

## MINUTES

### Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners Special Meeting-July 13, 2009

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners held a special meeting on Monday, July 13, 2009. The meeting took place in the Town Council Chambers at Town Hall at 1036 Main Street, Blowing Rock. Present were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Bobby Ball, Keith Tester, Phillip Pickett, Albert Yount and Tommy Klutz. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Town Attorney Allen Moseley, Emergency Services Director Kent Graham, Fire Chief Doug Matheson and Town Clerk Sharon Greene.

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and welcomed those present.

#### **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

##### **1. Blowing Rock Hospital Update**

Mayor Pro tem Keith Tester began the discussion by introducing Mr. Richard Sparks, CEO, Dr. Herman Godwin, Chief Medical Advisor, and Mr. Tim Ford, Hospital Administrator for Appalachian Regional Healthcare Systems who were present to update Council on future plans for the Blowing Rock Hospital facility.

Mr. Richard Sparks advised that Appalachian Regional Healthcare Systems began in 2004 and Blowing Rock Hospital had joined the system in June 2007. Since that time, many studies had been done to establish what was needed for Blowing Rock Hospital in order to turn the facility into a more stabilized operation. Mr. Sparks stated architectural, engineering, and accounting firms had been consulted to gather needed information. Mr. Sparks advised that Blowing Rock Hospital had been well maintained and had served its purpose for a number of years, but a new facility was needed. The current building did not comply with state building codes and was not A.D.A. compliant and renovations to the current facility would be very costly. Mr. Sparks also stated several meetings had taken place with various residents of Blowing Rock to gather information in order to create a strategic plan.

Mr. Sparks presented Council with a draft document containing information regarding a proposed 90-100 bed facility (**Exhibit A**). According to Mr. Sparks, future plans for the facility would focus on an post acute care/skilled nursing facility, which would slightly alter the current operations. He advised the medical clinic and urgent care areas would remain part of the new facility. Mr. Sparks explained the proposed plan would be more

of a neighborhood concept, different from other facilities in the area. For example; the proposed facility would be grouped as follows:

- 25 beds for short-term (1-2 week) rehabilitation
- 12 beds for Alzheimer's and dementia patients
- 13 beds for palliative care patients
- 25 beds for high activity skilled nursing care
- 25 beds for traditional skilled nursing care

Mr. Sparks mentioned that patients would be encouraged to interact with others in their neighborhood during meal time as well as during activities in the common room.

Mr. Sparks addressed several challenges such as the \$9.5 million in funding for the project. According to Mr. Sparks 15-20 organizations had been approached regarding funding, which included the Cannon Family Trust, and Duke Endowment as well as individuals.

He also advised that Appalachian Regional Healthcare had approached the owners of a 9-acre tract adjacent (formally owned by the hospital) to the hospital's current 3-acre tract about the possible acquisition of the tract or some complementary use of the property. Mr. Sparks stressed the urgency for a new building due to the status of the existing building and the cost to renovate it.

Dr. Herman Godwin then gave examples of the type of patients who would utilize this unique facility, such as Alzheimer and stroke patients, cancer/palliative care, pneumonia, etc. He stated other sites had been considered and it might be easier and less expensive to acquire property elsewhere, but a facility of this type was needed in Blowing Rock. He mentioned from a case management aspect and the fact that Blowing Rock Hospital currently employed 130-150 people the current location would be more feasible.

Mr. Sparks advised a private donor had gifted Appalachian Regional Healthcare with \$1,000,000, of which \$500,000 would be utilized toward the proposed facility. Mr. Sparks thanked Council for their time and asked that they support future plans for Blowing Rock Hospital.

After several questions regarding the phasing aspect and the land acquisition, Council voiced their support and excitement for the new facility and felt it would be an asset to the community.

Commissioner Tester stated he had been a member of the Blowing Rock Hospital Board of Directors for the past three years and he believed it was imperative that healthcare remain in Blowing Rock as it had for 70 years, but it was also important that a transition be made into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Mr. Tester stated due to him being a member of Council and the Hospital Board of Directors, he would not make a motion to commit the Town as a donor for the project, but emphasized the Town should show their

support by being the first donor to the project which would be over an extended period of time.

Commissioners Klutz and Yount spoke of their favorable experiences with the current facility and were in favor of the new concept.

Mayor Lawrence voiced how important healthcare was to the area and how delighted he was with the proposed project. Commissioners Ball and Pickett spoke of the uniqueness of the cluster concept and agreed that it was a good plan.

Audience members Ginny Stevens and JoAnn Mitchell had several questions regarding the proposed changes and how this would affect the residents of Blowing Rock. They were concerned that some residents might not be able to afford a facility of this type and residents and patients might lose some of the “small town” aspects of care currently being given.

Commissioner Tester advised the hospital was State regulated and the new facility would still accept Medicare/Medicaid patients.

Council agreed to further discuss the matter at a future meeting.

## **2. Blowing Rock Fire Department Update**

Emergency Services Director Kent Graham and Fire Chief Doug Matheson were present to update Council regarding Station II currently under construction on Hwy. 221. Mr. Graham began by stating Blowing Rock Fire and Rescue currently had 12 paramedics and approximately 56 volunteer fire fighters. He also said that nationally volunteerism was on a downward spiral due to the many fire, rescue, and EMS requirements. Mr. Graham advised that Blowing Rock’s fire district covered an approximate 52-59 square mile district, 9 of which are in the limits of Blowing Rock.

Mr. Graham further explained the insurance rating system and with the addition of Station II, residents within a 5-mile radius of the new station would be rated differently, which would save residents money on insurance premiums. He also stated that with the new station, response time would be enhanced greatly in that district.

A power point presentation was given by Mr. Graham which showed Council a rendering of the new station. He advised the half-acre tract had been donated by Dr. Thomas Vance. He also stated the construction of the new building would cost approximately \$360,000, the same as the cost of a new fire truck. He further stated the new fire station would house one pumper truck and a tanker truck which would meet the 1,500 gallons of water that is required of the station.

Mr. Graham emphasized how proud his department was of Station II and how they hoped to find property in the Aho area to build Station III.

Commissioner Yount requested that Council continue to be adequately updated on future projects. Mr. Graham, responded that Council would receive updates through work session minutes, monthly reports, and updates such as this on any future projects.

Commissioner Klutz had questions regarding the cost of insurance coverage on the equipment that was to be used at Station II. Town Manager Hildebran advised that insurance coverage on the complete fleet of trucks and equipment at the fire department was less than \$20,000 per year.

In closing, Mr. Graham said he hoped that Station II would be operational by the end of August.

**ADJOURN**

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m.

**MAYOR** \_\_\_\_\_  
**J.B. Lawrence**

**ATTEST** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Sharon Greene, Town Clerk**

**Attachments** (July 13, 2009)  
Draft Document Blowing Rock Hospital- Exhibit A