

MINUTES
Town of Blowing Rock
Board of Commissioners
Special Meeting-July 29, 2008

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, July 29, 2008 at 8:30 pm for a Special Meeting with HyettPalma Inc. to discuss the Blowing Rock Retail Strategy. Present were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Bobby Ball, Keith Tester, Albert Yount, Phillip Pickett, and Tommy Klutz. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, and Assistant Town Clerk Erica Cline.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 8:45 p.m.

New Business

Mayor Lawrence welcomed Ms. Delores Palma and Mr. Doyle Hyett from HyettPalma Inc. and thanked them for hosting the Public Hearing on the Blowing Rock Retail Strategy. He asked the other Commissioners for their comments on the Public Hearing held earlier that evening.

Commissioner Ball stated that she was disappointed with the hearing because most people were asking for things that were already in the works. She said people are unaware of the hard work and dedication the Council has put towards improving the town. She gave an example of the signage and parking issues mentioned at the hearing, which the Council is already working towards solving. Commissioner Ball stated if Council did everything the speakers suggested their taxes would increase.

Commissioner Klutz agreed with Commissioner Ball and stated there are 94 parking spaces available along Main Street. Thirty years ago the only places that needed more parking were the grocery stores and large restaurants. He stated that the town does not need to overdevelop parking and he does not want the parking deck in the middle of town.

Commissioner Yount stated that he is concerned with the assembly of property that would affect the historic look of the town. He also stated he is not totally opposed to a parking deck.

Commissioner Tester declared that the Council must address issues such as parking because the town is changing and growing. People and businesses are changing and if the town wants to attract high-end customers Council must recognize and plan for these issues. If not, the town will be a low-end tourist town.

Commissioner Klutz stated that if the parking deck is built the tourists/customers will not stay. They will be able to go to their cars and leave at the end of the day.

Commissioner Tester agreed that building the parking deck is a risk and that is why Council is looking closely at the project. He stated that if we want tourists during the day we must have parking. We don't have large modern motels and it will be cost prohibitive making the small motels in town accommodating due to land values. The small motels will go away and become retail.

Commissioner Klutz stated that the majority in attendance at the meeting at Blowing Rock School wanted Blowing Rock to stay the way it is now.

Commissioner Tester stated that the town isn't a "Mom and Pop" place anymore. The owners of the retail and restaurants want the property for resale value.

Commissioner Pickett stated he owns two motels in town. Boone will build bigger motels because they can go up four stories in height. He suggested that Blowing Rock should do the same along the corridors and create more green space by building higher and narrower. People now want state of the art equipment and it gets expensive. He also said that satellite parking wouldn't work because people wouldn't want to wait on a bus, and the town needs parking.

Commissioner Tester said that to halt building in Blowing Rock is just a dream. We need to protect the strip of Blowing Rock Village, from Chestnut to Highway 221. Right now the Council has a chance to manage the growth but when the town changes the property will become prime development property that can't be controlled. Council needs to define what the historic village is and control it. Then we can allow modern day development, such as a hotel with modern facilities. The code should be stricter within the Village with more leniencies on the outskirts of the Village.

Commissioner Klutz suggested putting parking on the streets the town wants to develop.

Commissioner Tester suggested putting parking where the growth is.

Commissioner Yount asked Commissioner Pickett as a motel owner, does he feel the effects of more hotels being built in Boone. Commissioner Pickett responded that 23 years ago occupancy was higher because people would stay for a month at a time. The traveling community has changed; people can't afford to stay as long now.

Commissioner Tester stated that the TDA has been here for four years and spent \$500,000 on advertisements but the occupancy rates have not increased. We

must increase the mid week stays in town. The motels are in danger because it isn't economically feasible to upgrade. The town needs more activities to do than just shop on Main Street. You can shop Main Street in half a day. He suggested that the shops stay open later and for merchants to be creative. We need to add things to do at night to keep people in town such as auctions and promoting the Community Arts Center and BRAHM.

Mayor Lawrence stated he appreciated the turnout and the town input at the hearing earlier in the evening. He agreed with Commissioner Tester that the Village is what people love. Main Street and Memorial Park are what draw people to the town. He suggested adopting a code to remodel buildings inside but leave the outside facade.

All commissioners agreed to focus on protecting Historic downtown Blowing Rock from Globe Road to Highway 221.

Commissioner Ball suggested making the Village a true Historic District.

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock mentioned that this discussion is similar to the efforts in 2003 and 2005 to establish a Town Center District separate from the rest of the Central Businesses with differing rules and standards.

Commissioner Tester stated that he would rather have quality over quantity of visitors. Promotions may say they want the upscale visitor but the town isn't doing what it takes to get them here.

Commissioner Ball stated that Council should look at other places rather than Sunset Drive for more parking because people will not walk that far due to elevation.

Commissioner Tester stated the shuttle and satellite parking would only work for events.

Commissioner Ball stated if the shop owners wouldn't park on Main Street they would have more parking for the customers.

Commissioner Tester stated the Police Department should start enforcing the two hour parking limit because the tourists expect it.

Mr. Hyett stated that the town is in a transition period, it's just a matter of what the town will do about it.

Ms. Palma informed Council about the other meetings scheduled for the week with a public presentation scheduled for September.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

MAYOR _____
J.B. Lawrence

ATTEST _____
Erica Cline, Assistant Town Clerk