

## **MINUTES**

### **Town of Blowing Rock**

### **Board of Commissioners**

### **Special Meeting-March 12, 2008**

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners held a special meeting on Wednesday, March 12, 2008. Attending were Mayor Pro-Tem Keith Tester and Commissioners Bobby Ball, Albert Yount, Phillip Pickett and Tommy Klutz. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Town Engineer Doug Chapman and Town Clerk Assistant Erica Cline.

Mayor J.B. Lawrence was out of town.

#### **Call to Order**

Mayor Pro-tem Tester called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and the Town Council proceeded with their annual departmental meetings.

#### **DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES**

##### **Infrastructure (Public Works/Water/Wastewater)**

##### **Water/Wastewater Issues**

Public Works Director Tom McRary met with Council to update them on the department accomplishments for 2007. He also discussed the Water/Wastewater Issues and his department's action plan with regard to these issues.

#### Accomplishments:

- Repaired the Furnace at the Water/Wastewater Plant.
- Cleaned basins on 8-7-07 and on 3-7-08.
- Replaced broken raw water valve.
- Rebuilt chlorinators at the Wastewater Treatment Plant. The cost was between \$1000 and \$1500. Waiting on the CIP.
- Replaced two blowers. Mr. McRary explained that at least one needs replacing per year.
- Replaced feed lines.
- Built new ramp to the dumpster at Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Town Manager Hildebran stated that Phase One of the Water and Sewer Capital Improvements Program and Corresponding Debt Service were approved by Town Council at last evening's board meeting.

Mr. Hildebran then discussed with the Council the proposed water interconnections with the Town of Boone and ASU and funding assistance from the state. Mr. Hildebran informed the Council he met with Boone Town Manager Greg Young about the issue and that the Boone Town Council is in favor of pursuing the water interconnection. As a result, a draft Interconnection Agreement has been prepared. Highlights of the proposed Agreement are as follows:

- "Emergency" is defined as when the condition of a party's water treatment or water distribution system presents an immediate or imminent threat to public health or safety.
- Reasonable efforts to accommodate any additional water purchase requests in meeting peak demand.
- Both parties will charge its prevailing commercial or institutional in-town service rate, whichever is higher.
- Installation of 26,000 feet of 12" diameter DIP water line running north along U.S. 321, and thirty (30) fire hydrants.
- Project estimated to cost in the range of \$3.5 to \$4.0 million.
- Blowing Rock is the primary applicant for a \$300,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission and Boone shall be primary applicant for a grant from the NC Rural Center expected to fund up to half of the Project costs. Both parties will seek reimbursement from the respective fire districts for all fire hydrants installed along the interconnection.
- If the parties do not obtain full grant funding, Blowing Rock has agreed to fund the balance (up to \$1.7 million) of the proposed costs. If receive partial grant funding

that requires a larger financial commitment, Blowing Rock has the right to renegotiate and/or terminate the Agreement.

- If Boone does not acquire full grant funding for its portion of the project, Boone has the right to renegotiate and/or terminate this agreement.
- Blowing Rock will be the contracting authority and responsible for the design and construction of the interconnection facilities.
- Blowing Rock shall cover a proportional booster pumping facility due to elevation change.
- The Agreement will remain in effect for a period of twenty (20) years with one (1) year increments.

Mr. Hildebran continued to discuss the Interconnection with the Council by informing them of the sewer needs. He suggested a sewer line be installed adjacent to the water line under the Hwy. 321 Parkway Bridge as a way to minimize future costs and Federal approvals. The project is estimated to take twelve (12) months to complete.

The Council also briefly discussed Laurel Park sewer. Staff advised that other neighbors adjacent to the current Quail Hollow Drive Sewer Project are willing to pay for sewer to accelerate access. The Quail Hollow Project can serve as a basis to serve most of the community.

## **Public Works Issues**

Director of Public Works Johnny Lentz addressed the Council with the department's achievements and issues. The department continues to implement the Street Pavement Plan by the priority list. Mr. Lentz gave an update on completed pavement projects. The department is in year 5 of a 10 year Plan.

Mr. Lentz informed the Council of the needed equipment replacements for the department. This includes a new work truck, spare garbage truck, and a new utility truck.

Commissioner Ball suggested that Mr. Lentz begin to address the issue of Town pickup of leaves by sending out warning letters and enforcing the ordinance. She also suggested that the Town have an ordinance stating if the homeowner has a personal gardener, the gardener should be responsible for the handling of leaves, not the Town. After a brief

discussion, Mr. Lentz and Mr. Hildebran advised that the current town ordinances most likely covered the issue and they would work to improve enforcement.

Mr. Lentz next updated the Council on the Warehouse stating that one building was in bad condition. Town Manager Hildebran stated there is approximately \$100,000 in reserve for the building replacement. Because of town code and its location, the Warehouse must meet appearance standards, but the Town Council discussed that possibly the building might aesthetically resemble the adjacent horse barns.

Mr. Lentz reviewed several storm water projects currently underway. Town Manager Hildebran advised the Town did not qualify for the FEMA grant the town had pursued. However, he stated that the town budget would include funding pursuant to the recently adopted Storm Water Master Plan. Mr. Lentz discussed sidewalk needs and the forthcoming Downtown Streetscape Plan. Mr. Hildebran stated the intent of both the Storm Water Plan and Streetscape Plan, was to prioritize projects and avoid duplication. The Town is setting aside money each year for both Plans and hopes to begin implementation beginning this year.

The Council suggested continuing to encourage businesses to place utilities underground. Conditional Use Permits require all new construction to place utilities underground. The Town is still working with Blue Ridge Electric as well as Bell South on these issues.

Mr. Lentz then discussed with the Council the issue of salary increases. He suggested that the department raise the starting pay for new employees. The Town has lost several employees to other municipalities due to their competitive pay.

Issues in Field Operations include:

- Sewer Overflows- The State has begun fining every time sewer hits ground.
- There have been five manholes found, including one at the hospital that has been repaired. The Town continues to set aside funding to correct inflow and infiltration.

- Department is fully staffed with three in school receiving certifications in preparation towards Mr. Lentz's retirement in late 2009.
- Replaced \$5000 meter at Shoppes on the Parkway.
- 120 spaces at the Cemetery with more space to open.
- Baseball field drainage needs to be addressed.

At this time, Mayor Pro tem Tester recessed the Special Meeting at 5:20 p.m. and Council entered into a Joint Session with the TDA.

### **Town Council/Tourism Development Authority Joint Meeting**

Members present for the Joint Session were Chairman Bernie Keele, Vice Chairman Kent Tarbutton, Mr. Keith Tester, Mr. Phil Pickett, and Ms. Lynn Drury. Others present were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, TDA Director Tracy Brown, and Town Clerk Assistant Erica Cline.

Mayor J.B. Lawrence was out of town.

### **Call to Order**

Mayor Pro tem Keith Tester called the meeting to order at 5:20 p.m. and introduced TDA Chairman Keele.

Chairman Keele introduced Authority members in attendance and thanked the Council for the invitation to discuss the 2007 TDA efforts and update the Town Council on future plans. He then invited TDA Executive Director Tracy Brown to discuss the accomplishments and upcoming issues of the Authority.

Mr. Brown began by handing out notebooks with Blowing Rock articles and advertisements produced or coordinated by the TDA in 2007. He then reviewed a power point presentation outlining TDA activities and issues –

## TDA Accomplishments:

- Produced a Visitor Guide- Every tourism business was included at no cost. There have been over 40,000 distributed with a new guide ready for April in time for the Wine Festival.
- Produced an Attractions Guide- Includes operating times and cost of attractions. Distributed to all businesses to hand out to visitors.
- Produced an E-newsletter “The Village Tattler”- Distributed every Tuesday by email to all businesses on the email list. Includes Frontline Headlines, Events, New Businesses, etc.
- Produced a Digital Press Kit- Includes History and Images for Press to assist them while writing a piece on Blowing Rock. Also provides a daily photo of different elevations with up-to-date temperatures.
- Produced You Tube Videos- Includes Area Attractions & Events with a link to the Town website.
- Southern Living- did an editorial piece on Blowing Rock. Mr. Brown commented on how great this was for the Town because of the difficulty getting an editorial piece done, not just an advertisement. He also mentioned the importance of a good relationship with the marketing press and travel writers.
- US Airways- did an editorial piece on the High Country. Good relationship with Boone, Watauga, and Blowing Rock Chamber.
- Occupancy Tax Revenue has grown to \$805,000 and continues to grow.
- Master Signage Plan- New signs have been installed throughout the downtown area which coordinates all signage. Also, the TDA is assisting in getting news racks and information kiosks.
- Eco-Tourism- Place more advertising emphasis on Hiking, Bird Watching, and the Greenway Trail. This is sustaining Tourism and should be utilized.

## TDA Issues:

- Fiscal Year Budgets are at times challenging because of advertising coordination that transcends both fiscal year and calendar year events.
- Occupancy Rates- Continues to be a problem with getting a number of heads in beds. Smith Travel Research provides data on most large properties in Blowing Rock but we have many mom and pop accommodations that don't want to disclose that information. Mr. Brown is creating a survey that would allow these places to share that information without giving away critical information. Mr. Brown also stated that the Occupancy Rates have increased but the actual occupancy has not. A recent Appalachian State University study states the average stay is 3.5 days.

- Sales Tax Collection- Information is only available at the county and municipal level over 5,000 in population. Mr. Brown is looking for alternate ways to gather retail sales information.

Town Council commended Mr. Brown and the TDA Board on their 2007 accomplishments and all of their efforts in making Blowing Rock a resort destination.

Mayor Pro tem Tester then recessed the Special Meeting with the TDA at 5:50 p.m.

### **Planning and Inspections**

Council met with Planning and Inspections Director Kevin Rothrock to discuss the 2007 accomplishments and issues of his department.

Because of increased building activity between May and October, Mr. Rothrock shared his concern that the workload demands of staff reduced customer service. The most time consuming issues are phone calls and walk-in traffic. Town Council suggested the possibility of hiring additional inspection staff to assist during this peak time to improve customer service.

The next issue discussed was the use of banners. The land use code prohibits banners unless they are inside the glass of the business or for limited special events. Mr. Rothrock asked Council if they would be interested in amending the code.

Commissioner Klutz suggested a banner in the park to display upcoming events as well as allowing businesses to display banners/pennants for special events for a period of three days. Commissioner Ball stated that previous Boards worked hard on getting the code in place and advised that the Planning Board be very careful in handling the situation.

Commissioner Tester warned that businesses would think it was acceptable to use banners once they saw the banners in the park.

Mr. Hildebran suggested designing a professional marquee for Sunset Drive at Memorial Park that displayed upcoming special events for the Town. He also stated the informational kiosks funded by the TDA could tie in aesthetically with the marquee.

Commissioner Yount suggested the issue go to the Planning Board for further study.

The Council briefly discussed downtown building heights and the need for visual models of proposed building heights. It was the consensus to develop a Downtown Area Plan and retain a consultant to lead the discussion. Mr. Hildebran suggested a citizen meeting when the summer homeowners are in town to discuss this issue further.

Town Council also discussed the need for a joint session with the Planning Board to discuss various issues.

Also discussed was the landscape ordinance. This involves commercial and private cutting of trees. Commissioner Yount expressed concern about the recent adoption of a less strict landscape ordinance and the impact it may have on the proposed Globe Project. He stated that this action caused friction with the Planning Board because they had worked four years to get the ordinance passed and the Commissioners at the time denied it.

Mr. Tester stated that the Commissioners were obligated to listen to comments expressed during public hearings and evaluate the proposals based on a variety of factors. He commented that if people do not come to support proposed ordinances, it shouldn't be expected that the Commissioners show support without the evidence of public support. He suggested in situations such as this that Planning Board members attend Council meetings to provide additional background information on issues so the pressure isn't completely on Mr. Rothrock to advocate their position.

Commissioners not attending the Planning Board meetings because of quasi-judicial matters coming before that board and the potential conflict it may cause should an item come to Town Council was also discussed.



Other issues discussed were the Comprehensive Plan, the Parking Study, Outside Dining and Display, Kilwins, and the addition to Village Hardware. Town Council suggested that minor conditional use items such as Kilwin's, Village Hardware, and Hartley Interior's should be administered by staff and require a formal CUP for Council approval. Staff agreed to develop procedures to streamline the process.

Mayor Pro-tem Tester commended Mr. Rothrock on his hard work and suggested additional staffing to alleviate the pressure of time within the department.

### **Administration**

Finance Director Nicole Norman met with Council to discuss the accomplishments and current items/issues for the department.

The accomplishments for the Administration Department are as follows:

- Implemented the Longevity and Service Award Policy
- Initiated Town match of 1% for 401(k)
- Added the Employee Handbook to the Town Website

Current items/issues for the Administration Department are as follows:

- Joining the State Telephone System- Town saving \$15,000 and will use those monies to upgrade telephones.
- Computer/Printer upgrades- This includes two desktop systems to be replaced (In CIP) as well as the front computer. Also, replace the dot-matrix printer to a laser printer.
- Office Renovations
- Sound System- Audio/Visual improvements. Mr. Hildebran suggested doing these upgrades at one time if budget allows. He also suggested to Council an overflow area with a television to help with Town Council Meetings.
- Cross-Training staff to aid in someone's absence.
- Website improvements- Code Red, Gov Deals, Official Payments have been added.

- Town Newsletter “Around the Rock”
- Cell telephone replacement for Fire and Police, as well as funding of a new blackberry device for Mr. Hildebran.

**Adjournment**

With no further discussion the meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Mayor \_\_\_\_\_

Mayor Pro-tem Keith Tester

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_

Town Clerk Assistant Erica Cline