

MINUTES
Town of Blowing Rock
Board of Commissioners
Special Work Session
August 7, 2012

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners held a special work session on Tuesday, August 7, 2012 at the Blowing Rock Fire and Rescue Building located at 8001 Valley Blvd. beginning at 3:00 p.m. Present at the work session were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Albert Yount, Dan Phillips, Tommy Klutz, Doug Matheson, and Jim Steele. Others present were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Town Clerk Sharon Greene, and the following members of the Employee Customer Service Excellence Initiative Design Team: Nicole Norman (Finance & Administration), Tammy Bentley (Planning & Inspections), Troy Reynolds (Police) Chip Sudderth (Fire & Rescue) James Townsend (Field Ops) Brian Banner (Utilities) Taylor Gupton (Intern) Dustin Watson (Sanitation) Matt Fontaine (Fire & Rescue), Jason Balcome (Parks & Recreation) and Amanda Lugenbell (Tourism Development Authority). Other members unable to attend were Sterling Lewis (Street) and Angel Mahaffey (Police).

Employee Customer Service Excellence Initiative Update

Town Manager Hildebran welcomed everyone and stated the following objectives were to be reviewed by the Design Team:

- The Goals of the Service Excellence Initiative
- Steps already taken in the process
- Results thus far and further steps in the process
- Support needed from Council to achieve the goal of providing excellent service in all areas of the Town.

Mr. Hildebran advised that Council would be hearing from the members of the Service Excellence Design Team as well as Tom Westall with Lead for Life who was partnering with the design team.

He then introduced all Design Team members and commented that Nicole Norman would speak regarding the goals of the Service Excellence Initiative.

Project Leader Nicole Norman reviewed the process goals and how the design team wanted to differentiate their products in order to set Blowing Rock apart from other communities as being the best place to live, work, visit, retire or open a business. Ms. Norman commented that Blowing Rock was already known as one of the prettiest towns in North Carolina; why not try to be one of the friendliest towns too.

Ms. Norman said by providing a unified goal for all employees, this would help give meaning and purpose to the work we do and develop a strong team perspective - Team Blowing Rock.

Ms. Norman stated the design team also wanted to focus on establishing a culture of service excellence and teamwork which would help each employee revisit the way they viewed the importance of their jobs and how they treated customers as well as each other.

Next, Ms. Norman spoke briefly about wanting to identify and eliminate any barriers to providing excellent service on an on-going basis.

Jason Balcome of the Parks & Recreation Department reviewed several steps that had been completed in the process. He stated it all started with a shared mission of where the design team wanted to go as a town with regard to service excellence. After doing this, it helped get everyone on board and enabled them to establish goals and plans. He stated their mission statement was *“To create a culture of service excellence and teamwork throughout the Town of Blowing Rock.”*

Mr. Balcome stated the design team was very passionate about their mission and committed to the process while still realizing this was not just a training program. It would require a cultural change for everyone in the town and take everyone working together to see that it happened. He stated that it was important that Town leadership get on-board as well, including all department heads and supervisors.

Mr. Balcome continued the outline, stating the next step was to get customer input about Blowing Rock’s current level of service and what was needed to improve it. This was done through a series of focus group sessions with citizens, business owners and non-profit organizations.

Mr. Balcome also talked about the importance of employee ownership. He mentioned there had been several meetings for all employees asking for input on customer service and improvements that were needed as well as identifying barriers that get in the way of giving good customer service.

Chip Sudderth of Fire & Rescue stated the customers wanted hometown service and that Blowing Rock was unique in that way; and that was how the design team developed the slogan “Rock Solid-Hometown Hospitality.”

Mr. Sudderth also reviewed the following eight (8) keys to service excellence developed through the customer focus group and employee sessions:

- Provide “Hometown Service”
- Build Positive Relationships
- Maintain a Positive Attitude
- Be Pro-Active, Not Reactive
- Exceed Expectations
- Be Professional
- Communicate Effectively

- Be Part of the Town Team

Officer Troy Reynolds of the Police Department spoke briefly regarding the need for all Town Employees and Department Directors to have a unified understanding so that everyone is “on the same page”. He also discussed areas of improvement that employees had mentioned and how they were committed to trying to improve upon these areas.

Ms. Amanda Lugenbell of the TDA/Visitor’s Center talked about a communication plan between departments to help improve any communication barriers that existed. She said through newsletters, posters and informational boards in each department, etc. employees would be better informed of what was happening in other areas/departments. She also mentioned a recognition process for employees for their outstanding customer service that was being developed as part of the service excellence program.

Ms. Norman stated that above all this process would be a long-term effort that the team and employees were committed to. The Service Design Team was working to coordinate all efforts toward integrating the Service Excellence Process into the Town’s culture and with the help of management and Council the team would continue to customize the program to suit the unique needs of Blowing Rock.

Mr. Tom Westall of Lead for Life advised that he had worked with other municipalities such as Salisbury, Lenoir, Concord, Winston-Salem, etc. and he felt very fortunate to work with the Town of Blowing Rock. Mr. Westall commented that the design team’s enthusiasm was very contagious and the employees were committed to improving their customer service skills. He also stated that he felt Blowing Rock would set the bar statewide for other resort/tourism communities.

Ms. Tammy Bentley of Planning & Inspections commented that Council’s support was needed to ensure this program was a success. She stated that Council could be a role model for employees and that part of the program involved Council taking part in recognizing employees for a job well-done. Ms. Bentley closed by saying that the design team welcomed any suggestions or ideas that Council might have to enhance the program.

Mr. Hildebran thanked all the presenters and stated that the employee-led program’s goal was to take customer service from “good to great.” The program would continue to be a work in progress with employees who were committed to excellence. He then asked if Council had any questions regarding the presentation.

Commissioner Steele questioned how new employees would be trained in customer service. Ms. Norman stated a program was “in the works” regarding the training of any new employees, however periodic employee orientations sessions were planned.

Commissioner Matheson commented that he thought the design team had done a great job with their presentation.

Mr. Westall stressed the need for Council to let employees know when they had done a good job as well as letting them know if there were areas they needed to work on.

Commissioner Yount inquired as to what disciplinary measures would be used for any performance issues. Mr. Hildebran stated that department heads would be doing performance evaluations and deciding if the employee deserved to be rewarded or if disciplinary measures were necessary.

Commissioner Phillips mentioned that he thought it would be a good idea to hand out the laminated cards with departmental phone numbers that Council had received from the design team to the public. He also mentioned that Council normally heard the negative things from residents/tax payers not the positive.

Town Manager Hildebran thanked everyone for attending the presentation. He stated that Council would meet with representatives from the Appalachian Regional Healthcare System next.

At this time a short recess was taken.

Mr. Hildebran encouraged Council to look at the rock wall samples being considered during the road widening process that were located outside the building prior to their leaving today.

Appalachian Regional Healthcare System Update

Mr. Richard Sparks, Mr. Jerry Hutchens and Mr. Keith Tester were present to update Council regarding the property that was acquired by ARHS located on Hwy 321 North. Mr. Hutchens began by stating that Wellspring Life Care Retirement had contacted ARHS regarding a partnership to construct a facility on the property. Mr. Hutchens commented that a joint venture had been discussed for approximately two years and it had been decided that this joint venture would not work for several reasons. Mr. Hutchens stated that it would be more costly than ARHS was willing to spend on this particular type of facility. He stated that ARHS' main priority was a post-acute care facility. Mr. Hutchens went on to say that the current Blowing Rock Hospital facility was in need of being replaced due to the outdated building. He stated that ARHS would continue to explore other retirement facilities and see what would work best for the culture of this area.

Mr. Hutchens advised the entire tract of property acquired by ARHS would not be needed for construction of the proposed facility so there was a possibility of another business also relocating to that area.

Mr. Sparks spoke regarding the trust that ARHS had acquired over their years of service to the area and they wanted to continue to give the best care possible to the residents of Watauga County as well as surrounding counties.

Mr. Hutchens also expressed their appreciation to the Town for their support during the acquisition of the property. He also advised that grant funding would become available October 1st that could be used in reworking the intersection and they hoped the Town would complete an application in order to possibly receive funding.

Mayor Lawrence asked if ARHS had a ground-breaking date for their project. Mr. Sparks commented that they hoped to begin in the late fall and they anticipated that Vannoy Construction Company would be doing the work.

Mr. Tester stated the proposed project was part of the Town's the Comprehensive Plan.

In closing Mr. Hutchens thanked Council once again for working with ARHS. Mayor Lawrence responded that a community without healthcare was a dying community. Mr. Hutchens commented that ARHS was committed to building a special premier facility that would provide excellent healthcare and bring several jobs to the area.

Adjourn

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

MAYOR _____
J.B. Lawrence

ATTEST _____
Sharon Greene, Town Clerk