

MINUTES
Town of Blowing Rock
Board of Commissioners
2013 Annual Retreat

The Board of Commissioners for the Town of Blowing Rock met in special session on Sunday, January 20, 2013 at 2:15 p.m. at the Doubletree Inn in Asheville, North Carolina. Present were Mayor J. B. Lawrence, Commissioners Albert Yount, Dan Phillips, Tommy Klutz, Doug Matheson and Jim Steele. Also present were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Town Engineer Doug Chapman, Finance Director Nicole Norman, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock and Town Clerk Sharon Greene.

At this time, Mayor Lawrence opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Town Manager Hildebran then reviewed the Retreat process and updated Council on the 2012 accomplishments.

Planning Director Rothrock discussed several items regarding the Planning and Inspection Department such as construction trends for the past year and plans for the upcoming fiscal year. Mr. Rothrock then updated Council regarding the results for the Comprehensive Plan Survey by stating there was an approximate response rate of 25% and that visioning workshops were planned in the spring.

After further discussion, the meeting recessed at 6:30 p.m.

On Monday, January 21, 2013, Mayor Lawrence reconvened the meeting at 8:25 a.m. In attendance were Mayor Lawrence, Commissioners Yount, Klutz, Phillips, Matheson, and Steele. Others in attendance were Town Manager Hildebran, Town Engineer Chapman, Planning Director Rothrock, Finance Director Norman and Town Clerk Greene. The meeting was recessed at 5:15 p.m.

On Tuesday, January 22, 2013 Mayor Lawrence reconvened the meeting at 8:30 am. In attendance were Mayor Lawrence, Commissioners Yount, Phillips, Klutz, Matheson, and Steele. Others in attendance were Town Manager Hildebran, Finance Director Norman and Town Clerk Greene. The meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

The major issues and topics were discussed during the sessions and the following action plan resulted.

Fiscal Management (Administration/Budgetary) Issues

- Continue to maintain and review Town Vision & Comprehensive Planning Initiatives.
 - Boone/Blowing Rock Alternative Transportation Plan
 - Town Pavement Plan
 - Town Master Signage Plan
 - Town Comprehensive Plan
 - MOU – Town & NCDOT US 321 Mitigation

Parks/Recreation & Landscape Master Plan
Comprehensive Financial Policy
Water & Sewer Capital Improvements Plan
Town Storm Water Plan
Downtown Parking Management Study
2009 Downtown Retail Strategy Report
Downtown Streetscape Plan
Capital Fleet Replacement Plan
5-Year Capital Improvement Plan

Board Appointments

Place appointments on February 2013 Agenda for consideration

- Planning Board (R. Pickett, D. Laughter, D. diSanti, N. Bovino - ETJ)
- Board of Adjustment (M. Klein, A. Whatley, J. Papa - ALT, S. Wilson - ALT)
- ABC Board (B. Miller)
- TDA (K. Tarbutton, R. Dyer)
- Seek board seat on Watauga County Economic Development Commission
- Develop land use code amendment to re-integrate Blowing Rock Appearance Advisory Commission into town code.

Fiscal Management (Administration/Budgetary) Issues

- Continue to monitor economic conditions and take advantage of financial opportunities as warranted.
- Provide funding for mandated increases associated with NC Local Government Retirement System, State Health Insurance Plan and Unemployment Insurance and fund increases in energy, fuel and propane expenses.

Administration/ Budgetary

- Proceed with Town Hall improvements in current Fiscal Year and in FY 2013-14 as funding permits (1 – Rear Walkway Improvements, 2 – Council Chamber Audio/Visual Upgrade, 3 – Record Storage, and 4 - Offices Renovation).
- Explore a hybrid sales tax distribution option for county consideration. (Seek change from 100% Per Capita distribution method to a 50% Per Capita and 50% Ad Valorem Levy distribution method.)
- Continue to make Customer Service Excellence Initiative the #1 priority of the organization and fund accordingly.
- Due to economic conditions, amend fee schedule to reduce downtown parking impact fee by 50%, with a 3-year sunset provision, for Town Council consideration.
- Proceed with a second Request for Proposals for Town Banking Services in Spring 2013.
- Update Town Personnel Policy at March meeting.
- Monitor revaluation process and educate citizens, as possible.
- Continue to monitor competitiveness of salaries and consider during FY 2013-14 budget process, including salary, insurance, benefits, etc. Seek to fund up to 5% market adjustment/merit salary increases, as funding allows.

- Consider the continued implementation of 5% 401K for general employees with an employee matching contribution, once economic conditions allow.
- Continue implementation of Environmental Conservation Plan, subject to cost evaluation and possible grant funding.
- Continue to work on improving communication with citizens (utilizing the Town Website and web links, the bi-monthly town newsletter "*Around the Rock*", water-billing inserts and media outlets).
- Continue to monitor utility rates to insure sufficiency with an emphasis on conservation.
- Continue to set aside 1/3 of TDA monies for Town infrastructure (and related infrastructure debt-service).
- Continue to maintain and fund Debt Service Schedule.
- Continue to maintain and fund Fleet Capital Replacement Schedule.
- Continue to maintain and fund Town 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan.
- Consider additional revenue sources to lessen burden on property tax (fees, assessments, municipal tax district, street cost recovery fee, etc.). Pursue grant opportunities, as available, to fund projects.
- Proceed with FY 2012-13 fleet capital equipment acquisitions at March meeting.

Tourism Issues

- Schedule annual meeting with TDA to review Tourism Annual Report (March 2013).
- Encourage lodging room modernization to enhance overall quality.
- Explore opportunity of attracting high-end lodging and work with County to profile and market tracts.
- Review statutes regarding TDA Board size.
- Develop ideas to keep Blowing Rock #1 in "top of mind" and how to maintain and enhance our magic.

Planning Issues

- Assist new businesses to expedite permitting process.
- Proceed with RFQ/RFP for consulting services for the update of the Town Comprehensive Plan (including road widening impact, Severn tract, old hospital site and Park Avenue).
- Based on 2012 Town Survey results regarding Short-term Rental, develop options for Council consideration. All options should include the following components - code enforcement, payment of occupancy tax and safety.
- Seek Town Attorney Opinion on legality of fee for rental enforcement.
- Proceed with next phase of Central Business/Town Center zoning discussion regarding building heights (40' max options).
- Continue to implement recommendations of the Downtown Retail Strategy and monitor effectiveness.
- Continue to implement and monitor planning/inspections customer satisfaction surveys to both contractors and property owners.
- Continue to monitor impacts of U.S. 321 Widening Project (work with tourism partners).

- Consider the possibility of service roads in Conditional Use Permit applications to improve access on Valley Boulevard once widening is complete (Interconnectivity).
- Pursue improved cellular telephone coverage in the Blowing Rock area.
- Consider feasibility of combining Planning Board and Board of Adjustment.
- Monitor growth opportunities (Possum Hollow Road area, Green Hill Road/Parkway, Goforth Road and US 321) and future impact on Town services.
- Facilitate discussion regarding economic development opportunities for the Blowing Rock Hospital property and surrounding land (once vacancy occurs) and Severn tract.

Public Safety Issues (Emergency Services/Police)

- Continue to work on improving communication with citizens regarding police and fire services.
- Continue to encourage installation of house numbers throughout the Town, with community group involvement and consider reflective street signs with block numbers to improve visibility at night.

Emergency Services

- Support efforts of Watauga County to improve ambulance service response throughout county and work to obtain a county Medic Base co-location @ Fire-Rescue Station I.
- Continue to encourage fire alarm systems/sprinklers in downtown buildings to insure protection of historic structures and downtown.

Police

- Continue efforts to increase foot patrols in downtown areas (especially during the peak tourism season and high-traffic times of 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.) and visit all businesses.
- Investigate crosswalk signage in downtown area.
- Develop a Request for Proposals and provide cost analysis for paid parking (kiosks) for Town Council review.
- Develop a contingency congestion plan for high volume traffic peak days.

Infrastructure Issues (Public Works/Water/Wastewater)

Public Works

- Continue Street Pavement Plan implementation and coordinate paving with water/sewer utilities and ditch repair.
- Continue Ditch/Storm Water Improvement Plan to improve existing ditches, considering the options of rip-rap, paving, piping or curb & gutter.
- Continue to operate a residential curbside recycling program, track cost savings and inform public of program success.
- Proceed with the expansion of Woodlawn Cemetery.

Capital Projects

- Continue evaluation of Town Facilities Improvements Study (Public Works, Police and Parks & Recreation) and begin initial implementation with the following order of priority:
 - 1) Proceed with Phase Two of Public Works Facility Improvements – Site/Drainage work (\$160,000), as funding allows.
 - 2) Develop Request for Qualifications from architects for design alternatives for American Legion building and surrounding property for Council consideration. (Jim Steele, Albert Yount).
 - 3) Discuss Ice House building rental with Appalachian State University and, if no interest, consider private rental interest.
 - 4) Explore Police Department improvements, such as evidence room, painting, etc. (\$15,000).
 - 5) Continue evaluation of Public Works, Police and Parks & Recreation facility needs/recommendations.

Continue to implement Water/Sewer Capital Improvements Plan and consider additional improvements as funds allow with the following order of priority:

- 1) Proceed with Greenway Lane Sewer project in FY 2012-13.
 - 2) Continue to seek grant funding to aid in water/sewer extension to Blowing Rock Hospital area on US 321.
 - 3) Per agreement with NCDOT, continue to set aside funds for US 321 NCDOT Water/Sewer Betterments and monitor construction.
 - 4) Proceed with Phase I Gideon Ridge water/sewer improvement plan once funds are available.
 - 5) Obtain easement for next phase of Laurel Park sewer extension, and proceed once funds are available.
 - 6) Continue to address inflow/infiltration sewer issues.
 - 7) Continue to fund water meter replacement program (electronic meters).
 - 8) Develop plans for CIP Phase IV (WTP Misc. Improvements) and seek state low-interest loan funds, for possible construction in 2014-15.
 - 9) Develop plans for Sewer Interceptor.
 - 10) Develop Plans for Sunset Drive water/sewer replacement. Construct once US 321 widening is complete.
 - 11) Replace and upgrade deteriorating water and sewer lines, as funding allows.
- Proceed with Downtown Streetscape Plan Phase IV – Windwood Antiques to Morris Street for possible construction in FY 2013-14.
- Continue to pursue NCDOT Enhancement funding for Downtown Streetscape Plan.
 - Continue to request utility providers (AT&T, BREMCO, and Charter) to consolidate/remove overhead lines where feasible.
 - Continue with implementation of Storm Water Master Plan – and pursue grant opportunities and allocate funding as economic conditions allow.

Parks & Recreation/Town Beautification Issues

- Continue P&R Master Plan implementation. (Explore options for US 221 sidewalk to Bass Lake.)
- Proceed with Memorial Park Improvements in FY 2012-13 (hardscape, tree wells, and Tennis Court fencing).
- Support efforts of the proposed Middle Fork Greenway Project connecting Blowing Rock and Boone.
- Continue to support sidewalks and bike routes.
- Continue to work with BRAAC on overall beautification of Town.
- Continue to improve overall Downtown/Park Beautification & General Maintenance and maintain as high priority.
- Consider schedule of fees/charges increase for Robbins Pool and Day Camp for 2013 season.
- Explore in-town locations for possible dog park.

Other

- Consider proposed black aluminum decorative fencing option (\$73,010) for US 321 Widening Project. Negotiate volume discount price with Contractor. Request property owner cost participation to upgrade to black aluminum decorative fence where black chain-link fence is proposed. Consider funding for landscaping enhancement in black non-aluminum decorative fencing areas (\$50,000).
- Proceed with lens-free coach light option for US 321 Decorative Lighting. (Check on receptacle outlets.)
- Work with BRAAC and NCDOT to begin process for beautification of entries into downtown from US 321 (South Main Street, Sunset Drive and North Main Street).
- Consider change in downtown timed-parking allowance from 3-hour to 2-hour.
- Gather data from all providers (AT&T, Charter Cable and Blue Ridge Electric) about feasibility of underground utilities and/or other options. Request preliminary cost estimates from providers and any reimbursement of cost requirements. Explore funding options.

MAYOR _____
J.B. Lawrence

ATTEST _____
Sharon Greene, Town Clerk