

DRAFT
Town of Blowing Rock
Special Departmental Work Session
Wednesday, March 5, 2014

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners held their annual Departmental Work Sessions beginning on Wednesday, March 5, 2014. The work session took place at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street, Blowing Rock N.C. Present were Mayor Pro-tem Albert Yount and Commissioners Doug Matheson, Sue Sweeting, and Ray Pickett. Commissioner Dan Phillips was out of town and unable to attend. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott Fogleman, Finance Director Nicole Norman, Parks & Recreation Director Jennifer Brown, and Town Clerk Sharon Greene.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pro-tem Yount called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

ADMINISTRATION

Finance Director Nicole Norman reviewed accomplishments and ongoing initiatives for her department. She advised that banking RFPs were sent out and the Town's operating accounts were moved from Wells Fargo Bank to United Community Bank which had proved to be a successful move.

Ms. Norman also advised the Employee Handbook had been updated and more updates were expected.

Ms. Norman commented the Town's website was in need of refreshing which would cost approximately \$5,000 for a good start. Town Manager Fogleman mentioned that he would like to have job applications online so that potential employees could complete them via computer. Commissioner Matheson suggested more information be placed on the Town's website so that everyone knows what is happening. He also asked that specific information regarding the Hwy. 321 Widening Project road closures be placed on the website.

Ms. Norman stated the Customer Service Initiative continued to be successful. She advised there were plans for customer comment boxes to be placed in the public areas at Town Hall, Parks & Recreation, Planning & Inspections, Police Department, and the Fire Department in order to receive suggestions, complaints, etc. from the public. Also, a departmental display would begin at Town Hall to build public relations between Town departments and the public.

Commissioner Matheson suggested a Police Officer be featured in the *Rocket* each week so the public would become familiar with the officers and possibly have an employee of the month featured in the newspaper as well.

Ms. Norman mentioned the Employee Classification and Pay Study briefly and mentioned the employee handbook would be updated further once the study was complete.

Ms. Norman mentioned plans to upgrade the audio visual equipment in the Council Chambers. Council had several comments regarding needed improvements they would like to see in order for those attending the meetings to hear and see the visual presentations. Commissioner Yount inquired about the timeline for those improvements. Town Manager Fogleman stated there was approximately \$3,500 set aside to begin the improvements in this fiscal year.

Ms. Norman then spoke regarding recent OSHA visits and future plans for voluntary OSHA inspections. During a voluntary visit, an OSHA representative would inspect Town Departments then make the Town aware of any safety improvements that were needed. She also mentioned that having departmental Safety Officers would be more effective than having a single Town employee designated as the Town Safety Officer. Commissioner Yount asked if the Town scheduled volunteer inspections, would they be treated differently by OSHA. Ms. Norman commented the Town would not receive penalties should OSHA find safety improvements that were needed and would not be subject to a random inspection for approximately 2 years following a voluntary inspection.

Asset tagging was also briefly discussed. Mr. Norman stated she hoped to receive assistance with this project from an ASU intern. She stated that her department continued to monitor the environmental conservation initiative; however additional resources were needed in order to do more in this area.

Town Manager Fogleman advised the use of an ASU intern would be pursued for several needs within the department including maternity leave support during the expected leave of Administrative Assistant Hilari Hubner and Finance Officer Nicole Norman.

Commissioner Sweeting suggested that recycling containers be placed on Main Street and possibly at the Post Office for the public. She mentioned the Boy Scouts might be interested in having this as one of their projects.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks & Recreation Director Jennifer Brown updated Council regarding projects and facility improvements within her department. Ms. Brown advised that her Assistant Director position previously occupied by Jason Balcom had recently been filled by Erin Kegley in January of 2014. She also mentioned the landscape position had been filled by Chris Pate.

Ms. Brown then discussed Council expectations for the Blowing Rock Appearance Advisory Commission (BRAAC). Council mentioned that BRAAC should work closely with Mr. Pate regarding projects on Town property. Commissioner Matheson also

suggested the Planning Board utilize BRAAC's help with projects that come before them.

It was the consensus of Council for BRAAC to be involved with improvements to Town property only, not private property.

At this time Mayor Lawrence arrived.

Town Manager Fogleman asked what Council's thoughts were and if they had any guidelines regarding cost recovery for recreational programs. Commissioner Matheson commented that he felt these programs were services provided by the Town as opposed to the Town making a large profit from them. Commissioner Sweeting commented that she would like to see profits utilized for equipment, supplies, etc for these programs. Commissioner Yount mentioned programs that continued to lose money should possibly be eliminated or their fees increased. Town Manager Fogleman stated the Town needed to be careful due to competition from other areas to not price themselves out of the market.

Ms. Brown spoke regarding capital improvements that she would like to see completed in her department. Ms. Brown expressed that she had been approached regarding adding an amphitheatre to Memorial Park. She commented the lower basketball court was in need of repair and possibly an amphitheatre could be placed in that area. Council had conflicting ideas regarding an amphitheatre being constructed in Memorial Park.

Ms. Brown also mentioned she would like to see poured rubber placed under the playground equipment for safety purposes and felt in the long run, this would be a cost effective improvement.

Mr. Brown also mentioned the area behind the tennis courts was in need of improvements.

Council suggested since the gazebo in Memorial Park was used for many different purposes throughout the year, it needed to be enlarged. It was the consensus of Council to move forward with the enlargement of the gazebo.

Ms. Brown also mentioned several other improvements she thought were needed, such as stairs in Memorial Park, dead trees that needed to be removed, etc. Commissioner Matheson asked about the status of the large tree in front of Town Hall. Ms. Brown commented there were plans for a complete redesign of the grounds in front of Town Hall.

JOINT MEETING WITH TDA

Present for the annual joint meeting between Council and the TDA were Authority Vice Chair Rob Dyer, Commissioner Doug Matheson, TDA Director Tracy Brown and TDA Assistant Director Amanda Lugenbell. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott

Fogleman, Finance Director Nicole Norman and Public Relations (PR) Consultant Dave Tomsky.

Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m. and introduced TDA Executive Director Tracy Brown.

Mr. Brown began the meeting with a power point presentation. (**Attachment #1**) He reviewed 2013 Highlights:

Mr. Brown introduced P.R. Consultant Dave Tomsky to everyone. Mr. Tomsky stated that in 1990 he had moved to the Asheville area and since 2006 he had been a media consultant for the TDA spreading the word about Blowing Rock through press releases, media relations, etc. He advised that he also worked with the Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show and the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum, etc. Mr. Tomsky mentioned that he worked with approximately 180 media sources and there was a growing awareness of Blowing Rock in many areas.

Next, a power point presentation was given by Mr. Brown that reviewed information regarding the TDA's collaboration relationships with the Blue Ridge Parkway, Appalachian Ski Mountain, Grandfather Mountain, etc. Also reviewed were items such as the media budget and earned media. Mr. Brown advised that Charlotte was the area's number one market.

Mr. Brown mentioned that he and 32 other AAA travel counselors along with the Blue Ridge Parkway Association had gone on a 10-day tour staying at a different gateway town each night.

Mr. Brown stated though Commissioner Phillips was unable to be in attendance at this meeting, Commissioner Phillips previously had questions pertaining to the public relations agency that the TDA was using. Commissioner Phillips had expressed the TDA should bid that service out. Mr. Brown stated that the TDA didn't feel the need to bid the service out because the agency being used was doing a great job. Mr. Brown continued to state that he had spoken with approximately 12 hoteliers in town regarding their occupancy rate and found only two (2) to be slightly lower, one (1) to be the same as the previous year, and nine (9) to have had increased occupancy. Mr. Brown stated more people were coming to the area, but they were getting a cheaper room rate due to using a middleman service such as Expedia, Groupon, etc.

Commissioner Pickett questioned advertising efforts for the Wine Festival held in April of each year. Mr. Brown advised that the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce handled the advertising for that event.

Audience member John Aldridge inquired if the TDA was advertising in major markets and the potential for advertising out-of-state. Mr. Tomsky stated press releases were going out to all metro newspapers in areas such as Atlanta, GA., Tampa, FL. etc., and to national travel magazines as well.

Mayor Lawrence thanked Mr. Brown and the entire Authority for their work on behalf of the Town.

Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, the joint meeting between Council and the TDA adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

MAYOR _____
J.B. Lawrence

ATTEST _____
Sharon Greene, Town Clerk