

MINUTES
Town of Blowing Rock
Town Council Meeting
August 8, 2023

The Town of Blowing Rock Town Council met for their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, August 8, 2023, 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 Doug Matheson and Council Members Albert Yount, David Harwood, Melissa Pickett and Pete Gherini. Others in attendance were Interim Town Manager Kevin Rothrock, Town Attorney Allen Moseley, Town Engineers Doug Chapman and Jared Wright, Fire Chief Kent Graham, Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown, Police Chief Aaron Miller, Interim Planning Director Brian Johnson, Public Works Director Matt Blackburn, Finance Officer Nicole Norman, IT Director Thomas Steele and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner who recorded the minutes.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Sellers called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone. Mayor Sellers verified attendance via roll call.

THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

MINUTE APPROVAL

Council Member Gherini made the motion to approve the minutes from the July 11, 2023 regular and closed session meeting, seconded by Council Member Pickett. Unanimously approved.

REGULAR AGENDA ADOPTION

Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Council Member Harwood.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Budget Amendment - #2023-12
2. Special Event – Porsche Event Street Closure
3. Mayoral Proclamation – End Overdose in Watauga County

Council Member Harwood made a motion to approve consent agenda as presented, seconded by Council Member Gherini.

SPEAKERS FROM THE FLOOR

None

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Parking Ordinance

Interim Town Manager Kevin Rothrock presented the proposed Ordinance Changes as follows:

- A. Establishes the ability for the Town to regulate and enforce paid parking;
- B. Amends the current fines for parking violations;
- C. Increases the fines for repeat parking violations;
- D. And allows the Town to immobilize vehicles when the owner is a repeat violator and has not paid for violations over a period of 60 days.

Section 6-29 has been added to allow for paid parking when Council decides to move forward with a paid parking program, and Section 6-35 has been amended to allow for increased parking fines and vehicle immobilization.

Mayor Sellers opened the Public Hearing.

Lela Silver, Owner of Storie Street Grille (Blowing Rock) – Spoke as an advocate for the workforce in Blowing Rock. Ms. Silver explained as an employer, it's very difficult to recruit employees as it is these days, but adding in the possibility of them having to pay to park will discourage them from wanting to work in Blowing Rock. She noted she is not for or against paid parking but wanted the Council to think about the workforce when making a permanent decision about paid parking.

Emily Roberts 309 Morningside Dr (Blowing Rock) – Spoke against paid parking. She noted that during the "Parking Question and Answer" meeting from March 28, 2023, the majority of people in attendance, both residents and business owners were against paid parking. She further noted that when then Town Manager Shane Fox asked "if you would like a show of hands, the majority of the people in the room are against paid parking". Ms. Roberts reiterated employers already face the challenge of hiring employees and paid parking will make it even harder to staff their stores and restaurants that are loved by residents. She concluded that taxpayers do not support this.

Tom Barrett 204 W. Green Hill Dr (Blowing Rock) – Read a letter on behalf of the Blowing Rock Civic Association in their support of a paid parking system for the downtown area.

Lee Rocamora 300 Laurel Park Road (Blowing Rock) – Stated it's not the taxpayers responsibility to pay for business employees, it's the responsibility of the employer. Paid parking does nothing to improve the parking situation, but if the revenues are used for improving the parking situation it would be worthwhile. He concluded that paid parking is not unique to Blowing Rock and most of the statements made tonight are hearsay, not validated by any data.

Mayor Sellers asked if there were any further questions or comments. With no further questions or comments Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson made a motion to close the public hearing, seconded by Council Member Pickett.

Council Member Harwood recommended adding language about the use of proceeds that come from paid parking, that those proceeds would be used exclusively for

regulating and enforcing paid parking. Also could be used for construction, acquisition, reconstruction, improvements to off-street parking facilities. He noted he would also like to add an exception for emergency vehicles; police, fire etc.

Mayor Sellers mentioned from his understanding, on-street paid parking funds cannot be used for new parking facilities, only for maintaining the current parking program. Which would be paying for personnel and for equipment, and that is State mandated.

Council Member Harwood asked for clarification that the proceeds from paid parking cannot be used to offset costs for new facilities.

Mayor Sellers stated only parking garages and the Maple Street parking areas proceeds could be used and asking Chief Miller to verify.

Police Chief Aaron Miller explained that his understanding is parking on US Highways, which would be Main Street, the proceeds have to go to offset the current parking program.

Council Member Gherini asked about church parking lots.

Chief Miller stated the initial plan was to create a public private partnership with the churches, businesses, and other organizations. If the Council were to choose paid parking in the future, those discussions would resume.

Council had an in-depth discussion of how the Town can further generate revenue from parking and how the Town can utilize those revenues. Further research will be done and more information will be provided at the Winter Retreat. No decision was made for paid parking.

Council Member Harwood made a motion to accept the ordinance as presented with the amendment exception for emergency vehicles, seconded by Council Member Yount. Unanimously approved.

Mayor Sellers asked Chief Miller to state for the public when they should start seeing the increased enforcement.

Chief Miller advised they have probably already seen some of that with increased days per week the parking enforcement is out. He explained the next step is to develop an internal system to track repeat violators.

REGULAR AGENDA

1. Request for Funding – Parking Enforcement

Interim Town Manager Kevin Rothrock stated in order to increase parking enforcement in downtown for fall of 2023 and Spring of 2024, the Police Department is requesting additional funding of \$10,000 over the budgeted amount of \$8,000. This amount covers

additional temporary staff hours for increased weekly parking enforcement until November 2023 and beginning again in May through June 2024. These added funds were not allocated in FY 23-24 Budget, so the General Fund Balance will be the likely source of revenue for this expenditure. There is a budget amendment for Council approval.

Council Member Harwood asked if this purpose was to get more “man hours” on the street instead of any additional collection systems.

Interim Manager Rothrock stated that’s correct, it is not anything additional, only a internal system evaluating the methods so staff can keep track.

Chief Miller further explained he and Interim Manager Rothrock had discussed and concluded there isn’t enough time in the current parking season to try to implement any new software and/or set up a new system. They both felt getting more “boots on the ground” would get them through this parking season and at the winter retreat in January Council can talk about systems and the cost of those systems during that time.

Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson made a motion to approve the budget amendment as presented, seconded by Council Member Gherini. Unanimously approved.

OFFICIALS REPORTS & COMMENTS

- Mayor Sellers – State of the Town is August 24, 5:30 pm at BRAHM. Work on the water/sewer has begun, started on South Main and will be working their way into Town. Do expect delays. 100th Anniversary of the Horse Show went very well and the library will be celebrating their 100th Anniversary as well.
- Council Member Yount – None
- Council Member Harwood – None
- Council Member Pickett – None
- Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson – None
- Council Member Gherini – Thanked Representative Pickett for attending the Economic Development Meeting a few weeks ago. Speeding on Ransom Street- he suggested to Interim Manager Rothrock about a temporary test speed bump being placed there and he suggested talking to a few other Council Members to get a concurrence. Council Members Harwood and Yount said they would support that.
- Town Attorney Allen Moseley – None
- Interim Manager Kevin Rothrock – Thanked Council again for allowing him the opportunity to serve as Interim Manager. Thanked staff and department heads for all their continued support. With McGill, been addressing some drainage issues throughout Town. Met with the Middle Fork Greenway and the Blue Ridge Parkway Superintendent to discuss moving forward with the Middle Fork project, and what obstacles/challenges must be addressed to make that a reality. Pre-construction meeting is coming up with McGill and VPC for the Memorial Park bathrooms project and work can start when the building permit is issued. Staff will

also be meeting with McGill to evaluate phase two elements and reprioritize before going out to re-bid.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Council Member Yount made a motion to go into closed session at 7:00 p.m. pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11.(a)(6) to consider the qualifications, competence, character, fitness, conditions of appointment or conditions of initial public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson. Unanimously approved.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:30 p.m. Council returned to open session. With no further business, Council Member Pickett made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Council Member Gherini. Unanimously approved.

MAYOR _____
Charlie Sellers

ATTEST _____
Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk

Attachments

Budget Amendment - #2023-12 – Attachment A

Mayoral Proclamation – End Overdose in Watauga County – Attachment B

Public Hearing - Citizen Letters – Attachment C

Budget Amendment - #2023-13 – Attachment D