

**MINUTES**  
**Town of Blowing Rock**  
**Town Council Meeting**  
**September 10, 2024**

The Town of Blowing Rock Town Council met for their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, September 10, 2024, 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, Council Members Cat Perry, David Harwood, Melissa Pickett and Pete Gherini. Others in attendance were Town Manager Shane Fox, Town Attorney Tucker Deal, Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown, Finance Director Tasha Brown, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Police Chief Nathan Kirk, Landscape Director Cory Cathcart, Town Engineer Doug Chapman 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 August 13, 2024, regular and closed session meetings, seconded by Council Member Perry. Unanimously approved.

Council Member Pickett made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 26, 2024, open and closed session special meeting, seconded by Council Member Pickett. Unanimously approved.

Council Member Harwood noted he had one “typo” correction for the August 26, 2024 special meeting minutes and had already communicated that to Town Clerk Hilari Hubner to correct. Ms. Hubner stated the correction had been made.

**REGULAR AGENDA ADOPTION**

Council Member Pickett made a motion to adopt the regular agenda as presented, seconded by Council Member Harwood.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

- 1. USDA – RD ESA**
- 2. Budget Amendment**

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

## **SPEAKERS FROM THE FLOOR**

Laura Bingham – 8977 Valley Blvd spoke about some of the top concerns among citizens: traffic, speeding and safety on Valley Blvd. Ms. Bingham asked for Council to consider taking a stand on these issues. She offered several suggestions including thinking of Hwy 321 as “Valley Blvd” instead of a highway, consider it as another “Main Street,” think about putting something in utility bills highlighting the speed limit on Valley Blvd to bring awareness and considering relocating the Police Department to Valley Blvd. Ms. Bingham thanked Council and stated she hoped to stir a little thought process among Council on ways to resolve this issue.

## **SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS**

### **1. Sports Day – Baker Stanley**

Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown recognized former Parks and Recreation employee Baker Stanley for being selected to honor with a proclamation for National Youth Sports Week.

### **2. Introduction of the new Police Chief**

Manager Fox introduced Nathan Kirk as the new Police Chief. Chief Kirk has been with the Town of Blowing Rock Police Department for five (5) years and served as Police Captain prior to his newly promoted role. Ms. Hubner gave the oath of office to Chief Kirk.

## **PUBLIC HEARING**

### **1. SUP – Shoppes at Watership Down**

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock explained Mr. David Reule is requesting a Special Use Permit to demolish four (4) office/retail units at Watership Down at 133 Morris Street and construct four (4) two-story office and residential units. The property is 0.119 acres and is zoned CB, Central Business.

The subject property involves 4 lots at Shoppes at Watership Down originally regulated by a Conditional Use Permit approved in 1995. The Applicant plans to partially demolish four (4) buildings and rebuild within the existing footprint and add a second story. A 5-foot side setback is required on the east and west sides. A waiver of Section 16-12.6 is being requested to allow the second floor of the buildings to be build within the 5-foot setback.

The property currently has four (4) total spaces reserved for the four (4) commercial units. The proposed project with office space and residential living units requires seven (7) parking spaces. The applicant proposes to add six (6) additional parking spaces in the rear of the building accessed through a passage way through the building on lot number four (4) for a total of ten (10) spaces. These parking spaces would be exclusively for the property owners. Any public spaces will be retained in the parking area in front of the buildings.

The area proposed for parking behind the building previously was used for parking but is now grass. Drainage from adjacent properties is currently directed to this area with no

coordination. The applicant intends to collect adjacent properties is currently directed to this area with no coordination. The applicant intends to collect adjacent property drainage pipes and runoff from the rear parking and the rear of the project buildings and direct the storm water to a detention storage structure just east of the property. This should improve the runoff situation in this area at least from a collection basis. Runoff will not be increased with the measures planned for this project.

Since buildings in the area are both flat roof and pitched, the Applicant proposes a mix of roof types to be complimentary to the surrounding architecture.

Building materials consist of natural stone, board and batten, wood shakes, and a “pebbledash” stucco finish.

Given the tight spaces and drainage areas on the property, landscaping will be added in front of the units in potted and raised retaining beds. There may also be room for a small tree to be added in the rear parking area.

The applicant is requesting a waiver to Section 16-12.6 of the Land Use Code to allow the second floor of the buildings to be built within the 5-foot setback. The applicant is requesting a waiver of the standard parking space width from nine (9) feet to 8.5 feet.

At their regular meeting on August 15<sup>th</sup>, the Planning Board made a recommendation to approve the Special Use Permit application and requested waivers of the side setback and the parking space width and the following additional condition:

1. That the job site construction deliveries and activities on Morris Street be restricted during Blowing Rock School drop-off and pick-up times.

Council Member Perry stated she was under the impression all the units would be commercial.

Mr. Rothrock explained there will be a mix of office and residential.

Mayor Sellers inquired about the “pass through” and if that would be for vehicle or pedestrian traffic.

Mr. Rothrock explained it would be for vehicles.

Mayor Sellers further inquired if the road was connected to a private road or a public road.

Mr. Rothrock explained the road does not go all the way through and the road was never meant to go all the way through. The road is only meant for the people who own/use those units.

Council Member Harwood asked for clarification on the back and if it was common property. The applicant, Mr. David Reule explained at some point the POA sold the back strip to

some of the owners and that is how he acquired them.

Parking was discussed at length.

Mr. Reule thanked Council for consideration of the project. He explained he lives in Blowing Rock, has two (2) children at Blowing Rock School and two (2) children in high school, he's very invested in the community and this project was born out of wanting to be deeper rooted in the community. Mr. Reule further explained his plan is to have an office as well as a few offices to lease out, as office space is very limited or non-existent in the area.

Mr. Reule stated the Carters, another owner, would continue their ownership of their office space and have a one bedroom apartment above, a two bedroom until would be one he planned to sell and the last unit would be for his father to live in. Mr. Reule explained it would be three (3) owners seeking to renovate their properties with one unit for sale.

Mr. Reule mentioned the architect he is working with on the project is one he has worked with before and they had really taken the time to come up with a design that would fit that area.

Mr. Reule acknowledged the parking is tight and the hope is to change some of the parking to the back of the building to spread it out some.

Mayor Sellers opened the Public Hearing.

Council Member Gherini asked Mr. Reule if he was ok with the condition Planning Board had recommended.

Mr. Reule was and expressed having children at the school and utilizing Morris Street to drop off/pick up children he understood the importance of no disruption in that process.

Council Member Harwood inquired about the parking area and required spaces needed from the applicant.

Council Member Perry asked why Mr. Reule chose to do a flat roof and asked if he could change it.

Mr. Reule explained he could change it, but didn't think it would be as appealing. He further explained the reason for the flat roof is for the historic precedence you see all the way down Main Street of a mix of flat and pitched roofs. Mr. Reule stated he was trying to tie into that. He would be open to changing to a pitched roof, but if possible preferred to keep the roof flat.

Council Member Perry asked how many feet was between the project and the Homestead Inn.

Mr. Rothrock mentioned there wasn't much space, approximately four (4) feet.

Mr. Reule added due to there not being much space was why they were keeping the existing and not trying to encroach anymore.

Mr. George Hanna from 1123 Main Street stated his grandfather had built his mom, Thamea Hanna's building in 1919. His property is located directly behind her building and backs up to the property in question. Mr. Hanna explained if he were to build a structure on his property it would completely take the front of Mr. Reule's property.

Mr. Hanna acknowledged the proposed project is beautiful and looks great on paper, but his concern is the size of the project compared to the size of the property. He expressed concern with the parking issues and the current handicap space that is on his property. He further expressed concern with the space being put there without his permission.

Mr. Hanna advised the current use for his property is parking, he rents the spaces to tenants of his mom's building. He further advised these parking spaces are very important as parking is already limited in Blowing Rock.

Mr. Hanna reiterated he loves what Mr. Reule is trying to do but is concerned with the size for the space and safety. He also expressed his concern with the construction causing disruption with his parking area he currently rents. Mr. Hanna thanked Council for their time.

Mr. Reule stated he really likes Mr. Hanna and felt they have had good conversations. He also stated he's met with a fellow business neighbor, Mr. Keith Tester, who manages the POA and is grateful for his support.

Mr. Reule expressed in the meetings he had with Mr. Hanna he did a lot of listening, but also tried to communicate he's not a huge developer trying to build a ten (10) story building, he's invested in the community wants to take every precaution and make sure people aren't inconvenienced.

Council Member Gherini made a motion to close the public hearing, seconded by Council Member Harwood. Unanimously approved.

Council Member Harwood expressed his admiration for Mr. Reule for his efforts to improve a property that is underutilized and will benefit Morris Street greatly.

Council Member Perry inquired about staging of building materials and how they would affect the other businesses as well as Mr. Hanna's parking lot.

Mr. Reule explained he will do his best in coordination especially during demolition.

Council Member Gherini felt the project was well laid out. He expressed his feeling this would bring a lot of interest from other property owners who may want to do similar kinds of things with their properties. He reminded we have a downtown study group and would

like to encourage them to start looking at the big picture.

Council Member Harwood asked if this property would require a handicap space.

Mr. Rothrock confirmed it would.

After further discussion, Council Member Harwood made a motion to approve the project with the following;

Conditions:

- The mechanical units are screened
- Required landscaping would not be in planters, but instead planted in ground
- The flat roof would be eliminated and redesigned for a sloped roof
- Relocating the handicap space to one of the other four (4) parking spaces
- That the job site construction deliveries and activities on Morris Street be restricted during Blowing Rock School drop-off and pick-up times.

Variances:

- More than three (3) primary building materials be used
- The standard parking space be 18 feet x 8.5 feet for all six (6) spaces
- The side yard setback from five (5) feet to three (3) feet

There was no second on the motion, so the motion failed.

Council Member Harwood made a motion to table until the October Council meeting, seconded by Council Member Gherini. Unanimously approved.

## **REGULAR AGENDA**

### **1. McGill Studies – Streets, sidewalks, reservoir, reservoir intake and budget amendment**

Town Manager Shane Fox explained in preparation for the upcoming 2025 Winter Retreat, McGill has prepared a series of proposals for studies to perform as part of the due diligence for retreat topics and possible 2025 bond discussion. These studies are an integral part of the preparation work needed to have accurate information to discuss as we plan for the future needs of the Town.

The proposed studies include a master plan for our sidewalk system along with possible expansion areas as well as a street and pavement assessment of our current inventory along with prioritization of needs and timing. As a part of the ongoing maintenance with the Town Reservoir, a bathymetric survey to determine the sediment and elevations including total water capacity, and possible next steps with regards to maintaining the water source. Separate from the study would be discussion of the results of the recent divers inspection of the water intake and recommendations for some additional maintenance of the intake and platform.

Staff recommends Council approve the proposals along with the appropriate budget

amendment to cover the cost.

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

## **2. Downtown Standards – set a public hearing date**

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock shared the downtown development subcommittee spent the past five (5) to six (6) months studying the Land Use Code and the development standards for downtown zoning districts. The subcommittee specifically focused on building setbacks and building heights for the Central Business and Town Center as well as roof design, building with natural stone, and expansion of the Town Center.

The subcommittee agreed on a draft ordinance which: a) establishes three (3) new zoning designations: Town Center East, Town Center West, and Town Center Sunset; b) defines setbacks and building heights for each zoning district including the remainder of Central Business; c) limits the use of stone products to natural stone in the downtown; and d) simplifies the language of the Land Use Code pertaining to dimensional standards in these downtown zoning districts.

The subcommittee is requesting Council set a date for a public hearing to consider this draft ordinance and request that the Planning Board study the proposal and provide a recommendation prior to coming back for a public hearing. It may take two Planning Board meetings to finalize these ordinance changes.

Council Member Perry made a motion to set a public hearing for the November 12<sup>th</sup> Council meeting, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson. Unanimously approved.

## **OFFICIAL REPORTS & COMMENTS**

- Mayor Sellers – None
- Council Member Perry – None
- Council Member Harwood – None
- Council Member Pickett – None
- Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson – None
- Council Member Gherini – None
- Town Attorney Tucker Deal – None
- Town Manager Shane Fox – Gave updates on Main Street Project, Maple Street – sewer this week, water in November, Green Street – water after 221, Laurel Lane – completed, spillway – in progress, Chestnut sewer – completed, Grandfather lift station – soon, USDA – work continues on design, audit field work – done

Upcoming dates:

Boone/BR Chamber Candidates Forum – Monday, September 16<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 p.m. at App Theatre, Planning Board – Thursday, September 19<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 p.m., Board of Adjustment - Wednesday, September 25<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 p.m. and ABC Board meeting – Thursday, September 26<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 p.m.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

At 7:55 PM Council Member Perry made a motion to go into closed session, **NCGS 143-318.11.(a)(3) Attorney/Client privilege**, seconded by Council Member Harwood. Unanimously approved.

**ADJOURNMENT**

At 9:00 p.m. the Council returned to open session and with no further business, Council Member Perry made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Council Member Harwood. Unanimously approved.

MAYOR \_\_\_\_\_  
Charlie Sellers, Mayor

ATTEST \_\_\_\_\_  
Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk

**Attachments**

**USDA-RD ESA – Attachment A**

**Budget Amendment – Attachment B**

**McGill Studies/Budget Amendment – Attachment C**