

MINUTES
Town of Blowing Rock
Town Council Meeting
August 11, 2020

The Town of Blowing Rock Town Council met for their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, August 11, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. The meeting took place at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street Blowing Rock, NC. Present were Mayor Charlie Sellers, Mayor Pro-Tem Sue Sweeting and Council Members Albert Yount, David Harwood, Doug Matheson, Virginia Powell, Town Manager Shane Fox, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner who recorded the minutes. Others in attendance via Zoom virtual/phone session were Town Attorney Allen Moseley, Town Engineer Doug Chapman, Fire Chief Kent Graham, Police Chief Aaron Miller and Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown. Finance Officer Nicole Norman and Public Works and Utilities Director Matt Blackburn were unable to attend the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Sellers called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone. Mayor verified attendance via roll call.

THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGINANCE

MINUTE APPROVAL

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting made a motion to approve the minutes from the July 14, 2020 regular session minutes, seconded by Council Member Matheson. Unanimously approved.

Council Member Powell made a motion to approve the July 14, 2020 closed session meeting, seconded by Council Member Harwood. Unanimously approved.

REGULAR AGENDA ADOPTION

Mayor Sellers advised Mr. Kent Tarbutton had requested to pull the Chetola Lake Dredging request off the agenda due to a recent illness. He advised the item will likely be back on the September agenda.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting made a motion to adopt the agenda with the change, seconded by Council Member Matheson. Unanimously approved.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Town of Blowing Rock – Ice House Lease – Permission to advertise for bids

Request to allow Town Staff to proceed with the advertisement for soliciting bids for lease of the Historic Town-owned Ice-House. Once bids are received, a public hearing will be conducted in accordance with NCGS and lease awarded by Town Council at the October Town Council Meeting.

2. Water Treatment Plant Bulk Chemical Tanks – Permission to advertise for bids

Request is to allow for Town Staff and McGill to prepare a schematic bid package to solicit informal bids to complete the removal of the old bulk chemical tanks at the Water Plant. Bids will be received and reviewed to possibly award at the October 2020 Town Council meeting. Potential funding would be derived from current Water Plant Reserves.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting made a motion to approve consent as presented, seconded by Council Member Yount. Unanimously approved.

SPEAKERS FROM THE FLOOR

Mayor Sellers and Town Manager Fox each read letter from Citizens; Morris Street Sidewalk (John Aldridge), Art and the Park (Emily Brinker, John Aldridge and Deborah McDowell), Speeding on 321 (Earnest Long, Laura Bingham/Rhonda Smith), Police enforcing masks (Lee Rocamora) and EMS Service (William Miller).

Comments in response to some of the citizens letters:

Mayor Sellers advised Mr. Cullie Tarleton contacted NC DOT and they will be providing additional signage to the Town of Blowing Rock. In addition, he contacted the secretary of the Department of Transportation and a formal letter is going to be sent to request the Highway Patrol to make more visits on Highway 321. Mayor Sellers further advised he, Manager Fox, Police Chief Aaron Miller and Council have all made it a effort to address this issue and resolve the problem as it is a safety issue.

Council Member Yount advised there is a “myth” among some people that the Blowing Rock Police aren’t doing anything about the speeding issue. He wanted these numbers to go on record; in 2019 Blowing Rock Police stopped 2,153 vehicles and during that same time frame NC Highway Patrol stopped 1,566 vehicles in the county. He further advised in July 2020 Blowing Rock Police stopped 238 vehicles and during the same time frame Boone Police Department stopped 196 vehicles. Council Member Yount stated Boone is three times bigger than Blowing Rock, so he just wanted to say these numbers show our officers are working.

Manager Fox advised he wanted to clarify a few things about the letter from Mr. William Miller. The Fire Department’s issue with the phone line was fixed that day as they weren’t aware the line was out. He advised it’s important for people to remember to always call 911 in a case of an emergency. The Fire Department phone number is more of an administrative number. He explained in years past Blowing Rock Fire and Rescue has always responded to all calls. During the COVID Pandemic, Watauga County Emergency Management Department along with a lot of other counties in North Carolina put a process in place for the most non-critical calls not to be dispatched to certain responders and instead only go to the EMS Service. The reason being is to limit the number of responders to a call due to COVID. Manager Fox further explained if the call is a life-threatening call the Blowing Rock Fire and Rescue as well as EMS will both be dispatched to the call.

BUSINESS MATTERS:

1. Chestnut Drive/Morris Street Drainage Project

Manager Fox advised for Council consideration, a change order to current Paving and Stormwater Project 2020 to include a more substantial drainage project along Chestnut Drive and Morris Street. Funds to be utilized from current paving budget, possible contingency funds and remaining funds from the Sunset Project close-out. The Town currently has approximately \$62,000 in current drainage budget, approximately \$50,000 in contingency and approximately \$300,000 in monies available from the Sunset Drive Project finalization reconciliation under the budget.

Town Engineer Doug Chapman from McGill advised as part of the 2014 General Obligation bond package, the Town set a goal of paving all its streets that had not been paved in the preceding few years. During the fall of 2019, the development of a final paving bid package was developed, which included Chestnut Drive. During the heavy rains of late 2019 and construction in the area, repeated stormwater problems were identified along Chestnut Drive generally from Main Street to Chestnut Circle was included as a bid alternate. The low bid amount for that alternate was \$220,180. With a limited amount of funds available at award, only a limited scope of the project was awarded, to include a portion of stormwater facilities near the east side of St. Mary's, and a section east and south of Morris Street along Chestnut.

As construction along Chestnut is nearing, repeated heavy rains in spring and early summer has intensified the need to complete a more expanded scope of drainage improvements along Chestnut. To that end, they have met with the Town Staff and the Contractor to develop a series of comprehensive stormwater steps to manage rainwater along this section of Chestnut (Main Street to Chestnut Circle).

The proposed stormwater improvements have been segregated into five (5) segments, as outlined in differing colors on the map. Those sections have differing functions, benefits, and costs:

1. Segment 1 – just east of St. Mary's – collects water coming overland (from the former hospital site) and distributes to piping flowing under Main Street. Cost \$22,000
2. Segment 2 – Morris St to south Henkle – collects water along Chestnut from Morris to the north entrance of the former hospital site (reducing the flow in ditch lines) and conveys to the drainage ditch along Morris St. Cost- \$83,000
3. Segment 3 – Chestnut to BRES – conveys water along the east side of Morris from the piping the ditch in this area and paving back a small ditch. Cost - \$60,000
4. Segment 4 – Henkle to Chestnut Circle – collects water along Chestnut to Chestnut Circle, including capturing water routed to the west side of Chestnut, north of Grandfather, after the road is regraded and paved. Cost - \$80,000
5. Segment 5 – St. Mary's to Morris St – allows Town staff to direct water south and east of Morris along Chestnut from discharging to Morris St., to discharging to Main

Street. A junction box with an overflow weir would be installed at the connection point. Cost - \$38,000

Total project costs for all these segments of storm drainage improvements is \$277,000. The project contracted as awarded, including \$62,560 in storm drainage improvements (segment 1 and portions of segment 2).

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting asked if segment five (5) was in the original bid.

Mr. Chapman advised it was included, segments one (1), two (2), four (4) and five (5) were all included in the original bid.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting asked if the culvert going down Morris Street on the right was going to be fixed would the sidewalk be able to be done on top of that at some point.

Mr. Chapman advised it would be possible and explained in detail how it could be done.

Mayor Sellers advised he had the understanding the cost is estimate for the sidewalk is around \$130,000 and asked if the cost could be reduced if the sidewalk was done in conjunction with the Morris Street drainage. Mr. Chapman advised it could be.

Mayor Sellers further asked what the time frame for the work to be completed would be. Mr. Chapman advised it could take up to six (6) months.

Council Member Matheson advised he personally felt with all the problems the Town has had over the years with issues on Chestnut using a twenty-four (24) inch pipe was under sizing. He explained he didn't think the cost would be much more to go up to a thirty (30) inch pipe.

Mr. Chapman advised he didn't think a larger pipe was necessary in that area and explained in detail the reasoning for his thoughts.

Council Member Matheson stated the water flow was increasing going down Morris Street and asked if that was not going to increase the problem that has been on Ransom Street at First Baptist Church.

Mr. Chapman advised it wouldn't be increasing water since the water was already there now.

Manager Fox reviewed the funding source, part from the original bond amount and the remining would be from the remaining funds from the Sunset Street Scape.

Manager Fox advised each time staff and the engineers had walked the project they were stopped by a number of residents who have all had a number of issues over the years. He explained this was good so those homeowners could show them just where the problems were occurring, show drain patterns etc.

Council Members discussed in detail different scenarios with Mr. Chapman and staff about drainage and what could happen and what would be done to help with those issues.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting asked Mr. Chapman if he felt comfortable in saying the new flow amount going down to the Baptist Church is not going to affect the new drain the Town just put in.

Mr. Chapman advised if all five of the segments were able to be met and the ability to direct some of the water flow to Main Street instead of Morris Street that would give the ability to lessen the impacts to Ransom Street near the Baptist Church.

Council discussed further the drainage and details of the project.

Council Member Yount asked if this project would give any resolution to the problem Richard Trexler has been dealing with for years. Manager Fox advised this would be an attempt to help improve that area but could guarantee it would completely fix the problem.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting made a motion to approve the Chestnut Drive drainage paving project as presented and to fund using the funds from the original bond as well as what funds were left over from Sunset Drive, seconded by Council Member Yount. Unanimously approved.

Council took a 15-minute recess at 7:30 p.m. They resumed the meeting at 7:45 p.m.

2. Blowing Rock Chamber – Art and the Park Contract

The Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce is requesting a renewal of their current Art in the Park contract for an additional five years.

Executive Director of the Blowing Rock Chamber Charles Hardin advised the request was for a simple five (5) year renewal of the current lease. He advised this would be the Chamber's third consecutive five (5) year renewal request and there have been no problems in the past that he was aware of.

Mr. Hardin reminded Council that several years ago Council had asked that the Chamber move Art in the Park off of the parking deck and move it onto Park Avenue. He explained this had proved to work out very well for the Chamber, the event, the Town, the artist and the.

Mr. Hardin advised there had been some question as to the need of a five-year lease. He explained that it's really important from a marketing, promotion and the biggest being a talent recruitment standpoint. He advised on any normal Art in the Park year it attracts 30,000 to 35,000 visitors a year. Mr. Hardin advised approximately \$8,000 to \$8,500 goes back to the Town's general fund from the show.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting advised if there were any staff comments regarding the request.

Manager Fox advised Chief Miller had requested that spot 84 on the map be relocated from in front of the police station near the handicap ramp, Chief Graham requested that access be allowed to each resident's home driveway and Ms. Brown needs to know dates in advance for scheduling weddings and events.

Council Member Harwood made a motion to renew the lease as is, seconded by Council Member Powell. Further discussion:

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting advised she thought Council needed to think about parking as hopefully in December the parking on Hwy 221 will be going away when the Bass Lake Sidewalk is completed. She further advised Council has been criticized as a whole for the lack of parking.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting advised Art in the Park takes up roughly ninety (90) to one hundred (100) parking spots. She felt Council needed to be aware of that and perhaps five (5) years is too long. In addition, this year the residences had requested that the Town have dispatch back at the Police Department, in which the Town has spent \$140,000 to have dispatching 12 hours a day, seven days a week and that area is being blocked.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting advised what she would like the Chamber to look at the parking situation and where else they could have Art in the Park that wouldn't affect our parking situation so much seven times a year. She felt there were other areas in Town that would be possible areas interested in having Art in the Park; the Horse Show Grounds, Appalachian Ski Mountain or Tanger Outlets.

Mr. Hardin advised he wanted to make sure Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting was aware that the Chamber pays \$1,200 a month to a shuttle service to run people from Tanger parking into downtown. He further advised they are already offsetting their forty (40) parking spaces and this is a huge partnership for the Town.

Council Member Matheson advised one of the things he hoped that would help with the parking is when COVID is over the Council get back to their discussion of the shuttle with AppalCart and help relieve some of the parking issue.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting asked if this lease agreement was something that could wait a year to see what COVID does and then re-visit next August. She advised there were no dates on their application. Council Member Matheson stated he was sure the dates would be around the same time that it has been for the last ten years. Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting advised she would feel better with actual dates that have been accepted by Parks and Rec staff.

Mr. Hardin advised for clarification of the lease agreement the Chamber is required to bring dates yearly before Council for approval for the next five years. He advised he has done that every year for fifteen (15) years. He further advised in all those years he can only recall one date that was in question and that was years ago when Rita Wiseman was on Council and there was concern the Art in the Park date was on Mother's Day weekend. Otherwise there has been no issues and the dates are around the same time each year.

Council Member Harwood asked if it would be unreasonable to ask for dates to be locked in for two years. Mr. Hardin advised he could provide that and further advised he could probably provide the whole five years if need be. Council Member Harwood stated he felt having those dates at least two years out could help Parks and Rec staff with scheduling weddings and events.

Council Member Yount asked Mr. Hardin if he had given any thought as to a good place for the vendors to park. Mr. Hardin advised the Chamber has looked at options and will continue to seek other options for the vendors to park.

Council Member Powell advised perhaps the Town could get permission to do a drone to gather some data from the next Art in the Park to see where people are parking and get information on where our parking problem is etc.

Council Member Matheson advised he had a friend that was going to be taking some drone footage that would help gather information for how to move forward with Public transportation.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting asked if Council would be willing to table this request until data can be gathered on what the parking situation is. Council Member Matheson advised he didn't think that was going to change Art in the Parks parking. He felt it was just going to only help with how to go forward with the public transportation aspect. The parking is still going to be an issue.

After further discussion. Council Member Harwood amended his motion to approve the five-year request and asked the Chamber to include Art in the Park dates for two years to Parks and Recreation for planning purposes, seconded by Council Member Powell. Unanimously approved.

3. 321 Valley Blvd. Update

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock gave an update of the Hwy 321 Valley Blvd. and provided a summary list for Council.

Council Member Harwood asked for enlightenment on the BRCA's contract with Mosaic Design. Manager Fox advised that Mr. Tim Gupton with the BRCA approached him about the funding and then reached out to Mr. Rothrock and Planning Board Chairman Pete Gherini to discuss what the plans were from the Planning Board perspective. He advised they took it upon themselves to raise to funds and hire this firm without any

Town input. The plan is to work with the Planning Board and the request of the Planning Board Chair is to potentially form a subcommittee once they have some data and information and present that to the Planning Board subcommittee.

Council Member Yount asked if this was a push for the New River.

Manager Fox advised he believed there was a push of storm water quality management, a potential Greenway that was discussed during the 2014 Comprehensive Plan. He explained there is about four (4) or five (5) points they are looking at accomplishing.

Mr. Rothrock advised they are also consulting with the New River Conservancy with the restoration of the New River.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting asked if BRCA could also be added to the stormwater management with the New River Conservancy because they have access to grants. She further asked if Mr. Rothrock had a timeline for these issues to be addressed as there were about seven (7) and she felt that was going to be difficult for Planning Board to do. She further asked if he had looked at which one's staff could do.

Mr. Rothrock advised there were some ideas they could present but would like to have the input of a subcommittee. He further advised once they get to a point as far as building heights, setbacks etc. he wanted to be able to take that to a public group for public input from ones who own property on Hwy 321.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting asked Mr. Rothrock if staff could initiate 11-2 and 11-3 and under supplementary number 2 on the report provided to Council. She explained one of the things discussed in the Ad Hoc Committee meetings was asking DOT if there were areas owned by them that couldn't be developed if they would allow the Town to put some sort of landscaping or wall work in. She felt that was something staff could work on and felt something of that nature there might be people in Town that would donate to a project like that.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting re-stated she felt there were things staff could start working on as she felt that Planning Board was going to be "slammed" with the list that has been created.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting advised the color pallet was actually a recommendation by the public. Mr. Rothrock advised the color pallet was sent to Planning Board per Council's request and they felt it was fine as it is. Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting stated she was trying to balance input public because the committee asked for public comments.

Council thanked Mr. Rothrock for all his hard work.

4. Watauga County Schools – Plan B – Town Assistance Discussion

Manager Fox advised due to COVID-19 issues, the Watauga County School System including Blowing Rock Elementary, are reopening utilizing a combination of a virtual academy and online learning for the first nine weeks. It is the goal of the Watauga County School System to return those who have chosen to return, to in-person instruction as early as mid-October 2020. It has been resources that the Town of Blowing Rock may assist the school system during this time.

Manager Fox advised he has heard from several Council Members regarding what the Town of Blowing Rock can do to help out in any way needs families may need. Chief Graham has created a special code where students and safely connect to a WiFi location for students to access in Town.

Council discussed some options. The consensus was for Parks and Rec staff to offer a space and people could go online and register a time to use the space to access the public WiFi

5. Top 13 Retreat List Update and Next Steps

Manager Fox gave an update of the Top 13 list from the January 2020 Retreat and discussed next steps via Power Point.

OTHER BUSINESS

- Mayor Sellers – No Comments
- Council Member Yount – advised regarding speeding he suggested if big trucks speeding call the company and report them to the safety director.
- Council Member Harwood – No comments
- Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting – thanked all of staff for their hard work. She has had people give her compliments on how kind and wonderful the Town Employees are.
- Council Member Matheson – wanted to thank Manager Fox for reaching out to the Town of Sparta after the earthquake to let them know if they needed any help our staff would be willing to help. Asked for everyone to please remember Tammy in your thoughts and prayers.
- Council Member Powell – No comments
- Manager Fox: Recognized Barry Ford for 30 years of service to the Town. Virtual Manager meeting on Thursday, August 13th. GIS work has recently gone through an update and is now complete. Now about six (6) weeks into our dispatch change and it's going very well. The Town of Boone Mr. Rothrock has worked with their Planning Department to begin helping each other out with needs and demands as far as needs arise. Middle Fork Greenway did have a twenty-minute public input session prior to the meeting tonight. Will be coming before Council in September to provide the same presentation.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 9:45 p.m. Council Member Harwood made a motion to go into executive session *NCGS 143-3 18.11. (a)(3) – Attorney/Client update on current litigation*, seconded by Council Member Powell. Unanimously approved. No action was taken.

ADJOURNMENT

At 10:00 p.m. Council returned to open session, with no further business Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Council Member Matheson. Unanimously approved.

MAYOR _____
Charlie Sellers

ATTEST _____
Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk

Attachments

Art and the Park Agreement/Lease – Attachment A

Highway 321 Update – Attachment B

Top 13 Retreat List Update – Attachment C