

Blowing Rock Appearance Advisory Commission

Minutes

April 13, 2021

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

Staff Present: Jennifer Brown & Cory Cathcart

Guest: Lee Carol Giduz

Begin: 9:06 a.m.

End: 10:48 a.m.

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

**Budget Update** – Mrs. Brown reported that revenue collected to date is \$41,501, which is \$4,381 more than had been projected for the year. She also stated that contributions continue to be collected for hanging baskets and planters. She added that only \$6,216.02 has been spent of the \$37,120 budget; however, the flowers for the hanging baskets, planters, and flower beds are yet to be purchased.

**Public Art Request 2021-2 (BRAHM)** – Ms. Giduz explained that it was necessary for BRAHM to be closed from March through October due to COVID. She stated that they are still not at full capacity and cannot conduct programs indoors due to state-mandated restrictions.

She presented a sign that she would like to hang on the outside of the BRAHM building to help advertise a featured exhibit in the museum and to differentiate the stone museum building from neighboring stone churches. It is a photograph of the Brooklyn Bridge by one of the exhibit's renowned artists. She noted that while her request is a stretch for a public art display, unusual times and challenges call for unusual solutions.

Mr. Andrews stated that he had lived in both Manhattan and Brooklyn and had had the pleasure of seeing, walking, and driving the Brooklyn Bridge often and agreed that it is a beautiful piece of art. His question was if BRAAC is the right commission to give an opinion and/or recommendation to Town Council for Ms. Giduz's request. He stated that he had reviewed Article 17 in the Town Code and had concluded that her request fell under Kevin Rothrock's authority due to the fact that it is a sign and signs do not fit under BRAAC's purview.

Ms. Giduz asked if the label at the top of the sign were to be removed would it still be considered a sign. Mrs. Pickett asked Ms. Giduz if she had taken this to Mr. Rothrock before she presented this to BRAAC and Ms. Giduz said yes, casually, and that would not approve. Ms. Giduz explained that she knows this is not a true fit to public art but would like an exception due to COVID, just as exceptions have been given to other businesses in Town during this time.

Mr. Andrews asked if there were any photographs of North Carolina in general or High Country in particular that would be more representative of our area. Ms. Giduz replied that there were not, that this was an international exhibit. She further explained that most photographers would not allow their pieces to be used as advertisements; however, this particular photographer had given her permission. Mrs. Knapp asked how long she would like to keep the sign hung and Ms. Giduz replied approximately

three months. Mrs. Knapp stated that this is a short-term display that would help the business until COVID restrictions were lessened. Mr. Wetmore said he liked the photograph; however, he was uncertain if it was truly considered a public art piece or a sign.

Mr. Andrews asked if Mr. Rothrock was available to answer questions. Mrs. Brown reached him on his mobile phone to answer questions. Mr. Rothrock explained that in the sign ordinance there is a maximum size that is allowed even for special events and that this sign exceeds that measure by a significant amount. The sign that BRAHM is requesting is 364 square feet. Mr. Andrews summarized to Mr. Rothrock that Ms. Giduz was stating that this sign is itself a piece of art that is a larger version of one on exhibition in the museum and that they are wanting to hang it to attract people to the museum. Mr. Rothrock disagreed. He confirmed that yes, it is a replication, but it is a sign for a special event. He did say that the ordinance allows signs for special events; however, the size of the proposed sign is not allowed by the ordinance. He explained that she could request an exception to the size of the sign; however, it would have to be presented to Town Council as a special event request with the size of the sign as an exception.

Mr. Andrews noted to Mr. Rothrock that Ms. Giduz had stated that exceptions had been made for businesses in town during COVID and asked Mr. Rothrock to itemize those exceptions. Mr. Rothrock replied that signs were allowed to let people know that businesses were open or offered take-out or curbside delivery. Businesses were allowed to have tents outdoors with heaters if the building code allowed. These were temporary and most restaurants are taking them down now that COVID restrictions are lessening.

Mr. Andrews explained to Ms. Giduz that he was not comfortable in making any recommendation to Town Council when this should be a special event request with a sign size exception. Ms. Giduz kindly stated that she would get in contact with the mayor and discuss the possibility of getting the request put on the Town Council agenda either tonight or next month.

**Arbor Day April 30, 2021 Planning** – Mrs. Brown stated that the Arbor Day celebration will be April 30<sup>th</sup> and asked BRAAC to decide the best time for the event. She suggested the afternoon in order to allow time for set-up and for Blowing Rock School classes to possibly attend before school lets out at 2:30 PM. She also stated that she would invite Town Council and the family of the young girl who had bought a tree for the park in 2011. Everyone agreed to hold the event at 1:30 p.m., Mr. Andrews will reach out to David Rogers to inform him of the event and of the personal interest story. Mrs. Brown will contact the school to invite them to the event.

**South Main Street & Valley Boulevard Landscaping** – Mrs. Brown updated the commission on the maintenance of 321-Valley Boulevard. She explained that the current DOT contract with Piedmont ends on July 15, 2021. An RFQ was issued by the Town and two companies submitted bids. She stated that staff is evaluating these bids and will give their recommendation to Town Council during their May meeting. Mr. Henderson asked what will happen with all of the dead trees that are currently planted. Mr. Cathcart replied that he is marking these trees for Piedmont to replace and that new trees will be under warranty after the contract has ended.

**Mayview Lake Fountain** – Mrs. Brown explained that the Town's engineering firm, McGill & Associates, is in the process of having Mayview Lake evaluated to determine the source of the sediment and what it would take to dredge the lake properly. She stated that due to the lake's ongoing sediment problem and its need for dredging, the purchase of a new fountain would be to be put on hold until that examination is complete.