

MINUTES

2009 COUNCIL RETREAT

The Board of Commissioners for the Town of Blowing Rock met in special session on Sunday, January 18, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina. Present were Mayor J. B. Lawrence, Commissioners Barbara Ball, Keith Tester, Albert Yount, Phillip Pickett, and Tommy Klutz. Also present were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Town Clerk Sharon Greene and Finance Officer Nicole Norman. At this time, Council reviewed the Retreat process and received an update on the 2008 accomplishments. At 9:00 p.m., Mayor Lawrence recessed the meeting for the evening.

On Monday, January 19, 2009, Mayor Lawrence reconvened the meeting at 8:30 a.m. In attendance were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Ball, Tester, Pickett and Klutz. Commissioner Yount departed the Retreat without explanation other than the attached handwritten note (refer to Attachment A). Others in attendance were Town Manager Hildebran, Town Finance Director Norman, and Town Clerk Greene. On January 19, 2008 the meeting recessed at 5:45 p.m.

On Tuesday, January 20, 2008 Mayor Lawrence reconvened the meeting at 8:45 am. In attendance were Mayor Lawrence, Commissioners Ball, Tester, Pickett, and Klutz. Commissioner Yount was not in attendance (refer to Attachment A). Others in attendance were Town Manager Hildebran, Town Finance Director Norman, and Town Clerk Greene.

(Note: McGill Associates Representative Doug Chapman attended on Monday, January 14 from 2:00 p.m. to 5:45 p.m.)

The purpose of the meeting was to hold a retreat to discuss key issues, initiatives and long-term planning. An issue-based process was used to help update the Town's FY 2008-09 goals and initiatives. The following major issues and topics were discussed during the sessions and the action plan below resulted:

2008 – RETREAT PRIORITIES & ACTION PLAN

Board Appointments

Place appointments on February Agenda for consideration

- Planning Board
- Board of Adjustment
- ABC Board
- TDA
- Watauga County Recreation Commission

Fiscal Management (Administration/Budgetary) Issues

Administration

- Continue to monitor economic conditions and pursue federal stimulus funding opportunities as warranted.
- Proceed with Council Chamber Audio/Visual Upgrade in current Fiscal Year and consider Town Hall Improvements as funding permits.
- Continue to work on improving communication with citizens (utilizing the Town Website and web links, the bi-monthly town newsletter "*Around the Rock*", water-billing inserts and media outlets).

Budgetary

- Continue to monitor competitiveness of salaries and consider during FY 2009-10 budget process, including salary, insurance, benefits, etc.
- Continue implementation of 5% 401K for general employees with 3% contribution beginning July 1, 2009.
- Evaluate Town Council Compensation at a future date.
- Proceed with a Request for Proposals for Town Banking Services (Mayor requests recusal from personal involvement due to any potential perceived conflict of interest.)
- Begin implementation of Environmental Conservation Plan.
- Continue to monitor utility rates to insure sufficiency and with an emphasis on conservation.
- Continue to set aside 1/3 of TDA monies for Town infrastructure (and related infrastructure debt-service).
- Continue to maintain and fund Debt Service Schedule.
- Continue to maintain and fund Fleet Capital Replacement Schedule.
- Continue to maintain and fund Town 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan.
- Continue to investigate the creation of a Downtown Municipal Service District to provide a funding source for streetscape improvements, additional restrooms and parking and minimize impacts to residential homeowners. Partner with Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce and review during Downtown Retail Study discussions.

Tourism Issues

- Proceed with Year-1 Implementation Sequence of Blowing Rock Retail Strategy and support the Steering Committee Concept – but suggest consideration of an additional residential representative on Committee.
- Schedule meeting with Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce to discuss Blowing Rock Retail Strategy and participation outline.
- Schedule annual meeting with TDA to review Annual Report (March 2009).

- Schedule a meeting (Mayor & Mayor Pro-tem) with the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum to discuss parking facility, including the following issues:
 - Plan/Bid Review (questions on what is included in quote and design detail)
 - Competitiveness of Costs (possibly other bids)
 - Project Delay Potential (economic conditions and current financing market)
 - Possibility of Shared-cost Partnership (town/merchants/BRAHM)
- Proceed with upgrade of Memorial Park restroom facility and continue with plan to fund/construct downtown public restroom facilities at Robbins Pool and Tiller/Lane property. Also, proceed with providing assistance to the US Park Service in installing water/sewer at the Bass Lake Comfort Facility. (Defer action at this time on installation of public restroom facilities at the Ice House.)
- Require major events to utilize portable restroom trailer facilities during large events to meet demand.
- Continue to explore partnership options in the provision of parking. (school and churches)
- Continue Master Signage Plan implementation (include Parks & Recreation facilities).
- Provide bidding opportunity for local vendors on future signage, as appropriate.

Planning Issues

- Continue code enforcement of dilapidated structures/lots.
- Proceed with customer satisfaction surveys.
- Proceed with the implementation of parking recommendations provided in the Downtown Parking Management Study and Downtown Retail Strategy.
- Request Planning Board to pursue a land use code amendment to allow banners twice a year with guidelines covering appearance, location/placement, time limits and enforcement provisions with penalties. (No flag signs, etc.)
- Request Planning Board to pursue permitting banner placement at Memorial Park for Tour of Homes, Winterfest, Blowing Rock Horse Show and Blowing Rock Community Day with uniform guidelines on appearance and size.
- Continue Town Land Use Code Review/Revision Project.
- Continue to review and maintain Town Comprehensive Plan.
- Request Planning Board to review Central Business District 40-foot maximum height limit in relation to preservation and economic factors with consideration to allowing a maximum of three stories and defining the area of emphasis for preservation as suggested in the Downtown Retail Strategy. (possible two zoning districts)
- Proceed with CUP Tracking Database Software (include landscaping component & parking lot maintenance).
- Consider land use code amendment requiring a conceptual model, computer simulation model, or similar technique for new building projects that shows proposed buildings in relation to surrounding area, as well as investigate the possibility of

Town developing a 3-D baseline data model of building heights for use by applicants.

- Continue to place planning/zoning information in “*Around the Rock*” to improve communication with the public.
- Review Outside Dining Regulations/Outside Display of Merchandise.
- Continue to monitor impacts of U.S. 321 Widening Project (work with tourism partners).

Public Safety Issues (Police/Emergency Services)

Emergency Services

- Prepare survey for “*Around the Rock*” newsletter to receive citizen feedback on the continuation of Memorial Park Fire Horn activation.
- Continue negotiations regarding Medic Base co-location.
- Continue to investigate requiring fire alarm systems/sprinklers in downtown buildings upon major renovation (possibly 50% or greater - ??) and new construction, but might be cost prohibitive.
- Review current fire detection requirements for existing downtown residential units.

Police

- Continue to set aside funds for Police Department Building renovation and conduct architectural study of old fire/rescue building for future use (Police, Recreation & Public Works).
- Continue efforts to improve noise and parking regulation enforcement. (hand-held parking citation device)
- Support current town/school efforts to manage Blowing Rock School traffic (the best alternative under the circumstances) and suggest that any additional measures be forwarded to the Watauga County School Board for consideration.
- Continue to monitor state legislative/administrative changes that affect E-911 telecommunications funding and any impact on the Blowing Rock telecommunications center.
- Consider equipment upgrades during FY 2009-10 budget process and pursue Mobile Data Terminals through available grant funding.

Infrastructure Issues (Public Works/Water/Wastewater)

Public Works

- Continue Street Pavement Plan implementation and consider R/W improvements and pedestrian issues on Ransom Street during scheduled resurfacing.
- Consider PW Warehouse during FY 2009-10 budget process and follow-up on acquisition of land adjoining warehouse.
- Continue Right of Way maintenance funding (via contract services) and request NCDOT to maintain state right of way.

- Investigate the possibility of using the town-owned lot across from Robbins Pool for re-location of the Town Recycling Center.

Water/Sewer

- Continue to pursue water supply and complete land exchange with U.S. Park Service for Town Reservoir property and avoid encumbrances that would prevent the exchange.
- Continue to monitor impacts of drought.

Capital Projects

- Continue to monitor American Legion Parking Facility construction and investigate placement of gate vehicle counter.
- Continue to monitor Water/Sewer Capital Improvements Plan - Phase I construction and consider additional improvements if project contingency funds allow.
- Proceed with bidding the Downtown Streetscape Plan – Phase I & III in the spring 2009 and use stamped asphalt for crosswalks. Pursue NCDOT Enhancement funding for Phase II.
- Request utility providers (AT&T, BREMCO, and Charter) to consolidate/remove overhead lines where feasible.
- Proceed with rebidding of the Robbins Pool Improvement Project in the spring 2009 with construction to begin in August 2009. Seek additional grant funding for the project.
- Proceed with the bidding of the Boone/Blowing Rock Water Interconnection Project in March 2009 and seek stimulus funding assistance if available.
- Proceed with implementation of Storm Water Master Plan – and pursue grant opportunities.
- Continue to develop Laurel Park sewer extension plan.
- Continue to develop Gideon Ridge water/sewer improvement plan and set aside funds as available.
- Proceed with the development of a Comprehensive Sidewalk Plan.

Parks & Recreation/Town Beautification Issues

- Continue P&R Master Plan implementation, with emphasis on Pool Project.
- Maintain current prohibition of dogs in town parks with code amendment.
- Develop a town-customized Event Guide for use of Memorial Park, which outlines plans and minimum requirements for park usage.
- Investigate upgrade (compacted rock dust, paver border, drainage) of Davant Field Walking Track.
- Continue dialogue with American Legion on future of building and review town lease.
- Work with TDA representatives to evaluate Holidays Decorations.
- Continue to work with BRAAC on overall beautification of Town.

Other

- Follow-up with NCDOT regarding drainage problem at Town Welcome Sign and U.S. 321.
- Follow-up on noise issues on Ransom Street.
- Follow-up on BRAAC Watering Truck load restrictions.
- Follow-up with Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce and inform of plans for old Fire Station as a Parks & Recreation space (as outlined in P&R Master Plan). (American Legion building a possibility)
- Investigate tax valuations with Watauga County to verify market conditions.
- Maintain current Short-term Rental Policy.
- Continue to keep apprised of Blowing Rock Hospital planning.

ADJOURN

With no further business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 10:45 a.m. on Tuesday, January 20, 2009.

MAYOR _____
J.B. Lawrence

ATTEST _____
Sharon Greene, Town Clerk

ATTACHMENT (2009 Retreat)
Commissioner Yount's Handwritten Note-Attachment A