

# Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., Dec. 14, 2023

## Candidates line up for Primary Election

By Brittney Lofthouse

The filing period for candidates running for office in the 2024 elections ends Friday, December 15, and with 2024 being a presidential election year,

but North Carolina will also see a closely-watched race for governor, as incumbent Roy Cooper is term-limited.

A handful of candidates have filed for county and local elec-

tions as of Wednesday, Dec. 13 at 9:30 a.m. During the first week of filing, candidates for statewide and congressional positions also put their names on the ballots.

• See **PRIMARY** page 19

## HS varsity swim team now at 5-0

On Tues., Dec. 5 the Highlands Varsity Swim Team traveled to Brevard to swim against the Asheville Trailblazers and the Brevard Varsity Swim Team. The boys won 105 to 45 to 93, respectively, winning on 7 of 11 events.

Freshman Jack Sumner won the 100 butterfly, and the 100 backstroke; Junior Finneas Garner won the 50 freestyle, and 2nd in the 100 freestyle; Sophomore Conner Hughes won the 500 freestyle and 5th in the 200 IM; Freshman Chase Kenter won the 200 IM and 2nd in the 100 butterfly; Sophomore Aniah McKim won the 100 breaststroke and 3rd in the 200 IM; Paolo McRae got 2nd at the 50 freestyle and 3rd in the 200 freestyle; Jesus Mendoza-Tentle got 3rd in the 100 breaststroke and 5th in the 200 freestyle.

The relay team of Garner, McRae, Hughes, & Sumner won the 400 freestyle relay.



## 'Home for the Holidays' now on stage at PAC

Mountain Theatre Company opened its production of Home for the Holidays at the Highlands Performing Arts Center on December 8.

It's Christmas Eve, and spirits are low across the globe. A ragtag group of show elves come

together to broadcast their annual North Pole holiday show live to the whole world to raise Christmas spirits and save the joy of the season.

This festive original musical features musical comedy at its

• See **HOME** page 22

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## MC Commissioners vote to terminate Shearl's resolution seeking partisan school board races

By Brittney Lofthouse

Tuesday night, Hilary Wilkes, the Highlands representative of the Macon County Board of Education, along with Board Chair Jim Breedlove, presented a resolution to Macon County Commissioners urging them to end consideration of a resolution seeking state lawmakers to change the way board of education members are elected in Macon County.

The resolution Wilkes presented was unanimously approved by the Board of Education during its Monday board meeting and was the result of Commissioner John Shearl's request last month for the county to petition the state to change the election method.

"I'm here to speak on behalf of our full board in regard to the resolution discussed at your last meeting, to change our seats from non-partisan to partisan," said

Wilkes. "Thank you for making the decision to table your resolution and give our board an opportunity to discuss and weigh in on this issue. At our November meeting, we shared our thoughts. And we all share an opposition to such a change and have voted unanimously on the following resolution."

The resolution stated that the recent debate among the Macon County Board of Commissioners, held without notice or input from the Macon County Board of Education or with the general public, has included the question of whether the county should petition the local delegation to the NC General Assembly for a local act enabling or requiring the Macon County Board of Education to be elected on a partisan basis.

Local interest and concerns

• See **PARTISAN** page 22



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# • THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

## • MAYOR ON DUTY •

### More legislature updates

A critical shortage of workforce housing plagues communities and economic development across the nation. What are the factors that contribute to the shortage? Let's start off with off-the-chart building costs, high land prices, interest rates, and investment companies buying houses only to charge high rents. While the expanding short-term rental market contributes to the problem, some advocates believe that strict zoning and building codes that limit density and construction options also aggravate the situation.

The North Carolina Legislature saw the introduction of several workforce housing bills in this past long session. Surprisingly, none of the bills gained final approval.

HB 562 and SB 317 were titled Addressing the Workforce Housing Crisis. In its recent legislative digest, the North Carolina League of Municipalities pointed out that the NC Homebuilders Association Builders supported this legislation. If passed, it would have cut or curtailed local zoning and planning regulations in order to promote housing affordability. The bill would have also changed density requirements, translating into more units per acre of land. The issue of density has been at the forefront of promoting more affordable



Highlands Mayor  
Patrick Taylor

workforce housing.

To me, there was also a disingenuous provision in this legislation. The bill called for income limits, or a low-income provision, for a portion of the units, but it was only for one year. The bill stalled.

HB 537-The Workforce Housing Act was also introduced. Its main provision would allow multi-family housing in all business and residential zones. It also would limit building design provisions. To promote multi-family housing, this

bill provided that land owned by local governments could be sold or leased below market value provided the land was used for multi-family units. This bill also did not pass.

Another related bill was HB 409/SB374-Regulation for Accessory Dwelling Units. I reviewed this bill in last week's article. Again, my problem with this bill was that if short-term rentals were not allowed in these units, the goal of providing housing for working people would be drastically curtailed.

Since last week I have talked with experts from the North Carolina League of Municipalities. They reminded me that any town could amend its zoning ordinance to permit accessory dwelling units. Highlands could do a review of dwelling unit provisions where the town could create very specific restrictions in order to maintain the residential character of a neighborhood. Such an action would have to have strong community and board support.

The notion of allowing accessory dwelling units gets back to the challenges of building workforce housing. A homeowner seeking to develop such units would face changes that may not make such a project economically feasible. High construction costs and interest rates might be insurmountable obstacles at this time.

So, efforts for workforce housing did not move forward in the state legislature. However, I sense a growing concern and need for action.

SB 515 Water and Sewer Affordability Act also passed the Senate but not the House. This bill would limit the amount customers living outside a city could be charged for water and sewer. A municipality would have to conduct a public hearing in order to raise rates above 25%. With growing pressure to extend water and sewer beyond the town limits of Highlands, I find this bill to be a concern. It, along with previous state actions, portends

more control of these municipal utilities by the state. My reaction is to be highly cautious about extending these valuable services beyond town limits. Such a move might make the state view our system as a regional rather than a town utility.

All this maneuvering and positioning is an

effort to create more workforce housing.

Where Highlands, the state, and the country are headed over this critical challenge remains to be seen. Stay tuned; this is an issue of interest that affects a wide range of people.

There is more to come in the coming year on this important issue.

## • HIC'S VIEW •



"Well lets see. Our civilization landed about ten thousand years ago, domesticated the natives. But be careful, right now the natives are restless."

## • WEATHER •

Thu, 14-Dec	Fri, 15-Dec	Sat, 16-Dec	Sun, 17-Dec
49°F 25°F	50°F 25°F	50°F 39°F	48°F 38°F
Plenty of sunshine	Plenty of sun	Sunshine and patchy clouds	On-and-off rain, some heavy
RealFeel® High 53° Low: 27°	RealFeel® High 54° Low: 28°	RealFeel® High 53° Low: 25°	RealFeel® High 46° Low: 36°

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### Highlands Newspaper

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## • LETTERS •

### Does Highlands need a Food and Wine Festival?

Dear Editor,

In the Nov. 30 edition, I read the letter-to-the-editor regarding a citizen's concerns and questions about the recent Food and Wine Festival sponsored by Highlands Events entitled "Let's stop catering to the out-of-town party throwers."

It brought to mind the past (2022) Festival and my own concerns about the image the festival portrays of the community. My granddaughter and her fiancé were visiting from out of state and it was the first in-person introduction of Highlands for our future son-in-law. Their visit coincidentally coincided with the Food and Wine Festival, so they decided to go downtown to check out what was going on. On their return I asked the future son-in-law what was his first impression of our beautiful mountain town. He responded that the first thing he noticed was a man down on all fours on the sidewalk vomiting with two police trying to help the inebriated man to his feet. Matt's description was much more graphic and descriptive, but maybe not good protocol for a letter to the editor. Surely this is not the first impression of Highlands we citizens want for our town.

My concern is that we may not need a Food and Wine Festival. We have many fine restaurants in Highlands, all with excellent chefs, and as both full-time and seasonal residents, it is very difficult to procure a reservation except at either 5:30 p.m. or 9:00 p.m. for two or more weeks ahead. I am delighted that businesses and restaurants are doing so well, but surely this is driving their usual customers away. Local restaurants are so busy, it must be difficult for them to provide the service they might choose. Why would we need an annual Food and Wine Festival when we already have excellent restaurants?

I did not realize until recently that an out-of-town "events company" coordinated the Food and Wine Festival, so I question why do we need an "events company" with little or no interest in our community to manage these events. And, more to the point, why do we need weekly "events?"

Kelsey Hutchinson Park was not designated as an "Events Arena" for the Chamber of Commerce's use. It was designed and dedicated as a "People's Park" and given to the Town of Highlands by those who donated toward the building the park. Thus, the Town Commissioners must give permission for Founders Park to be used continually by the Chamber and others.

Therefore, I submit that the Town of Highlands Commissioners need to say "No" to so many of these extraneous, unnecessary, unwanted events sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce. We have an excellent group of Commissioners and a great Mayor. Step up and do your duty for the entire community!! We count on you.

**Mercedes Heller**  
**Highlands**

### Knife fights over the deck chairs on the Titanic

Dear Editor,

The world as we know it is changing dramatically. We have entered the era of the polycrisis in which a cluster of related global and local risks with compounding effects are having unprecedented effect – greater than the sum of the individual risks. We are barreling toward both climate and democracy collapse. We are imbedded in wars and wars over wars and it is unclear which nations, terrorist groups, financiers or parties are pulling the strings. For all the good artificial intelligence can offer humanity, we are witnessing its use to drive agendas with falsehoods and biases on repeat. Dictatorships globally are on the rise. Billionaires can decide if a country gets wifi or how the Supreme Court will take a decision. At home, 16% of American children are living in poverty, 44 million people in the US are food insecure, workers cannot make ends meet on low wages, there is a housing crisis, and our young people are falling behind in education while suffering depression, anxiety and fear. We have lost the plot.

And in North Carolina? Our leaders are busy plotting ways to never lose an election again, getting permission to decide what goes on record and what does not, and formulating a shadow police to do their bidding. Our leaders are distracting us with fear mongering over the non-starter issues such as taking away gas stoves or legalizing marijuana while they are in fact taking away our reproductive and voting rights and making it legal to hate or hurt anyone who does not agree, believe, orient or look like them. And, we are paying them handsomely to do this, our taxes pay their salaries and insurance that the rest of us can't afford or access while they are bolstering their wallets with big money from lobbyists. They ignore

• See LETTERS page10





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# • DINING •

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# • OBITUARIES •

## Jon Thorpe Earp

Jon Thorpe Earp, 80, passed away peacefully on December 4, 2023.

Jon was born in Des Moines, Iowa, to the late Thorpe and Hazel Earp on December 27, 1942. The family moved to Sarasota, Florida in 1951 where Jon was involved in all sports, especially Sarasota County Little League. He graduated from Sarasota High in 1961 and then enlisted in the United States Navy from 1961 to 1964. Jon was a superintendent for Gulf Contracting in Sarasota, until moving with his family to Highlands, NC in 1979, where he continued his carpentry business, Carpentry Unlimited. Jon loved building, fishing, hunting, and spending time with his family.

Jon is survived by his wife of 56 years, Kay Calhoun Earp, two children, Kristy (Edward) of Highlands, NC and Kevin (Jane) of Scaly Mtn., NC. Four grandchildren, (Kaitlin, Kenan, James, and Katie), and one brother, Steve (Patti) of Venice, FL.

No services will be held.

Online condolences may be made at [www.bryantgrant-funeralhome.com](http://www.bryantgrant-funeralhome.com). Bryant-Grant Funeral Home and Crematory is serving the Earp family.



## Patricia Moore Parker

Patricia Moore Parker, 79, passed away peacefully at home in the early morning of October 30, 2023. She was a loving mother, grandmother, and friend, and her memory will forever be cherished by those who knew and loved her.

Born October 19, 1944, in Kilgore, TX, Patricia was a remarkable soul with a heart full of kindness and a spirit full of resilience. Some of her favorite times were in Whitesides Cove, NC where she and her husband have resided since 1991 and began visiting as early as 1963 when they first married. She made a lasting impact on her community there helping with Summer Chapel for over 15 years.

Patricia is survived by her husband of 60 years, Joseph Parker, three children, and seven grandchildren. Her children: John (Tonya), Thomas (Diana), and daughter Trish Santoro (Joby), her grandchildren: Jessica White (Jonathan), Christina Parker Holmes (Jonathan), Ashlynn, Megan, Kayla, JoJo, and Eli.

Patricia is predeceased by her parents Junius and Rethal Moore, her brother Brice Moore, sister Susan Moore, and infant son, Fleming Parker. Their reunion in the afterlife brings comfort to all who loved them.

Her memory will be cherished by her family and friends for her passion for gardening, her delicious homemade eggnog, her quick sense of humor, and her great advice. She was a U.S. Marine Corp wife to her core and volunteered with numerous organizations at each post including Glynco GA, MCAS New River NC, MCAS Cherry Point NC, and NAS



Beeville TX.

A celebration of life will be held in her honor on December 16, 2023, at The Church of the Incarnation in Highlands, NC at 2:00 pm. All those who knew, and loved Pat are welcome to attend and celebrate her remarkable life.

Pat will be deeply missed, but her legacy will live on through the memories and the love she shared with us all.

Online condolences may be made at [www.bryantgrantfuneralhome.com](http://www.bryantgrantfuneralhome.com). Bryant-Grant Funeral Home and Crematory is serving the Parker family.

## Lois Hedden Rains

Mrs. Lois Hedden Rains, 76, passed away Thursday, December 7, 2023. Mrs. Rains was born October 2, 1947, in Clemson, SC, to the late Wilbur and Opal Allsep Hedden. Lois worked in medical research, was a reporter for several newspapers and she held a Real Estate Broker's license. She loved gardening, humming birds, photography, and traveling. Lois was a loving wife, mother, grandmother, and sister.



Survivors include her husband, John Rains; three children, Kevin Rains, Victoria Rains Jenkins (Stephen Jenkins), and Cameron Rains; three grandchildren, Elisha Rains Wallace, Galeb Rains Wallace, and Allison Jenkins; three brothers, Gene Hedden (Barbara), Ralph Hedden (Jewel), and Bud Hedden (Pat); and two sisters, Linda Hedden and Mary Dotson (John).

In addition to her parents Lois was preceded in death by three brothers, Tom Hedden, Jimmy Hedden, Lawrence Hedden.

A funeral service was held Monday, December 11, 2023, at the Double Springs Methodist Church in Franklin, NC with the Rev. Roy Lowe officiating. Burial followed in the church cemetery.

Online condolences can be left at [www.bryantgrant-funeralhome.com](http://www.bryantgrant-funeralhome.com) Bryant-Grant Funeral Home & Crematory is serving the Rains family.

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# • INVESTING AT 4,118 Ft •

## Embracing the blessings of Christmas: A season of joy, love, and giving

As the winter chill descends and festive lights illuminate the streets, the world eagerly anticipates the magical season of Christmas. Beyond the twinkling decorations and the aromas that fill our kitchens, Christmas brings with it a unique set of blessings that transcend borders and unite people in the spirit of joy, love, and giving. With the wars that now continue depriving innocent people of their God-given right to life and spreading hatred and judgment even in our own country, Christmas will prevail.

To those of us fortunate to live on the plateau part time or full-time we are truly blessed. There is something so special and almost magical to life here. I have been fortunate to be a full-time resident for 29 years, having shared a wonderful life with my late husband for 33 years. I am sharing grief with several friends who recently lost spouses, mothers, fathers, and a young mother and daughter who could not escape a house fire as her husband and two-year-old son watched in terror as their lives changed forever when flames engulfed their home. The cliché of “every day is a gift” could not be more relevant and is a Christmas gift to all tied with heartstrings.

Here are a few of my thoughts during this holiday season:

1. Celebrate the Gift of Love: At the heart of Christmas lies a celebration of love—the love of family, friends, and even strangers. The holiday season prompts us to reflect on the importance of human connections and the warmth that emanates from the bonds we share. It's a time to express affection, reconcile differences, and strengthen the ties that bind us together.

2. Spread Joy and Cheer: Christmas is synonymous with joy, and the infectious laughter and smiles that fill the air are blessings in themselves. The season encourages us to embrace a childlike wonder, rediscovering the magic and delight in the small things. Whether it's the joyous sound of carols, the twinkle of holiday lights, or the thrill of exchanging gifts, Christmas bestows upon us the precious gift of happiness.

3. Be Kind and Generous: The spirit of giving is a hallmark of Christmas, em-



**Pat Allen BIC**  
Allen Tate Realtors/Pat Allen  
Realty Group.

phasizing the joy that comes from selflessly helping others. From participating in charitable initiatives to small acts of kindness, the season inspires generosity and compassion. The blessings of Christmas extend beyond receiving gifts to the fulfillment derived from giving to those in need. There are many non-profits that need our help on the plateau for people and animals in need. Seek and you will find them. It doesn't take much to make a big difference.

4. Traditions that Create Lasting Memories: Christmas traditions, whether rooted in cultural practices or personal rituals, play a significant role in fostering a sense of belonging and continuity. From decorating the tree to sharing festive meals, these traditions create enduring memories that bind generations together. The blessings of Christmas lie not only in the present celebrations but also in the nostalgia and shared experiences that echo through time.

5. Renewing Hope and Faith: In a world now marked by challenges and uncertainties, Christmas serves as a beacon of hope. The story of the nativity inspires faith and reminds us of the enduring power of hope, even in the face of adversity. The season encourages us to believe in the possibility of positive change and the potential for a brighter future. We must never lose hope.

Christmas, with its blessings of love, joy, and giving, serves as a universal reminder of the best qualities within humanity. It is a season that encourages us to look beyond the material aspects and embrace the intangible gifts that truly enrich our lives. As we exchange gifts, share laughter, and gather with loved ones, let us reflect on the profound blessings of Christmas. They are real and priceless.

• Pat Allen is the broker-in-charge of Allen Tate/Pat Allen Realty Group in the downtown office at 295 Dillard Road. She is a Certified Luxury Home Marketing Specialist, a consistent award-winner, and a top producer every year for her real estate career of 19 years. You may reach her at 828-200-9179 or email her at [pat.allen@allentate.com](mailto:pat.allen@allentate.com)



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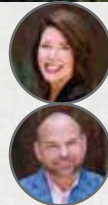
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## BEAR CAT LANE

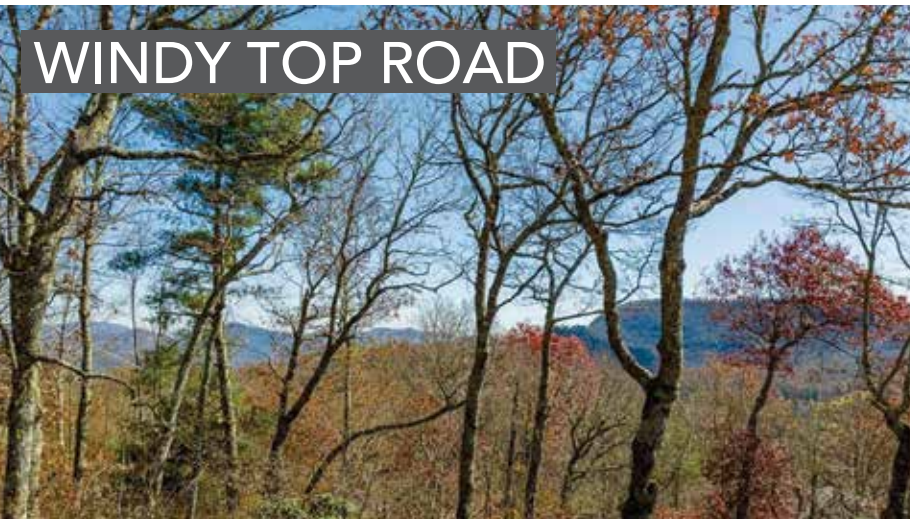


You can build your own dream home in this picturesque setting where you can maintain your southern view.

Cashiers, NC 28774 | **\$185,000** | MLS #101433  
Ken Fernandez | 828-507-3156



## WINDY TOP ROAD

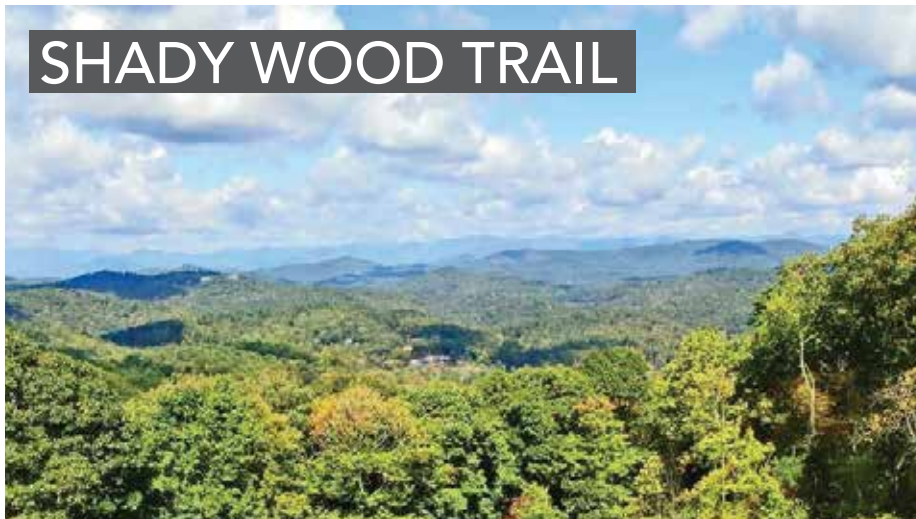


This exceptional building lot offers more than just a place to call home; it provides a lifestyle.

Highlands, NC 28741 | **\$185,000** | MLS #103300  
Rick Harrison & Steve Sheppard | 404-906-5113



## SHADY WOOD TRAIL



Amazing long range layered views lot located inside the gates of Old Edwards Club! 1.53 acres corner lot.

Highlands, NC 28714 | **\$315,000** | MLS #103268  
Darlene Conley | 404-427-2448





## ...LETTERS continued from page 4

nore what the population at large needs and the views they express. They are not representing North Carolinians. They are representing themselves.

Our NC leaders are in no way prepared for the polycrisis we are confronted by. They have moved beyond rearranging the deck chairs and have resorted to knife fights over the deck chairs on the Titanic. The ship is sinking, and worse still they are exacerbating the situation

or pretending it is not happening. We need leaders who are critical thinkers, who will rise up and see further, change the discourse, have foresight and the political will to make a difference. We need people who will be creative in solution finding, work for the values our country was founded upon, and build bridges among and be inspired by the diversity of our population, not seeking to pull us a part, and will work towards our

success in our livelihoods, education, experience and well-being. North Carolinians, we have to do our part. We must find and support those leaders who will put the knives away, stop trampling on our fellow passengers and/or become leaders ourselves and get busy with distributing the life vests.

**Constance Neely  
Macon County**

## Examples of how the town doesn't support businesses

Dear Editor,

I would like to respond to Mayor Pat Taylor's request for feedback about how the town doesn't support businesses which he posted online and in the newspapers. First, I appreciate him calling me his friend as I, too, consider him a friend. However, we see the actions of the Town Board differently.

I want to start by emphasizing that what is beneficial and enjoyable to residents, visitors, and businesses are not mutually exclusive. The board cannot make decisions with the intent of helping or reducing one group without affecting the other groups.

### STRs/Occupancy Tax

The mayor and the board spent over a year trying to pass indefensible ordinances to eliminate Short-term Rentals (STRs) which ultimately failed and resulted in the current reasonable ordinance. But the mayor and the board did succeed in dividing this town.

Now we wait to see how much of our tax dollars the mayor and the board are willing to spend on another, most likely indefensible, scheme to amortize STRs as a use in R1 and R2.

Two board members have recently made it well known their objection to STRs is that they create a 2-tiered zoning district. I find this ironic considering the board changed the uses allowed in the B1 district sometime in the recent past (maybe at the adoption of the UDO) to remove hotels and make them nonconforming uses.

I owned property in B1 when

this occurred, and no one seemed concerned about a 2-tiered zoning district then. In addition to making STRs in R1 and R2 nonconforming uses, this current board also added the following language to Article 7-Nonconformities in the UDO:

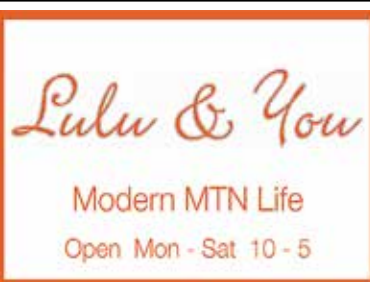
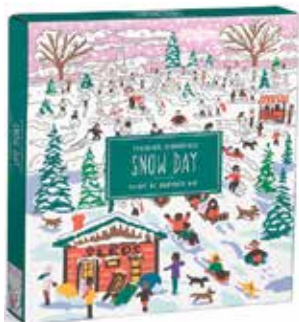
The provisions of this Section are intended and designed to limit substantial investment in nonconformities, to prohibit the intensification of nonconformities and to bring about eventual elimination...

Consequently, the Town Board has put Highlands Inn, Old Edwards Inn, and Highlander Mountain House on notice that it desires to eliminate them.

The hotels and STRs the board wants to eliminate have generated substantial increases in Occupancy Tax over the years. The Town has long leased town-owned building to nonprofits for nominal fees, however, when the Visitor's Center went from receiving \$100,000 a year to about \$1 million the mayor and the board started using words like "deserve" and "entitled" when discussing why some of the Occupancy Tax should be used for town projects as well as charging higher rent for the Chamber which is also a non-profit.

The board's ongoing determination that the Chamber pay for public restrooms appears that it is unaware that Sales Tax from hotels and STRs generated about \$50,000 which went directly to the town's General Fund. I fail to un-

• See LETTERS page 16



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Highlands**







As we enter this season of giving, we want to take a moment to express our gratitude for your support of our Mission to lift health and well-being across the Plateau.

From our village to yours

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Cashiers  
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Season  
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CANDLELIGHT SERVICE  
5:00 PM DECEMBER 24TH

COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH  
3645 CASHIERS RD HIGHLANDS NC 28741

## • BIZ/ORG NEWS •



### TL&LC on giving thanks

By Anna Norton

As 2023 draws to a close, The Literacy & Learning Center has much to be thankful for. We started the year with extensive damage to our Learning Center from a frozen and burst pipe. The Highlands United Methodist Church offered their space for us to hold our programs while our building was being repaired, for which we are most grateful.

The building was fully repaired by April, and we are thankful for the local businesses such as Highlands Handyman, Highlands Decorating Center, Dave Miller Plumbing, ServePro, and our landlords, Margaret O'Donnell and Al Bolt, who volunteered their time, labor, and funding to help the center re-open.

Our after-school program has been re-structured thanks to the vision of our newest Programs Manager, Carline Cox, and students are being supported more than ever. We are grateful to our community partner organizations: The Bascom, International Friendship Center, Highlands Biological Station, Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust, Hudson Library, the Counseling Center of Highlands, Highlands-Cashiers Hospital, and Highlands Police Department, for providing programming for After-School Enrichment. We are also thankful for the Highlands School teachers and administrators who support our work with their students for a common goal.

We are grateful to Allisha Mason,

who provided a second round of summer camps this year, allowing us to help prevent the summer slide for more local youth than before. We are grateful to our newest full-time staff member, Carolyn Middlebrooks, who will be leading us on the exciting venture of our new pre-K program that will begin in 2024.

We are grateful to our many donors and community granting organizations, including Dogwood Health Trust, Highlands Motoring Festival, Regions Bank, Our Lady of the Mountains Catholic Church, First Presbyterian Church of Highlands, Macon County Community Funding Pool, Rotary Club of Highlands, Rotary Club of Highlands - Mountaintop, WNC Bridge Foundation, Glass Foundation, Cullasaja Women's Outreach, Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, The Williams Family Foundation, and Mountain Findings, for providing funding to make all of our programs available for free to the community. We are grateful to our devoted volunteers who patiently give of their time to foster understanding for our students. We are grateful to our Board of Directors: Kirk Dornbush (Board Chair), Vickie Betts, Mark Chmar (Vice Chair), John Golen, Bill Lathem, Bob Lennon, Lisa Richards (Treasurer), Susan Smith, and Dawn Van Fleet (Secretary) for their dedication in steering the ship of learning.

We warmly wish peace and gratitude to all, especially during this giving season.



## • BIZ/ORG NEWS •

### 'Early Bear' Bear Shadow discounts for single-day and two-day tickets are now available

Bear Shadow music festival – the two-day weekend event in Scaly Mountain May 11-12<sup>th</sup> is offering a blind ticket presale with 'early bear' discounts for single-day and two-day tickets.

Fans will have the opportunity to purchase discounted tickets ahead of the official lineup announcement, which will be made at a later date.

The festival will feature a variety of live musical acts for nearly any musical taste. Previous Bear Shadow performers include Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real, Drew Holcomb & The Neighbors, Jason Isbell and The 400 Unit, St. Paul & The Broken Bones, Band of Horses, Trampled by Turtles, Spoon, The Head & The Heart, The War & Treaty and more. In addition to

live music, the festival features a local makers market, artisan food and craft cocktails.

Blind ticket sale prices represent a 10% discount off of regular priced single-day tickets and 15% discount off of regular priced two-day tickets. Blind presale tickets will be available on Thursday, Dec. 7 beginning at 8 a.m.

Visit <https://bearshadownc.com/> for information about how to purchase tickets.

Bear Shadow, produced by Highlands Festivals, Inc. and Eleven Events, is a music festival named in honor of the bear-like shadow that appears behind the region's Whiteside Mountain in the fall and spring. The music main stage, called "Base Camp," will be held at Winfield Farm in Scaly Mountain, about 7 miles from Main Street in Highlands.

Visit <https://bearshadownc.com/> for information about how to purchase tickets.

1 Day GA - \$157.50/pp

1 Day VIP - \$292.50/pp

2 Day GA - \$255.00/pp

2 Day VIP - \$510.00/pp

Platinum (up to 8 people in pod) - \$6,000/2 day

*We ♥ Locals*  
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THEATRE COMPANY  
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## HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS DECEMBER 8 - 24

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Fun for all ages, this ALL NEW musical revue promises dazzling costumes, high energy choreography, and is sure to fill audiences with good, old-fashioned holiday cheer!



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Highlands Chamber of Commerce / Visit Highlands, NC

[WWW.MOUNTAINTHEATRE.COM](http://WWW.MOUNTAINTHEATRE.COM)





## ...LETTERS continued from page 10

derstand why a visitor's use of our roads, sidewalks, water, sewer, and electricity is

more of a burden than that of a full-time resident of Highlands.

If all STRs became full-time residences, would the town still have the same attitude? I believe it is the town's responsibility to provide services to every resident and business in the town limits regardless of ownership or length of occupancy.

The most recent theme from the board is that it should receive Occupancy Tax money for infrastructure like Jackson County. On several occasions the mayor and the board have said they want money like Jackson County to spend on roads, sidewalks, utilities, etc. I talked to the Jackson County planner and he explained that Jackson County does not operate under the same state legislation as Macon County. They worked with their state legislators and passed a bill allowing the Occupancy Tax rate to be raised to a maximum of 6% and to allow for grants for infrastructure improvement if very strict guidelines are met. It's similar to requesting a zoning variance in Highlands where there

are specific conditions that must be met. Money is not just given to the town of Sylva or Jackson County; projects must be presented and approved. I'm regularly amazed that our Town Board does not understand how the Occupancy Tax legislation works and what rules must be followed regarding expenditures.

### Car Chargers

The Chamber's request for use of town parking spaces for electric car chargers was met with misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about car chargers. This request took multiple meetings when it should have been a simple matter. No funds were being requested, no ongoing budget line items, the Chamber just wanted to designate a few parking spaces for car chargers. The Town is in the business of selling electricity and the Chamber wanted to buy.

A board member argued that we should not give preference to electric cars by designating spaces, yet they passed a UDO that gives preferences to real estate agents as it applies to the employee/business parking ordinance. The mayor questioned what would happen if they changed the type of plug used in electric cars. I had the only publicly available car charger for over six years and when the Chamber considered chargers, they called me to ask the pros and cons. When Highlands Country Club considered chargers, they called me. However, when this request came before the board no one called me to ask questions.

### Planning Board/Comp Plan

The board treats the Planning Board like a necessary nuisance and only completed the Comprehensive Plan to continue enforcement of the Zoning Ordinances which was required by state law. The town made a big deal of involving residents in the Comp Plan process and holding multiple public forums. Once it was passed the mayor and the board said it was more of a guideline/suggestion than a plan and the town was under no obligation to follow it.

This attitude has continued by the total lack of any progress updates, or reports from the Planning Department or Planning Board. To me this is not surprising because several years ago I held a meeting of past Planning Board members and a Town Board member so we could express our thoughts on the need for a Comprehensive Plan and hiring a qualified Planner. The Board member disagreed and did not think Highlands needed a Comprehensive Plan or Planner; "We all know what Highlands needs to be," was the comment.

To date the Planning Board has cancelled more meetings than it has held. There was a time when the Planning Board met

every month, even without agenda items, to discuss current planning issues facing small towns.

### Parking

Whenever an issue arises that involves public parking, we hear one of two things: 1) Highlands has more parking spaces than any town of its size in western North Carolina; or 2) We cannot approve this request because it will take up parking spaces.

This dysfunctional approach to parking manifests in many ways. Our UDO has outdated parking restrictions on commercial buildings, it restricts much needed incidental apartments downtown due to parking restrictions, the town perennially marks many public parking spaces as Loading Zones, or No Parking, without any review to see if the need still exists.

### Utility Charges

On a personal example, when I installed a generator at my building, I combined three commercial electric meters into one as both a safety measure and a convenience for the town. The result was the town installed a demand meter which charges a large fee for using more power at one time (not total for the month). I didn't increase our usage, but my monthly electric bill increased. I inquired many times with town employees about how the demand meter rates were calculated and was told they didn't know. The town website explains how residential and standard commercial meter rates are calculated but not demand meters. I don't think this is in keeping with NC Utility Commission rules.

When my three meters were combined into one, I still had two accounts for water/sewer only (the water meters were not combined) and I was still being charged the Coal Ash Recovery fee. I brought this to the mayor's attention and after several months the fee was removed but the mayor did not offer to refund the money collected for all the prior months.

On the two accounts with only water/sewer, I get charged a monthly garbage fee for each, in addition to the highest garbage rate for the one account with the electric meter. So, I'm paying almost double for garbage but only getting the service for a single account. When I inquired with the town office about a water meter account being charged a garbage fee, I was told it was "town policy." When I asked to see this policy in public town documents nothing was presented.

I would be happy to sit with the mayor and discuss any and all of these issues.

**Thomas Craig  
Highlands**

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## **Sunday, December 17, 5 pm**

### **Sacred Seasonal Music by Candlelight**

### **Sung by Ensemble and Congregation**

### **All are Welcome**

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# • HIGHLANDS EVENTS •

## NEW POOL SCHEDULE

• Lap Swim: Mon.-Fri., 6-9:45a, and Sat., 10a-11p - 6 lanes. Water Aerobics: 18 yrs plus, Mon.-Fri. 10-11am with Karen Chambers. Adult Swim: 18 years old+, Mon.-Thurs 11a-1:30p; Public Swim Mon. thru Thurs. 3:30-7p; Sat. 11a-6p and Sun. 1-6p. For info, call 828-526-1595.

## ICE RINK SCHEDULE

• Thursdays 3:30-8p; Fridays 3:30-10p and Saturday's 1-10p; Sundays 1-5p. Also, Sun., Dec. 24, 1-5p; Tues. Dec. 26, Wed., Dec. 27, Mon. Jan. 1, Wed., Jan 3 -- 1-8p..

## Through March 3

• Ice Skating in the Park is opening

soon. Thursdays 3:30-8p; Fridays 3:30-10p; Saturdays 1-10p; Sundays 1-5p. \$5 with or without skates.

## Through Dec. 31

The Artistic Work of John Robert Mack at the Macon County Library in Franklin on Siler Road..

## Through Dec. 24

• "Home of the Holidays" at Mountain Theatre Company now in residence at the Performing Arts Center on Chestnut Street. Tickets go to [www.mountaintheatre.com](http://www.mountaintheatre.com)

## Dec. 16

• Santa in the Park at K-H Founders Park.

## Fri. Dec. 15

• At The Learning & Literacy Center, a Gingerbread Decorating Extravaganza! For toddlers, preschoolers and their caregivers at 11 a.m. It's Free and no registration is required. 675 S. 4th Street.

## Sat. Dec. 16

• Wreaths across America Day is Saturday The ceremony will be at 12 noon at Highlands Rec. Park, 600 North 4th Street. Volunteers are needed to

place wreaths. Volunteers will be shuttled to and from Highlands Cemetery afterwards.

## Sat.-Sun., May 11-12

• The 4th annual Bear Shadow will be held again at Winfield Farm in Scalp Mountain. Visit <https://bearshadownc.com/> for information about how to purchase tickets.

# CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION

## ADVENT III

Sunday, December 17 at 10:30am  
Annual Festival of Lessons and Carols

## ADVENT IV

Sunday, December 24 at 10am  
Holy Eucharist - Historic Chapel

## CHRISTMAS EVE

Sunday, December 24 at 4pm &  
6pm Holy Eucharist with Choir

## CHRISTMAS DAY

Monday, December 25 at 10am  
Holy Eucharist - Historic Chapel

520 Main Street, Highlands,  
NC [incarnationwnc.org](http://incarnationwnc.org)



Join us for our worship series *"Engaging Advent"* at  
**First Presbyterian Church of Highlands**

Sunday, December 17	11:00am	Sunday Celebration: We Prepare
Thursday, December 21	12:00pm	Service of Light: We Remember
Sunday, December 24	11:00am	Sunday Celebration: We Hope
	4:30pm	Harp Prelude by Jillanna Plummer
	5:00pm	Christmas Eve Service with Candlelight: We Rejoice

*All are welcome!*

*Todos son bienvenidos!*

471 Main Street  
Highlands, North Carolina  
828.526.3175  
[www.fpchighlands.org](http://www.fpchighlands.org)



# • SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •



## The Lord is with you

**Pastor Randy Lucas**  
Highlands United  
Methodist Church

According to the Gospel of Luke, that's what the angel Gabriel said to Mary. "The Lord is with you." You can read the account of the angelic visitation and announcement to the young virgin in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel, sometimes referred to as "The Annunciation." Luke is often the preferred gospel writer to read around Christmas. It's Luke who tells us of angels heralding the good news of great joy to all people about Jesus' birth to shepherds who were keeping watch over their flock by night. Thanks to Luke we know about the overcrowded inn and the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.

Luke is also the gospel writer who tells us about Gabriel's visit to Mary. Though initially perplexed and surprised by the astonishing claims of the angel, Mary eventually learns that she has a very important role to play in God's plan of salvation for the world. "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." That's the way it began.

As we journey deeper into December, in these days observed by the Church as the season of Advent, we are invited to ponder and reflect on the meaning of Christmas as we seek to prepare our hearts and lives to celebrate the birth of Jesus into the world, hearing again the invitation to receive him anew into our hearts. Advent encourages us to live these days in a posture of expectant waiting.

"The Lord is with you." As Luke tells the story, that was one of the first things out of Gabriel's mouth. Given the overwhelming news he was about to lay on her, that seems like a pretty good way to begin. If Mary could accept that, if she could really and truly believe that the Lord was with her, then she could handle whatever came next. Luke doesn't tell us, but I like to think she recalled those words as her, soon to be born, son later found himself in the crosshairs of religious and political forces that would fit him for a cross.

Come to think of it, the same can be said for you and me. In the season of Advent, Christians longingly wait for the light to dispel the darkness, a hope that lies at the heart of Christmas. What if we could hear the words of Gabriel's greeting as spoken to us? What if we could really and truly believe that the Lord is really and truly with us? In Matthew's Gospel, which looks at the birth of Jesus from a different perspective, the presence of the Lord is also affirmed. Matthew borrows from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah, writing "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us."

Here is my simple hope for you. No matter whether this season finds you at a place of joy or sorrow, no matter whether you are basking in abundance or wearied by want, no matter whether your spirit is at peace or troubled, no matter whether you are surrounded by family and friends or feeling isolated and alone, I hope you'll consider this. The truth spoken by Gabriel to Mary long ago is the truth spoken to you in these December days by the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

The Lord is with you.

## Proverbs 3:5

## • PLACES TO WORSHIP •

## John 3:16

### BLUE VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Oliver Rice. Pastor (828) 421-1315  
Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11  
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

### CHAPEL OF THE SKY

Sky Valley, GA • 706-746-2999  
Sundays: 10 a.m. Worship; Holy Communion 1st & 3rd Sundays

### CHRIST ANGLICAN CHURCH

Rev'd Dr. Michael Matlock, Rector  
464 Hwy 64E. Cashiers, NC 28717  
CAC@christanglicancashiers.org & 828-743-1701

Sundays: 9:30 am Adult Christian Formation;  
10:30 am Holy Eucharist Worship

Wednesdays: 6 pm Bible Study, Prayer, Potluck

Thursdays: 10 am Healing Eucharist

### CHRIST CHURCH OF THE VALLEY, CASHIERS

Pastor Brent Metcalf • 743-5470  
www.cashiers.church

Sun. 10:45am. S.S. 9:30am. Wed. 6pm supper and teaching.  
Tues. Guys study 8am. Gals 10am.

### 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  
Sundays: Service 10:45am, Children's 10:30am  
Wednesdays: Youth 5:30-7pm; Women's Bible Study: Mondays  
4:30pm, Tuesdays 10am; Men's Bible Study: Wednesdays &  
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## • POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

**Highlands Police entries from Dec. 2. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a summons/citation, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or those of public officials have been used.**

### Dec. 2

• At 12:40 p.m., officers responded to a call for help regarding a child custody argument.

### Dec. 5

• At 6:13 p.m., officers responded to a call of someone in possession of meth and drug paraphernalia in the parking lot

## ...PRIMARY from page 1

Beginning with US House of Representative District 11, the seat currently held by Congressman Chuck Edwards: Edwards has filed for re-election and so far has one primary opponent in Christian Shawn Regan, a Hayesville, NC Republican.

The District 11 race currently has one Democrat, Asheville resident and current NC House of Representative District 116 rep Caleb Rudrow.

Incumbent North Carolina Senator Kevin Corbin for District 50 has filed for re-election and currently has no primary or Democratic challengers.

House of Representative District 120 rep Karl Gillespie however, currently faces a Democratic challenger in Nancy Curtis, of Andrews.

Locally, the Macon County Board of Commissioners has two seats up for election. A District II seat currently held by Josh Young, who has filed to run for reelection, and District III which represents Nantahala and Cowee. District III is currently held by Paul Higdon and he has filed for reelection and will face a primary opponent in newcomer and local business owner Barry Breeden.

Candidate filing ends at noon on Friday, December 15. The 2024 primary election is March 5. The general election is Nov. 5.

of Mountain Fresh Grocery.

• At 6:38 p.m., Samuel Stephen Nix, 31, of Otto, NC, was arrested for possessing meth. He was issued a \$1,500 secured bond. His trial date is yet to be determined.

### Dec. 9

• At 10:43 a.m., officers responded to a call of shoplifting at Mountain Findings where \$200 of recreational/sports equipment was taken.

• At 8:39 p.m., Carlos Bellamm Guzman Perez, 22, of Franklin, NC, was arrested for excessive speed on the Franklin Road and DUI. He was issued a \$1,500 unsecured bond. His trial date is Jan. 17, 2024.

**The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Dec. 5.**

### Dec. 5

• At 5:18 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Smallwood Ave.

• At 6:53 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Smallwood Ave.

### Dec. 6

• At 6:48 p.m., the dept. responded was first-responders to a location on Main Street.

### Dec. 7

• At 8:33 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Smallwood Ave.

### Dec. 8

• At 6:54 p.m., the dept. responded to a call of a possible gas leak at a residence on Sequoyah Dr.

### Dec. 10

• At 10:06 a.m., the dept. responded to a call of a possible gas leak at a residence on Holt Knob Rd.

• At 10:10 a.m., the dept. was first-responders at a residence on Foreman Road.

### Dec. 11

• At 10:51 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on Main Street.

• At 12:20 p.m., the dept. responded to a call of a possible gas leak at a residence on Highgate Road.

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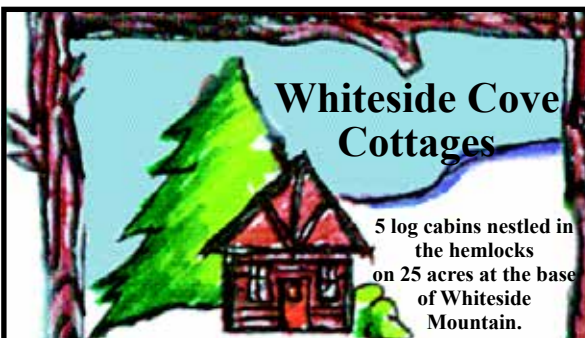
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## ...HOME continued from page 1

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## ...PARTISAN continued from page 1

have been portrayed as an impetus for supporting such a change, because recent years demonstrate a widespread political effort with the number of school boards elected in a partisan manner growing from just 17 of 115 school boards in 2015 to more than 50 after the most recent General Assembly.

"Members of the Macon County Board of Education have been elected on a non-partisan basis since at least 1968," reads the resolution. "If the board were elected on a partisan basis, Macon County citizens who are registered independent or unaffiliated would be required to petition for inclusion on ballots and pursuant to the Hatch Act, those who are federal employees would be forced to choose between their appointment and holding office or even participating in a partisan election for the Board of Education."

The resolution also noted that unlike other elected officials, school board members must bear sole allegiance to the students and parents they serve, and not leaders or platforms of specific political parties.

"School boards have the primary responsibility for setting school policy and hiring school-teachers and administrators, and neither of these responsibilities should be influenced by political party affiliation," reads the resolution. "Educational issues decided by the school board are non-partisan issues, and the board's judicial and personnel functions must be non-partisan."

Chairman Breedlove expressed his gratitude for opportunity to share the school system's perspective with the board.

"We do appreciate this opportunity to delve into it a little bit deeper," said Breedlove. "I've been serving on the board for 15 years. I'm very proud of our work. I think we always follow the creed that we have in our boardroom, which says, in the best interest of the students. And that is what drives us."

Macon County Board of Education's newest board member, Diedre Breeden, a Republican, spoke to commissioners urging them to terminate the pending resolution.

"It's really important to get to know your candidates at the personal level, what they stand for, because as I've said a lot of times while I was running and campaigning for office, I'm not a politician," said Breeden. "Don't call me that. You know, I may identify with the Republican Party, but I'm not a politician. Because who I identify as, number one, is a follower of Christ, a wife, and a mom. And that is what leads how I vote. And all of us on our board have similar things that motivate us, and it's not a D or an R or an I. There are people, from the other side, who also do not support this being a partisan race for that very issue."

Breeden continued by saying that more than the issue of the county entertaining a resolution to change the method in which the board of education is elected, the issue was how the county was willing to consider such a resolution, while ignoring the real, genuine needs of the school system.

"And I think that's kind of an undeniable truth that we all have to accept the grass is green, the sky is blue, and this is a politically charged world. So, people want to know. OK. But here's my issue with this whole concept," said Breeden. "When I first got notified last month that this was on your agenda, I took a pause and I said, OK, is Nantahala on the agenda? No. The middle school track? No. Those are the issues that over the last year are in a little red book I carry around. The voters are reaching out to me with their concerns; all the real-time issues that impact our students, our teachers, our staff, our families. Those are the things that I want to see discussed between our two boards."

Commissioner Danny Antoine said that since the November meeting he had spoken with several people, members of the board of education included and now has a different perspective of the issue and because of that and his desire to support the board of education, he made a motion to terminate any further discussion on a resolution to make the local board of education partisan and that motion was seconded by

Commissioner Josh Young.

Commissioner John Shearl said he believes the board should be elected on a partisan basis, in line with state and national trends.

"This is a much bigger picture on the state and national level. Almost half of the school districts in North Carolina went to partisan races? It seems like there is a much bigger problem in education beyond Macon County," he said.

Shearl then said the Macon County Board of Education has limited power and authority over the education of Macon County children.

"Politics is in every breath that we take. And it just seems like the five school board members feel like it's a direct attack on them personally without regard to what they're doing for the kids," said Shearl. "We understand what you're doing for the kids. But who sets the policies above and beyond the Macon County school system? These policies are handed down to the Macon County school system, and you follow them, and you have very limited power when it comes to how the school system actually operates."

Chairman Breedlove responded and clarified to Commissioner Shearl that the local board does in fact have significant authority over local schools and that it is his belief that politics play no role in those decisions.

"With all due respect, I disagree with the assumption that you just had about politics," said Breedlove. "I'm not worried about state politics. We operate just like your board does. We have a lot of control on how the school system in Macon County conducts itself, how our curriculum is established, and how we try to do our best for our students to succeed. So, we don't care, bluntly, about national politics. I don't care about state politics. Our goal is to do what is in the best interest of the Macon County students, period. That's all we're trying to do."

The Macon County Board of Commissioners voted 4-1 to terminate the resolution to make the local school board race partisan with Commissioner John Shearl casting the lone dissenting vote.



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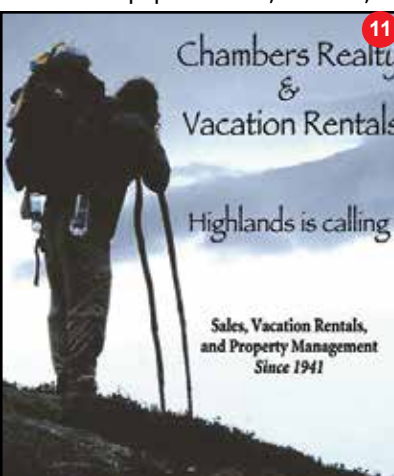
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