

**Town of Blowing Rock
Board of Commissioners
Departmental Meeting- March 12, 2012**

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners held an annual departmental meeting on Monday, March 12, 2012 at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street, Blowing Rock. In attendance were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Albert Yount, Tommy Klutz, Doug Matheson and Dan Phillips. Commissioner Jim Steele was out of town and unable to attend. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Finance Officer Nicole Norman, Emergency Services Director Kent Graham, Police Chief Eric Brown, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock and Administrative Assistant Tammy Bentley.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

TOWN COUNCIL RETREAT ACTION PLAN

Scott Hildebran reviewed the action plan enacted at the retreat. All the Board appointments have been done, except those for the ETJ.

FISCAL MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Finance Director Nicole Norman reviewed the budgetary issues and priorities for the Administrative/Finance Department. Ms. Norman said the economic conditions would continue to be monitored and funding would be pursued as warranted. The NC Local Government Retirement System (LGERS), health plan, and fuel increases are also being monitored and are on the radar. Town Hall improvements for 2012 and 2013 will proceed as funding permits. Staining the windows in the Planning & Inspections department will be complete this year and replacing the roof is scheduled for next year. Mr. Hildebran said that the video camera used for taping Town Council meetings has been replaced and we are currently working with Charter to begin using the new unit in order to enhance the video/audio quality. Ms. Norman said records storage remodeling is forthcoming as time allows and that the Town Hall office renovations are on hold. She also said that the Town is continuing to monitor competitiveness of salaries. Ms. Norman is also working on a Request for Proposals for the Town's banking services to be sent in the summer/fall. Ms. Norman also said that we will continue to monitor utility rates, TDA occupancy tax collections as they pertain to Town infrastructure funding, and the fleet replacement schedule based on the 5 year plan.

Mr. Hildebran distributed a memorandum outlining bids and financing proposals for FY 2011-2012 capital equipment. The bids were for two SUV vehicles for the Police Department and a skid steer and backhoe for Public Works. The Commissioners discussed the particulars of the equipment, bidders and maintenance provided for the proposed new equipment, and purchasing used as opposed to new equipment. Mr. Hildebran said that the cost for new equipment is better priced when the "hours" on used equipment is considered as well as government discounts available on the new equipment. This purchase will not increase the Town's fleet as two pieces of equipment will be traded in and two vehicles will be sold as surplus. Staff recommends that the bids be awarded to the low bidders, Capital Ford, Bobcat of Lenoir and James River Equipment of Wilkesboro. Staff solicited bids from nine local lending institutions. Of the nine, three responded. Staff recommends that the financing be awarded to the low bidder, BB&T Bank for Board consideration at the March 13th meeting.

FY 2011-2012 Capital Equipment Bids and Financing Bids- Exhibit A

Ms. Norman asked the Commissioners if they had any questions for her. Commissioner Klutz suggested the Town Hall roof be replaced this year as there are active leaks and asked the cost of the roof. Ms. Norman responded that the cost was quoted at \$15,000 to \$20,000 and that funds to replace the roof are planned to be included in the 2012 – 2013 fiscal year budget with leaks only occurring with heavy rain and/or ice back-up. Commissioner Klutz confirmed that the office renovations would be completed last and asked if we had a cost on that project. Ms. Norman confirmed the time frame and said she would look into the cost. Commissioner Yount asked if Watauga County tax assessor was assigning transfers as “not open market”. The Catawba County office is doing this. This designation indicates that the transfer was not an “arm’s length transaction” and the sale price is not included for evaluation purposes; thereby preserving the property tax base. Ms. Norman stated she would research the issue and answer later in the meeting.

Environmental Conservation Plan

Mr. Hildebran said the Town will investigate the installation of an electric car charging station. Commissioner Klutz asked what this would cost the Town. Mr. Hildebran responded that the cost would be approximately \$15,000, but grant funds would be sought in an effort not to cost the Town anything. Ms. Norman will need to check with the Public Works department for more information on the recycling at the Post Office. Ms. Norman said that the iPads are on order and should be here in the coming weeks. Mr. Hildebran said the Town Council packets will be stored in the Cloud and retrieval is very simple and the Commissioners will be able to make notes to the packages. Ms. Norman reported that the organizational work order software is being tested in Public Works, Town Hall and Planning and Inspections and that everyone is pleased so far.

Downtown Municipal Service District

Mr. Hildebran said that Asheville is now assessing a Downtown Municipal Service District tax. The additional tax revenue is being used for streetscape, garbage collection and plantings. They were opposed to it initially, but the benefits are now realized. There are 56 municipalities in NC doing this. Mr. Hildebran indicated that we are still researching the issue.

Communications with Citizens

Ms. Norman said that the Police Department and Fire Department have information in the February edition of Around the Rock. She asked the Commissioners to let her know if they had any additional ideas for the newsletter. Mr. Hildebran said that the organizational structure of the Town will undergo changes to enhance customer service. The Town will work with Mr. Tom Westall, of Lead for Life, who has helped many jurisdictions improve their customer service skills. This will be staff driven and achieved through a series of workshops. Commissioner Phillips asked if the Town Manager or Department Head handles complaints from Council. Mr. Hildebran answered that they go through him and that the recently implemented work order system is a great resource in tracking service follow through. The system allows tracking in all departments; weekly, daily and monthly. Commissioner Phillips asked how the Freedom of Information Act plays into personnel matters. Mr. Hildebran responded that personnel matters such as disciplinary action, pay, and firings are governed by state statute. The Commissioners discussed the best way to handle complaints about specific employees.

PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES (Emergency Services)

EMS Director Kent Graham asked the Commissioners if they had any questions regarding the recent public announcement about replacing a fire truck and refinancing. Commissioner Phillips asked how much was still owed on the old truck. Mr. Graham said that part of the financing included the truck, Station 2, two trucks and an ambulance for a total of 1.2 to 1.3 million dollars. The tower truck was sold for \$250,000. Mr. Graham also said that the interest rate would be reduced and that the net debt and pay-out time did not really change. Commissioner Phillips asked where the money comes from to pay the note. Mr. Graham said from the fire tax, which is assessed to property owners in the Blowing Rock Fire District in Caldwell and Watauga counties, but not to property owners in the town limits. Commissioner Phillips confirmed that the Department is purchasing a new ladder truck and asked the cost of the truck. Mr. Graham confirmed and said the new truck is \$499,675, less the \$250,000 price for the old truck. Commissioner Phillips asked if maintenance was the issue with the old truck and why. Mr. Graham said that the truck was ill-suited to this fire district and prone to repairs and had been in the shop before. He also stated that the Department acted quickly because a last minute opportunity arose to sell the truck and that the new owner knew the history of the truck.

Mr. Hildebran and Mr. Graham gave an overview of the structure and funding of the fire department. The department is primarily funded through the Blowing Rock Fire Tax and donations. The Commissioners discussed the structure of the department and Mr. Graham offered to have a meeting with the Commissioners to further explain that structure. Commissioners Yount, Phillips, and Klutz all felt that they should have been informed of this before the announcement as they could not address it when asked. Commissioner Matheson serves as Chief of the Fire Department and was fully aware of the situation. Commissioner Matheson apologized for not informing the other Commissioners and said that he understands that notice would facilitate the working relationship between the Commissioners and the public and he said he would make sure they were informed in the future.

Mr. Hildebran asked Mr. Graham to give an update on the Medic Base. Mr. Graham said there had been changes at the County Commissioner level and a new County Manager but they will continue to be advised. Watauga Medics is requesting an additional truck, but that wouldn't happen. The County did extend medic's contract and medics will continue to work on the Blowing Rock base. Commissioner Klutz noted that both locations for ambulance service were in Boone and that he feels that Blowing Rock should have a base. Commissioner Phillips asked if we have any options. Mr. Graham said that Watauga Medics does not want to lose the Blowing Rock district and they are in the process of giving Blowing Rock another ambulance for back-up. Commissioner Matheson said that our level of Paramedics also makes a difference. Commissioner Klutz responded that the response time to his mother's house was incredible. Commissioner Phillips said that we need to educate the public so they are as proud of the Blowing Rock Fire Department as the Town Council is and that he wants the perception of all the departments to be as good as possible. Mr. Graham said their website should launch in two weeks and that would be a good source of information.

Mr. Hildebran told Commissioner Yount that Ms. Norman had contacted Bill Tester, Appraisal Director/Revaluation Coordinator for Watauga County and that they would not

consider short sales or foreclosures in revaluations unless there were several in the neighborhood.

PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES

Police Chief Eric Brown told the Commissioners that based on the research of other agencies that consolidated dispatch is a solid approach. Mr. Hildebran said the state is pushing consolidation and that Watauga County has the equipment, but we need to be sure that Blowing Rock is getting a fair deal. Burke and Rockingham counties are hiring a consultant to help them with the process of consolidation. He noted that Seven Devils gets free dispatch services. Commissioner Matheson voiced his concern with making sure Blowing Rock is treated fairly. The Commissioners discussed the staffing and organization of the new system. Mr. Hildebran said now is the opportune time to do it with two town dispatchers eligible for retirement. Commissioner Phillips asked who is putting all of this together for the county. Mr. Hildebran said he did not know. Commissioner Phillips asked who we negotiate with. Mr. Hildebran responded the County Manager. Commissioner Phillips asked how we can be protected against future cost increases. Mr. Hildebran said that the County could dedicate a portion of the county tax to public safety and fund the consolidation that way or allocate sales tax. Mr. Hildebran told the Commissioners that he needed their direction on what to do. Commissioner Phillips said that we start at nothing. Commissioner Yount asked Mr. Hildebran to update the Council after his meeting with County Manager Deron Geouque. Commissioner Phillips asked Mr. Hildebran to tell the county we would not participate financially and that the county should allocate a portion of the existing property tax as a "public safety tax".

Chief Brown said his department is fully staffed and that the Lieutenant position listed as vacant was not an open position, but rather a rank in the department not filled at this time. He said that last fiscal year the department purchased 9 shotguns and received a grant from the Blowing Rock Community Foundation for the purchase of an 800 megahertz radio which has also been purchased. He also asked for 5 additional Mobile Data Terminals and printers and is making a request for grant funding to purchase those units this fiscal year from the same agency as funding was received for the initial units they have today. The 911 call station has been upgraded to match the Sheriff's system. He reported that traffic enforcement was up in 2011 due to a spike in traffic accidents in 2010, when 119 accidents were reported. In 2011 85 accidents were reported due to the implementation of a highly visible traffic campaign. He is seeking funding for a radar box, 4 bullet-proof vests, replacement of the portable radios as scheduled and 2 vehicles as outlined in Capital Equipment Replacement Schedule.

He said there was room for improvement in public relations and he will focus attention on that in 2012 with more aggressive foot patrol and officers visiting stores. He plans to continue the Chat with the Chief or a similar program. He is very proud of the department's crime prevention program and can enhance it further in 2012. He said his facilities are in desperate need of remodeling, but he was not prepared to discuss that now. Mr. Hildebran said that McGill Associates will discuss all facility improvements at the meeting next Monday.

Commissioner Matheson asked about the grant for a Segway or three-wheeler. Chief Brown said the Segway was not appropriate, but he is looking into the 3 wheeler as they are very stable. Commissioner Phillips asked about using bicycles. Chief Brown said in the past he has requested 4. Commissioner Yount asked if there is a contingency plan

for phone calls received from the public at the Blowing Rock Police Station if we consolidate our 911 service with the county. Chief Brown said there will be some staffing. Mr. Hildebran said we may use a switchboard service. Commissioner Klutz asked if there would be a problem if the Town continued with our own dispatch services. Mr. Hildebran said that would not be a problem unless the state mandates that we must have 2 people on staff at all times. Commissioner Yount asked if an emergency could cause a delay in local dispatch. Chief Brown said it was conceivable. Commissioner Phillips asked if there was an increase in shoplifting. Chief Brown said there was, but he hoped the increased foot patrol would combat this growing problem. Commissioner Phillips said he would like to see the radar box used on the by-pass and increased foot patrol and officers in shops. Chief Brown said he would get that accomplished.

PLANNING ISSUES

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock gave an update on a recent parking survey involving towns from Western NC. Planning staff intern, Taylor Gupton contacted several communities and asked how they handled downtown parking, including fees, time limits, fine amounts, and whether the parking was subcontracted. Two municipalities utilized parking meters. The fees ranged from \$0.50 to \$0.75 per hour. Mr. Rothrock and the Commissioners tried to determine a possible income amount that metered parking could generate. Commissioner Matheson said not to include Sunday in their calculations. Commissioner Phillips said there is a negative perception of issuing tickets in Blowing Rock and he has received lots of negative feedback from shoppers. Mr. Hildebran suggested we should poll the merchants and that the TDA may have input. The Commissioners discussed options to control merchants parking on Main Street and changing the 3 hour limit to 1 hour. Council also discussed designating parking for motorcycles and golf carts. Mr. Hildebran said that motorcycles and golf carts could park only in designated parking spaces, and would be subject to a ticket if in violation. Commissioner Matheson asked the status of getting bike racks in front of the park. Mr. Hildebran said we are still working on it.

Mr. Rothrock informed the Commissioners that Ms. Gupton and the Planning Subcommittee are going through the new Comprehensive Plan Survey to determine what questions to include. NC State will most likely assist with the survey and provide an analysis and summary for the Council after the survey is completed. Commissioner Phillips asked what the survey will cover. Mr. Rothrock said that among other topics, short term rentals, Police, Fire and Parks & Rec. will be included and that the updated survey will help guide the creation of a new Comprehensive Plan document.

Mr. Rothrock said the Planning Board is looking at building heights and setbacks in the Central Business area and that the Land Use Code revisions will be finished Tuesday night if Council approves them.

In another update, the Planning Department mailed 172 customer service surveys in January, 2012 and 38 or 28% were returned. Some were signed and some were anonymous with both favorable and unfavorable comments. The department continues to find ways to improve the service they provide.

Mr. Rothrock is working on options for the fencing involved in the 321 widening project. The betterment cost from black chain link to black aluminum will range from \$72,000 - \$152,000, depending on the linear footage. Mr. Rothrock will talk to the contractor about

getting a better price and provide options for the Council to consider at a later date. Mr. Rothrock is also looking at pedestrian lighting options so the new road doesn't look like a runway. Commissioner Phillips asked if there would be a pedestrian button at 321 and Sunset and Commissioner Klutz asked about golf cart crossing. Mr. Rothrock responded stating there will be a pedestrian crosswalk and golf carts would cross with normal traffic movements. Mr. Rothrock contacted Taylor and Murphy Construction, contractor for the widening, and arranged for the Town to have the trees on the Underwood property. He also said the blasting should start in 3 to 4 weeks.

Mr. Rothrock reported that he met with William Self and discussed options for stockpiling waste dirt from the 321 project and areas for potential major fill projects. Mr. Rothrock also spoke with Chris Byers with Taylor and Murphy who indicated that Mr. Self is trying to assist their company in finding locations to dispose of fill dirt. Mr. Rothrock said that Taylor and Murphy does not have a contract with Mr. Self although he is trying to move some of the structures scheduled for demolition. Mr. Rothrock also stated through conversations with Mr. Byers that topsoil is not available nor gravel for use as fill, but just a mix of dirt and rocks.

Mr. Hildebran updated the Council on the Streetscape Plan. NCDOT will provide drainage pipe from St. Mary's Church to Storie Street. Waters Brothers will install the pipe. This will be coordinated with the repaving of Main Street scheduled in mid-April. Commissioner Yount said reported Wells Fargo had no interest in offsetting the expense of the streetscape in front of their building.

OTHER

Commissioner Phillips said that many Town Councils had meetings to discuss agenda issues prior to the Town Council meeting. He suggests we consider pre-agenda meetings so the Commissioners are educated about the issues. He also asked about two new businesses opening in town and the process for approving new businesses. Mr. Rothrock responded some changes are administrative and other changes require a Conditional Use Permit. Commissioner Phillips also asked about merchants putting merchandise on the sidewalk. Mr. Hildebran said that the Town would work with the Chamber who polices that.

ADJOURN

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

MAYOR _____
J.B. Lawrence

ATTEST _____
Tammy Bentley, Administrative Assistant

ATTACHMENTS

FY 2011-2012 Capital Equipment Bids and Financing Bids- Exhibit A