across the Western North Carolina Landscape attracts many admirers from far away to bask in the beauty of God's good creation that daily surrounds us in Highlands. We are truly blessed! The changing of the leaves and the crisp mornings here in the mountains are daily reminders of this very special time of the year. And though we are all susceptible to missing the sacred gift of each fleeting moment, distracted as we often are by life's challenges, limitations and disappointments, hopefully we have sufficient clarity, at least occasionally, to enjoy this very special time of the year.

Finding ourselves in these final days of October, we're also being reminded of the other end of the beautiful fall season of color, the falling of the leaves. Autumn brings us both beauty and an important seasonal message. In fact, each season has a lesson to teach us, reminding us of the rhythm of life. From winter's lesson of dormancy and death to spring's message of resurrection and new life to summer's lesson of growth and vitality to autumn's reminder of transitional beauty and relinquishing, the seasons mirror our own rhythm of living.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes of the Hebrew Scriptures, the preacher Koheleth reminds us that there is a season for everything (3:1-8). There is a time for birth and a time for death, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to keep and a time to throw away.

If you've ever run across an episode of A&E's popular television series "Hoarders" you know the kinds of problems caused by the inability to discard. And though we may be tempted to marvel at another person's reluctance to throw away things that clearly are in need of disposal, perhaps we're not so far removed from the tendency to hold on too long with white-knuckled veracity ourselves from time to time.

Autumn is a transitional season, a season filled with beauty, a time for vibrant mountain landscapes and a time for yards filled with leaves. Autumn is a season of letting go. The rhythm of the trees and falling leaves remind us of the wisdom of Ecclesiastes. There is indeed a time for loosening our grip.

And like the sad stories portrayed on the show Hoarders, the more familiar we are with something and the longer it has been part of our lives, the harder it is to loosen our grip on it. It can be true with material things, of relationships and it can also be true about attitudes, practices and behaviors we have cultivated in our lives.

If we fail to heed the Ecclesiastical wisdom on display during autumn, we can easily find ourselves imprisoned by a Hoarders-like wall of painful memories, past failures and the bitterness caused by long-ago wounds.

We all do it of course. It's a quirk of the human condition. So if your inner-hoarder has been winning, take heart! Don't give up! And may God grant us all wisdom and courage to learn the lesson of autumn. There is a time for letting go.

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

John 3:16

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Sunday night services every 2nd & 4th Sunday at 7

Wednesdays: Mid-week prayer meeting: 7 p.m.

BUCK CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH

828-269-3546 • Rev. Jamie Passmore, Pastor

Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11

CASHIERS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Rev. Aryn Williams-Reubel, Pastor 828-743-5298

Sundays: School at 9:30 Worship 10:30

Wednesday night Dinner and Service 5:30

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Holy Communion 1st & 3rd Sundays

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www.christanglicancashiers.com

Sun. - 9:30am Worship (no music); 10:30am Sunday

School; 10:30am Worship Service.

Mon. Night Bible Study & Dinner, 6pm, call for details.

CHRIST CHURCH OF THE VALLEY, CASHIERS

Pastor Brent Metcalf • 743-5470

Sun. 10:45am, S.S 9:30am. Wed. 6pm supper and teaching.

Tues. Guys study 8am, Gals 10am.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CHURCH

283 Spring Street

Sunday Service: 11 a.m.

Testimony Meeting: 5:30 p.m. on the 3rd Wed.

CLEAR CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor Jim Kinard

Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11 a.m.

1st & 3rd Sunday night Service: 7 p.m.

Wednesdays - Supper at 6 p.m.

COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH

www.cbchighlands.com • 526-4685

3645 Cashiers Rd, Highlands, NC • Sr. Pastor Gary Hewins

Sun.: 9:30am - Adult Sunday School; Worship Service 10:45am;

10:45am Children's Program, Youth-12:15 - 2:30pm Tues:

Women's Bible Study 10am-noon

Thurs: Men's Bible Study 7:30-8:30 a.m.

COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH OF SKY VALLEY

706.746.3144 • 696 Sky Valley Way #447

Pastor Steve Kerhoulas

Worship: Sun. 10:30 a.m. Holy Communion 2nd. Sunday

EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION

Rev. W. Bentley Manning, Rector • 526-8152

5th and Main streets • www.incarnationwnc.org

Sunday Services in the Chapel:

Rite I, 8a; with choir; 9:30a; with choir, 11a.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HIGHLANDS

828-526-4153 • www.fbchighlands.org

Dr. Mark Ford, Pastor • 220 Main Street, Highlands

Sun.: Worship 10:45 am; Sun.: Bible Study 9:30 am

Wed.: Men's Bible Study 8:30 am; Choir 5p; Prayer Mtg 6:15p

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Curtis Fussell & Emily Wilmarth, pastors

828-526-3175 • fpchighlands.org

Sun.: Adult Ed.: 10 a.m.; Worship 11 a.m.

Tues: Men's Group 10 a.m. Wed: Bell Choir 4 p.m., Choir: 6p

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Wed. Kidsquest 6p.; Worship 7p.

HIGHLANDS ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Randy Reed, Pastor 828-421-9172 • 165 S. Sixth Street

Wed. Bible Study: 6 p.m.; Sundays: Worship: 11

HIGHLANDS CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor Dan Robinson • 11339 Buck Creek Road

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www.highlandsmethodist.org

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Pastor Zane Talley

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Wed: Bible Study and Youth Mtg.: 7 p.m.

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4224 Big Ridge Road (4.5 miles from NC 107)

Weds: Bible Study 6:30 p.m.; Youth Group 6 p.m.

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Rev. Fr. Jason K. Barone - 526-2418

Mass: Wed. noon (Latin), Thurs. noon, Fri. 9a; Sat. 4p; Sun., 11a

SCALY MOUNTAIN BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Marty Kilby

Sundays: School - 10 a.m.; Worship - 11 a.m. & 7

Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg.: 7 p.m.

SCALY MOUNTAIN CHURCH OF GOD

290 Buck Knob Road; Pastor Donald G. Bates • 526-3212

Sun.: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 10:45 a.m.; Worship: 6 p.m.

SHORTOFF BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor Rev. Andy Cloer

Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11 a.m.

Wednesdays: Prayer & Bible Study: 6 p.m.

ST. JUDE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Mass: Tues. noon (Latin), Thurs. 9a.; Fri., noon; Sat. 5:30p; Sun. 9a

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10/14)

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• See CLASSIFIEDS page 30



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...LAWSUIT continued from page 15

work done," he said.

Coward said the Feb. 1 deadline is not written in stone.

"It may take longer; this is the first "stay" date for right now. If we need more time, if the plaintiffs see we are working in good faith toward a solution, they would likely extend it. But the judge who has to sign this is going to say "until when?" So we are going to say Feb. 1, but if we need to, we can request an extension on that order."

Commissioner Donnie Calloway asked if there was a way to address the new "pop-up" STRs and the current rush of some people to buy houses for STRs.

Coward said that is a concern and that's why the group is trying to finalize the UDO by Feb. 1, but he suggested those with a vested interest; those who have been using their homes as STRs over a period of time, would be grandfathered

and protected.

"If they have done that, then they have a right to continue that use of the property," he said. "But that requires a period of time, a certain amount of investment that shows that they rely on a law as they interpret it. That is a lot different than people who are rushing to get to a point to have their rights vested because their rights aren't vested right now."

Coward said it's likely Highlands will end up having a permit/application process for STRs.

"We will talk about that further the next time we meet and have something to bring to the board about how that whole process will work," he said.

If it turns out that Feb. 1 is too soon, and the town is working in good faith, the judge will likely listen and agree to an extension.

– Kim Lewicki

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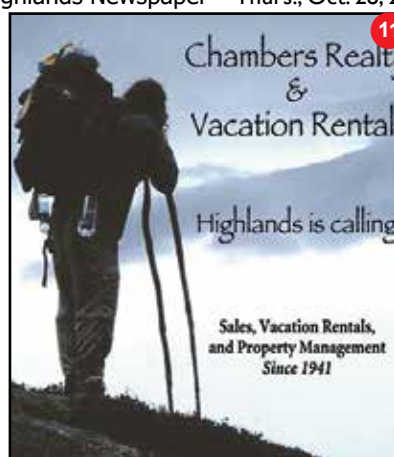
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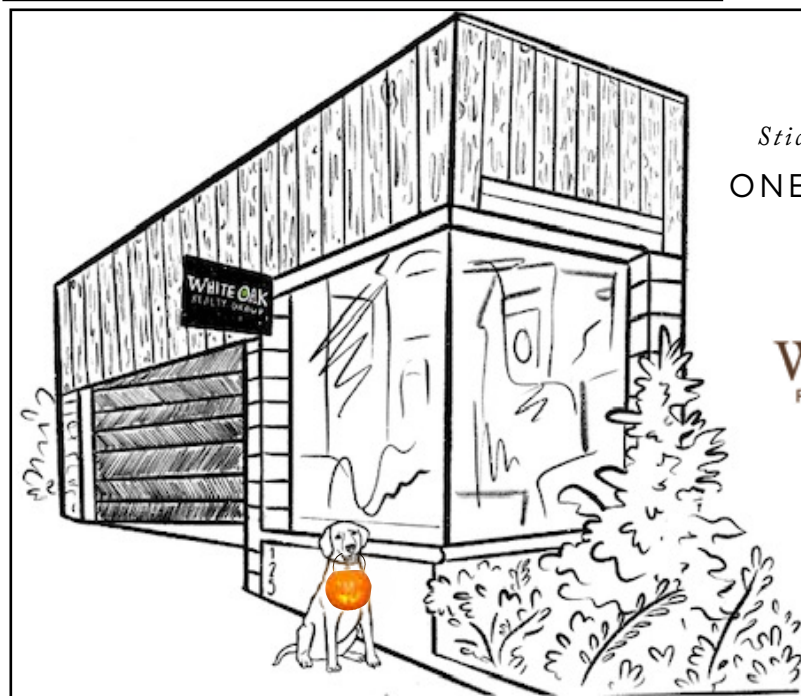


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