

Planning and Zoning Board

Minutes

Thursday, August 18th 2022

5:30 p.m.

The Blowing Rock Planning and Zoning Board met on Thursday, August 18th, 2022, for their regularly scheduled meeting. Members present were Chairman Bill McCarter, Tom Barrett, Catherine Perry, Sam Hess and Chris Squires. Staff members present were Director Kevin Rothrock, Zoning Officer Brian Johnson and Taylor Miller.

Chairman McCarter called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Chairman McCarter asked if there was a motion to approve the minutes from the last meeting. After corrections of previous minutes, Mr. Chris Squires made a motion to approve, seconded by Member Catherine Perry. All in favor.

1. Solar Panels

Mr. Rothrock presented the staff report. He noted that the Blowing Rock's town ordinance regulates solar panels on commercial buildings but there are no restrictions on residential buildings. The current ordinance also limits town staff from approving more than 20% of a roof for solar panels. If a permit request comes in for more than 20% of a roof, it must go before town council for approval. It can be approved for 100% of the roof by town council if they decide to approve that much.

The town invited a few different speakers to present to the Planning Board to help provide information in regard to solar panels and how they can impact our town. Speakers present were Landon Pennington, Adrienne Taite and George Santoucci.

The speakers presented some information about solar panels and the work that they do. All want to help the community transition to a cleaner version of living. A point was made that solar panels can be aesthetically pleasing for the town. Most people imagine these big, gaudy panels on top of the roof but we can come a very long way in the aesthetics of solar panels and how they can blend in with our environment without being an eyesore. Solar energy can also be cost effective while also being locally generated and supported.

The Town of Boone was discussed and how they plan to create renewable energy for the town. All of the Town of Boone facilities are operating at 100% clean – meaning they provide their own energy.

They discussed a platform used by the Town of Boone and how we can have access to the same platform. It is called Solsmart. This platform provides an online permit application for anyone wanting to apply for a permit to install solar panels. It waives the permit application fee in order to entice people to want to apply. They have a 3 day

turn around period for residential applications meaning that applicants will know in 3 days whether or not they have been approved or denied for their solar panel application. The platform also encourages towns to allow small scale solar panels in all zones of a town.

Mr. Rothrock asked Mr. Santoucci about setbacks for ground mounted structures and whether or not the Town of Boone still requires the same setback restrictions for any type of ground mounted panels on a property. Mr. Santoucci advised that they still enforce setback requirements.

Member Sam Hess questioned how often people ask to install only 20% of their roof with solar panels. Mr. Santoucci advised that it was rare for someone to want only 20% of their roof.

Member Chris Squires asked if there were any requirements or restrictions on installation of cheaper systems that could produce a heavy glare or reflection.

Mr. Santoucci acknowledged that they do not have any restrictions or requirements for that specifically.

Chairman McCarter stated that we could definitely fix our ordinance by removing the 20% limitation for solar panels on residential homes but if we want to encourage solar panel installation, it might take a bit more thought and consideration.

Mr. Rothrock asked the board if they wanted to make a decision now in regard to the current ordinance or provide him with some direction and let him draft something up for them.

All members seemed in agreement about keeping the current ordinance but striking the portion about staff only being able to approve only 20% of roof. They do not want the staff to be restricted to the only 20% approval.

Member Sam Hess made a motion to approve that decision for the ordinance, seconded by Member Chris Squires. All in favor.

Member Harrison Herbst made a motion to adjourn the meeting. All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Chairman Bill McCarter

Taylor Miller
Planning & Zoning Support Specialist