

Town Council Meeting - Monday, December 13th, 2021

The Town of Blowing Rock Town Council met for their regular monthly meeting on Monday, December 13, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. The meeting took place at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street Blowing Rock, NC. Present were Mayor Charlie Sellers, Mayor Pro-Tem Sue Sweeting and Council Members Albert Yount, David Harwood, Doug Matheson, Town Manager Shane Fox, Town Attorney Allen Moseley, Town Engineer Doug Chapman, Fire Chief Kent Graham, Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown, Police Chief Aaron Miller, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock and Public Works Director Matt Blackburn, Finance Officer Nicole Norman and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner who recorded the minutes.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

town, people, years, rock, blowing, mask, trailhead, greenway, employees, council, cdc, dustin, mandate, project, data, months, expert, board, moving, state

SPEAKERS

Tyler Bryson, David Harwood, Albert Yount, Mark Murphy, Sue Sweeting, Melinda LaVecchia Daniels, Doug Matheson, Melissa Pickett, Shane Fox, Evenlight Eagles, Charlie Sellers

Charlie Sellers 04:19

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome this Town Council meeting on December 13, 2021. Thanks for coming out on this beautiful day in Blowing Rock. If you would, we're going to call for attendance

Albert Yount 04:34

Here

David Harwood 04:36

Here

Sue Sweeting 04:37

Here

Doug Matheson 04:38

Here

Charlie Sellers 04:40

Please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance Okay, approval of minutes November 9, 2021. Do I have a motion?

Sue Sweeting 05:17

So moved.

Charlie Sellers 05:18

Do I have a second?

Doug Matheson 05:19

Second?

Charlie Sellers 05:20

Any discussion? All in favor

Albert Yount 05:23

Yes

David Harwood 05:26

Yes

Sue Sweeting 05:29

Yes

Doug Matheson 05:29

Yes

Charlie Sellers 05:29

Okay. approval of minutes November 17, 2021.

Sue Sweeting 05:38

Motion to approve as presented.

Charlie Sellers 05:41

Second. Any discussion?

David Harwood 05:41

Second

Albert Yount 05:47

Yes

David Harwood 05:48

Yes

Sue Sweeting 05:48

Yes

Doug Matheson 05:49

Yes

Charlie Sellers 05:49

And approval of minutes November 23, 2021. Do I have a motion?

Doug Matheson 05:55

So moved.

Sue Sweeting 05:56

Second.

Charlie Sellers 05:57

Any discussion?

Albert Yount 06:01

Yes

David Harwood 06:02

Yes

Sue Sweeting 06:03

Yes

Doug Matheson 06:04

Yes

Charlie Sellers 06:04

Recognized outgoing Mayor Pro-Tem Sue Sweeting for her 8 years of service on Town Council and presented her with a plaque.

Hilari Hubner 06:08

Administered the Oath of Office to incumbent Mayor Sellers and Council Member Matheson; as well as newly elected Council Member Pickett.

David Harwood 13:46

Selection of Mayor Pro-Tem. Mr. Mayor, I'd like to make a nomination please. I just have a couple of comments. I'd like to nominate Doug Matheson for Mayor Pro Tem. Doug is one of the most honorable, honest people I've ever encountered in my life. He has been a faithful servant to the town for the last 12 years on Council. He has a true son of Blowing Rock. The former fire chief and represents us very well

with the League of Municipalities and the High Country Council of Government. I cannot think of a better person to nominate, and I hope everyone else on this Council would support me in that nomination.

Albert Yount 14:40

Second

David Harwood 14:53

Yes

Melissa Pickett 14:54

Yes

Doug Matheson 14:56

Yes

Charlie Sellers 15:01

Congratulations Alright now, do I have a motion to adopt the regular agenda as presented?

David Harwood 15:22

So moved

Charlie Sellers 15:23

Do I have a second?

Melissa Pickett 15:25

Second

Charlie Sellers 15:26

Any discussion? All in favor

Albert Yount 15:31

Yes

David Harwood 15:32

Yes

Melissa Pickett 15:34

Yes

Doug Matheson 15:35

Yes

Charlie Sellers 15:35

All right. Under the Consent Agenda we have Winterfest. Do I have a motion to approve?

David Harwood 15:44

So moved.

Charlie Sellers 15:45

Do I have a

Albert Yount 15:45

Second

Charlie Sellers 15:47

All in favor

Albert Yount 15:51

Yes

David Harwood 15:52

Yes

Melissa Pickett 15:53

Yes

Doug Matheson 15:55

Yes

Charlie Sellers 15:55

Winterfest Consent Agenda is approved. Public comments. Ladies and gentlemen, if you would like to come up to speak for your three minutes, please get with Hilari over here. And fill out a card so we know where you're coming from. And we will be more than happy to hear your thoughts. Thanks. Mark Murphy would you step up to the podium please. IF you would state your name and address

Mark Murphy 16:42

My name is Mark Murphy with 171 China Creek, which is just this side of Westglow. I'm sure a lot of ya'll have seen my face around town, I all in town all the time. And wanted to give you what I hope is a little unusual insight on the COVID stuff. I am a retired pharmaceutical chemist I invented the way Ibuprofen is made. It turn out that was very famous invention, I speak at scientific conferences. I won't tell that story. After I did that I became a patten attorney and practice paten law in Atlanta for about 20 years. A patent lawyer is the guy you call when your scientists have found something special that they think is worthwhile. And the lawyer reads about it understands it, turns it into a legal document, and then argues with the patent attorneys about the science and the law. I did that job for 20 years. Okay, a lot of experience. I since the COVID thing has come up. Every morning, I take a couple of hours. And I read news stories from all over the world. I have databases and follow all over the world. And I read a lot of the original scientific studies and clinical studies. And I know enough to know most of that, and I

can look up but I don't know, I really do know this stuff very well. I wanted to give you some opinions, some information tonight, I will tell you without telling the story that the new variants are inevitable, it's part of the way the virus functions, they're going to keep coming, we're going to have to learn how to deal with it. Health wise, we got to deal with the health issues. We've got to learn to deal with it economically. And we've got to learn to deal with it legally, because it's a long term thing. It's going to be around. So I thought I'd give you some thoughts about how we should try to deal with it. I don't think if you look at the next slide, please. I don't think masks work very well. I know they don't actually and the biggest single issue is just people don't wear them well. They just don't wear them. You see them down over people's nose. It's all that sort of thing. The worst example of that, of course, is a lot of people don't wear them at all, even in Boone where they have a mask mandate. When I go around Boone, I see 30% to 40% of the people just ignoring it and not wearing them. These things are surgical mask. They are good to be like a handkerchief over your nose. When you sneeze or cough. If you've got COVID they'll do something to catch some of that stuff. But they do not have the ability to filter the aerosols and small particle aerosols that spread COVID around this room, I could do a demo, but they just don't filter the small ones. They protect other people when you sneeze or cough a little bit. But that's about all they do. They don't protect you at all when breath in the air. N- 95 mask like this one are available now you can get these and they're about less than \$1 apiece. They do have the ability to filter The air that you breathe in, if you wear it well, the trick is wearing it well and most of us don't, I can't keep them up very well. So most masks, in my opinion really do very little good. I can show you. I've got scientific studies I can discuss with you.

Charlie Sellers 20:18

You only have about 30 seconds left.

Mark Murphy 20:21

Okay. I want to say there is no expert at CDC telling us what to do about this. As a matter of fact, there's a computer, it makes alerts. And the CDC website itself says spread should be determined locally, not by CDC, they don't have any legal jurisdiction, it's a local matter. How should we react, and I've got some data at the back, I guess I won't have time to go over. Look at the numbers closely use common sense. Consider local factors. We all know Boone and Blowing Rock and a bunch of these other cities are all very different, and they need to be treated differently. I want to give you an alternative way of looking at it. Don't just panic, when you see that red light. When you've got a car that go off on your car dashboard all the time, some of them are important, some of them might be the tires low. Some of them may need a little action mate, you may need some maintenance. Some of them you may need call a mechanic about. And if the oil pressure is bad, you need to stop the car and call wrecker. We're all used to dealing with that. And I'm saying you should do it the same way. Go through the pressure. I will point out one of the slides of a data. I put some slides in with what the CDC computer actually gives. But look at the schools here in Watauga. County. They say there are 5,400 students and staff 16 positive cases last week, that 0.3%. Now that's not measurable of all it's something to worry about. I don't see that as emergency that justifies taking people's like rights and liberties away legally, I think you need to have a good justification to take people's rights away. Please look at the CDC data. I printed some of that out. We've had a Thanksgiving bump, but it's small compared to the bumps we had last year. I think that's probably because of vaccines. But look at the data. Look at the data closely. And we can talk about if you would like to.

Charlie Sellers 22:23

Thank you. Evenlight Eagles step up to the podium.

Evenlight Eagles 22:43

Can you give me a warning when I have one minute when I got one left. Thanks, Evenlight Eagles 612 Ransom Street. And so I think David brought up some really good points last time. I think when he says you're not experts. And you were wanting to base your decisions on expert opinions. I think that makes sense. And I think you're right, none of you guys out there are experts in this. None of you are qualified to make these choices for people. They're just your opinions. The problem is then when you do ask the experts, you're still just getting opinions, as we just saw, he's got a different opinion than other people. David asked Charlie also, who do you turn to when you're sick? And you said your doctor and then David, you would go to your expert. I imagine each and everybody here goes to when they're faced with a health issue that they're going to go to the expert that they know and that they trust. But there's variations within this. And if you don't like the opinion, you go and get a second opinion. Right? And so ultimately, each of us has the right to make the choices about what we want to do with our health. And not only does Charlie not have to do what David's doctor says David doesn't have to do a Charlie's doctor says unless one of those doctors becomes an expert on the Town Council Blowing Rock and they vote in the direction that one of them agrees with to tell everybody else and so I don't think it's right that if an expert were on the panel to have that opinion, they could tell you that you've got to go by these rules or you'd agree you got to go by this x where everybody has different experts that they agree with and if you guys had to abide by the experts that I agree with you wouldn't like it at all I guarantee it. So basically the CDC does not have a corner on on science as we just heard, you know, it there's there are so many different expert opinions. Thank you. And yeah, so also just taking you know the government doesn't have study over us. The government doesn't have custody over our health. It doesn't work that way. That's the way the Constitution set up because there's such different opinions that it's not right for one to be able to choose the right for the other. So the mandates, I'll keep coming back to it, but the mandates are unconstitutional. So, thank you.

Charlie Sellers 25:26

Tyler Bryson, please step up to the Podium.

Tyler Bryson 25:34

Good evening, Tyler Bryson 152 Hilltop Way. So I understand it's going to be potentially on the agenda about mask mandates. I'd have a quick, you know, speaking of authorities and experts, I have a quick 29 second clip, I will play for you guys.

Charlie Sellers 26:02

Actually, that is not acceptable, you need to speak for yourself, you can speak for what you want to say

Tyler Bryson 26:10

It's not acceptable to play Tony Fauci

Charlie Sellers 26:15

You can say what he says. Yes,

Tyler Bryson 26:16

I will. I will repeat it. And I do have the documentation. So Tony Fauci early on, said there's no reason to wear a mask. It may catch a droplet here and there, but in essence, it does no good. He says, people start fidgeting, they start they start grabbing their mask. Everyone of us has gone to restaurants. They see the server's going around going through the motions, because they have to wear a mask. That the pull it down, they talk to their fellow server, they pull it back up, they handle the dishes. They handle the food. I mean, is that effective? Is that safe? No, you don't hear about anymore. Wash your hands. You know what, how many seconds underwater? Hot water, I mean what happened to all that stuff? Now, so what I'm saying with Tony Fauci, people have known the effectiveness of masks for years, the science does not change in a matter of a few weeks, from useless as Tony Fauci said to now a lifesaver so he's so called authority. Now so all I'm saying to you guys and I know everyone's heart wants to protect people. But let's let people let's be let's allow people their God given freedom to choose what they inject into their body, or what they put on their face. Let people assess their own risk. Do not mandate any of this stuff. It's dividing families friends and our town. Let's continue to be one, I looked it up, there's 531 municipalities in this state. And last I heard there's four or maybe five let's be one of the 526 municipalities in North Carolina that let people decide for themselves and not one of the four attempting to take away our civil liberties. I urge you guys don't mandate masks let people decide for themselves. Thank you.

Charlie Sellers 28:35

Okay, I think we had one other Hi, how are you?

Melinda LaVecchia Daniels 28:45

Yes, Melina LaVecchia Daniels 4908 US Highway 221 South, we live a couple miles down from Westglow. Thank you for this opportunity to speak. My husband and I have a small business in Boone. We started a retail artists and gallery in 2019. Five months before the pandemic hit. We got temporarily shut down. I used to work at Westglow, I got fired because I wouldn't wear a mask to teach fitness and health to the ladies there that were exercising in the pool. We just signed a lease December 1st for a Main Street property. We are very excited to join you guys here on Main Street with a retail fine art store. I am so thankful that you brought up this point about the Boone mandate, working there living here. We have seen 30% 40% 50% do not abide in it. From a culture of living in the High Country for about 15 years. I've seen it completely discriminate our High Country culture that people are so desperately trying to receive when COVID hit the fiscal year 2019 To 20 from 2020 needed 21. Recently, our DTA has risen from tourism taxes by 90.2%, we have gone from 1.9 million, from gross income of tourism to almost 5 million. And this is something that people are coming up this mountain, despite their circumstances to experience our culture, I do not want to see Blowing Rock become another culture of brokenness and discrimination, and this business against this business, because what you're seeing right now, especially with our Town Council, is them saying we're not going to go support this local High Country, small business, because they don't agree with us, that is not something that we've built our tourism or our community off of, I hope that you guys will see that in our small town, how wonderful it is to bring small businesses here. Another thing that I think was really great, people aren't wearing these effectively, we see that in restaurants, how all of a sudden, spontaneously COVID

disappears when you sit down. But when you get up, it's all of a sudden, permissible and non permissible to wear your mask. In the retail industry. What we're seeing right now is half and half of the folks that come into our shop, wear them and they wear them so incorrectly, they don't have the proper mask, you're so right about the droplets that escaped. They're also touching it nonstop. And then they touch the products. So they touch it five to ten times, touch the products that products back. And I truly believe that a masked person is going to spread bacteria more than an unmasked person who is not touching their face, or the source of these viruses or bacteria. This is something that we've seen over the last two years from going up and down, up and down with the mask in a retail setting from working in the restaurant industry up here. Gideon Ridge, Bistro Roca. That was my job previously, for the past 10 years before we became a retail space. And so I really am thankful that you guys have given us this opportunity to speak our minds and I would love the opportunity to best serve our community well, by giving them the freedom of choice to enter my building. Thank you so much.

Charlie Sellers 32:05

Thank you. Good luck with your new Business. Okay, moving right along here, since we don't have any more public comments, thank you for those his feet. Thank you so much. Presentations, I'm going to turn this over to Mr. Shane Fox.

Shane Fox 32:29

Recognized Employee Years of Service:

Mike Barfoot (40 Years)

Timothy Everhart (35 Years)

Kevin Rothrock (20 Years)

Trathen Greene (15 Years)

Matthew Fontaine (10 Years)

Brandon Norris (10 Years)

Dustin Watson (10 Years)

Charlie Sellers 42:39

I'll get started. Okay. All right. This next section is the award from American Planning Association. Middle Fork Greenway.

Wendy Patoprsty 42:55

Gave an update on the Middle Fork Greenway and Presented an Award to the Town from the American Planning Association for the Middle

Charlie Sellers 52:20

Thank you. Our thanks to you and your staff for what you have done you made it happen. So thank you, you genuinely did something great with this one for sure.

Charlie Sellers 52:43

Presented a Resolution to Representative Ray Pickett and Senator Deanna Ballard for each of them for the hard work and time spent into the recently passed NC Budget.

Charlie Sellers 1:00:08

Thank you so much, guys. Council, all the citizens, we greatly appreciate it. So thanks again.

Charlie Sellers 1:00:36

Moving right along. On the regular agenda, we are looking for an update on the COVID situation, Shane, would you'd like to lead off with this

Shane Fox 1:00:52

So just a reminder, and now we'll pull up some information here in just a few seconds. Town Council voted to remove the state of emergency and does lifted the mass mandate at the November 17 2021 special town council meeting. The motion that was made to lift the State Emergency included the discussion was concluded the discussion that COVID percent positive rate increased to over 5%. For more than seven days consecutive, that the town council will meet and discuss any possible next steps during the first week of December, based on the CDC reported seven day COVID positivity rate. It was indeed over 5% During that time, thus, the need to put the item on the agenda tonight. So during the last number of weeks, I have provided each of you on a weekly basis with the updated numbers that we had used during the 17th meeting, which is from the CDC. The CDC website, you can pick your state and the county, and you will find that data is presented throughout the course of the information here. What I have been sharing with you all includes positivity rates over the last seven days, number of new cases over the last seven days, which is located here at the top and number of deaths and hospital admissions. And so if you see here, the date on this information is December 13 at the top and it shows 97 new cases in the past seven days 4.5% positivity. And that has changed since even yesterday it was 5.01% new hospital admissions at nine. And the data that we've used in the past to be shared from a positivity standpoint is here, that data is being shown through Friday, December the 10th 2021. And is that 4.5%. Again, that was at 5.01%. Yesterday, goes as high as 7.28% Last week, which is the reason for this. So even the data that I had pulled up a few moments ago has changed from point 5.01 to 4.5. So I don't know if it's a perfect science, but I do want to share this data with you. We did reach above 5%. If you look at the period from this fall, when we had our spike, you can see here, this is where we instated late August when stated the mask mandate as we were above eight, nine as high as 12 and 13%. In early September, and then you can see as the numbers started declining to the November date in which we took away the State of Emergency. You'll see a large increase here it did go as high as almost 10% from the data that I remember looking to where it is today at 4.5%.

Charlie Sellers 1:04:51

Thank you. Any thoughts Council, any new additions

Doug Matheson 1:04:57

Make recommendation to discussion to start out with is with what is looking like right now. That we just let the Manager keep us alert and letting us know about it and continuing on as we are right now

Charlie Sellers 1:05:22

We'll let our Town Manager, keep us abreast that he's been to it and take it week by week and hope and pray that everybody stays well, and hopefully we can get through this. Okay.

David Harwood 1:05:40

This doesn't require action now correct

Shane Fox 1:05:42

It doesn't currently we do not have anything in place. And so right is not required. No actions

Charlie Sellers 1:05:47

Not required unless I want to make a motion.

David Harwood 1:05:50

So when would we? Just to be clear, when would we discuss this again? What would be the trade? Well,

Doug Matheson 1:05:57

I guess if we stay with our motion, being it has dropped down below five again, that we would have to go back above five again for seven consecutive days. If we stay with what our original motion was.

David Harwood 1:06:11

That was my understanding. I just wanted to be clear

Charlie Sellers 1:06:14

We'll just we'll just let Mr. Fox notify us as he's been doing. And if we see a spike, and we can address it the given time. Good enough.

Albert Yount 1:06:26

Well, I think Shane alluded to it drops pretty quickly. Like daily.

Shane Fox 1:06:34

The data changes daily, obviously, I think that's true.

Albert Yount 1:06:37

So if it's over five for three days and then drop them to three. That negates the seven days. Seven days starts again.

Shane Fox 1:06:47

The motion was for seven days, seven consecutive days and percent positive was 5%.

David Harwood 1:06:54

Do we have any additional information from Mrs. Greene

Shane Fox 1:06:58

I spoke to Mrs. Greene today. She believes that we are seeing a peak or solid peak from the Thanksgiving holiday, which I think is evident here from the numbers. Her concern obviously was with

the coming of holidays, Christmas and New Years that we may see something similar to that unknown. But that was her biggest concern to me was just it's been the tendency for now, for more than a year that as holidays and gatherings come and go we see peaks and valleys, peaks, you know there after those holidays and just wanted to stress to everyone to be safe and diligent. Obviously, if you haven't received your vaccine, then please do so and continue to be diligent in that process. T

David Harwood 1:07:42

Thank you.

Albert Yount 1:07:43

One question, when I get that thing from you, there are like three, I see three figures. One 2.8 is out of outliers. This is just about as easy as nailing up Jell-O on the wall.

Shane Fox 1:08:03

The so for everyone that that doesn't receive these emails. Once a week, I'll give an update to the Council and provide data from APP Healthcare from North Carolina DHHS, and from CDC for them to have all three avenues to look at along with the links themselves data just like this, they can pull the data themselves. And the data is different from place to place. The timing has a lot to do with that. I believe so. Not saying that the 2.8 I think you're referring to last week was an outlier. It was from I believe, App Health, which was a week lag and what the data was being presented from the situation report this out there. So a lot of this has to do I think with the timing of the data that's being delivered and how it's being how it's being delivered from an efficiency standpoint.

Charlie Sellers 1:08:56

All okay. Okay, so we'll leave this up to the Town Manager to follow through with us moving forward and notify us accordingly.

David Harwood 1:09:05

Thank you for the update.

Charlie Sellers 1:09:06

Thank you. Moving right along. Well, we're at now the official reports and comments. I just like to say thank you to the Council, I would like to say thank you to our citizens. Thank you to Virginia Powell and Sue Sweeting of course our Town Manager, all the people that have made 2021 a success. All organizations, chamber, civic organizations, everybody that makes our town so special. And I would like to say thank you so very much. That being said, we have some various board positions available that we hope some people will entertain if you would like to entertain these board positions. Ms. Hilari, you can submit an application to Hilari at Town Hall for up until January 3, is that correct? We have planning board four vacancies we have board of adjustments one vacancy, Tourism Development Authority, two vacancies. The Blowing Rock appearance advisory board which is essentially called BRRAC, we have two vacancies and the Alcohol Beverage Control board which has one vacancy. So if you'd like to get additional information on these, these opportunities to help us out in the town, please you know consider throwing your name in the hat because these are very informative very important

boards for us. And I would just like to wish everybody Merry Christmas Happy New Year. And hope everybody's holidays are safe and joyful.

Albert Yount 1:11:05

Like to wish Melissa Godspeed oh this board she showed up on time but she's been tardy and supplying a menu to Council for a meal she promised Council.

David Harwood 1:11:36

Can't believe that's what you use your time for. I have been previous meeting thanked Sue and Virginia for their time. So I'm not going to do that again. But I want to use my time to welcome you. I really feel like you should be welcoming me because you have been involved I think in every committee in this town, every board and I have had several meetings with you. And I don't think I've ever left a meeting without you teaching me something and that's the God's truth. And so I am thrilled to death that you're on here even more thrilled that you are a buffer between Doug and I, so thank you, I appreciate that.

Melissa Pickett 1:12:32

Thank you, I appreciate that. I am excited to be here and so thankful to the citizens in this town to give me the opportunity so I'm excited to be here and get started. So I'm very grateful to all of you all in the staff for moving the meeting to tonight so Ray and I can go celebrate our daughter graduating from college tomorrow. So for everybody who wants to know why we're meeting tonight that is why and I cannot think of more from the bottom of my heart that I get to do that tomorrow so I have a fully functioning adult yes. But I am excited to be here and I'm so looking forward to serving with all of ya'll even though I seem to be the only female up here now so thank you

Doug Matheson 1:13:28

I want to start off with also welcoming Melissa aboard and thanking the town for the wonderful Christmas party that we had. And also anybody out there if you drop by Town Hall we have some new faces here working for us now and congratulate them welcome them aboard also. As I mentioned the Council the last time that I'd be having with the League two meetings and I had one the financial week before last and I had the conference this past week. So just to bring you up to date a few things coming out of there that actually relate to us. A lot of this money that the we have been able to get this year has generated a lot of grants out there now. So we are going to have to really be you know on our toes and jumping on it because the money they have added a lot of money into the grant funding this year. So we need to be aware, as David knows, and try and get our share there. Coming out of the financial part. They're predicting that federal is going to slow purchasing coming up early spring, which what they're saying is going to start raising interest rates by the first June. So that, with that info look for that come in the first of June the interest rates have come or will probably be going up. So if we need to beg, barro or whatever we need to do it by then. The League is proud to announce that they have now a 89% vaccination rate, they want to put that out there. They also want to know that it they as League we have said this was the best legislated session for municipalities in years. For once, the municipalities really came out ahead. We started back last year and Ms. Sweeting sat on that board of setting goals that we would like to get enacted and worked with. And out of the goals, they started out without, with 100. Sue, and them narrowed it down to 30. And then my crew, we narrowed it down to 15 out of 15 that we turned into the state 75% of them we accomplish this year, which is a huge rate for us.

First state budget passed in three years, little over 1400 pages if you want to read it and but you know, which had a over a billion dollars earmarked for cities from ARP money. Two of the things that just a state that we were able to keep out of was policy items that had been added on and one of them had to do with short term rental, we were able to keep that out, where the town's would not be losing control, we still have our controls. And the other was the tree removal. That was also in there to where we would not have any say so at all on trees being removed in our jurisdictions. Powell Bill funding which is money that we get from the state for highways in Blowing Rock and our streets, they increase that Ray and the Senator Ballard increase that money. We'll look for first big check, hopefully in January. They also added a firefighters cancer policy in this year. And that was something big for the firefighters. And fortunately for us, it was not an unfunded mandate where we have to cover it and it will be covered. So we don't have to worry about that. And that that was something good that came out of there. The league is still really trying to buy, our building burnt as everybody knows, about three years ago, we've got one of the best locations in Raleigh down there. It's just a block over from the State House. So we're trying to get started building back there. We're trying to work and buy the county part out it was a dual ownership between the cities and counties in North Carolina. And so we're trying to buy them out. So we can go ahead and get started with our new building down there. So that's pretty much where we're at right now. But thank you all for allowing me to be there.

Albert Yount 1:14:43

Well that is better than none

Shane Fox 1:19:33

Thank you, Mayor and Council. I'll start by echoing some of the same comments thank you to Ms. Sweeting and Ms. Powell for their years of service. I had privilege for two and a half years to work with both of them. And I shared an email with counsel one day this weekend of the accomplishments just in the last two and a half years that each of them had been a part of and played a huge factor in so from my perspective working with them on daily basis, sometimes more than even I would like, they've been a godsend to allow me first to come here. And then secondly, to guide me and leader and provide leadership through the last two and a half years. So thank you to Ms. Powell and Ms. Sweeting for the past two and a half years, I've had a chance to work with them. And then welcome to Melissa. So it feels like you've been here the whole time. I think because you have been here on something or many, many things I should say, since I've been here. So it feels like this just seemed right for you to be where you are right now. So thank you for your willingness to run and look forward to working with you over the next number of years. And in the midst of saying thank you to three elected officials, I would say thank you to all of our Town staff. As the Mayor pointed out, 2021 was an unbelievable year in so many ways dealing with COVID, obviously, has been an up and down battle, as you all know, for everyone. So whether from home to work, I can't say enough about these employees that we have here, we have very little turnover. As you heard earlier, we have a ton of individuals that have been here 5, 10 15, 20 plus years, that just continue to show up every day and do their job regardless of what's going on in the world regardless of what may be going on in their own household. And from my perspective, I can't say thank you enough for that, because it makes my job easier when everyone shows up and everyone does what they're supposed to do. And that's truly what we have here we have almost 70 full time employees that show up on a daily basis and do their job, regardless of what's going on again in the world or in their household. And they do so with a great attitude. And I can't be more appreciative of

that. So I say thank you to all of our 70 employees in all six of our departments for 2021. Just being unbelievable year that couldn't ask for better employees there. I'll go through a few updates. The Bass Lake sidewalk project is pretty much complete. So we have two fence panels that are left to be installed that we had to order. So if you've heard there is a shortage and shipping and getting things in. So we do have a little delay there. Those will be probably put in in the springtime in front of Ms. Susie Greene's house. But other than that the project is complete. That is a seven year project not construction wise, but I think it was seven years from start to finish. The plan as of right now is our next council meeting is January the 11th. We'll plan on having a ribbon cutting before the meeting weather dependent. Hopefully it's good. It's been good so far. So hopefully it continues. But the plan right now and the public will be invited to that not sure the exact location, we'll let the Chamber help us work on the location of where that ribbon cutting should take place. But that's a monumental project, it's \$1.2 million. So the price tag isn't necessarily the largest. But that project is a unique project that is really unique to Blowing Rock where you're connecting Federal lands, to the Town of Blowing Rock, with an unbelievable walkway that just is going to open up a world of possibilities there for folks to get out. Enjoy what makes us so special here. Also would like to say the landscaping obviously, down at 321 and Sunset I think I mentioned this last time has been completed the work in front of the fire station as a part of that project as well. While that's important is that we've not been able to have a flagpole in front of the fire station that's going to be installed now as part of this project. So you've seen the rock work if you've driven down 321 some mulch has been put in the plantings will go in in the spring and it will look just as good as 321 and Sunset corridor does right now. So it's going to be a tremendous asset for the fire station from just a beautification standpoint. And then the flagpole itself obviously, is going to be tremendous to have. Crosswalks at Main and Sunset and 221 and Chestnut, the crosswalks have been ordered signals have been ordered. All that should be in hopefully early in 2022. And so we can start that project. The plan right now is to start that project. Right after Winter Fest which will be the first of February is a fairly short construction time window about 90 days give or take, so to speak. So those signals, including the stoplights at Main and Sunset will be installed for in time for the spring, early summer season as folks start coming really back into town. So we're excited about that. And then just today, Mr. Matt Blackburn and I spoke about meeting with BREMCO and the next couple of days about installing some flashing signs on Sunset around the school walkway areas. We used to have some signs there so we're going to be looking at putting those back into place on both the east and west bound lanes there or north and south I should say of Sunset to allow for a signal flashing signal during the school hours with the crosswalks and so that's something that we're looking to put back into place. A couple dates that I'll remind everyone just here briefly before we go into closed session. Again the next council meeting is January the 11th. That is a Tuesday. The office is closed for several days during the holidays. So we'll be closed Thursday and Friday the 23rd and 24th. So that's next Thursday and Friday. And then the 27th, which is the following Monday. We open Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and the closed again for the 31st for New Years. And so, again, close on Thursday and Friday 23rd and 24th closed on that Monday, the 27th and Friday the 31st. And then the other day that I have here written down is our retreat is set for the 24th, 25th and 26th of January. And right now we have that booked at BRAHM that's a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, the last Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday of the month of January. So with that, I'll be more than happy to answer any questions that you all may have for me.

Charlie Sellers 1:25:49

Okay. All right, ladies and gentlemen. We're going to be going into closed session. We did not expect any decisions to be made. This is just for a follow up.

EXECUTIVE SESSION – 7:26 p.m

Albert Yount 1:26:07

Made an motion to go into closed session under NCGS 143-318.11.(a)(3).

David Harwood

Second

Albert Yount

Yes

David Harwood

Yes

Melissa Pickett

Yes

Doug Matheson

Yes

Charlie Sellers Thank you so much, everybody for coming this evening. And hope everyone has very, very safe and happy holidays.

At 8:25 p.m. Council returned to open session.

Doug Matheson

Motion to adjourn.

Albert Yount

Second

Albert Yount

Yes

David Harwood

Yes

Melissa Pickett

Yes

Doug Matheson

Yes

MAYOR _____

Charlie Sellers

ATTEST _____

Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk

ATTACHMENTS:

Resolution – Senator Deanna Ballard and Representative Ray Pickett – Attachment A