

Highlands Newspaper

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MC maps out capital needs for next 5 yrs.

By Brittney Lofthouse

Macon County is embarking on an ambitious plan to address its capital needs over the next five years, a plan that totals \$180 million. This comprehensive plan,

presented last week by County Manager Derek Roland, encompasses a range of projects aimed at enhancing infrastructure, education, and community services. Crucially, the county intends to

accomplish these goals without raising taxes, leveraging its strong financial position and conservative revenue projections.

One of the major projects

• See **CAPITAL** page 5

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As investigators return to Mission, the hospital sets 10-minute goal for ER patient care

Other procedural changes, part of hospital's plan of correction for immediate jeopardy, include collection of lab orders within 30 minutes

By Andrew R. Jones
Asheville Watchdog

Mission Hospital has enacted drastic operational changes, including rapid turnaround time goals for emergency department patients and their lab work and enhanced communication procedures, all as state investigators have returned to the Asheville facility this week following recent federal findings of serious deficiencies and immediate jeopardy.

Patients should be seen, triaged, and assigned to a nurse within 10 minutes under new policies that also press for lab orders to be collected within 30 minutes, according to internal hospital documents obtained Tuesday by

Asheville Watchdog.

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) investigators visited HCA Healthcare-owned Mission on Tuesday. It is unknown how long the investigators will be at the hospital.

"DHSR staff are currently on-site conducting a follow up survey," NCDHHS spokeswoman Hannah Jones said. "DHSR cannot comment on ongoing investigations."

Mission and HCA spokesperson Nancy Lindell did not immediately respond to The Watchdog's questions about the changes in procedures, the visit,

• See **MISSION** page 9



Many members of the Highlands business community turned out for the worksession at the Highlands Civic Center Thursday night to air grievances about their relationship with the town. - Photo by Kim Lewicki

The business community and Town Board discuss the need for change

For a couple of months Mayor Pat Taylor has encouraged members of the business community to discuss ways the Town Board and administration can better support them and last Thursday the Town Board got an earful at the worksession prior to the regular Town Board meeting.

Regulations against signage, string lights, parking and the lack

of affordable housing for staff were the hot topics along with more support for outdoor recreation businesses off Main Street.

Though the mayor said he didn't get as much feedback as he would have liked, there was a re-occurring theme around the lack of affordable housing for people who work in Highlands; town ordinances that are too restrictive for

businesses i.e., parking, signs, capacity limits, outdoor lighting, and noise levels.

People were invited to address the board from one of the 12 seats set up in front of the commissioners while others participated or just listened from the gallery.

Some at the table included

• See **BUSINESS** page 7

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

Last week's business roundtable got me thinking

The governmental process can be slow, and as some have observed in Highlands, we are cautious and painstakingly deliberate. At the business roundtable last Thursday night, that concern was expressed: Highlands needs to be dynamic and open to change. But, as elected representatives of the town residents, the mayor and board members need to always take a deliberate and critical analysis approach to adopting new town policies and committing tax dollars to projects.

The notion that the mayor and board should be looking at what other towns like Aspen, Blowing Rock, Asheville, and Brevard are doing to see new directions and business models also came to the forefront. I, for one, do that.

All weekend, I pondered and reflected on these ideas about seeking guidance and following the lead of other tourist communities. The converse may be applicable too; some communities may look to what we



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

do in Highlands as a model for sustained economic practices and measured development.

For the record, I have visited several resort communities across the county. I use these visits to see what other similar communities do compared to Highlands. I always come away appreciating what other towns do, but I also hold to my conviction that Highlands, with all our rich history and tradition, should remain as the Highlands that residents love and our visitors enjoy. Historically,

we are more of a retreat community than a tourist community. What do I mean by a retreat community? People continue to retreat here to escape the hustle and bustle of metropolitan areas and jammed-pact tourist towns. Our robust neighborhoods with new multimillion-dollar homes and high resale prices are also major components of our overall economy. As I want to engage with folks in the business community, I also hope the board will engage with folks living in our neighborhood communities, whether those residents are full-time or seasonal.

Last weekend, when Highlands had a rather full downtown, Sallie and I visited friends and family in downtown Asheville. Yep, I was taking notes and left with a few impressions. Both Asheville and Highlands enjoy a robust tourist clientele. We both have great downtown restaurants and watering holes.

But there are some things I do not want to see come from Asheville to Highlands. The downtown density is heavy, and parking is challenging and not free like here. But it is time for Highlands to consider charging for parking in certain areas. We parked in an unstaffed, non-metered Asheville parking lot. How did we pay? Sallie simply scanned a QR code on her iPhone that took her to a parking app. We entered our car tag number and paid with a credit card. Since we spent about six hours downtown, we paid, like so many others, about \$30. Hey, I had a creative moment. Maybe that is what Highlands should do on our highly desirable Main Street parking spaces, do QR code metering. To balance and distribute parking, back streets like Oak, 2nd, and 3rd could remain free parking.

Now, I know some will say, look at that greedy mayor's scheme to get more

money for the town. Yes, I am embracing a benevolent, entrepreneurial idea. Direct the parking revenue toward improvements to downtown. For instance, the comprehensive

plan proposes parking decks around Oak Street. Use parking revenue for that goal, or replacement of the aging trees on Main

• See MAYOR page 14

• HIC'S VIEW •



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• INVESTING AT 4,118 FT •

Does this price make my house look big?

Is bigger always better? In the last few years, it seems like homes built in our area have been on the larger side and the prices have been larger, too. I think it's just a sign of the times, it's trending. We've gone through this before.

Some people buy expensive homes and cars as status symbols, whether they make buying decisions consciously or subconsciously can't always be determined. It's almost like the universe posed the idea: <cue the fog machine with dreamy music> Consumers are ready to spend money, they want to spend money -- a lot of money. Let's give them something to spend it on. Let's give them a home bigger than the average home, let's put all the latest trends and colors in it and let's make sure the craftsmanship looks custom, like we made it just for them. That works for a while, but then they look a little like cookie cutter homes.

In our area, people who don't build, buy existing and remodel. They buy older homes, built after the 1970s, before that, we're talking about mid-century and homes built before the 1950s are just old, but if they've survived this long, they deserve a little respect. Some of the renovations seem to take up a lot more space than the original home, justifying the thought that bigger is better.

Opposites attract, right? After a few years of building or creating very large homes, will we go back to the tiny home phase? That's what it was, right? A phase? Sort of like a teenager, bound, bent, and determined to get their way. Years later, they look back and some of them think, "What was I thinking when I did that?"

The tiny home has its rightful place as does the McMansion. Consider it the Yin and Yang of home construction. Do they belong beside each other? Maybe not, maybe so. Imagine a rural area with no HOAs or other policing guidelines imposed. Let's say there were four homes built by a developer that were between 3,000 to 5,000 square feet. Along comes a lot owner who builds a very modest home of about 1,000 square feet, then another few very large homes, then a couple more small homes. Who decides what is aesthetically pleasing? The owner of the small home may not mind the giant atrocities around him, and the owner of the large home may not mind the ridiculously small home next



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So, where are we headed? Do we want to live in a playground for the rich and famous? If not that, do we want to live in an area where all the homes are large so that even the average Joe looks like 'he belongs'?

Don't get me wrong. There is absolutely nothing wrong with a very large home. I've seen some stunning designs, spacious rooms, extra rooms, gloriously landscaped homes with carriage house-type garages that are larger than many homes, but I think the Yin Yang needs adjusting every once and awhile.

The Highlands-Cashiers MLS may be the only MLS in the state of North Carolina that doesn't require square footage to be measured. It's a long story, but way back before that was the case, we used to get our MLS sheets (that's right, we had book with real pages -- it was similar to a phone book -- remember those?) Anyway, when a home sold, we would look at the price and square footage and one of the ways we measured the worth of a home was the price per square foot. These days, when compiling a CMA (comparative market analysis) we compare the sold price of nearby homes that have similar characteristics to get a fair market price.

The title of this article was inspired by a song by Sir Mix a Lot. You may remember the song, Baby Got Back. (If you don't, that's OK.) I made up some different lyrics to be used for real estate.

I like big homes and I cannot lie.

Most home buyers can't deny when a high-priced home

Pops on the market- in your face

You spread the word 'cause you Think it's the best in its place.

What makes that house so good?

Highest in the neighborhood?

Why do the sellers think it's better?

Multi-millionaires want to have her

Time for a showing, and all will be revealed

Then you'll be knowing if the price matches the yield.

Your home is your castle, but it doesn't have to look like one unless you want it to. In the end, size doesn't matter, it's the price you pay that you have to come to terms with -- literally.

...CAPITAL continued from page 1

in the pipeline is the \$127 million investment in upgrading Franklin High School, coupled with \$5.49 million allocated for the Highlands School project. These initiatives reflect the county's commitment to improving educational facilities and ensuring a conducive learning environment for students.

The Macon County Airport is also set to undergo significant improvements, with plans to allocate \$1,822,600 for hangar development in 2024-25. According to Roland, outside dollars would be utilized to cover the majority of improvements, with the county's commitment coming in at just \$182,260. Additionally, runway extensions and safety enhancements are scheduled over the next five years, with a total cost of \$24,991,679, again primarily covered by outside funding, with just over 10% of the needed funding (\$2,499,168), coming from the county budget.

County leaders voted to approve more than \$2 million for Southwestern Community College, following a request made by SCC President Don Tomas.

One of the two proposed projects approved for funding is a classroom expansion at the Cecil L. Groves Center for additional science coursework.

The second project is something that has been controversial among county leaders for the last several years, dating back to when former Commissioner Karl Gillespie was on the board of commissioners. Dr. Tomas again asked Macon County for additional funding for the Public Safety and Training Center for a new fire training building, something SCC has been working toward for the last eight years.

Leaders of Southwestern Community College first approached the Macon County Board of Commissioners in 2016 about the decision to construct a new burn building training facility in Macon County as part of the Public Safety Training Center.

The burn building, which is located in the Industrial Park, is a three-story pre-cast concrete and masonry brick structure supported by a slab on grade concrete foundation.

Cost of the burn building has varied from year to year since 2016, with money being put into appraisals, designs, assessments, evaluations, and more. The original projection was that a new burn building would cost \$2 million, with Macon County providing \$500,000 toward that total cost.

The Macon County burn building is now 34 years old, with Macon County last providing funding to replace burn panels in 2016 after flooding damage. In 2018, Macon County approved \$1.3 million for the burn building project however, those plans have since changed. The total cost for the project is now expected to be near \$4 mil-

lion. Roland said only \$3.1 million was allocated for this fiscal year's Construction in Progress (CIP) budget. Dr. Tomas argued that construction costs have increased since the county's original commitment in 2018 and while SCC has secured a \$1.4 million bond, SCC is looking for the county to pay the remaining amount. The burn building, paired with an additional \$1.5 million for the science classroom, commissioners voted 5-0 to approve the funding request for SCC and add it to the 2025 county budget.

The capital improvement plan also includes recreational and public safety enhancements. Phase 1A of the Recreation Master Plan, featuring new tennis and pickleball courts and bathrooms at the Macon County Recreation Park, is slated to cost \$1,766,275 in 2024-'25. Moreover, several maintenance projects, such as roof replacements and HVAC upgrades, are budgeted at \$900,000 in 2024-25 to ensure the longevity of county facilities.

Looking ahead, the county is mindful of its vehicle and technology needs, earmarking \$9 million for ambulance and other vehicle replacements over the next decade. Furthermore, \$1,330,430 has been allocated for information technology upgrades in 2024-25, including a significant payment for data storage.

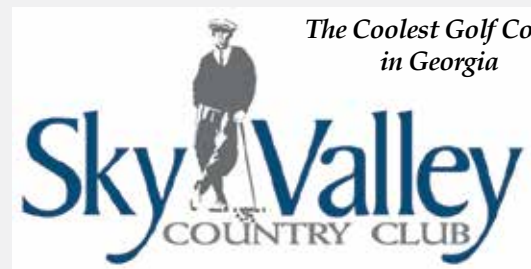
Despite these ambitious plans, Macon County's financial position remains strong, with a credit rating of AA2/AA. This favorable rating enables the county to borrow money at attractive interest rates, facilitating the funding of capital projects. With a strategic approach and prudent financial management, Macon County is poised to address its capital needs efficiently while maintaining its status as one of North Carolina's financially stable counties.

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• LETTERS •

Quotes from our 'Founding Fathers' and others that resonate today

Dear Editor:

A while ago I read a quote attributed to one of the Founding Fathers that had to do with the presumption that the electorate possessed the knowledge and goodwill to successfully sustain a democracy.

I haven't been able to find who said that or the exact wording. But I did find lots of other political quotes from the Founders that seemed particularly relevant in this election year. Here is a very small sampling of the ones that resonated with me:

"...we ought to live as brothers, doing to each other all the good we can, and not listening to wicked men, who may endeavor to make us enemies. By living in peace, we can help and prosper one another..."

- Thomas Jefferson

"Man, once surrendering his reason, has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous, and like

a ship without a rudder, is the sport of every wind. With such persons, gullibility, faith, takes the helm from the hand of reason, and the mind becomes a wreck."

- Thomas Jefferson

"A government of laws and not of men."

- John Adams

"He that cannot obey, cannot command."

- Benjamin Franklin

Although the political wisdom of the Founding Fathers has remained remarkably sound over these many years, I did find a few examples which, at least in part, have not. Buried in the Federalist Papers (68) is the below passage. It refers to and advocates for the idea of an Electoral College. But this passage caught my attention not because of its argument but by its assumptions regarding moral certainties and requisite qualifications. Here it is:

"This process of election affords a moral certainty

that the office of President will seldom fall to the lot of any man who is not in an eminent degree endowed with the requisite qualifications."

- Alexander Hamilton

Those wise men of their time could not have anticipated this century's divisive relativism regarding moral certainty and requisite qualifications.

These reminders from the past are as relevant in 2024 as they were when they were first spoken — more so even. But citizens of goodwill and common sense can still prevail. Let's make that happen.

Voting is the expression of our commitment to ourselves, one another, this country and the world." Sharon Salzberg

"Every election is determined by the people who show up."

- Larry J. Sabato

Mase Lucas
Scaly Mountain

The accomplishments of Trump as President were many

Dear Editor,

I am responding to the letter-to-the-editor in the Feb 1st edition entitled "Don't let the smoke get in your eyes" by Carole Light of Scaly Mountain.

In July of 2020, President Trump issued an executive order to lower the cost of insulin and epipens. It's very easy to find this fact, if we don't remember it, from many different sources on the internet.

In February 2018, Trump issued an infrastructure plan which was opposed by the Democrats. In 2019, he issued an executive which encouraged the purchase of US made construction materials for infrastructure projects.

I do agree with your other reader that the President's age is not a factor. It has to do with mental competence. My father was chairman of boards and successfully ran

a business until his death due to cardiac complications at age 89.

I could go on to list the many accomplishments of the Trump administration that were unfortunately reversed shortly after the Biden administration took control. For example, President Trump reduced the influx of illegals coming over the border (Biden administration halted the construction of the border wall on the southern border) incomes rose, unemployment dropped—there are too many to list in this letter and can be found on nonpartisan websites. We all know without looking it up that life was markedly better under the Trump administration until the pandemic took over our world.

Annette Minninger
Highlands

...BUSINESS continued from page 1

two representing the Chamber of Commerce, Blye Hunsinger and Tricia Cox, who was also representing Berkshire Hathaway Home Services, Richard Delany from Old Edwards Inn, Mike Bryson of Bryson Grading and Paving, Steve Hinky and partner from Art Highlands, George Powell of Highlands Aerial Park, Jim Tate of Tate Landscaping, Clarissa, co-owner of the Stubborn Bull, and others.

Though everyone clearly had issues with the Town Board's decisions on various topics, everyone appreciated the roundtable discussion while recognizing it was just the beginning of possible change and movement toward a better Town/Business relationship.

Workforce housing was the first issue discussed with everyone saying they would like the town to take a more proactive approach to solving the problem.

"I don't think anyone here is prepared to offer a solution, but I would like the town to make a stronger effort in solving the problem and maybe we can all work together and come up with a solution," said Bryson.

Delany said OEI has the means to solve their own housing issue but said he was once told by the town that employee housing wasn't a town issue.

"I was told it was a private sector issue and I want to

say I wholeheartedly disagree," he said. "There are other towns throughout the United States that are dealing with this issue — Jackson Hole, Asheville and others — because the lack of workforce housing is like a cancer that will slowly ruin a town if the people who live here and work here and spend money here do not live here."

He said the nurses and teachers and managers deserve to be able to live — maybe not right in town but closer to town.

"I think ignoring it and sticking our heads in the hole pretending it's not a problem will eventually be a huge minus for Highlands. We need to come up with some kind of plan," he said. "I have been approached by about 23 investors who would love to get into some kind of housing investment but it's going to take financial contributions and help by the town."

Clarissa from the Stubborn Bull said the town was way behind when it comes to employee housing and she considers it a crisis. She said there are templates already set up in other second-home and tourist towns like Aspen, so no one has to start from scratch.

"I have 40-50 year-round employees. The young ones —

• See BUSINESS page 8

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...BUSINESS continued from page 7

the servers and college kids – don't mind the drive but how am I supposed to find professionals with families when there is nowhere to live?" she asked. "This is a crisis and we're talking about string lights."

A recent article by NPR documented how cities like Minneapolis, Houston, NY City and others are dealing with the lack of affordable housing ... not just workforce housing ... by throwing out parking rules, changing density allowances on single-family parcels, and creating more housing options by changing zoning regulations.

That was an issue brought up by Tate. He suggested that the town's zoning ordinances hadn't really changed in 30 years, that commercial businesses were going up along the corridors into town because there wasn't any other place to go, and though not in the town limits, town infrastructure could help with housing.

For instance, if town sewer was extended, commercial buildings on corridors could offer incidental housing on upper floors or apartment complexes would be possible.

Delany suggested the town be proactive to possibilities and new ideas rather than reactive as in the past.

"Instead of thinking the status quo is great or saying let's not change anything, or the first reaction from the board at a new suggestion being skepticism and dismissiveness, it would be nice to hear, 'Wow, that's a great idea, that could be fun for the town,'" he said.

He noted how initially the town was against Music in the Park which had to be initiated by the Thomas and Kay Craig and was eventually taken over by the Chamber. How a year-round covered pool was initially boo-hooped, too.

Commissioner Brian Stiehler admitted that the town often considers the negatives – how much will it cost, will it be profitable, etc., but suggested the commissioners could do better.

Delany said leaving things the way they are regarding lack of housing, signage, lighting, and

parking restrictions will be the death of the town.

"Why do businesses need to be busy? Because that's how we live, that's how our employees live. Making the town busier all year long makes this town sustainable, strong and viable. So, I ask you, why is change wrong if it means businesses can be open 12 months and give employees a viable economy where they can live and grow?"

Some people in the audience – those who are retired or independently wealthy and who don't own a business in town, said they preferred the old days in Highlands when there weren't so many events and so many visitors.

But Delany said businesses needed to be busy year round to be viable and though appreciated, dining at a restaurant in town once a month doesn't sustain a business – consistency is key.

Commissioner John Dotson said he believed there would always be a few months a year when business is slow in Highlands and it would always be that way due to where it is located.

Fifth generation Highlander Bryson said he is glad Highlands is the way it is now.

"You know it's just a better place than it used to be. Now you can make a living here. There's still more to do. Let's keep it going," he said.

Relating to supporting the commercial district, Cox said it was important for the town to revisit things like sign ordinances.

"I am specifically speaking about the real estate community which is a big part of the economy here. I don't know why people can literally put paper on the windows, but you can't put a very elegant lighted sign," she said. "I'm not talking about a neon sign. I think sign ordinances and parking are very big issues that we need to come up with solutions for."

Hinkey had issues about signs and string lighting which has recently been outlawed unless over dining areas at night and which must be turned off at closing, and the discourse got rather heated.

"We have been here for two years and we have really tried to work our way in and it hasn't

worked and the reason it hasn't worked is we struggled to repair a tear-down building and didn't have enough money for a sign so we put an open sign on the lawn and we were immediately beat up by the police over and over until we took it out of the ground.

"Town rules say you can't have an open sign on the lawn so no one knew we were here. There are five other businesses in town with open signs separate from their buildings and people who have property to rent have 'for rent' signs in the yard, but I can't do it.

"You cannot have a selective misuse and abuse of the 1st Amendment, so I will keep my open sign in my front yard from now on.

"We need to have a change because you want to take away our livelihood. Every business in this town should be allowed to do it and string lights, too. People are afraid of the bears, they trip over broken concrete. Lights mean people can see and walk up to the windows and look inside. They can't get hurt," said Hinkey.

His partner agreed saying the town needs to listen and come up with a solution to support businesses off Main Street.

"I am asking you to consider this not only for us but for other businesses that aren't on Main Street. We are part of this community, so please consider it," she said.

Powell and Hinkey suggested the town take a bigger part in promoting businesses, too.

"Outdoor recreation is North Carolina's number one revenue generator, more than banking and insurance and financial institutions combined and in Western North Carolina it's even more," said Powell. "We are outside of the town limits, we don't require parking and we're not on Main Street. We don't create traffic and we don't really use any of your infrastructure, but we are dependent on your referrals."

He said since they are out of sight, they are out of mind and requested that the town collaborate with the outdoor recreation

• See BUSINESS page 14

...MISSION continued from page 1

or what will happen next.

One Mission document, titled "ED Focused Plan of Correction: ER Leadership Review," contains 10 action plan items. All the items directly correlate to deficiencies outlined in a 384-page report from the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) obtained by The Watchdog on Thursday. That report described long waits in the emergency department, significant delays in lab work, and neglect that led to the deaths of four patients and injury to others.

The internal document obtained Tuesday by The Watchdog is part of the practical application of a plan of correction that Mission must create and follow or risk loss of its Medicare and Medicaid funding after it was placed in immediate jeopardy by CMS. Mission has until Friday to get the hospital out of immediate

ment, known as a CIWA, within an hour of their arrival and begin treatment as soon as possible to reduce the severity of their withdrawal symptoms.

- When patient needs are escalated to another provider outside the emergency room, closed-loop communication must be used. Closed-loop communication is when the person receiving instruction or information repeats it back to ensure the message is understood correctly, and the sender confirms to "close the loop."

- The timely execution of radiology orders ensures that providers are given important information to make decisions in the best interest of patients.

- All pediatric patients should have an informed consent-to-treat on file.

- A ligature is defined as anything which could be used for the

ber 2023 and several instances that led to immediate jeopardy, the most serious sanction a hospital can receive.

- According to several nurses who work in Mission's emergency department and who are members of its nurses union, the hospital has changed many procedures since early January, around the same time The Watchdog was the first to report that NCDHHS recommended to CMS that the hospital be found in immediate jeopardy.

- In fact, during the time of the NCDHHS inspections, hospital leadership sent an unusual email to all medical staff, The Watchdog revealed, informing it of seemingly obvious expectations in the emergency department, including a need to respond when alerted to a patient's loss of consciousness or "emergent" condition, and to stop to stabilize

It should be noted that the Medicare patient satisfaction survey showed the outlying hospitals have good patient ratings, that it's Mission Asheville that has very low ratings.

jeopardy, the most severe sanction a hospital can face.

The document informs staff that:

- All emergency department patients must receive an initial pain assessment.

- Heart signal monitoring for patients whose care was ordered by a doctor should be completed within 10 minutes.

- Labs should be collected within 30 minutes of the order.

- Patients arriving at the emergency department must be seen, triaged, and have their care assumed by a registered nurse within 10 minutes. This includes patients who are on an EMS stretcher, even if they are not immediately assigned rooms.

- For patients who need heart monitoring through telemetry, nurses, or whomever is delegated, have 30 minutes from the time the telemetry order is placed to begin cardiac monitoring for such patients.

- Patients experiencing alcohol withdrawal must have a completed specialized assess-

purpose of hanging or strangulation. Ligatures pose a risk for patients who may be suicidal.

In addition, the hospital has provided emergency department nurses cheat-sheet style pocket guides to follow the action plan items, as well as instructions on how to interact with NCDHHS investigators.

"This is your chance to shine," reads one document, which tells nurses:

- "Assist unit in completing survey unit readiness checklist

- Greet surveyors with name and title

- No food or drinks in patient care areas

- If you don't know the answers say, "I am not sure, let me find that information for you"

- Policies, personnel files, or printouts of the patient record should be requests and provided through survey support team"

- NCDHHS investigators last visited the hospital for three weeks in November and December. They found nine deficiencies between April 2022 and Novem-

patients at risk of dying.

- The Watchdog had reported in August 2023 on nurses' concerns that the hospital's lax emergency department transfer procedures were endangering patients. For two years, the nurses had sent formal complaints to NCDHHS, but as The Watchdog reported, the agency had not sent investigators to the hospital, citing staff shortages.

- Months later, Mission changed some of its procedures to require phone calls during handoffs, which the nurses had previously requested.

- State investigators visited Mission soon afterward. They found failures in hospital leadership as well as problems with patient handoff procedures and other communication failures.

- "The hospital's leadership failed to ensure a medical provider was responsible for monitoring and ensuring the delivery of care to patients presenting to the emergency department," the CMS report stated.

• See MISSION page 14

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Two loves



Pastor Mark Ford
First Baptist Church
Highlands

The word “love” is thrown about a lot these days. Just this past week it was the word on many a card, boxes of candy, and attached to many roses on Valentine’s Day. But just as “love” has been cheapened by this commercialization, it has also been victimized by its overuse in literature and verbal exchanges throughout time, being stripped of its true meaning.

It has been romanticized, sexualized, politicized, mythologized, and philosophized. For most it doesn’t appear to transcend the domain of Harlequin novels or the poetry of Keats and Lord Byron. It is used as a cursory goodbye by many. “Love” has lost its impact through overuse and vain repetition without real meaning and understanding. Religion is not exempt.

In the Christian domain, it is suffering a great deal today. There are two loves that I want to address in this regard – God’s love and our love for God.

First, let it be stated boldly and without reservation, the Bible tells us that “God is love” (1 John 4:8) and “God is holy” (1 Peter 1:15). God’s nature or essence is primarily one of love and holiness. Directly, God is a personal being who deeply cares for and desires the well-being of His creation. And so “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Thus, love is not just His essence but His energy in reaching out to others. And it is sacrificial. Most are very comfortable with this insight about God’s love. But there is one caveat that must be acknowledged. For “whom the Lord loves He chastens and scourges every child whom He receives” (Hebrews 12:6).

Like any good father who wants the best for his children that he loves, there will be discipline, reproving, and even punishment when that child is wayward and disobeys. Adding to John 3:16 above, we might say, “And God so loves you that He will rebuke you, discipline you, and even punish you because He is love and He loves you!” His love is not a blanket of unconditional acceptance and pabulum of tolerance for the disobedient. He would not be a fit or loving Father who ignored or looked the other way when we disparage and disobey His precepts for godliness. In love He must reprove, rebuke, and even punish when we indulge in lying, hate, bigotry, greed, drunkenness, adultery, fornication, sexual licentiousness, and ... you get the picture. God hates it when we thwart the precepts of His Holy Word – and we can’t be selective. Love hates sin – all sin – for the sake of the sinner and the good of the saint.

Second, you are to love God “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Matthew 22:37, 38). And then, out a genuine love for God you can “love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mt. 22:39). BUT – and you knew this was coming – we cannot begin to claim that we love God unless

• See SPIRITUALLY page 11

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

John 3:16

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CAC@christanglicancashiers.org & 828-743-1701

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Thursdays: 10 am Healing Eucharist

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www.cashiers.church

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

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Wednesdays: Youth 5:30-7pm; Women’s Bible Study: Mondays

4:30pm, Tuesdays 10am; Men’s Bible Study: Wednesdays &

Thursdays 7am @ Zookeeper Bistro

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am in Sanctuary, Wed: Healing Eucharist 12 pm in Chapel, Morn-

ing Prayer: Mon-Thurs 8:30 am in Chapel

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• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from Feb. 16. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a summons/citation, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or those of public officials have been used.

Feb. 16

• At 10:15 a.m., officers responded to a 2-vehicle accident on the Franklin Road near Holt Knob Road.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Feb. 13.

Feb. 13

• At 10:05 a.m., the dept. investigated the cause of smoke at a residence on Buck Creek Road.

Feb. 14

• At 7:29 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Upper Lake Road.

• At 8:30 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Holly Tree Lane.

• At 11:37 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Bowery Road.

Feb. 15

• At 3:14 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a residence on Barney Road.

• At 7:09 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Carriage Lane that resulted in standing by for MAMA he-

licopter.

Feb. 18

• At 11:12 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on the Franklin Road.

• At 2:34 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Little Scaly Road.

• RABUN GAP NACOOCHEE NEWS •

Rabun Gap students participate in statewide elementary honors chorus

Five fourth and fifth-grade students from Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School showcased remarkable commitment and discipline as they participated in the prestigious 2024 GMEA Statewide Elementary Honors Chorus held at the Clayton County Performing Arts Center (CCPAC) in Jonesboro, Georgia on Saturday, February 10.

The students who participated were Conor Healy '32 of Clarkesville, GA; Hudson Garner '31 of Franklin, NC; Harrison Green '31 of Rabun Gap, GA; Crosby Kennett '31 of Rabun Gap, GA; and Natalie Wood '31 of Highlands, NC.

Led by their devoted Lower School Music Teacher, Quashona Antoine, affectionately known as Ms. Qui, students diligently learned five intricate pieces of choral music over the course of a month. Their dedication was evident as they willingly sacrificed recess time every day and even devoted a Saturday morning to perfecting their performances and committing each piece to memory.

Traveling to CCPAC on Friday morn-

...SPIRITUALLY continued from page 10

we obey His Word and follow His precepts for godly living. Jesus said, "He who knows my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him..." (John 14:21).

You see, when you take these two important nuanced accouterments about God's love and our love for God, it is obvious that love is not a cheap sentiment to absolve or excuse or even elevate sin about reproach. Love is not a penknife to cut out those teachings we don't like. Love requires sacrificial obedience to God's total revelation in His Word, and this Biblical, Divine love holds us accountable to the Truth that is God's.



Pictured, from left, are Harrison Green '31 of Rabun Gap, GA; Hudson Garner '31 of Franklin, NC; Conor Healy '32 of Clarkesville, GA; Lower School music teacher Ms. Quashona Antoine; Crosby Kennett '31 of Rabun Gap, GA; and Natalie Wood '31 of Highlands, NC.

ing, the students engaged in a rigorous day of rehearsals guided by the expertise of acclaimed choral directors Dr. Jordan Cox and Dr. Kay Pace with over 250 other fourth and fifth-grade students.

"Through their unwavering dedication and hard work, these students proudly rep-

resented RGNS with honor and excellence, demonstrating the profound impact of commitment, discipline, and perseverance in achieving their musical aspirations and creating memories that will last a lifetime," said Ms. Antoine.

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SENIOR COUPLE FROM HIGHLANDS SEEKING A YEAR ROUND RENTAL. Will consider neighboring towns in our Western NC area. Please call Lynn Kimball at 828-421-8193. (st. 2/15)

PARTNER/INVESTOR FOR A DOG KENNEL BUSINESS on my property south of Highlands. If interested and to learn more, please email Brian Grace at gracebrian907@gmail.com. (st. 1/18)

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HIGHLANDS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE/ VISIT HIGHLANDS, NC -- Welcome Center and Office Coordinator – Part Time, Hourly. Performs a variety of administrative and clerical tasks including, but not limited to, oversight of the Welcome Center and its functions, scheduling, communications, inventory, data entry, tracking, and reporting. View full job description visit: <https://www.highlandschamber.org/live-work/job-board/>

• See CLASSIFIEDS page 14

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...CLASSIFIED continued from page 13

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HIGH COUNTRY PHOTO/KEVIN VINSON: scanning photos, slides & negatives to CD or DVD for easier viewing. Video transfer to DVD. Everything done in house. Leave message at 828-526-5208.

...BUSINESS continued from page 8

industry perhaps by putting decals on windows to let people know they are available.

Hinke said Highlands Town Board could be proactive in its support of businesses and follow Brevard's Town Council that initiated the creation of a phone application map showing where every business is located.

Hunsinger said as the new chairman of the Chamber Board he wanted to see more collaboration between the town and the Chamber saying all these issues would require public and private input.

"We aren't going to solve anything tonight. But I think we can

have a dynamic and ongoing relationship. This is a chance to refresh and move forward together. A big part of this is the occupancy tax and we at the chamber hold the keys to that. The money that is earned in Highlands comes back to Highlands and the chamber is responsible for that.

"We need to continue to use these dollars to promote our community, it's quality of life and sustainability to provide vital assistance to local nonprofits and to offer free, family friendly entertainment for residents and visitors.

"By fostering a collaborative relationship we can ensure that

...MISSION continued from page 9

• Hospital leadership also "failed to ensure emergency care and services were provided according to policy" and "failed to ensure adverse events were documented, tracked, trended, and analyzed in order to implement preventive actions and identify success of actions taken," according to the report.

• Leadership and other issues were connected to system-wide breakdowns and the deaths of four patients: one who died after a bag of medication ran dry, two who died after his labs were delayed; one who was left alone in a hallway bed.

• One patient who did not die had labs delayed for hours as he suffered from alcohol withdrawal, according to the report. He waited in the emergency room for nine hours, and during that time he suffered a seizure and fell, wounding his head.

• "Band-Aids on a gunshot

wound"

• The changes have brought pressure on nurses who say they are being micromanaged. Some are being asked to sign forms about care they gave patients weeks ago. Others are being told by management that even the smallest mistake will mean huge setbacks for the plan of correction, they say.

• Still others are worried that, once surveyors leave and the pressure following the immediate jeopardy dissipates, HCA and Mission management will continue to staff the emergency department below what is needed.

• "I know it's temporary," Jennifer Gibson, an emergency department registered nurse and union member, told The Watchdog in a Feb 5 interview. "It's discouraging because I know in my heart that ... it's going to go right back to 'the war zone,' as we call it."

...MAYOR continued from page 2

Street? Or maintaining public restrooms and even, perhaps, adding more. Or covering the Founders' Park Plaza for year-around use.

By the way, there are some things that other towns like Asheville do that I am absolutely against for Highlands. Those cumbersome, cocktail bicycle contraptions they have that sling partygoers around downtown, listening to cool music, and drinking simultaneously, do

not conform with the style of this unique mountain community.

Nor do I support the fad of creating social drinking districts like Franklin, Sylva, and Bevard have done. Such a district might be great for those towns, but with our center isle parking on Main Street and the existing heavy traffic periods, I don't see it for Highlands. And I am not uninformed. I have attended presentations and

Highlands remains a premiere place to live and work. We are happy to have that relationship with you and are happy to move forward," he said.

Mayor Taylor said he appreciated the turnout and said this would be the first of many collaborative meetings to come.

During the public comment period of the Town Board meeting that started after the worksession, Lila Howland, a member of the Highlands Neighborhood Coalition said she hoped the board would consider having a meeting with residents and neighborhoods as it did with the business community.

- Kim Lewicki

• Jacob Rhea, also an emergency department registered nurse and union member, said he feared the implemented fixes could be temporary and that Mission needed ultimately to focus on hiring more full-time employees.

• "All of the nursing staff at Mission ER, we want to actually have a better solution," Rhea said in a Feb. 6 interview. "We want to be able to provide the care that people need. But the way that they're going about it is they're trying to put Band-Aids on a gunshot wound."

• Asheville Watchdog is a nonprofit news team producing stories that matter to Asheville and Buncombe County. Andrew R. Jones is a Watchdog investigative reporter. Email arjones@avlwatchdog.org. The Watchdog's reporting is made possible by donations from the community. To show your support for this vital public service go to avlwatchdog.org/donate.

discussed the matter with other municipal and state officials at conferences. A social drinking district is a complicated process and not for every town.

I am also working on creative approaches to workforce housing. Inevitably, Highlands will change and do things differently, but let us make changes deliberately and with care in the spirit of preserving this unique environment and community.

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