

The Village Record

The Newsletter of
Village of Flat Rock
110 Village Center Drive
Post Office Box 1288
Flat Rock, North Carolina
Telephone: (828) 697-8100
Fax: (828) 697-8461

Volume XXXII Number 1

March / April 2023

From the Mayor's Desk

Nick Weedman

2023/2024 Property Taxes

Earlier this year, all property owners should have received notice from the Henderson County Tax Assessor giving the appraised value of their real property as of January 1, 2023.

Most values increased significantly, primarily due to the rapid rise in home values in Flat Rock. Values typically increased between 35% to 50%.

This value multiplied by the tax rate in effect as of June 30th is the amount of taxes due on the property as of September 1, 2023. Property owners have until January 5, 2024, to pay the bill without any interest charge.

The Village's tax rate is primarily driven by the rates the three fire departments serving our community get approved.

Here is how that rate is determined.

The Village is served by three fire departments: Blue Ridge Fire and Rescue, Valley Hill Fire and Rescue, and Green River Fire and Rescue. None of these are government agencies and thus lack taxing

authority. All are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations.

The budgeted tax rate is determined annually and then submitted to the Henderson County Fire and Rescue Advisory Committee. This Committee reviews each Department's budget, and once approved, that recommended tax rate is submitted to the County Commissioners. At a County Commissioner meeting in late May or early June, the tax rates are formally approved and submitted to organizations that tax real and personal property.

The Village of Flat Rock has contractual agreements with each of the three Fire Departments and will bill real and personal property at a single tax rate.

Preliminary advice from each of the three departments indicates that two are planning to keep their requested tax rates at levels equal to last year. One department indicates it expected to lower its rate by one cent.

If the current indicated rates are those submitted for approval, the tax rate to be used by the Village will decrease by about one cent. If all of this holds, the 2023 / 2024 tax rate will likely decline from \$0.13 / \$100 of value to about \$0.12 / \$100 of value. This means most tax bills would increase for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 1, 2023.

The tax rate by Henderson County is likely to be reduced. One Commissioner wanted to go ahead and set a tax rate, but this was premature, and the idea was dismissed earlier this year. The new rate will be decided in May or June once all of the County government departments have had their proposed budgets approved.

The Village Council will do everything possible to work with the Fire Departments to get the lowest property tax rate possible for the new billing cycle.

2022 / 2023 Property Tax Report

Collection of taxes billed in early September 2022 is proceeding as expected. The Village billed \$1,293,242 in real and personal property taxes and received 99.3% of that amount as of late March. There are about 50 properties that are delinquent owned by 25 individuals or accounts. This collection rate is slightly ahead of the same time a year ago.

The Tax Collector has sent reminder letters and updated bills to all owners of delinquent accounts. A process has begun to seize the bank accounts of those owners through the garnishment process. This is an expensive alternative to paying on a timely basis but is a tool that is an effective collection process.

With about three months left in this fiscal year to collect the remaining open accounts, it is anticipated that all will be collected. The exception to this could be the estates of individuals who have died since the tax bills were sent.

The next step is to advertise delinquent accounts. The expense of doing this can often

exceed the amount due, but it is an effective way of getting owners' attention and payment from those who have yet to pay.

Advertising delinquent accounts is an essential step before foreclosing on those accounts.

The Village has started foreclosure on properties in the past, but owners have finally stepped up to pay the accounts before their property is sold on the steps of the Courthouse.

The Village has been collecting property taxes for about twenty years and has achieved a 100% collection rate. As we entered this current tax year, no delinquent taxes were owed to the Village for real or personal property.

Current Village Government Activities

- The **Park Commission** is working on proposals for **additions to the Park at Flat Rock Master Plan**. (The original master plan has been accomplished.) This plan has been a significant focus of the village efforts for several months, as the commission presented ideas to the Council on adding amenities to the park. The commission is revising its final draft to present to the Council for approval this spring.
- The **Planning Board** will review the Land Development Ordinance (LDO), which is the **village zoning** document, to identify: 1) any inconsistencies with current government requirements and 2) any zoning descriptions that lack standard elements. The village is now interviewing zoning experts to serve as a consultant.

- The village **Transportation Advisory Committee** has, after obtaining necessary right-of-way approval from the NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT), purchased two **electronic speeding signs** for placement where most needed.
- The **Council** will consider a resolution expressing **opposition to making NC municipal elections partisan**. This possibility has arisen within discussion (and County Commission support) of making School Board elections partisan.

Village Government Needs Your Input

We invite you to participate in YOUR government. It can be as simple as reading the Council minutes that are easily accessed on the Village website. ALL Village government meetings – the council, the boards, the commissions, and the committees – are open to the public, and their minutes are available by request. Just check the monthly calendar on the website for where and when these meetings occur or to learn of any calendar changes.

Or plan to join us on the second Thursday of every month for the Village Council Monthly Meeting. These meetings include open discussions of village **policies**, village **spending**, the **activities** of all portions of village governance, and the Park Foundation.

THERE IS A PUBLIC COMMENT TIME AT THE BEGINNING AND END OF EVERY COUNCIL MEETING, INCLUDING THE AGENDA WORKSHOP, AND WE WELCOME AND BENEFIT FROM PUBLIC INPUT.

And, when all else fails, express yourself via the village email system. The mayor and each council member have an address on the website: www.villageofflatrock.org.

Or, if you want to reach all of us at once, send an email to the mayor, and he will share it with Council: mayor@villageofflatrock.org.

SHRED AND DRUG TAKE-BACK MAY 6, 2023

The spring Shred and Drug Take-Back will be Saturday, May 6th, from 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM. Just drive-thru on Village Center Drive, and Council volunteers will fetch your sensitive papers and old medicines for secure removal. Shred America, a veteran-owned company, will shred the papers on the spot. Henderson County Sheriff's Office personnel will take care of the medicine. Please stay in your car at all times for everyone's safety.

DO's and DON'Ts – Shredding

- NO PLASTIC BAGS OR PLASTIC ITEMS!! They will ruin the shredder!
- Paper amount limited to 3 file-size boxes or the equivalent. Please don't weigh down one container; council members are not Olympic-ready.
- This is NOT a recycling event for newspapers, magazines, or any other papers that don't require security.
- No notebooks or any metal larger than a standard small paper clip allowed.

DO's and DON'Ts – Pill Drop

- No restrictions on the number of permitted items – pills, inhalers, and patches.

- NOT accepted – chemotherapy drugs, epi-pens, or sharps and needles.
- You do not have to take your pills and other items out of their original containers. Just pass them over in a bag. (Plastic is okay for this step.)

IN CASE OF CANCELLATION DUE TO EXTREME WEATHER, CHECK THE VILLAGE WEBSITE FOR UPDATES.

www.villageofflatrock.org

Flat Rock was Built by VOLUNTEERS

The establishment in 1995 of the Village of Flat Rock was made possible by dedicated volunteers. They achieved a legal charter from the General Assembly and created a government for the Village. Their dedication allowed Flat Rock to control its future and to do so with fiscal responsibility.

In their vision, the village would rely on the pool of talented and generous people that loved their community. The hope was that the government – from the council to the office crew – would be staffed by volunteers to avoid municipal taxes. But some things must be done by state-accredited employees or performed by hired experts. The three fire departments that service three different sections of Flat Rock require payment to keep us safe. And the addition of the much-loved park increased village expenses.

Many current residents of Flat Rock are unaware of this history and the vital role that volunteers play in keeping Flat Rock viable and fiscally responsible. Part of this vision remains. By law, a salary was designated for the mayor and council members; but each

year elected officials vote NOT to take a salary. The council cannot do its job without the boards, commissions, and committees that support many functions. These positions are filled with volunteers. And many of these volunteers, who have played their parts for years, are getting a bit weary.

THE VILLAGE NEEDS NEW VOLUNTEERS TO MAINTAIN OUR COMMUNITY AS A SPECIAL PLACE.

Your volunteer time can range from running for elected office (think of all the times you made suggestions about how things SHOULD be done) to helping the office staff with basic but time-consuming functions. Consider joining one of the advisory bodies, all of which are described on the village website. OR get a copy of the Volunteer Request Form that lists all of this information. This information will also be available at the Village Ice Cream Social, so you can pick one up while eating that free cup of chocolate chip.

THANK YOU FOR VOLUNTEERING!!



Flat Rock Village Council Award Grants

The Flat Rock Village Council approved awarding financial grants that provide financial support to public service providers county-wide and Flat Rock-based independent businesses and nonprofits impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding of these grants was made possible by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

The Village of Flat Rock received \$1,078,153.45 in ARP funds.

Supporting public service providers that work throughout the county was particularly rewarding for Council. The Village Council worked with the County Commissioners to jointly fund an EMS quick response vehicle for county Emergency Services, each party contributing equally toward its purchase. The Village Council also awarded an additional grant to Emergency Services for a state-of-the-art training simulator.

In addition, the three fire departments that cover the Flat Rock area, Blue Ridge Fire and Rescue, Valley Hill Fire and Rescue, and Green River Fire and Rescue, received substantial funding to help them update equipment needed for the vital and life-saving services they provide.

After reviewing all submitted applications, the Council approved the following grants, which have been distributed:

General government service grants:

- Blue Ridge Fire and Rescue, \$320,000
- Valley Hill Fire and Rescue, \$125,000
- Green River Fire and Rescue, \$50,000
- Henderson County EMS, \$70,000

Flat Rock-based independent business and nonprofit grants:

- Flat Rock Playhouse, for COVID-related expenses (HVAC, new carpeting, sanitizing, testing), \$103,748
- Friends of Carl Sandburg at Connemara, Inc. to help maintain access to the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site with passenger vehicle service while the lake bridge is repaired, \$37,500
- Ladies Aid Society of Flat Rock, Inc. to continue assisting local nonprofits helping residents with basic needs, \$17,500
- Pinecrest Presbyterian Church, for COVID-related expenses (installation of air purifier), \$7,727
- Cuisine Team, qualified award for severely impacted sole proprietor business, \$12,500.

Village service grants:

- Premium pay for village employees, \$109,004
- Consultation/administration costs for the grant program through Land of Sky Regional Council, \$15,000.
- Stormwater project – Dye Creek remediation project in the Park at Flat Rock, to begin in Fall 2023, \$210,000.

All grants awarded followed federal and state regulations. The business/nonprofit grants were also required to demonstrate a 20 percent reduction in revenue from a base year before the pandemic emergency to the following year.

Mary Roderick, Ph.D. with Land of Sky Regional Council, is working with the Flat Rock Village Council and staff on administering these grants.

Land of Sky Regional Council (landofsky.org) is a multi-county, local government, planning and development organization providing technical assistance to local governments and administering projects and programs that benefit the region's citizens.

Update on N. Highland Lake Road Project

The N. Highland Lake Road project seems to be not just never-ending but never-starting. The initial start date for construction has been pushed back multiple times over the past several years; however, at the Henderson County TAC meeting on March 15th, Rusty Darnell, head of the local NCDOT office, said that their contractor is scheduled to begin construction during the first two weeks of April. Below is the current road project information:

- The current estimated cost for the project is now \$9.97M (up from the original estimate of \$2.62M).
- The contractor has submitted a formal claim to NCDOT that the delay on the N. Highland Lake Road project is due to the unavailability of material.

- The NCDOT Construction Unit in Raleigh and the local NCDOT office are reviewing his claim for validity.
- The claim review/resolution process involves several steps, and there is no date yet for completion.
- The current contract includes what is called a “substantial completion date” of October 2023 (and a total completion date of March 2024). Depending on the claim finding by NCDOT, the contractor could be liable for damages, or if needed, NCDOT could extend the contractual due date with no contractor liability.

For updates on the road project, please check the North Highland Lake Road Project link on the Village website (villageofflatrock.org).

What Happened to the Front Lake at Carl Sandburg Home NHS?

In August 2022, the park closed Front Lake bridge for safety due to drainage issues in the historic dam. Front Lake bridge was built on the spillway portion of this dam. The earthen dam on the left side of the bridge is eroding and unstable. That is why the bridge is closed and blocked off. Do not go into these closed areas.

Front Lake dam was built in the 1850s. It includes a stone spillway (the wall the water flows over to keep the lake level) and earthen banks on the left and right sides of the spillway. The earthen bank of the left (“park”) side has a history of water seepage and repairs because it was built on sand, not bedrock. The right (“parking lot”) side and the stone

spillways were built on bedrock and had no issues.

The dam is inspected regularly. Some seepage is expected and, for years was deemed within acceptable limits. However, over time, water had been undercutting the left side. The earthen dam was breached in August 2022. Repairs will reinforce washed-out areas on the earthen dam's left ("park side") and replace the rusted corrugated metal pipe. The planned Repairs are based on newer standards. They will slow down water seepage and filter out sediment. A more robust inspection and monitoring process will be implemented to catch minor problems early before they become catastrophic failures.

The park doesn't have firm dates for repair as yet. Please check www.nps.gov/carl or the park's Facebook page for updates. Visitors should check the park's "Plan Your Visit" page for up-to-date information on where to park, how to access the park, and when shuttle service is available.

Village Council Fights Invasives

The Village has hired Bartlett Tree to treat the hemlocks along Little River Road in early April. The application targets woolly adelgid, which has harmed so many of these trees in the past. Hemlock treatment is provided by the Village every four years. Homeowners whose properties abut Little River Road have received a letter from the Village requesting permission for the treatments along the greenway.

Spraying of kudzu will be in late July or early

August, as usual. Council member David Dethero maintains a list from year to year of previous kudzu spraying, and he will be in contact with those known to have kudzu. Any Flat Rock resident who believes they have kudzu, but have yet to receive village-sponsored spraying, should contact Mr. Dethero by early July; he will meet with the owners to review the property together. His contact number for this and any questions is 828-692-5375.

Spring in the Park at Flat Rock

The Park at Flat Rock is changing with the seasons! One seasonal happening visitors may wish to explore is on the north side of the park, just past the Nature Center and The Quiet Place. There, adventurous visitors can discover the park's vernal pools.

Vernal pools are an interesting and ecologically important wetland feature: shallow pools that dry up and disappear in the summer and fall. These drastically different seasonal environments provide an ideal habitat for the park's amphibians. Frogs, toads, and salamanders rely on these variable but predictable conditions to support their lifecycles.

Popular seasonal residents have returned to the park, the Canada geese. Park regulars will recognize them as the same geese born here last spring! Though they migrate across the continent, Canada geese return to the same spot every winter. Cute as they are, please remember that they are wild animals and should not be given food from people. Feeding the geese can lead to several problems, both dietary and behavioral. Come see how they've grown up before they fly north again!

**Village of Flat Rock
P.O. Box 1288
Flat Rock, NC 28731-1288**

Schedule of Meetings

All monthly **Council Meetings** are on the **second Thursday** of each month, and will start at 9:30 AM, unless that day is a holiday.

Agenda Workshops are scheduled to start at 9:30 AM on the **Monday** 10 days prior to the Council Meeting, unless that Monday falls on a holiday.

The Planning Board meets the **first Tuesday** of each month from 10:30 AM until 12:00 Noon

The Board of Adjustment meets the **first Tuesday** monthly at 2:00 PM or as needed.

The Historic Landmarks Commission meets the second Thursday of each month after the monthly council meeting (if there are agenda items).

Village of Flat Rock office hours are 9:00 AM—4:00 PM, Monday through Friday.

Village Directory

Mayor: Nick Weedman	828-693-5300
Council Members:	
<i>District 1</i>	
Matt Toner	832-256-7631
Tom Carpenter	828-692-5352
<i>District 2</i>	
Anne Coletta, Vice Mayor	828-595-0707
Susan Gregory	703-509-8230
<i>District 3</i>	
David Dethero	828-692-5375
Barbara Jeter	828-290-7485
Village Administrator: Pat Christie, CZO	828-697-8100
Village Clerk: Michelle Parker, CMC	828-697-8100
Tax Collector/Deputy Village Clerk: Carol Richard, CMC	828-697-8100
Park Director: Michael Dages	828-435-0397