

**MINUTES**  
**Town of Blowing Rock**  
**Board of Commissioners**  
**Departmental Work Session**  
**March 19, 2012**

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners continued their annual Departmental Work Session on Monday, March 19, 2012 beginning at 4:00 p.m. The meeting took place at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street, Blowing Rock N.C. Present were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Albert Yount, Tommy Klutz, Doug Matheson and Jim Steele. Commissioner Dan Phillips was out of town and unable to attend the work session but was reached via on-line skype. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Finance Director Nicole Norman, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Town Engineer Doug Chapman, Water/Wastewater Treatment Plant Supervisor Tom McRary, Public Works Director Mike Wilcox, Public Works Superintendent Matt Blackburn, Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown and Town Clerk Sharon Greene.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m.

**UPDATE**

Town Manager Hildebran gave an update on the consolidated dispatch program stating he would be discussing several concerns that Council had regarding the program with Watauga County. He also stated that Watauga County was aware that Council was in favor of the concept, but wished to further discuss the following items:

- Need to develop pro-forma start-up cost model based on operational needs not on maintaining current staffing levels of all entities
- Develop several funding models for consideration (and compare to state benchmarking project for cost per call)
- Define a “call for service”
- Desire a Memorandum of Understanding or similar document which outlines future costs to participants (projection of costs over a 5 year period and what percentage of the budget does BR pay) , technical advisory committee make-up/responsibilities, operational structure, center performance standards as compare to state benchmarking, etc.
- Consider other funding options – i.e. modification from per capita sales tax distribution method to ad valorem method with dedicated portion to public safety or dedication of a portion of the county property tax rate to public safety, whereby all county residents pay equally for public safety communications/emergency management
- Add the Town of Seven Devils to funding stream if they receive service

- Consider elimination of positions whose duties are redesigned as a result of new department
- Acquire outside consultant to review proposal and make best practice recommendations regarding organizational structure and costs
- Consideration of a discount for early commitment or a premium price for participation at a later time

Mr. Hildebran also mentioned that Appalachian Regional Health Service had placed a 24-acre tract under contract located along Hwy 321 and adjacent to the Blowing Rock Hospital tract that was recently annexed into the Town. He advised that authorization would be needed from Council in order for him to pursue grant money from various agencies to construct a lift station and install water and sewer lines to accommodate growth in that area and serve as the future hospital site.

Commissioner Klutz asked how the Town would benefit from the sale of the 24-acre hospital tract and from the construction of the new hospital. Mr. Hildebran stated aside from maintaining 120 jobs and the addition of approximately 120 jobs to the area, once the new hospital was built, the old hospital property on Chestnut Drive would be added back to the Town's tax levy since it would no longer be exempt.

Commissioner Steele inquired what the cost would be to the Town in order to pursue grant money for this project. Town Engineer Chapman advised the cost could possibly be \$10,000-\$15,000. Commissioner Matheson made a motion to authorize Town Manager Hildebran to pursue grant funding to construct a lift station and install water and sewer lines to the area. Commissioner Steele suggested the motion include that the cost not exceed \$15,000 for the Town to pursue the grant funding. Commissioner Matheson agreed to amend his motion. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Yount. Unanimously approved.

Mr. Hildebran also mentioned that Town employees would be attending a kick-off customer service work shop (a Council initiative) on March 27, 2012. Commissioner Steele asked what the cost for the initiative would be. Mr. Hildebran stated the cost was approximately \$14,000 and would be paid over the current (2012) and next budget year (2013).

Mr. Hildebran updated Council regarding a proposed 5.3% increase to employee health insurance for the upcoming fiscal year but premiums for dental insurance would remain the same. There would also be a slight increase in Worker's Comp insurance as well as the Town's liability insurance, but employee retirement costs would decrease slightly.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES**

### **Water/Wastewater**

Mr. Chapman stated the Town had obtained a low interest loan in order to make several needed upgrades and renovations to the wastewater treatment plant. Utilities Director

Tom McRary mentioned that his department was currently painting the outside wall of the Water Treatment Plant and planned to landscape the area as well.

Mr. Chapman spoke briefly regarding the Town reservoir. He stated there had not been a large change to the volume level since the reservoir was surveyed six (6) years ago.

Mr. Chapman also mentioned the Town was working to identify any Inflow and Infiltration (I & I) problem areas. Mr. Hildebran advised that approximately \$60,000 had been set aside to make any needed repairs.

### **Public Works**

Public Works Director Mike Wilcox and Assistant Public Works Director Matt Blackburn were present to answer any questions Council had regarding their department.

Mr. Hildebran and Mr. Chapman stated that an assessment of town ditches was currently in process. A priority list would be established in the next 60 days assessing ditches that needed immediate attention. Town Manager Hildebran advised the ditch improvements would be synchronized with installation of any water/sewer lines as well as with the street paving schedule so that all needed improvements could be done in sync with one another.

### **Engineering Items**

Mr. Chapman showed several plans to Council regarding renovations to the Police Department.

Plan A consisted of a complete renovation to the upper and lower level of the existing Police Department. Located on the upper level would be office spaces for the Chief, Lieutenant, Captain, etc. as well as more record storage space, a conference room and renovation of the dispatcher area and kitchen.

The lower level would include evidence storage, an evidence room, a classroom, a criminal processing area, detective office space and a sally port area, etc. The proposed cost for Plan A was \$840,000.

Plan B consisted of a more scaled down version in the lower level; adding only locker rooms, an evidence storage area and interview room for a total of \$250,000.

Plan C consisted of the same renovations to the upper level, however, the lower level would have storage space where the locker rooms were proposed in Plan B. This renovation would cost approximately \$165,000.

Mr. Chapman then reviewed Plan D which would omit the interview room on the lower level and add more storage area. The upper level would remain the same as in Plan B & C. The estimated cost of this plan was \$170,000.

Commissioner Klutz asked if any thought had been given to relocating the Police Department to the new Fire Department building on Valley Boulevard. Commissioner Phillips stated that several residents had mentioned that idea to him as well and he felt this option needed to be studied further.

Mr. Hildebran relayed that this had been discussed during the planning stages for the new Fire/Rescue building and Council at that time had decided that the Police Department needed to remain downtown. He also mentioned the Fire Department as well as the Town had funded the construction of the new building. With plans to possibly locate a medic base at the Fire Department there would not be adequate space to house the Police Department as well.

Commissioner Yount commented that he had not heard from any residents in town who wanted to relocate the Police Department. Commissioner Matheson also felt this would not be the best option.

Commissioner Klutz stated that he would like a consensus to be reached regarding the issue. He remarked that he and Commissioner Phillips were in favor of further studying the option of relocating the Police Department to Valley Boulevard in the Fire Department building. According to Commissioner Klutz, it seemed that Commissioners Yount and Matheson as well as Mayor Lawrence were not in favor of relocating the Police Department to that area. Commissioner Klutz then asked Commissioner Steele to give his opinion on the matter. Commissioner Steele stated he would like to visit the Fire Department and further analyze the situation before stating he was for or against the idea.

Mr. Hildebran reminded Council that a study had been done by an Architectural firm in that field on what was needed in the long term before the new Fire Department was constructed. The building had been constructed to fulfill the needs of the Fire Department for the next 40 years.

Mr. Chapman then reviewed plans for renovations and changes to the old fire department building located on Park Avenue. He advised that the building could be left as is or could be torn down and a retaining wall built for an approximate cost of \$100,000 to \$150,000. The other options given was to demolish the second floor of the building and renovate the lower level so that a multi-purpose meeting room could be added, plus a storage room and restroom facilities for an approximate cost of \$290,000.

Mr. Chapman then discussed several options for improvements to the American Legion building.

One plan showed upgrades to the existing building for a figure of \$285,000 as outlined in the PARTF Grant discussed in January. Mr. Chapman also showed Council plans for an addition of two 40X40 open wings to the existing building for a total of \$600,000. He mentioned to reconstruct a new facility on the property maximizing all available building space; the cost would be approximately \$1,940,000.

Council agreed to continue discussions on facilities at a later date.

### **Council/TDA Annual Joint Meeting**

Tourism Development Authority (TDA) members joining Council for the joint meeting were: Kent Tarbutton, Dean Bullis, Leanne Mattar and Rob Dyer. TDA Director Tracy Brown began the meeting with a power point presentation. He highlighted several areas in which the TDA had worked to further promote tourism in the area. He stated that approximately \$174,851 had been spent on infrastructure which included money toward parking facilities, way-finding signage, informational kiosks, etc. He also remarked the TDA had sponsored events in the area such as Winterfest, the Wine Festival, Art in the Park, etc. Mr. Brown said the TDA was continuing to follow suggestions from the Hyett Palma study.

Mr. Brown commented that the TDA continued to collaborate with other entities such as the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce, Boone Chamber of Commerce, etc. He spoke regarding “earned media” results that were very important and useful in the promotion of the area. Mr. Brown stated a total of \$172,523 had been spent on advertisement.

Mr. Brown mentioned the weekly Village Tattler was sent to tourism related business owners, and 50,000 visitor guides had been distributed throughout the area. He said that in 2011, there had been 17,738 visitors to the visitor center and approximately 6,500 phone calls received.

TDA Chairperson Kent Tarbutton also stated the parking problem in town had been remedied with the addition of the parking facilities which the TDA had helped fund. He remarked that the 321 Widening Project would impact the area somewhat but he was looking forward to a good business year.

Mayor Lawrence departed the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Commissioner Klutz commented that he thought the Town continued to lose revenue from short-term rentals in the area and better enforcement was needed.

Mayor Pro-tem Yount requested the Tourism Authority explore ways to identify short-term rental violators as a first step in studying the issue. Chairperson Tarbutton concurred.

Mayor Pro-tem Yount thanked Mr. Tarbutton and Mr. Brown and the entire Authority for their work on behalf of the Town.

### **OTHER**

Ms. Joann Mitchell then gave Council an update on the Blowing Rock Art and History Museum. She began by stating that in the first six months of business, the museum

had seen 6,008 visitors. Ms. Mitchell updated everyone regarding the upcoming events planned for the year 2012. Ms. Mitchell remarked that a wonderful article had been featured in the prestigious American Art Review magazine on the museum.

Ms. Mitchell advised the museum wished to reach a goal of one million dollars in their endowment fund and continued to work toward meeting their goal. She also commented the tenant relationship with the TDA was working out very well.

**ADJOURN**

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

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

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