

MINUTES

Town of Blowing Rock

Board of Commissioners

Special Meeting-March 10, 2008

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners held an annual departmental meeting on March 10, 2008. Prior to meeting with department heads, Council received an update from several Blowing Rock Art and History Museum representatives regarding the proposed museum project on what is known as the "old Tiller property". Council members present were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Bobby Ball, Keith Tester, Albert Yount, Phil Pickett and Tommy Klutz. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Town Clerk Sharon Greene, Human Resource Administrator Erica Cline, Parks & Recreation Director Jennifer Brown, Police Chief Eric Brown, and Emergency Services Director Kent Graham.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and welcomed BRAHM representatives.

BLOWING ROCK ART & HISTORY MUSEUM UPDATE

Representing BRAHM were John Calvin, Wellborn Alexander, Ginny Stevens, and JoAnn Mitchell. Ms. Mitchell began by stating five million dollars had been raised toward the proposed Art & History Museum and they anticipated breaking ground in the summer. Ms. Mitchell stated BRAHM had retained Boone Construction Company as the builders for the project and Mr. John Calvin a licensed engineer had agreed to be the project manager at no cost. She also added that Mr. Calvin had agreed to supply project manager services to the town for the parking facility project also at no cost.

Ms. Mitchell stated final plans for the museum were in progress, when finished, BRAHM could proceed with the town conditional use permit process. She also stated that clear instructions were needed from the Town regarding the parking structure and that Town Manager Hildebran provided a letter outlining Council's wishes. (Exhibit A) Mr. Hildebran advised that Town Attorney Allen Moseley and Attorney Tony di Santi would need to work jointly on an agreement outlining a joint design/build bidding process, construction oversight and payment reimbursement procedure.

Mr. Hildebran also advised, based on Council direction, a change to the plans for the parking structure would be needed in order to add public restrooms in that area.

According to plans the two-level parking structure would add ninety-five additional parking spaces in the downtown area. Ms. Mitchell also stated the entrance on Wallingford Street had been eliminated and would be a service drive only. Public access would be limited to Chestnut Street.

Commissioner Tester inquired if anyone with BRAHM had talked with neighbors in the area regarding their feelings on the parking structure. Ms. Mitchell stated they had received mostly positive input from the neighboring residents.

Mr. Wellborn Alexander stated the project would take approximately two years to construct and BRAHM wanted to use the pay as they go plan so they would not be indebted. A revised schematic plan was shown to Council for the museum project. Commissioner Ball commended BRAHM on the new design of the building.

Mr. Calvin stated that a design/build concept would be used and BRAHM would be utilizing the services of Mr. Steven Price who has done many projects in the Blowing Rock area.

Commissioner Klutz voiced his concerns regarding the parking structure and felt the price to construct it was climbing daily. Mr. Klutz wanted to know where the money to build the structure was coming from. He also wanted to know with the addition of the parking structure at the American Legion Building, were both structures needed.

Commissioner Tester stated that per the contract between the Town and BRAHM, the Town was responsible for the cost of the parking structure, but the parking structure and the museum were being constructed concurrently in order to save money. Mr. Hildebran advised the design/build concept could save the Town approximately twenty percent on the parking structure.

After further discussion regarding the cost and design of the parking structure, Mr. Calvin stated he would get cost estimates for the parking structure and provide them to Mr. Hildebran.

Mayor Lawrence thanked the representatives of BRAHM for their update and felt the museum would be a great addition to the area.

DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES

Parks & Recreation/Town Beautification Issues

Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown presented Council with the 2007 accomplishments of her department as well as the retreat priorities and action plan for the following issues:

- Continue current Halloween Festival but work with merchants to minimize concerns.
- Maintain current prohibition of dogs in town parks with enforcement of policy – including relocation of Pet Show to non-park property.
- Continue dialogue with American Legion on their building and schedule facility improvements on Ruritan Club building (ADA ramp/vapor barrier).
- Continue to work with BRAAC on overall beautification of Town.
- Proceed with Robbins Pool Improvement Project and continue to seek additional grant funding.
- Continue P&R Master Plan implementation.

After a brief discussion regarding the No Dogs in Town Parks rule, Council suggested that a letter be sent to interested parties informing them of Council's decision to maintain the current prohibition of dogs in town parks.

After updating Council on several improvements being made to the Town park areas, etc. Mrs. Brown continued by stating her department was now in charge of the July 4th and Christmas parades previously coordinated through the Chamber of Commerce. Mrs. Brown advised she did not foresee any major problems with this other than recruiting enough volunteers to help with the parades.

Mrs. Brown discussed the Halloween Festival and addressed the issue of when the festival was held. Mrs. Brown commented the festival usually ran from 3:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. with the Monster March at 5:30 p.m. on a Saturday and she felt most parents would not be in favor of their children being out late on a school night. She felt having it on the weekend was more feasible in order for more children to participate. Council had several questions regarding merchant participation. Mrs. Brown advised that merchant participation was entirely optional and that her department sent letters to each merchant advising them when the festival was to be held and what they needed to do in order to participate. Commissioner Klutz suggested that letters be sent encouraging merchants

to stay open later during the event. Mayor Lawrence also recommended the Town send a public thank you to the merchants who participated.

Mrs. Brown updated Council on several improvements to the Ruritan Club building. She stated the sign in front of the building needed replacing. Commissioner Tester felt the building needed an historic plaque. Commissioner Klutz commented his restoration business could possibly donate a new sign or restore the old one if needed.

Mayor Lawrence announced Watauga County had agreed to donate \$50,000 towards the Robbins Pool Improvement Project. Mr. Hildebran stated after the donation from the County, the funds for the project was short only \$39,500 from a goal of \$1,068,000.

After further discussion, Council thanked Mrs. Brown and her department for the great job they were doing.

Public Safety Issues (Police/Emergency Services)

Council met with Police Chief Eric Brown to discuss the 2007 accomplishments of his department and to go over the 2008 Police Department Retreat Priorities and Action Plan regarding the following issues:

Police

- Continue efforts to improve noise and parking regulation enforcement.
- Consider equipment upgrades during FY 2008-09 budget process.
- Continue to set aside funds for Police Department Building renovation and conduct architectural study of old fire/rescue building for future use (Police, Recreation & PW).

The continued problem with motorcycle noise was discussed. Chief Brown stated his department planned to increase the number of traffic checks which might help with monitoring motorcycle noise.

Chief Brown advised he was presently at full-staff after hiring several new officers. He also touched upon projects such as the D.A.R.E. program with Officer Toby Ragan, the Special Olympics, the Torch Run, etc. they were currently involved in.

Police Officer salaries were briefly discussed. Commissioner Klutz asked if additional personnel were needed. Chief Brown stated he would like to have another full-time dispatcher if possible. Joint dispatching in conjunction with the County was also mentioned with Chief Brown stating he was not in favor of this. Chief Brown discussed his equipment needs which were firearms, computers, and an additional taser gun, etc. Commissioner Yount stated he would like to see this department receive all their equipment needs sparing no expense. Commissioner Klutz agreed with Commissioner Yount.

Commissioner Ball questioned changes to be made to the facility once the Emergency Services Department moved into their new building. Chief Brown stated they had outgrown their current space and suggested the Town consult with someone who specialized in police department needs when it was time to update. Town Manager Hildebran mentioned funds were reserved for the upgrade of the police department due to a donation received from the ABC Board specifically earmarked for this use.

Council commended Chief Brown and his department for a job well done.

Emergency Services

Emergency Services Director Kent Graham joined Council to discuss his departmental accomplishments for 2007 and discuss the following issues:

- Complete construction of new Emergency Services Building.
- Continue negotiations regarding Medic Base co-location.
- Proceed with Rescue Squad vehicle ownership & insurance coverage plan in lieu of \$15,000 annual town contribution.

Mr. Graham updated Council on progress being made on the new EMS facility. He also advised a sub-station would be placed on Hwy 221 in the near future to supply better fire protection to residents in that area. Mr. Graham advised another sub-station was needed

in the Aho area. Mr. Graham advised members of his department had completed their training and they were now working at paramedic level.

Mr. Graham discussed the need for an agreement with Watauga County to place a medic base in the new facility when it was completed. Council inquired if the level of service would be enhanced once the new facility was in use. Mr. Graham responded he felt the level of services would most definitely be enhanced. A merger between the Volunteer Fire Department and the Volunteer Rescue Squad was also briefly discussed. Mr. Graham felt this could be worked out in time.

Council concluded this portion of the meeting by stating residents were blessed to have the level of service supplied by the EMS Department.

Fiscal Management (Administration/Budgetary) Issues:

Due to lack of time, Mr. Hildebran stated this departmental meeting would be rescheduled to a later date.

Other

Town Manager Hildebran presented Council with a breakdown of TDA Funding which showed appropriations over a 7-year period for the American Legion Parking Structure.

Council further discussed the parking situation in town. Commissioner Pickett asked other members how they felt about a flat fee being charged for parking in the new parking structures. Commissioner Ball stated this had been discussed previously and she also did not like the idea of parking meters along Main Street. Mr. Hildebran stated the police department would be enforcing the parking situation downtown more which should move vehicles off the street into parking lots. Commissioner Yount stated he did not like to see a trained police officer marking tires and encouraged the use of non-sworn personnel. Mr. Hildebran advised it may be difficult to charge for parking in the new structures because some businesses had paid into the "in lieu" parking fund for parking.

Adjournment

After further discussion regarding parking, Mayor Lawrence adjourned the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

MAYOR _____

J.B. Lawrence

Attest: _____

Sharon Greene, Town Clerk

Attachments

Proposed BRAHM Building/Parking Facility Letter