

Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., April 16, 2026

Highlands lowers requested fire tax

By Kim Lewicki

To handle the ever-increasing Highlands Fire & Rescue calls and to make sure the equipment from trucks to turn-out

gear is up to par, the Highlands fire district's fire tax has to be increased. How much is the question.

Since the retreat in March

an increase from the current 1.91 cents per \$100 property valuation to 4.41 cents has been discussed but once a calculation error was

• See FIRE TAX page 5

Increases for services/fees decided at budget mtg.

By Kim Lewicki

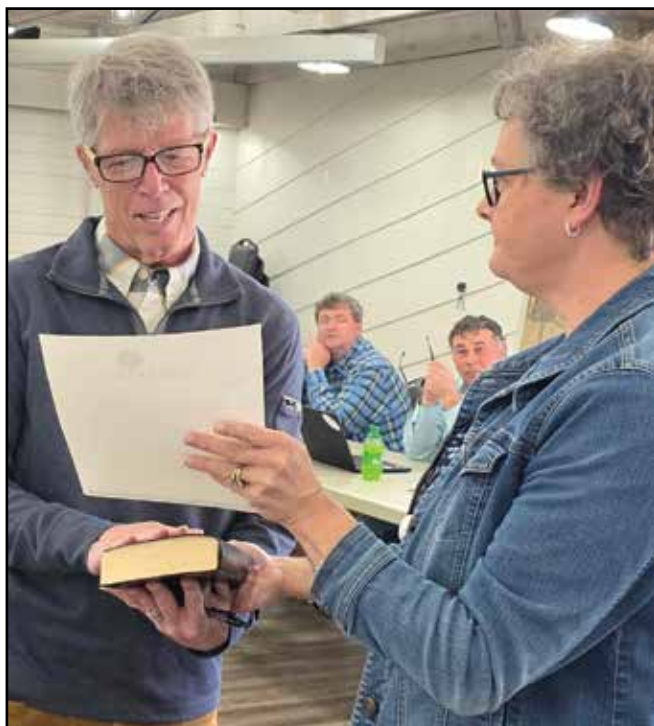
Before the budget for the upcoming fiscal year is accepted, the Town Board holds a few budget worksessions to go over needs and requests prior to adoption.

At the first worksession for FY '26-'27 held Thursday, April 9, commissioners considered the HF&R Dept. budget (particularly the proposed fire tax increase - see Highlands lowers requested fire tax), capital requests across all departments, the cost-of-living adjustment, increased insurance rates, water & sewer rate increases, and Land Use fee increases.

So far, the total budget for FY '26 - '27 is \$23,820,995 but that is subject to change by the time the budget review process

• See BUDGET page 6

New commissioner is seated



Highlands Town Clerk Gibby Shaheen, swears in Bill Grubb.

Prior to the budget worksession for FY '26-'27 last Thursday, Bill Grubb was sworn in as commissioner. The Town Board selected him to fill Commissioner John Dotson's seat which he vacated December 2025.

Photo by Kim Lewicki

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County tax office takes steps to complete 2027 property reappraisal

By Kristin Fox

Over the past year, property owners may have noticed employees of the county's tax office physically visiting their properties. At this week's regular meeting of the Macon County Board of Commissioners, Abby Braswell Macon County Tax Department Director explained why.

Braswell gave a presentation on the property reappraisal program the county is in the midst of completing. The Macon County Tax Department is in the process of updating the values of all 44,580 plus parcels in the county to reflect 100 percent fair market value as of January 1 of the reappraisal year (2027).

During a reappraisal or revaluation, property is not singled out. Rather every property in Macon County is reviewed by the tax department.

The reappraisal project is expected to be completed by January 1, 2027. The new assessments will be used to determine the amount of property tax due on each property for the 2027 fiscal year. The millage rate, also called the mill rate, is used by local governments to calculate property taxes. One mill represents \$1 of tax per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

The municipalities, Town of Highlands and Town of Franklin, will use the reappraisal values to set the tax rates that will create the revenue to fund their budgets. The county tax rate is set by the board of commissioners to create the revenue required to fund the county budget.

As mandated by the state, all 100 counties in North Caro-

• See APPRAISAL page 17



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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

Voluntary water restrictions are on the horizon

The state and Western Carolina are in a state of drought. In Macon County, a large part of the western part is in extreme drought. Here on the Highlands Plateau, we are in a severe drought category and are headed to the extreme level any day.

Due to these dry conditions, a statewide outdoor burning ban is in effect. That declaration means no burning period. We have had multiple wildfires across the mountains in recent weeks. Seasonal high winds add to the dangerous conditions. Please be on the lookout for any violations, such as burning materials at construction sites. If you see such activity, please call the Highlands Police Department at (828) 526-9431 or the non-emergency dispatch number at (828) 524-2020. A firefighter or law enforcement officer will respond.

Our town's water department is also monitoring the drought situation. The state requires our water plant to have a drought



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

response plan in place. Our plant operators are following the plan's protocols and are in contact with state officials. While we have not implemented the first voluntary stage of the plan, we are very close to doing so.

Unfortunately, no significant rain is in the forecast at the time of this writing. Be significant, I mean, a period of rain that delivers multiple inches over an extended period. A spot shower of a half inch or less will not break the dry conditions. Do not get me wrong, those showers help in the short term, but they do not remove the drought condition we presently face.

The Town Board meeting and workshop session are scheduled for Thursday, April 16. The workshop will begin at 5:30 instead of the usual 6 pm start time. We have two items to cover at the workshop that may take some time. The board will be reviewing a format for reestablishing town committees to research issues. Each committee will consist of two board members, the Town Manager, the Town Clerk, and the relevant department head.

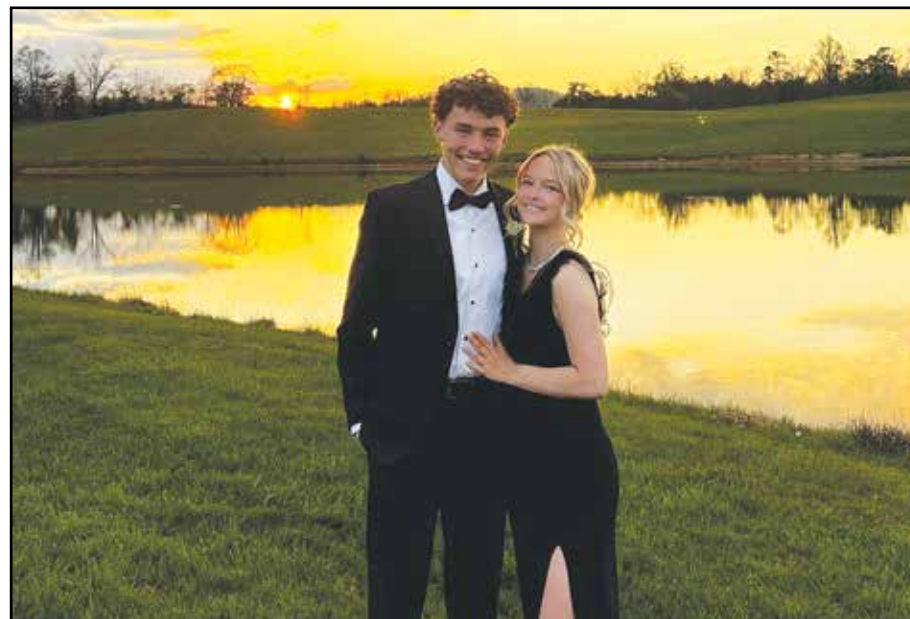
Another workshop item will be a Q&A session with the Town Attorney regarding the proposed procedures for conducting town meetings. Our attorney has drafted an extensive set of procedures that the board will review prior to approval. I have a list of questions, and I am sure board members do as well.

At the Town Board meeting at 7 pm, there will be several agenda items of interest. Changes to the noise ordinance and parking are on the agenda. Also, the Town Attorney has proposed an amendment to the ordinance concerning drinking in public places.

The board will also be going into closed session at the end of the session. The purpose of the closed session is to receive an update and give instructions to the town attorney concerning the Willoughby Zoning Board of Adjustment Appeal.

Hope to see you at the workshop and or the Town Board meeting. The meetings will also be accessible remotely via the YouTube channel on the town website.

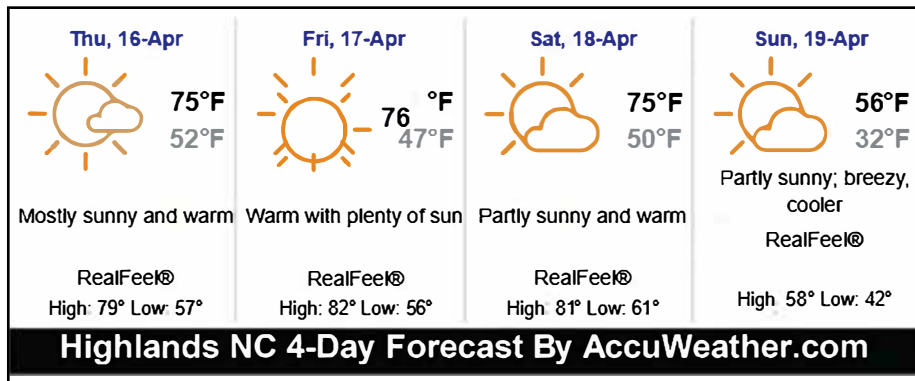
• SNAPSHOTS •



Sunlight on the water, music and dancing!

Highlands' Timmy McDowell and Lass Ward – daughter of Highlands Town Manager Josh Ward – at Christ School prom Saturday, April 11. McDowell is a junior at Christ School in Asheville. Ward is a junior at Franklin High School. They are both lifeguards at the Highlands Rec Park pool.

• WEATHER •



Highlands Real-Time Weather Station @ HighlandsInfo.com/wx.htm

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The People's Losses for Government Gains



Annual Interest on the National Debt:	\$1 trillion (A budget might help)
Congressional Salaries, Expenses, and Health Insurance:	\$5.1 billion plus 72-75% Gold Level Health Insurance
Pentagon Budget:	\$900 billion +\$200 billion additional request for war
Iran War Costs:	\$1 billion+ per day
Renovating Alcatraz:	\$152 million
Tax Cuts for Billionaires:	\$117 billion per year
Presidential Golf Trips (Not just Mar-a-lago):	\$101 million to date during this term; \$13.6 million for 4 trips Feb 3-Mar 4, 2026
Jetting Habits:	
Kristi Noem jets:	\$200 million
Renovation of Qatar gift jet to Trump:	\$1 trilliion
Kash Patel personal trips: (under Senate investigation)	\$200,000
Private Indulgences	(Your dime their luxury)
White House Ballroom:	\$400 million (private funding that should benefit our tax base)
Presidential Library:	\$1 billion
Kristi Noem's Ad Campaign:	\$220 million
Pete Hegseth's private steak and lobster Pentagon dinners, and a piano:	\$23 million (more private funding)
Total Costs of Key Priorities:	\$3.264 trillion



What our communities need but our government feels we do not deserve

Healthcare and Medicaid:	-2.1 trillion
Medicare:	-45 billion
Food assistance:	-300 billion
Housing:	-26.4 billion
Education & research, including health research:	-81.5 billion



TOTAL COST OF OUR LOSSES: -\$2.55 TRILLION

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...FIRE TAX continued from page 1

adjusted, the new fire tax of .0391 cents will be lower than originally requested.

At the first FY '26-'27 budget meeting last Thursday, commissioners discussed each new expense requested by the town's various departments with the final phase of the discussion centering around the fire department's '26-'27 budget.

No one questioned the need for the fire tax increase and what the money would be used for, but Commissioner Amy Patterson questioned the line-item increase for salary and wages when figuring in the requested three new full-time firefighters.

In FY '25-'26, the line item for salaries and wages for the eight full-time employees – six firefighters and the chief and asst. chief – the figure was \$317,031. For '26-'27 when including the three new full-time firefighters requested, the figure for salaries and wages jumped to \$970,000.

"I don't understand why that is so high," said Patterson.

Finance Director Rebecca Shuler, who was at the meeting, was quick to check her figures and acknowledged that

something wasn't right.

To give Shuler time to investigate and subsequently the board time to either OK or deny the increase, the budget meeting was recessed until 8 a.m. the next day, Friday.

By the next morning, the figures were adjusted, which changed the amount needed by the HF&R department and hence the fire tax figure.

"We had about three sheets that Josh [Town Manager] and I had been working off of. I am not sure if I used the wrong sheet, the total instead of just the salary or if I reversed some of the numbers," she said. "I am thankful Commissioner Patterson questioned it."

Shuler said with the updated numbers for the salaries and benefits for the addition of three new firefighters and capital for new vehicles or equipment purchases (loan payments for these purchases), only a 2-cent increase will be needed.

"This amount estimated at \$2,373,151.00 along with the other forms of revenue from donations, interest and Jackson County contributions will cover the addition of three new firefighters along

• See FIRE TAX page 15



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...BUDGET continued from page 1

is over.

Hudson Library

The Hudson Library board's request of \$350,000 was the subject of discussion. The library has requested \$350,000 from both the county and the town – which concerned commissioners.

Commissioner Amy Patterson said that the Highlands Township funds 52% of the county's budget so Highlands would actually be paying for half of the county's part of \$350,000 plus its own.

"We will have already paid our share," said Patterson. "But the library is recreation for some people, so we need to see where we are budget-wise before we decide."

Commissioner Jeff Weller said the library is for the people of the plateau so it's not just a town responsibility. Commissioner Bill Grubb said the library services every generation and agreed with Commissioner Patterson.

"Let's look at what we can pay because I would like us to give something so they can then look at their budget and possibly make changes," he said.

Mayor Pat Taylor reminded the board

that FY '26-'27 will be a tight budget year so funding the full \$350,000 is a big ask.

COLA/Insurance Rates

Given the current rise in inflation and the increase in the cost of goods across the board, the Commissioners agreed to shoulder a 3% COLA adjustment for employees for \$2,47,364.

Town Manager Josh Ward said insurance rates have skyrocketed so the cost for the town to fund free health insurance for employees will go up, as will the cost employees pay for their families to be on their plan. Ward said deductions will probably go up, too.

The town's current insurance plan through Blue Cross Blue Shield is going up 49.5%; Signa's quote came in 47.4% higher and United Healthcare came in at 35.1% higher -- all for the same plan.

"This is really fluid right now, so we will wait and see what Wayah can negotiate for us," said Ward. "So, for now we will budget based on the existing costs but it's likely to change before the next budget meeting."

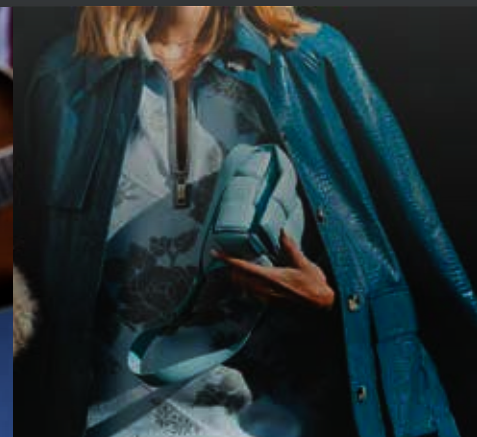
Water/Sewer Rates

• See BUDGET page 7

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...BUDGET continued from page 6

Based on the recent auditor's report that suggested the town raise water/sewer rates 4% annually from now on and the fact that the department's fund balance is low, commissioners agreed to raise the water/sewer rates 10% for FY '26-'27 and then 4% each year thereafter.

"We need to build up the fund balance and to do that we have to increase rates," he said.

Commissioner Patterson said people need to understand they have gotten a bargain for a number of years.

Ward also noted the current drought conditions and said, "we are teetering on requesting voluntary restrictions."

Land Use Fees

Following a suggestion from Planning & Development Director Michael Mathis, the board voted unanimously to increase items on the Land Use Fee Schedule.

According to Mathis, during Fiscal Year 2025, the Town of Highlands Zoning Board held seven meetings for Special Use Permit and Variance hearings, with one attorney representing the Zoning Board.

In Administrative Appeal hearings as in the three-hour Zoning Board meeting regarding the STR denial by the zoning board, there were two attorneys present: one representing the Zoning Board and the other representing staff.

Consequently, in FY 2025, the town spent more than \$20,000 on legal fees for services provided to the Zoning Board -- \$14,000 of which was for attorney fees for a case that was dismissed.

The current application fee for Special Use Permit, Variance, and Administrative Appeal hearings is \$250. NC General Statute does not set a rate for these application fees; instead, it states only that they must be reasonable.

"After doing some research, I noticed that other places in North Carolina are charging higher application fees for Zoning Board Hearings," said Mathis. "For example, the Town of Blowing Rock charges \$1,000 for a Special Use Permit, and the City of Asheville charges \$800 for Administrative Appeals. The City of Charlotte charges \$1,400 for a Residential Variance and \$1,900 for a Commercial Variance."

The staff recommended increasing the application fee for Special Use

• See BUDGET page 17

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• LETTERS •

Response to 'Here's the Thing' column: 'War! What is it good for?'

Dear Editor,

The title of Bud Katz's "War! What Is It Good For?" column in the April 2 edition presents an eloquent personal perspective. Yet no personal reflection removes the responsibility to acknowledge historical reality. Invoking the familiar phrase that "the U.S. is not the world's policeman" may sound appealing. When applied to the case of Iran, the limitations of that argument become especially clear.

For almost five decades, Iran has acted against the United States and its interests, directly and through proxies, with consistency and intent. In 1983 - '84 alone, Iran's primary proxy, Hezbollah, carried out the bombings of the U.S. Embassies and the Marine Barracks in Lebanon that killed 258 Americans and injured scores more. During the same era, Hezbollah hijacked two commercial airliners, killing three U.S. citizens. In 1996, the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia killed 19 U.S. Air Force personnel and wounded 372 Americans. During the Iraq War, U.S. military reports as many as 500 American deaths to Iranian-supplied IEDs and weapons.

U.S. homeland security threats are real. Incidents like the recent, failed attack on a Michigan synagogue are not theoretical. Although no deaths have occurred, Federal investigations continue to document Hezbollah-linked money laundering, fundraising, smuggling, weapons-procurement attempts, and surveillance.

Iran's strategic objectives include: the elimination of the State of Israel and U.S. influence in the Middle East, together with the expansion of a theocratic model of governance under clerical authority. Iran has sought nuclear capabilities, protected by an arsenal of missiles and drones. In a nation of 93 million, the leadership relies on support from a 15% minority and a powerful security apparatus to suppress dissent.

Iran's proxy network reflects its broader strategy. Hezbollah received upwards of \$200 million annually in the early 2000s and over \$700 million per year in the 2010s. Hamas has been funded \$70-\$100 million annually. The

Houthis in Yemen receive tens of millions per year. Iran's oil revenues exceeded \$415 billion between 2014 and 2025, enabling this proxy funding, military expansion and regional influence.

Roughly 20 percent of the world's energy supply passes through the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint Iran has controlled and disrupted for almost 50 years. Depending on the severity of interference, U.S. inflation alone could rise from 1/2 to 3 percentage points. Inflation in Asia, Europe, and South America could increase by 3 percent, while parts of Africa up to 6 percent.

The unavoidable fact: if Iran was to transition from a regional irritant to a nuclear-armed state governed by hardline religious radicals, it is only the United States that has the capability to confront and address the threat to world stability. The United States cannot ignore this moral, and practical obligation.

No one desires war, but neither can the world accept living under the threat of a nuclear-armed regime driven by radical ideology. Understanding the true stakes only requires understanding historical record. History has a way of repeating itself.

Howard Lefkowitz
Cashiers, NC

Your words matter, Mr. President

Dear Editor,

We all awakened Easter Sunday morning to receive the below message from the President of the United States, who proclaims he is a practicing person of faith:

Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!!! Open the F----- Strait, you crazy bastards, or you'll be living in Hell - JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah.

Mr. President, I do not know who your spiritual guides are or where you were taught about genuine faith.

• See LETTERS page 13

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• INVESTING AT 4,118 FT. • Quiet Luxury and English Ivy

There are small towns like ours, all across America that are having growth pains, and the trend of quiet luxury doesn't seem to be stopping anytime soon. English Ivy is beautiful, but it's also known as an invasive addition to our landscape. I've heard it said about English Ivy, "First year it sleeps, second year it creeps, third year it leaps." If you think about it, the growth of our area is sort of the same way. Instead of the first, second and third year scenario, it's more like 1875-1930s then 1940s - 2000s then 2001-2026.

Kelsey and Hutchinson founded Highlands as a tourist spot, but there were already settlers living on the Highlands Plateau and in Cashiers Valley long



Jeannie Chambers
Chambers Realty
& Vacation Rentals

before they ever came here. The Cherokee Indians had lived in the area for centuries until the early 1800s when the European settlers moved in. In a way, I bet those settlers thought that they could make the utopia they'd found even better.

There were several notable people who'd settled in the area before 1875; Norton, Hawkins, Dobson, Gibson and many more. I wonder if those farmers, doctors and cattlemen ever wondered what the area would be like in a hundred or two hundred years?

After 1875, the area was advertised as a tourist destination known for its high altitude, pristine mountain water and

• See INVESTING page xx

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Satulah Falls is this 3.48 acre tract just outside the town limits. This is the last piece of land owned by the Harbison family.



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Spring Home Improvement - 2026

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Offering Affordability

A manufactured home may make homeownership possible for more American families. The average price

of a new, single-section factory-built home today is around \$200,000 including the land, versus more than \$500,000 for a new site-built home.

Fortunately, this affordability does not come at the cost of quality. The process of building manufactured homes in a factory is quick, efficient and cost-effective, which accounts for their relatively low cost. It also does not come at the cost of long-term pay-off. According to the U.S. Federal Housing House Price Index, a manufactured home appreciates in value similar to a site-built home.

Titling Considerations

Depending on who owns the land you live on, you can title your home as real property or personal property (also called chattel or home-only). Real property, often called real estate, refers to land and any structures affixed to the land. Personal property is a broader category that covers any property you own that is movable, such as vehicles, tools, furniture and other belongings. If you are buying a manufactured home to install on land that you already own or are planning to purchase, it can be titled as real property once the home is affixed to the land. If you are renting a site in a manufactured housing community or leasing on private land, you will likely need to title the home as personal property.

While titling the home as personal property can be quicker and save you money on real estate taxes, it's important to know that some lenders will only provide financing for the purchase of real property. To widen your financing options and improve your chances of landing a better interest rate, loan terms and protections in the face of hardships (such as following natural disasters or changes in your financial situation), consider a manufactured home as real property.

There are mortgage products specifically designed for buyers of manufactured homes, including some low-down payment options. For example, Freddie Mac's CHOICEHome loans offer financing for factory-built homes titled as real property with a down payment as low as 3% of the purchase price. Speak with your lender about which financing option best suits your circumstances.

To learn more about manufactured homes, and for additional insights into making homebuying more affordable, visit myhome.freddie.com.

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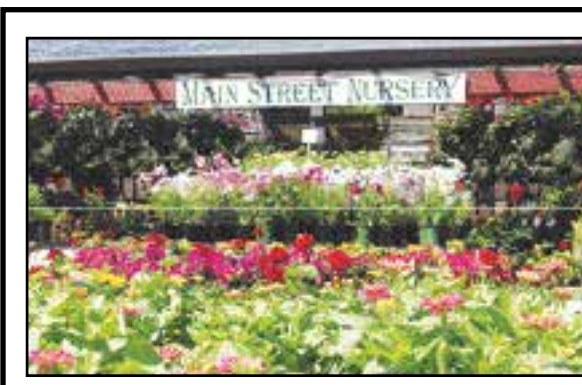
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...LETTERS continued from page 9

However, I must share with you that faith is not an easy proclamation, but the way we live our lives and treat and speak to others. Your Easter statement may be the worst example of one practicing their faith I have ever witnessed.

Would we accept such horrid words from our clergy of all faiths, our Sunday School teachers, our Vacation Bible School leaders, our mayor, our educators or our grandchildren? OF COURSE NOT!

I also wonder where are the moral voices of our church leaders, especially the conservative evangelicals, when such language is spewed on the High Holy Day for many of us. Yes, the Pope has been abundantly clear about not confusing our Holy Scripture to justify killing people during a war. Again, I ask, where is the voice of those who claim to be Believers and Followers?

Lastly, Mr. President your words were nowhere near those of a Risen Lord when He spoke to his true followers. I suggest you discover by prayer, study, and a long journey of the true nature of one who is living the Faith.

Reverend Dr. Mike Cordle
United Methodist Minister,
Retired
Highlands, NC

Under-financing is not the problem with U.S. public education

Dear Editor,

In the April 9 issue of the Highlands Newspaper, Mr. Stearns wrote a letter-to-the-editor entitled, "A tipping point: The Haves and the Have Nots."

And wrote this sentence, "The USA education system has been under financed for as long as I can remember."

Here are the facts that he did not mention.

The US consistently ranks as one of the highest spenders on K-12 education globally. As of early 2026, the average annual expenditure per student in the US public school system is approximately \$18,614 though some metrics say it is closer to \$16,000.

The US typically ranks in the top 5 highest spenders per student among de-

• See LETTERS page 14



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...LETTERS continued from page 13

veloped nations often trailing only countries like Luxembourg, Norway and occasionally Austria or South Korea.

The results we get for what we are spending is certainly worthy of discussion. But \$16,000 to well over \$18,000 per student per year for K-12 should

probably get us better results. I know of several reasons why I believe the results are not what we want, but money is not one of them.

**James Riddle
Highlands**

Look what the gov't spends our taxes on

Dear Editor,

Recently I read an article in People magazine detailing the spending at Department of Defense in September of 2025, information courtesy of Open the Books. September is the last month of the fiscal year for the government when extra funds must be spent to prevent a budget reduction the following year. Recalling my time in the Army, I remember how near the end of the fiscal year we made a list of our needs for the upcoming year, but also a wish list in case there was a budget surplus.

As the Head Nurse of a Level II Newborn Nursery, I took our needs very seriously. I was 22 years old at the time and green as Army officers go but I knew

my duty was to provide the best possible care for my patients with the most needed supplies. So, imagine my surprise when I read a list in People magazine of how the Department of Defense, and our Defense Secretary, spent their budgetary surplus.

Did you know that at the end of the 2025 fiscal year the Department of Defense spent over 225 million dollars on furniture? There are approximately 26,000 civilian and military personnel at the Pentagon and if they each have an office they could have received about \$9,000 for furniture for said office. The provision for furniture is on every yearly budget for approximately 38 million dollars. My question is why the furniture emergency?

And in the month of September 2025, the military spent over 18 million dollars on Alaskan King Crab, ribeye steaks, Salmon (for those who aren't steak lovers), Ice Cream machines, Sushi prep tables and donuts. Throughout the year, including September, the Pentagon spent an additional 36 million dollars on lobster tails.

Spending more than \$50,000,000 on delicacies makes me question how many lavish dinners were sponsored by the Pen-

tagon in 2025. Did every member of the staff receive an invitation? Was the extra furniture budget spent on dining room furniture?

And with a dinner there must be entertainment because how boring is it without music from a Steinway grand piano, or a violin, or a custom-made Japanese flute? Even if they cost the Pentagon almost \$150,000. And because one needs to sit back and put one's feet up after a sumptuous dinner how about a footrest; of over \$100,000 worth of footrests?

Should we care what the Pentagon does with our tax dollars; that the surplus budget was large enough for each employee to spend almost \$9,000 on furniture or that every employee could have consumed over \$2,000 of luxury food in one year? Should we care that three musical instruments costing almost \$150,000 were purchased by the Pentagon? Should we care who was present at the Pentagon dinners?

Should we care how the government spends our taxes? Does it matter to you because it certainly matters to me.

**Margaret Pickett
Highlands, NC**

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• HS SPORTS •

Highlands Athletics Weekly Recap: Soccer Shutouts and Links Leadership

It was a packed week for Highlands Athletics as track and field athletes hit the road, the golf teams dominated the greens, and the girls' soccer team maintained a flawless defensive record across three matches.

Girls Soccer: Defense Dominates in Three-Win Week

The Highlands High School girls' soccer team had a banner week, securing three victories without conceding a single goal. Goalkeeper Keeley Bosdell was the star of the defensive unit, recording three consecutive shutouts and making several crucial saves to keep the clean sheets intact.

- Monday vs. Cherokee: The Highlanders opened the week strong with a 4-0 victory. Aubree Brooks led the scoring with two goals, supported by strikes from Jordyn Borino and Nani Campos.

- Thursday vs. Macon Early College: In the first-ever meeting between the two schools, Highlands took a 2-0 win. Jordyn Borino and Anabelle Hays each found the back of the net to secure the historic victory.

- Friday @ Cherokee: The Highland-

ers completed the season sweep of Cherokee with a gritty 1-0 win. The match remained deadlocked until Cayden Pierson scored the lone goal with just 9:00 remaining on the clock.

Golf: High Marks on the Highlands Plateau High School Boys

The boys' golf team split their time between South Carolina and their home turf this week.

- Monday: The team traveled to Oconee Golf Course for a friendly match against West Oak HS. Sam Conner and Rowen Carnes led the Highlanders, finishing 4th and 5th respectively.

- Tuesday: Hosting a five-team match at Old Edwards Club, the boys secured a 2nd place team finish behind Cherokee. Sam Conner took 3rd place individually, while Rowen Carnes again placed 5th.

Middle School Co-ed

The Middle School golfers stayed hot, winning their head-to-head matchup against Macon Middle.

- Sky Valley Match: The team posted a



Brett Lamb
Highlands School
Athletic Director

combined score of 194. Top performers included Brynn Mason (42), Camden Westendorf (47), Ian Kittrell (52), and Charlie Wilkes (53).

- Wednesday @ Franklin Golf Course: Highlands defeated Macon Middle School 192-198. Camden Westendorf led the way with a 45, followed closely by Ian Kittrell (46) and Charlie Wilkes (49). Jensen Bowers and Harper Ramey both contributed solid

rounds of 52.

Track & Field: Worley and Pierson Lead the Way in Robbinsville

Highlands Track and Field traveled to Robbinsville this week to compete against tough regional competition.

Claire Worley was a force for the girls' team, personally accounting for all 15 points scored by the Lady Highlanders. Worley earned 3rd place in the 1600m and 4th place in the 800m.

On the boys' side, the team tallied 17 total points. Notable performances included:

- Stephen Pierson: 3rd Place in the 110m hurdles.

- Boys 4x100m Relay: 4th Place.



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...FIRE TAX from pg 5

with an amount of a little over \$300,000 for the capital purchases or loan payments for trucks," she said. "In addition, with this increase there will not have to be a fund balance appropriation."

At the new rate, owners of a house valued at \$1 million would pay \$200 more a year compared to last year. Chief Gearhart said the .0391 fire tax per \$100 valuation will probably hold steady for three to four years.



Commissioner Patterson said the town doesn't want to have to go back to the county every year and Mayor Pat Taylor said the department needs just enough to cover expenses and loan commitments and COLA.

"We don't want to collect too much or have too much of a surplus, but this will enable us to have a small reserve fund," he said.

The new figure has been sent to the county whose job it is to look out for the taxpayers even though the county isn't levying the tax.

The county is expected to consider the request at a meeting in May.

At .0391 cents, the Highlands Fire District tax would be the lowest in the county.







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...INVESTING continued from page 10

fresh, clean air. As early as 1877, there were circuit riders who rode their horses to town to preach. In the 1900s the area attracted people like Dr. Mary Lapham who worked at Bug Hill, the local TB sanitarium. By the 1920s, many affluent people discovered Highlands and Bobby Jones hit the ball that started the first golf course, Highlands Country Club. As far as development, there were hotels built, boarding houses, and the necessary stores for the residents. Those years

would have been the “first year it sleeps” stage. Highlands was definitely waking up, but it was still a sleepy, very seasonal little town.

The next 60 years brought real estate development, three more country clubs, businesses, hotels, Bed & Breakfasts, Inns, restaurants, and vacation rentals. People of all walks of life moved to and stayed in the area. 1940s to the 2000s would have been considered the years it crept, and the time period that I discovered High-

lands. I will forever be grateful to marry into a family whose family’s history went back before the town was founded. I got to hear how it used to be from passed-down stories of many generations.

The last 25 years have been the years our area leaped. The appeal of quiet luxury has drawn more and more affluent people to the area, but with the demand comes higher prices for real estate. The residents “from all walks of life” are slowly disappearing because they’re hav-

ing to commute from less expensive areas or leaving the area altogether. Lack of workforce housing is a problem many communities face all over the country.

We are fortunate to have so much national forest lands in our area and the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust to add private lands to be conserved. When you stop to think about the people who lived here before Kelsey and Hutchinson “put Highlands on the map,” and the people who came afterwards who found their paradise, I wonder what they would think now? Would they be pleased with how the area has kept up with modern times? I bet at least some of them would hurt every time a tree is cut, some would wonder why, even though man-made air conditioning is available, why we choose that instead of opening a window. After all, for many years, the byline for Highlands was “AIR CONDITIONED BY NATURE.”

I hope we can move backwards a little. Even though it didn’t have the name back then, storytelling luxury has sort of always been the way when affluent people moved to Highlands in the mid-20th century. They had beautiful homes wherever they came from, and when in Highlands, they chose to live almost minimalist and enjoyed nature. They still had cocktail and dinner parties, but it seemed different somehow. For the most part, they enjoyed having meals where locals worked and dined, they enjoyed talking and getting to know their plumbers, electricians, handymen and caretakers. There was a connection that seemed to be the glue needed to live together, even if just for the season.

My hope is that we can all find that connection again so that none of us are looked at like invasive English Ivy. We are so fortunate to be in this beautiful place. Let’s not take it for granted.

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...APPRAISAL continued from page 1

lina complete a thorough and objective property reappraisal program involving the analysis of every property located in the counties. Every four years, Macon County undergoes a reappraisal program.

North Carolina Statutes 105-283 and 105-286 mandate all counties complete the exhaustive review in order to value all properties at 100 percent of the market value. The goal is to ensure all property owners in the county pay their fair share in property taxes, nothing more or less.

The purpose of a reappraisal is not to increase taxes. In fact by state law, tax equity is the desired function of a reappraisal. The goal of reappraisal is to reflect changes in the market and to ensure taxpayers pay no more than their share of the tax burden.

The value of property is determined by buyers and sellers in the market. When determining the current market value or price for each property, the appraiser considers many factors such as square footage, number of bathrooms, location, etc. Properties appreciate at different rates based on market demand, property location, property type, condition, age, etc.

Property taxes originated as a method for sharing the costs of government services such as local schools, police protection, fire protection, lighting, water and sewage among people who use them. The amount of tax responsibility for each property is in proportion to that property's value.

The state general statute requires that real property be appraised or valued at its true value in money. True value in money is the market value estimated in terms of money at which the property would change hands between a willing

and financially able buyer and a willing seller, neither being under any compulsion to buy or sell and both having reasonable knowledge of all uses to which the property is adapted and for which it is capable of being used.

A hundred percent of market value is based on the most recent qualified sales that occurred leading up to the reappraisal date or the true fair market value. While sometimes it is hard to determine, the tax department focuses on what it knows are good sales and not any that are not good sales.

When the appraised value increases that does not mean the taxes will increase. Each taxpayer assessment will change at different percentages. The rate of change in the property value that has occurred since the last reappraisal will affect how much or how little the assessment goes up or down in the 2027 appraisal. The tax rate that is set will determine if taxes go up or down. The first year of a reappraisal it is mandatory to publish in the proposed budget what the revenue neutral rate would be based on the new tax base.

In July, the tax department will provide commissioners with an update on reappraisal values. A presentation of the proposed schedule of values will be presented to commissioners on August 11, 2026. A copy of the schedule will also be available in the tax office for public inspection. After a public hearing in September, commissioners will consider accepting the schedule of values at their October meeting.

For more information Macon County residents can contact the Macon County Tax Assessors Office at (828) 349-2143 or visit their website www.maconnc.org/Tax.

...BUDGET continued from page 7

Permits, Variances, and Administrative Appeals to \$1,000 and to \$1,000 for a conventional rezoning. Rezoning fees in the City of Asheville range from \$1,000 to \$2,500, depending on the size of the property; the application fee for Conditional Rezonings in the Town of Highlands is \$1,500.

The last proposed change is to charge \$100 for Zoning Confirmation/Determination Letters.

"We pay more for attorney fees than the applicants are, so we are losing half of the money charged without an increase," said Commissioner Patterson.

Mathis said he isn't suggesting the increase to keep people from requesting a variance or filing an appeal, but if it costs them more, they might think about pursuing the issue especially regarding variances because it's rare that a variance is granted.

Usually to be granted a variance, the applicant has to show that he or she can't make use of the property without it.

Finance Director Rebecca Shuler said with as many changes that were discussed at the first budget meeting, the overall budget will definitely change before the next workshop on April 30th.

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SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING

God is alive in you and in me

Rev. Kelley Connelly
Associate Pastor
First Presbyterian Church

Just a few weeks ago now, the Christian Church celebrated Easter Sunday. Easter is the day that we observe and celebrate Jesus' miraculous resurrection from the tomb. It's very typical to begin an Easter Sunday worship service by proclaiming, "Christ is Risen!" And the congregation usually replies with a resounding, "He is risen indeed!" It's a day of joy, fellowship, and celebration for many of us. As one young person in my congregation put it; "Today is Easter! Which means two things. God is alive and Lent is over!"

The truth of her proclamation really struck me. While yes, Easter Sunday does in fact mark the completion of Lent - which most people observe by fasting from something for 40 days. And let it be known that this particular individual was glad to realize that Lent was over because it meant that her dad could have chocolate again after 40 days without it! A milestone that is most certainly worth celebrating. But I was even more amazed by her ability to summarize the message of Easter so simply and flawlessly. Because, yes! God is alive, and it is good news! But for a young person to grasp this message of new life so effortlessly was inspiring. She was able to not only observe and understand the events that surround Jesus' death and resurrection, but she was able to point us toward the good news. Which was very much needed that morning. Especially considering the endless amount of the pain, tragedy, and suffering that fills our headlines, our news feeds, our hearts, and even our day-to-day lives.

It can be hard to believe the Good News that Christ is risen while the war with Iran approaches day 50 and becomes progressively more heartbreaking. Just like it's hard to hear and believe someone when they say "everything is going to be OK" following the news of a devastating medical diagnosis or coming to terms with the end of a relationship. At this very moment there is no shortage of pain and suffering in our world. Some of us know this pain far too well. But what I am reminded of each spring season with the blooming of the dogwoods and the celebration of Easter is that God is alive! God is alive and at work in us - with each terrifying headline, with each tear, with each deep breath, and moment of doubt, God is with us.

In his poem "Patient Trust" Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, he writes "Above all, trust in the slow work of God." This sentiment lies at the very heart of the Easter message: just as the seeds of the Resurrection were sown in the stillness of the tomb, God's presence in our

• See **SPIRITUALLY** page 21

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

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CASHIERS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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

Sundays: School at 9:30; Worship 10:30

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Sunday: Adult Christian Ed. 9:15a; Holy Eucharist, 10:30a;

Fellowship 11:45a; Wed: Bible Study/Contemplative Prayer, 5p

CHRIST CHURCH OF THE VALLEY, CASHIERS

Pastor Jacob Tedder • jacob@cashiers.church • 743-5470

www.cashiers.church

Sun. 10:45a; Wed Study: 5:15p supper and childcare.

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.

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

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

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

Wed.: Men's Bible Study 8:30 am; Women's 10:30 am

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Wed: Bell Choir 4p. Chancel Choir: 5:30p

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Wed. Kidsquest 6p.; Worship 7p.

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

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Services: 1st Fri. and 3rd Sat. and Rosh Hashanah & Yom

Kippur.

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Sun: 10:30 a.m. at Big Ridge Baptist Church. 4224 Big Ridge

(4.5 miles from NC 107)

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

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Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg.: 7 p.m.

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Sunday School: 10 am. Worship Service: 11 am

• BIZ/ORG NEWS •



At last week's MountainTop Rotary meeting, Jennifer Turner-Lynn, Assistant Director of REACH spoke about their mission to eradicate domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking in Macon County by leading comprehensive prevention, intervention, and education efforts. REACH works directly with survivors, coordinates community resources, and delivers outreach programs that raise awareness and change behaviors.

• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from April 10. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a summons/citation, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or those of public officials have been used.

Accidents:

Warning & Citations

• During the week the dept. issued seven Citations and 30 Warning Tickets

April 10

• At 11:44 a.m., a resident on Sagee Woods said someone dug up a plant from his backyard.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from April 7.

April 7

• At 10 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on Buck Creek Road.

• At 3:50 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Aunt Dora Drive.

April 8

• At 4:09 p.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on US 64 east (Cashiers Road).

• At 7:56 p.m., the dept. provided mutual aid to the Cashiers FD.

April 9

• At 6:38 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on Buck Creek Road.

• At 8:29 a.m., the dept. investigated the cause of an odor at a location on N. 4th Street.

• At 9 a.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a location on S. 4th Street.

• At 11:42 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Hedden Lane.

April 10

• At 8:29 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Hillside Drive.

• At 10:49 p.m., the dept. investigated the cause of smoke at a location on Flat Mountain Road.

April 11

• At 12:19 p.m., the dept. responded to a call of a dryer fire at a residence on Happedt Drive.

• At 12:46 p.m., the dept. responded to call of a brush fire at a location on Buck Creek Road.

April 12

• At 3:10 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Whiteside Mountain Road.

• At 12:40 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Donald Ross Road.

Rotary Club of Highlands Chartered 1945



Bingo

Our Rotary Club of Highlands sponsored Bingo Night for April will take place at the Highlands Community Building on Thursday, April 9th, 6:30 PM and will benefit the Interact program at Highlands School.



Students of the Month

In March • Highlands School Congratulations to the Students of the Month for March 2026 and their families!

Elementary School:

Ali Aguilar Colmenares

Middle School:

Brayley Williams

High School:

Birdie Sherwood



UPCOMING EVENTS

- **April 14** .. Josh Bryson - Club Assembly
- **April 21** .. Interact Club of Highlands
- **April 28** .. Todd Holder - Coffee Cult'ure
- **May 7** Kyle Bryner of Blue Hound BBQ BBQ contest winner

Coming up, the Rotary Club of Highlands will feature weekly luncheon meetings and programs on April 14th, 21st, and 28th.

All upcoming meetings for April will be held at 12:00 noon at the Highlands Community Building



I am honored to share Rotary International's remarkable progress toward eradicating polio. Thanks to the commitment of Rotarians worldwide, only two cases of wild poliovirus remain globally—a historic achievement.

For over three decades, Rotary has been at the forefront of the fight against polio, leading immunization campaigns, raising funds, and advocating for the protection of children everywhere. Rotary's presidential messages—United for Good and Creating Lasting Impact—perfectly summarize these worldwide efforts. By working together across borders and generations, we not only strive to eradicate polio but also to create lasting positive change for communities everywhere. But the job is not yet finished. Until polio is eradicated everywhere, every child remains at risk. Rotary International remains dedicated to reaching every last child with vaccines, strengthening health systems, and ensuring a polio-free future for generations to come.

In service,

Josh

JOSH BRYSON,
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• CLASSIFIEDS •

...SPIRITUALLY continued from page 18

lives is rarely a sudden thunderclap, but rather a steady, internal transformation. In our modern world, we often demand “instant Resurrections”— immediate solutions to our grief, rapid healing to our pain or sudden clarity in our doubt. It’s just part of the world we live in. But when we trust in the slow work of God, we can find the strength to recognize that even when we are inundated with doubt, fear, our own sadness, or completely weighed down by the weight of the world, we can find strength in knowing that yes – indeed, God is alive! God is alive in you, in me, and in the world.

This is the ultimate hope of the season: that God is alive in us, working through our gradual unfolding to turn every personal winter into a flourishing spring. As we press forward, my hope is that each of us can hold close to the promises of Easter. And relinquish our need for control and lean into that slow, divine grace, trusting that the same power that rolled away the stone is even now quietly, slowly, transforming us too. And remember, Christ is risen, he is risen indeed!



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4 BD/3BA FOR RENT HIGHLANDS – Updated farm home, located between Highlands & Cashiers off Hwy 64. \$2,800/month, includes all utilities with high speed wifi. Call Marcy 828-482-4239 (st. 7/10)

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• BIZ/ORG NEWS •

The Laurel Garden Club Awards Grants for 2026

The Laurel Garden Club of Highlands is pleased to announce that grants totaling \$19,385 have been awarded to eight local nonprofit organizations for 2026.

This year's grant recipients are: The Coalition on Non-native Invasive Plant Material, Center for Life Enrichment, Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust, Highlands Community Child Development Center, Highlands Historical Society, The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center, Highlands Performing Arts Center, and Peggy Crosby Community Service Center.

Each organization was selected based on its alignment with the Laurel Garden Club's mission to protect and conserve natural resources while enhancing the beauty of the town and its native mountain landscapes.

The Laurel Garden Club is a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to these goals. To support its mission, the Club periodically hosts fundraising events such as home and garden tours, kitchen tours, luncheons, and other special gatherings. Proceeds from these events are awarded as grants to local nonprofits.

Since 2002, the Club has distributed more than \$239,645 in grants to community organizations. This ongoing support is made possible through the generosity of the community, and the Laurel Garden Club extends its sincere appreciation to all who participate in and support its fundraising efforts.

• HIGHLANDS AREA EVENTS •

NOTE:

• The Rec Park pool will be closed through Saturday, April 18th for roof panel replacement.

• Highlands Pharmacy is closed on Saturdays until May. Hours are Mon.-Fri. 9a to 5:30p.

POOL SCHEDULE



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PICKLE BALL

• At the Recreation Dept. every Monday - Friday 10am-1pm indoors for the winter (notice the days and time has changed),

MOUNTAIN FINDINGS

• **Spring Hours:** Friday & Saturdays. Open: 10 am - 1 pm. April 17-18; May 1-2, 8-9, 15-16; Thurs., Fri, Sat.: May 21-23, May 28-30. Spruce Street. www.mountainfindings.org

ALL WEEK

• Scaly Mountain/Highlands/Cashiers Alcoholics Anonymous "Open Meetings" are for anyone who thinks they may have a drinking problem or for anyone interested in the A.A. recovery program. Open meetings are held at Scaly Mountain @ Grace Chapel, 9915 Dillard Rd., Scaly Mountain each Tues at 5:30 pm and Highlands @ the 1st Presbyterian Church, 471 Main St., on Monday at 5:30 p.m. and on Wednesday & Fridays @ 12:00 noon. Open in-person meetings are also held in Cashiers @ the Albert Carlton Cashiers Community Library, 249 Frank Allen Rd. on Sunday at 5pm, on Tuesday @ 7 pm, on Friday at 5 pm and on Saturday at 9 am. For more information please visit our website www.aawnc80.org or to speak with a member of A.A. 24/7 call our HELP Line 828 349-4357

Mon.Thurs.

• At First Presbyterian Church, ArtSpace is open from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The next exhibit will start in mid-August. For information contact fpchkelley@gmail.com

Mon., Tues., Wed, Fri.

• EnerChi: Connect mind, body, and breath using Tai Chi in a meditative movement practice. Call or email if interested in these classes 828-634-1404 or Well-springClasses@gmail.com. Mon. 5:30-6:30pm, Tues. 4-5pm, Wed. 6:30-7:30pm and Fri. 4-5pm and 5:30-6:30pm.

Mon-Wed-Fri

• Aerobics with Tina Rogers 8-9am at the Rec Park.

• Balance, Stretch & Strengthen Class at the Rec Park 8:30-9:30am. The cost for the class is \$30 a month and is led by Vivian Brewer. Call the Recreation Department at 828-526-3556 for more information.

Mon., Tues., Thurs.

• The Food Pantry behind the Methodist Church on Spring Street is open from 10a-6p.

• Exercise Class with Michelle Lane at the Rec Park at 5:30. A combo class with different types of exercise. 828-526-3556

Second Mondays

• The local chapter of PEO, an off-campus sorority founded in the 1800s that provides grants and loans to women with financial need who want to return to school or further their education meets at 10 a.m. For more info call president Paula McDonald at 706-372-3004

Tuesdays

• Strength Training at the Rec Park 8:15-9:15 am.

• At Wayfarers Chapel, Workshop for Writers – from 5-6:30 PM

• ESL classes at The Literacy & Learning Center, 6-7 p.m. 675 S 4th St.

2nd Tuesdays

• Highlands Writers Group meets on alternate Tuesday afternoons at 3pm. Writers still uncomfortable with in-person gatherings may participate via Zoom meetings. For more info contact Bud Katz at either 828-526-3190 or at budandlynn@me.com

Wednesdays

• The Literacy & Learning Center offers a FREE weekly Citizenship Class led by Faviola Olvera from 5:30 to 7 pm at 675 S 4th St in Highlands, this program is designed to help students navigate the complexities of the U.S. naturalization exam.

• Digital Navigators will be at the Hudson Library from 1-3 PM, digital navigators will host a Tech Time drop-in time at Hudson Library with the goal to assist attendees with basic smartphone, laptop, iPad and tablet skills. For more information, call the Library at 828-526-3031. This program is free and open to the public.

Thursdays

• Kickboxing 8:15-9:15a. at the Rec Park. No martial arts background necessary Contact the Rec Dept. at 828-526-3556 for more info.

• At First Presbyterian Church a free concert "Music for Prayer" at noon. These casual concerts are almost entirely improvised and last 30-45 minutes.

• At Hudson Library, special children's events will be on tap on Thursday afternoons at 3:30 Kids Zone programs.

3rd Saturdays

• The American Legion Post 370 meets at the First Methodist Church at 315 Main St. in their community room/909 chapel. Breakfast is at 9a; meeting is at 10a. Email ncpost370@gmail.com or just join us at 9am.

Wed., April 15

• Brown Bag Lunch & Learn Canva 11:3s-1p at the Highlands Community Center.

Sat., April 18

• The Highlands Chamber of Commerce/Visit Highlands, annual Plateau Pickup. Volunteers will gather at 8:30am at K-H Park (Pine Street) to check in and get clean-up assignments along key corridors including U.S. 64, N.C. 28, N.C. 106, and select areas of downtown Highlands. For more info, email events@highlandschamber.org or call 828-526-5841.

• At The Bascom, Artist Talk with Dean Kessmann, 3 pm, Free.

April 24-26

• PAC Educational Theatre is excited to present our All-Community Production of Shrek: The Musical. The all-community cast features talented performers of all ages who have come together to create a production full of creativity, laughter, and magical moments. Tickets are on sale now!

Sat, April 25

• Headwaters Bird Alliance local chapter of the National Audubon Society outing Lonesome Valley with Richard Yow, Cashiers, NC. For more information or to reserve a spot for any of the outings, please email hello@headwatersbirdalliance.org

Wed., April 20

• Brown Bag Lunch & Learn AI, 11:3s-1p at the Highlands Community Center.

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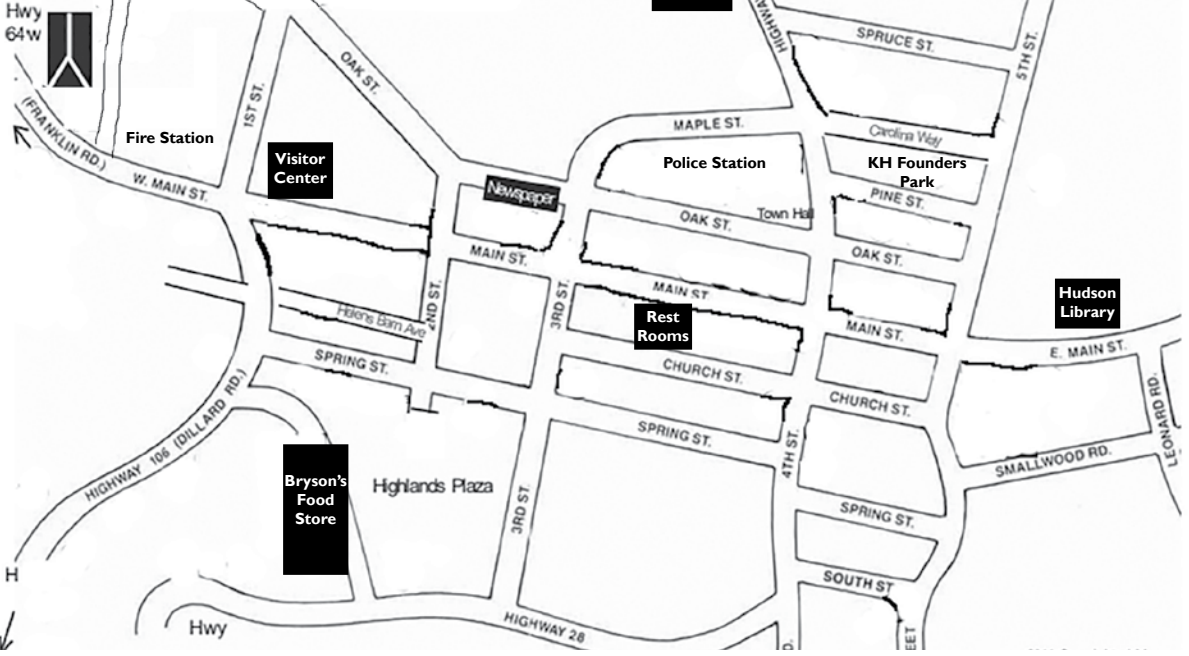
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