

Blowing Rock Appearance Advisory Commission

Minutes

February 2, 2021

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

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

Begin: 9:09 a.m.

End: 10:57 a.m.

**January Minutes Approval** – Mr. Henderson made a motion to approve the June minutes. Mrs. Knapp seconded, and the vote was unanimous to approve.

**Budget Update** – Mrs. Brown reported that she had not received the current financials and that she would forward them upon receipt. She did report that BRAAC has \$27,588 in fund balance which does not include the \$10,000 that the Town had borrowed for this budget year.

**Tree City USA Update** – Mrs. Pickett reported that the Town's application had been approved. While she had not yet received any official documentation from Tree City USA, she is expecting a packet from them shortly. Mrs. Brown noted that since Arbor Day is April 30, 2020, we need to plan for the species, size, and location, as well as the ceremony for the tree to be planted on that day.

Mr. Cathcart stated that he had walked around Memorial Park and had identified appropriate sites where a tree might be planted. Mrs. Pickett asked if those locations might interfere with the proposed park project. Mr. Cathcart was confident that they would not. He invited feedback regarding the species of the tree. Mr. Wetmore stated that he would like to see at least a four-inch caliper maple tree planted, one that would display beautiful fall color. He noted that downtown is currently lacking fall colors and that this should be of primary importance as we consider planting new trees. Mr. Henderson agreed. Mr. Henderson reiterated that while we must not plant a twig, we also cannot plant a tree that is too big such that our equipment could tear up the park during installation.

Mrs. Brown reported that the two large maples in the tree wells are not in good shape and those would be other possible locations to plant new maples. Mr. Cathcart stated that once those trees were removed, he would fill the wells with good soil nearly to the top before new trees are planted. Mr. Henderson asked about their prognosis for survival. Mr. Cathcart responded that the survival rate will improve because the wells would be filled with soil, thus water could not accumulate around the trunks, which has caused the existing maple trees' trunks to rot. Mr. Wetmore asked how we might avoid the backlash that the Town had received when the large, dead maples in front of Memorial Park were removed. Mrs. Pickett noted that two key qualifiers for the Town of Blowing Rock to be designated as a Tree City USA member were that it has identified a Tree Board (BRAAC) and that the Town now has established a tree ordinance. These formal entities will bring transparency to decisions.

Mr. Henderson asked for Mr. Cathcart to gather prospective tree species, sizes, and costs for the next BRAAC meeting. Mrs. Brown stated that she would contact the North Carolina Forestry Service to see if they would return to evaluate the rest of the large trees in Memorial Park as they had done in the past.

**Public Art Request 2021-1 Update** – Mrs. Pickett stated that Kent Tarbutton had told her that he was not currently pursuing the permanent placement of the Whirlwind sculpture at this time. Mr. Andrews reiterated Mr. Henderson’s observation last month that it had only been recommended by BRAAC and approved by Town Council for a one-year display, to be replaced annually. He agreed with Mr. Henderson’s opinion that even though everyone may like this sculpture, there may be another one that might come along that is liked even more. Mrs. Pickett noted that Mr. Tarbutton will present any future proposals regarding the disposition of this and subsequent installations at this site.

**Signage for New River on Bridge at Sunset Drive** – Mrs. Pickett explained that Mr. Albert Yount approached her with the design for a sign for the bridge at the bottom of Sunset Drive that names and describes the New River. She stated that she had sent the design to the board earlier for their review. Mr. Henderson made a motion to approve the installation of the sign. Mr. Andrews seconded, and there was unanimous vote to approve.

**Water Truck** – Mrs. Brown stated that she and Mr. Cathcart have been working on items for the upcoming budget. One of those was for a watering truck that would serve the landscape department’s needs. She reported that Mr. Cathcart found a mini truck with a dump bed and a scissor lift which would be useful for trimming and decorating trees as well as for other department needs. Mr. Cathcart explained that this truck is small enough to get travel in the parks and it would be easier to water the hanging baskets with this truck as the driver sits on right-side, the same side where the hanging baskets are located.

Mrs. Brown explained that the price of truck was less than \$11,000 and that the dealership was holding it until we could confirm Town Council’s approval to purchase the vehicle. She stated that she had the money in her current budget to cover the cost, which is much less than the original \$30,000-\$40,000 that had been considered last year for a new watering truck. Mr. Cathcart stated that he didn’t feel it would be necessary to spend \$30,000-\$40,000 on a truck that could only be used for watering when we could get a truck where we could easily install and remove the water tank to utilize it year-round.

Mr. Fox stated that he was having meetings with every Town Council member at the end of this week to review next week’s Town Council meeting agenda and would make sure that they understood the need and terms. He noted that there were no capital expenditures proposed for any department in this current budget cycle. He is aware that the current water truck is emitting carbon monoxide into the cab, necessitating keeping the windows open to prevent poisoning and that a solution is necessary before watering begins in May.

**Lights on Valley Boulevard** – Mrs. Brown stated that it had been suggested that white winter lights be hung on the light poles along 321/Valley Boulevard. She explained that with her current staff and the number of poles on both side of the road there was no way that they could decorate those in addition to those that are currently decorated. She suggested asking the contractor that currently decorates the large blue spruce in front of Town Hall and the two maple trees in Memorial Park to provide a price quote. Mr. Henderson liked the idea and Mrs. Pickett felt that it would help incorporate the businesses on Valley Boulevard with Downtown businesses. Mrs. Brown said she would reach out to the contractor and report back to BRAAC.

**North Main Street & Valley Boulevard Landscaping** – Mrs. Pickett noted that the Town has purchased the property on Valley Boulevard that includes the tall bank that is the north entrance to downtown. Mrs. Brown reported that landscaping for this area is addressed in the downtown entrance project that was placed on hold when COVID hit. She said she would talk with the contractor regarding specifics and would report those to BRAAC. Mr. Henderson asked if the Town was looking into adding a sidewalk on

that side of the bank to connect to the sidewalk across from Chetola. Mrs. Brown was uncertain but will ask.

**Other Business** – Mr. Andrews asked Mrs. Brown if she could summarize what had been discussed at retreat. Mrs. Brown declared that it had gone well. Town Council was supportive and encouraging to all departments and their needs. She reported that Town Council had encouraged the Parks Strategy Committee to pursue applying for a PARTF grant to implement elements of the Virginia Tech plan and other needs for Memorial Park.