

## Blowing Rock Appearance Advisory Commission

### Minutes

November 10, 2020

Members Present: Melissa Pickett, Curt Andrews, Bo Henderson, Carol Knapp, & Chris Wetmore

Staff Present: Jennifer Brown, Cory Cathcart, & Shane Fox

Guest: Tim Gupton

Begin: 9:01 a.m.

End: 10:37 a.m.

**October Minutes Approval** – Mr. Andrews made a motion to approve the June minutes. Ms. Knapp seconded, and the vote was unanimous to approve.

**Budget Update** – Mrs. Pickett asked if the fund balance had been confirmed. Mr. Fox replied that the annual audit has been completed and we are waiting for the report. He is hopeful to have the final audit report on the December Town Council meeting.

Mrs. Brown reported that revenue collected to date is \$24,646 and that she had just received several more donations in the mail which will be added to this. Expenditures to date are \$3,379.48 which includes the cost of mailing the donation appeal letters, the Post Office Box rental, and a small water truck repair.

Mrs. Pickett asked Mr. Cathcart about the condition of the water truck. He stated that it had barely survived this year's watering season and is unlikely to last another year, therefore a newer watering truck will be necessary. He has been researching options to determine the best fit for the department.

**Tree City USA Follow-up** – Mrs. Pickett shared the Arbor Day Foundation's Tree City USA slides that she will be presenting to Blowing Rock Town Council on November 10. She noted that there are a few very reasonable requirements at no incremental cost to the Town. The Town is expected to establish

- 1) a tree board,
- 2) a tree budget, and
- 3) a public tree ordinance.

→ It is also recommended that there would be a certified arborist on staff.

- 1) Mrs. Pickett suggested, given its mission as established by Town Council and its consistency with that of the Arbor Day Foundation, that BRAAC serve as the tree board.
- 2) Mrs. Brown noted that there is already a line item for trees in the Town budget.
- 3) Mrs. Pickett has drafted an ordinance for Kevin Rothrock (Planning Director) to review. She plans present the revised proposed ordinance to Planning Board on November 19<sup>th</sup> for their consideration and recommendation to Town Council at the upcoming December Town Council meeting.

→ Mrs. Brown shared that Mr. Cathcart was already very interested in becoming a certified arborist. He had begun the certification process in Colorado before he moved to North Carolina.

**Cone Road Nature Park Presentation** – Mr. Gupton, representing the Mayview Homeowners Association (HOA), presented its desire to convert the Town of Blowing Rock’s laydown yard on Cone Road into a nature park. He informed BRAAC that he may approach organizations such as the Village Foundation for support and will be asking the Town to contribute. He reported that he had investigated properties close to the Public Works building that could be used as an alternative laydown yard and has been negotiating with a property owner to purchase approximately one acre of land. Mr. Gupton stated that \$40,000 had been pledged by private donors for the purchase of the property and will be asking the Town to contribute to the creation and perpetual maintenance of the nature park as well.

Ms. Knapp noted that many years ago chemicals were dumped at this sight. She asked that if this property were to be transformed into a nature park, could safety be assured. Mr. Gupton replied that this had been researched and an environmental study had been performed, concluding that if the soil were not to be disturbed there would be no negative effects from the historical dumping of chemicals. Furthermore, he confirmed that this sight had not seen chemicals dumped in many years.

Mr. Andrews asked Mr. Gupton to define “nature park.” Mr. Gupton replied that it would be a quiet place, perhaps with sheltered picnic tables, where residents can retreat apart from out-of-town visitors who favor downtown parks.

Mr. Wetmore asked whereas the Mayview HOA was driving this proposal, have proposed specific conditions been identified as to how the property will be utilized if approved. Mr. Gupton replied that the only stipulation would be that no pickleball courts will be installed since most donors have pledged monies specifying that there would be no pickleball courts as a condition for their donation.

Mr. Wetmore shared his concern for the ability of the Town to handle the maintenance and upkeep of the property. He observed that the Landscape Department is already been struggling to keep up with the open areas and parks that already exist. He suggested that the Mayview HOA consider a pledge to provide a maintenance budget that would account for materials and potentially incremental staff hours. Mr. Gupton replied that the vision was for a passive nature park with minimal upkeep.

Ms. Knapp asked if the Mayview HOA itself had considered purchasing the laydown yard from the Town and turning it into a park. Mr. Gupton stated that would not be a possibility because the Town needs a lay down yard.

Mr. Andrews stated that the proximity of this potential park to Town Center seems to be more beneficial to Mayview residents. He asked if they had conducted an overall expected utilization demand study as well as a financial analysis of this project to determine the benefits to the Town and to specific townspeople. Mr. Andrews elaborated, asking for the underlying financial analysis that supported Mr. Gupton’s estimates of projected incremental property tax values and for the associated breakeven point of financial costs and benefits for taxpayers. He also asked for related lot-by-lot projected incremental values to those property owners of the adjacent seven buildable lots and if these were sufficient such that it would be more reasonable to expect full support from them rather than from all taxpayers, given the likelihood of uneven benefit.

Mr. Gupton replied that such a marketing study had not been conducted; however, he knows that this park would be a benefit to all Town taxpayers because with all the tourists who currently use Blowing Rock parks, there is no place for residents to enjoy the outdoors and that they would presumably find their way to the proposed nature park. Mr. Gupton added that there are indeed seven buildable lots that are adjacent to the current lay down and no one will build on because of how unsightly the site is. Mr. Andrews concluded that while he likes the idea of public parks in general, including nature parks,

without answers to his questions regarding demand and financial benefit, he would be at a loss to endorse this proposal.

Mr. Wetmore asked if this potential park would include parking. Mr. Gupton explained that they did not have a conceptual drawing right now. He suggested that it be apart of the parks Master Plan that Parks & Recreation will be developing this winter. He does envision six to ten parking spaces in that area. Ms. Knapp asked if he thought restrooms would be apart of this project and Mr. Gupton stated that he was not certain, but he could see port-a-johns camouflaged somewhere in the park.

Mr. Andrews then asked if given the impact that COVID has had on Town budgets, is this the time to pursue such a project given broader Town needs that appear to be more crucial. Mr. Gupton replied that the Town should always encourage economic development and creating green space, especially now. He stated that a \$75,000 - \$100,000 project will only cost the Town \$15,000 - \$40,000 plus the undetermined cost of maintaining the park. Mrs. Pickett noted that BRAAC is not responsible for the financial side of the project, that it would fall to Town Council. Mr. Andrews agreed; solely making the point for BRAAC's minutes for consideration by Council.