

MINUTES
Town of Blowing Rock
Town Council Meeting
October 13, 2020

The Town of Blowing Rock Town Council met for their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, October 13, 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, Town Attorney Allen Moseley, Town Engineer Doug Chapman, Public Works and Utilities Director Matt Blackburn, Planning and Inspections Director Kevin Rothrock, Police Chief Kent Graham and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner who recorded the minutes. Others in attendance via Zoom virtual/phone session were Fire Chief Kent Graham, Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown and Finance Officer Nicole Norman.

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 September 8, 2020 regular and closed session minutes, seconded by Council Member Powell. Unanimously approved.

REGULAR AGENDA ADOPTION

Council Member Matheson made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented, seconded by Council Member Yount. Unanimously approved.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Budget Amendment - #2020-10

Budget Amendment to account for various items. **Budget Amendment #2020-10 – Attachment - A**

2. Debit Issuance – FY 2020-21 Capital Equipment

Bids for FY 2020-21 Capital Equipment, Financing proposals and resolution approving financing.

Debit Issuance – FY 2020-21 - Attachment - B

3. 2012 EMS Resolution – Renewal/Recommitment of the 2012-05 EMS Resolution

Renewal and recommitment of support for the 2012-05 Resolution, signed by Mayor JB Lawrence on February 14, 2012.

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

SPEAKERS FROM THE FLOOR

Mayor Sellers read letters from; Mr. Don Hubble (relocation of utility lines to underground on Main Street), Joann Mitchell (Hwy 321 noise), Mr. Leigh Dunston (county ambulance service) and Mr. Lee Rocamora (county ambulance service). **Citizen Letters – Attachment C**

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Patricia Aiken Annexation – 252 Heather Ridge Lane

Mr. Rothrock advised Ms. Patricia Aiken has submitted a petition of voluntary satellite annexation for Council consideration with the intention of connecting to Town sewer utilities. Consistent with Town policy, any property that desires connection to Town utilities must be located within the corporate limits. At the September 8, 2020 meeting, Council approved Resolution 2020-03 to initiate the satellite annexation process and Resolution 2020-04 to set the date for public hearing. Ms. Aiken is responsible for the cost for extending sewer service to her property and for the availability fees for any buildings connected to the system. Public sewer service is near to Ms. Aiken's house approximately two lots away.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting made a motion to open the public hearing, seconded by Council Member Harwood. Unanimously approved.

With no questions and comments. Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting made a motion to close the public hearing seconded by Council Member Harwood. Unanimously approved.

Council Member Yount made a motion to approve the request as presented, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting. Unanimously approved. **Aiken Annexation – Attachment D**

BUSINESS MATTERS

1. Water Treatment Plant Bulk Tanks

Town Engineer Doug Chapman advised as approved at the August Council meeting, Council decided to move forward with the project to replace the bulk storage tanks. McGill prepared a schematic bid package to solicit informal bids to complete this work. Bids were solicited from five (5) area contractors that have completed comparable work. Unfortunately, several bidders did not have resources currently available to take on the project and only one (1) bid was received. Mr. Chapman advised he recommended tweaking the packages, rebidding and should have results for Council review at the November or December meeting. Manager Fox advised he felt this was the best option. No vote was necessary.

2. Main Street Crosswalks

Town Engineer Doug Chapman advised one Council's priority items from the 2020 Retreat was improving crosswalk conditions at the intersection of Main and Sunset. Due to high vehicular and pedestrian traffic, this intersection can become dangerous with multiple movement possibilities. To address the issue, McGill has worked with Town staff to identify options for improving movements at that intersection.

Mr. Chapman reviewed the three primary options:

- Option 1 – Installing new traffic and pedestrian signals, mounted on the sides of the intersection. This option includes constructing curb extensions on the west side adjacent to Memorial Park and the northeast corner to accommodate the traffic signals and NCDOT standards. To accomplish this option, two (2) parking spaces will be buried; however, overhead power, phone, cable, and guy wiring will remain. The estimate project cost for this option is \$270,000.
- Option 2 – Retaining the existing traffic signals and installing new pedestrian signals mounted on new poles on the southeast and southwest corners of the intersection and a third mounted on an existing pole on the northeast corner. A curb extension would be installed on the west side of the intersection adjacent to Memorial Park to shorten the crossing distance of Main Street south of the intersection. To accomplish this option, one (1) parking space would be lost to the curb extension installation. The wiring for these signals would all be buried; however, overhead traffic signal, power, phone, cable, and guy wiring will remain. The estimated project cost for this option is \$190,000.
- Option 3 – Retaining the existing traffic signals and crosswalk lengths and installing new pedestrian signals mounted on new poles on the southeast and southwest corners of the intersection and a third mounted on an existing pole on the northeast corner. No curb extensions would remain through the handicap ramp on the west end of the Main Street crosswalk would be replaced to meet the latest ADA requirements. The wiring for these signals would all be buried; however, overhead traffic signal, power, phone, cable and guy wiring will remain. The estimated project cost for this option is \$120,000.

Council Member Harwood asked what the cost would be to add curb and guttering to option three. Mr. Chapman advised the cost difference is about a \$7,000 difference and the only real difference between Option two (2) and three (3) is the curb extension.

Council Member Powell advised there is a water line under Main Street that is in need of being replaced and Council may want to consider doing so in conjunction with this project while work is being done in that area anyway.

Mayor Sellers advised that was a good point and should be considered. He further advised in his opinion this "can has been kicked down the road" for years and it's time to take action on this project.

Council Member Matheson advised he felt it would be best to do a non-signal crosswalk at Chestnut Drive and Main Street and put a signal crosswalk at Morris Street and Main

Street. He further advised he would like to revisit at the winter retreat looking at all the intersections for safety.

Mayor Sellers advised his understanding is Chestnut Drive and Morris Street is not currently in consideration, only Main Street and 221 and Main Street and Sunset Drive.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting advised she would like to hold off for a pedestrian crosswalk with lights for Chestnut Drive and Main Street at a later date. She further advised 221 and Main Street and Sunset Drive and Main Street were the higher priority and needed to be the primary focus. She asked Mr. Chapman if a crosswalk could be put at Sunset and Main on the North side. Mr. Chapman advised that is something that had been talked about in the past but has never approached DOT about it. He further advised he didn't know a reason why it couldn't be done but would be a DOT decision. Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting explained she felt it would increase pedestrian traffic at that location. She further explained it is a perfect time to consider adding and making a three-way crossing instead of a two-way crossing which would help with traffic.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting advised DOT has a wooden pole on 221 that isn't currently being used for utilities, but instead for DOT to put their signs on. She explained it's an eyesore and felt DOT needs to work with the Town to improve the signage in that location. She further advised she agreed with Mayor Sellers that this "can has been kicked down" and Council needs to take a stance as this is a safety issue.

Council Member Powell stated she was excited about the available options and felt pedestrian traffic will be increasing with the Middle Fork Greenway and Bass Lake Sidewalk.

Manager Fox reviewed funding options and advised approximately \$150,000 in bond money is remaining from the sunset project and an additional \$110,000 from the ABC Board for a total of \$260,000 to start with. He further advised discussions had begun with TDA Executive Director Tracy Brown about the possibility of the TDA helping with funding. He explained if that were to be an option the TDA Board would have to approve that first. Manager Fox advised monies could also be pulled from the general fund so there were several options to make up the difference in funding.

Council Member Matheson advised he liked option one (1) best. He explained he felt it was a concern with having the stop lights on pedestals as trucks unloading at the stores could block the stoplights and most people are use to looking ahead for the stoplights. Council Member Matheson further advised having the yellow zone curbed out there wouldn't be anywhere for buses to load and unload which are usually carrying senior citizens.

Council Member Yount advised he agreed Mayor Sellers, and it needed to be done, needed to be done right and needed to be done once. He further advised he was in favor of the pedestal lights and felt it was a way of the future.

Manager Fox showed an example of what the pedestal stop lights would look like.

Council Member Matheson advised he felt the pedestal stop lights didn't give enough vision and safety wise it's better to look forward.

Council asked Manager Fox if there had been any safety concern. Manager Fox advised DOT had no documented safety concern. He had heard fog is a concern for Blowing Rock, but again there are no documented safety issues with DOT.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting advised she had researched the safety with these types of lights and had not been able to find any safety issues. She further advised buses should not be unloading in the middle of the intersection. She stated it should be up to the Town to find a place for the buses to unload and that needed to be looked at.

Council Member Harwood stated he would like to see Sunset Drive and Main Street be the grand jewel and didn't have an issue with option one (1) for that area. He felt there was really only one option for 221 and Main Street and would like to advocate for Chestnut Drive and Main Street for a non-signal \$65,000 option. Council Member Harwood explained he pulls out of that intersection thousands of times a year and feels there isn't a really good sight line and a crosswalk would be a nice addition.

Council Member Yount advised he agreed with Council Member Harwood.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting advised she too agreed with Council Member Harwood. She further advised if people are concerned with losing parking spaces, there are five (5) spaces on Maple Street without time limits that could possibly be gained.

Council Member Matheson advised he liked option three (3) better and would like to Morris Street and Main Street or Chestnut Drive and Main Street done now in conjunction with 221 and Main. He further advised he felt Council needed to be careful what is drawn from the General Fund now as there are projects that will be coming up.

Council Member Powell asked Manager Fox what kind of buffer is currently available in the General Fund. Manager Fox advised currently it's at 53.2%.

Council Member Powell advised she would love to see Council go for option one (1) and then with the extra \$175,000 get the TDA to go with the Town and split the cost of 221 and Main Street.

Mayor Sellers advised Council is just approving the design concept, this is just step one and will come back to discuss details.

Council Member Yount would like the outlier to be the second sidewalk at Main Street and Sunset Drive.

Council Member Harwood made a motion to move ahead with securing bids for option one (1) on Sunset Drive and Main Street, the one option for 221 and Main Street, the non-signal option for Chestnut Drive and Main Street and would like to look into a second crosswalk on North Main as an alternate, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting. Unanimously approved.

Further Discussion:

Council Member Matheson advised his main concern is the crosswalks are needed.

Council Member Yount advised Council couldn't have come up with a better plan and felt this was a long time coming.

3. 321 Update

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock gave an update on the 321 progress. He advised the sub-committee will be taking the draft they came up with to the Planning Board for review. He further advised they would like to have some sort of public meeting but are still trying to figure out the details on that.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting thanked Mr. Rothrock for his leadership and for he and the sub-committee's hard work.

OTHER BUSINESS

- Mayor Sellers – thanked Chris Pate and Parks and Recreation for the look of downtown. He further thanked Manager Fox, staff and Council for their continued hard work.
- Council Member Yount – advised at last month's meeting during the Chetola dredging discussion, he had stated he would support anything Council decided to do except do nothing. He advised Council did do something and said it would be discussed at retreat in January. He further advised since then it's been discovered some of the problem may be with the Blue Ridge Conservancy behind Papa Joe's restaurant and hopefully something can be done with them to help with this problem. He restated Council did do something and will discuss and hopefully remedy the issue at retreat.
- Council Member Harwood – none
- Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting – thanked Manager Fox for leading the bond repairs as several residents have expressed their appreciation for the paving and sewer work.
- Council Member Matheson – reminded people to register with the census.
- Council Member Powell – none
- Manager Fox – the census data came out that Watauga County rates 90th in the state with response, definitely in need of reporting. Early voting will be in Town Hall starting October 15th through October 31st and day of voting will be at Blowing Rock School on election day per Board of Elections. Reviewed the progress of the top thirteen list from Retreat. Read a letter from Linda Steen announcing her retirement.

Council took a ten-minute recess at 7:45 p.m. before going into closed session.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 7:55 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 Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting. Unanimously approved. No action was taken.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:00 p.m. Council returned to open session, with no further business Council Member Powell made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Council Member Matheson. Unanimously approved.

MAYOR _____
Charlie Sellers

ATTEST _____
Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk

Attachments

- Budget Amendment #2020-10 – Attachment – A**
- Debit Issuance – FY 2020-21 - Attachment - B**
- Citizen Letters – Attachment C**
- Aiken Annexation – Attachment D**