

**Town of Blowing Rock
Board of Commissioners
Special Meeting – June 10, 2013**

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners held a special meeting on Monday, June 10, 2013 beginning at 3:00 p.m. The meeting took place in the Town Council Chambers at 1036 Main Street Blowing Rock. Present were Mayor Pro-tem Albert Yount, Commissioners Tommy Klutz, Dan Phillips, Doug Matheson and Jim Steele. Due to a prior appointment, Mayor Lawrence arrived at 3:25 p.m. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Planning Intern John Smith and Town Clerk Sharon Greene.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pro-tem Yount called the meeting to order at 3:08 p.m.

DISCUSSION ITEM

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock stated the Town had sent Requests for Proposals to assist with the update of the existing Comprehensive Plan. According to Mr. Rothrock, the Town's Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2004. He then introduced Executive Vice President Jason Epley of Benchmark CMR, Inc.

Mr. Epley stated that he had 17 years of experience in the planning profession working with municipal, county, regional and state government planning programs throughout North Carolina, specializing in comprehensive planning, military related planning, development, regulation, urban design, public involvement and meeting facilitation.

Mr. Epley then introduced Mr. Kris Krider, Urban Designer and Planner. Mr. Krider commented that he had 20 years of public and private planning and design experience, most recently with the Town of Davidson where he served as Planning Director and Economic Development Manager for the past eight years.

Planner Vagn Hansen was also introduced. He too gave a brief work experience history, stating that he had 10 years of experience in the planning profession. He had primarily worked with large and small municipalities as a consultant in state government, specializing in land use planning, geographic information systems, ordinance development and zoning administration.

At this time, a power point presentation was presented to Council. Mr. Epley stated the initial step of the planning process was to meet with Town Staff and the Planning Committee to discuss the Comprehensive Plan update in detail in order to gain insight into the current planning issues, gather all existing adopted plans/ordinances, and set the stage for the rest of the planning process. Mr. Epley stated one of the main challenges was to plan for growth that would not change the character of the town. Their company's approach was to gain a vision of what was desired, design a plan best suited to meet those needs, then implement the plan.

A timeline of events during the process was given. Mr. Epley stated a website would be provided to update the public as well as gather citizen input throughout the process. Workshops would be held to gather public input as well. According to the proposed project schedule, a final draft of the plan would be completed by January 2014.

Mr. Krider stated it was important to know Council's vision regarding development and identification of areas where growth was desired.

Several examples were shown of areas where Benchmark had assisted with their Comprehensive Plans such as Forest City, Weaverville, Bermuda Run, etc.

Commissioner Steele asked if Benchmark had reviewed the former Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Epley stated they had reviewed the 2004 Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Phillips stated that Blowing Rock was unique due to the road widening currently in progress and change was inevitable. Mr. Krider stated there were rules in which to manage the growth pattern in that area such as the zoning ordinance, design guidelines, and the Comprehensive Plan and even though it may take longer than anticipated, the Town needed to make sure it was done correctly.

Commissioner Yount had questions regarding the flexibility of NCDOT. Mr. Hansen stated the Town needed to articulate their desires and voice them to NCDOT. Planning Director Rothrock then mentioned the Town had a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with NCDOT which helped.

Council thanked Mr. Epley, Hansen and Krider for their presentation.

A brief recess was taken at this time.

After the meeting resumed, Planning Director Rothrock introduced Mr. Dennie Martin of Martin-McGill. Mr. Martin gave a brief background history of his company. He advised that Martin-McGill was closely affiliated with McGill Associates with offices located in Hickory and Asheville. Mr. Martin commented that Martin-McGill's interest in the Town's Comprehensive Plan stemmed from their long-time experience and knowledge of the community and surrounding region. He commented Blowing Rock was truly a unique and extraordinary place and Martin-McGill would greatly value the chance to assist with their planning process.

Mr. Martin commented he had worked extensively with local governments like Blowing Rock as a facilitator, planner and innovator.

Mr. Martin reviewed the comprehensive plan approach which addressed four fundamental concepts; such as a planning process consistent with Blowing Rock's unique character, meaningful community participation, a strong quality of life theme, and a concise and user-friendly document. Mr. Martin commented that during the planning process, solutions would be found that worked best for the community. He stated that

his approach would be to “resist being typical”, to help throughout the process, look at what had been accomplished, and what was envisioned for the future and help the Town find a way in which to create this on paper.

Mr. Martin then explained the community involvement strategy that would be followed. He advised that general information would be distributed to property owners, interest groups and businesses regarding the Comprehensive Plan update and the Town’s desire to gain input from the community. Informational communications, meeting notifications, etc. would be given to local newspapers, social media sites, radio stations, and any community television networks. He advised that four (4) public meetings would take place during the planning process, to discuss strategic points in the planning process and solicit public input as well as to discuss the plan draft during the Planning Board meeting and Town Council meetings. A website would be dedicated in order to distribute information and solicit community involvement as well.

Commissioner Yount voiced his concern with NCDOT disagreeing with the final document. Mr. Martin stated even though the Town did not control NCDOT, this was our community and the Town needed to articulate what they wanted regarding the road widening process.

Commissioner Steele wanted to know what the document would look like. Mr. Martin stated the document would not be a 300-page document, but would be something that people would enjoy reading that would be memorable and easily understood. He envisioned it to be a concise, user-friendly plan that would be interesting and unique as well.

Commissioner Steele also wanted to know if Mr. Martin had worked with resort towns previously. Mr. Martin stated that he had, several years prior.

Commissioner Phillips stated the Town now had a lot of “day-trippers” and he would like for a plan to be developed that would attract year-round visitors.

Council then thanked Mr. Martin for his presentation.

Commissioner Yount stated the Town utilized McGill Associates already, and even though they did a good job, he was concerned with utilizing another group so closely affiliated with McGill Associates.

Mayor Lawrence stated the most important large tract of land in Blowing Rock was Memorial Park which should be protected at all costs.

After a brief discussion regarding costs comparisons, Mayor Lawrence asked for a consensus from Council. Based on discussion from all members, it was the consensus of Council to select Martin-McGill for comprehensive planning consultant services. The Board agreed to consider their choice over the next 24 hours and make a final selection during their regular meeting on Tuesday, June 11, 2013.

ADJOURN

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

MAYOR _____ **ATTEST** _____
J.B. Lawrence **Sharon Greene, Town Clerk**