

**DRAFT**  
**Town of Blowing Rock**  
**Special Departmental Work Session**  
**Thursday, March 6, 2014**

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners continued their annual Departmental Work Sessions on Thursday, March 6, 2014. The work session took place at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street, Blowing Rock N.C. Present were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Albert Yount, 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, Public Works Director, Mike Wilcox, Public Works Superintendent Matt Blackburn, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Police Captain. Aaron Miller and Emergency Services Director Kent Graham.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

**PLANNING & INSPECTIONS**

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock began by updating Council regarding new construction in town. He stated there had been approximately fourteen million dollars in new construction/renovations in 2013 which was almost double that of 2012.

Planning Director Rothrock advised his department had improved the new business permit process and in the past several months, customer complaints had improved. Mr. Rothrock felt his department worked at finding solutions, not building roadblocks for customers.

Mr. Rothrock advised there was no Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee meeting held on March 11<sup>th</sup> as planned, due to other events that were occurring the same day. He mentioned there would be a Steering Committee meeting on April 8<sup>th</sup> before the regular Council meeting.

Mr. Rothrock then discussed short-term rentals and the need for the Town's Land Use Ordinance to be reviewed and clarifications made. Commissioner Sweeting inquired as to how short-term rentals are enforced. Mr. Rothrock stated enforcement was complaint driven. Short-term rental enforcement fees were also briefly discussed. It was the consensus of Council that it would not be feasible to begin charging this type fee.

Changes made to the Land Use Ordinance were discussed by Mr. Rothrock, stating that one of the most useful changes had been the Board of Adjustment procedures, making it slightly easier to obtain a variance.

Signage in the Central Business district of Town was also discussed. Mr. Rothrock mentioned the ordinance had changed in 2009 allowing businesses to hang signs inside their windows which were not regulated by the Town. However, there were some instances where it was becoming slightly cluttered looking. He asked if Council wished

for his department to begin a more stringent review. It was the consensus of Council to continue allowing businesses to have signage inside their businesses windows; however, Mr. Rothrock was directed to continue to monitor the situation closely, being especially sensitive to any complaints received in this area.

Commissioner Sweeting mentioned that she had heard from several businesses located further from the street that sandwich boards should be allowed; however she did feel that uniformity was needed. Commissioner Sweeting also mentioned several areas along Main Street where sidewalks were too congested and narrow for sandwich boards. Mr. Rothrock stated there were a few businesses that seemed to have quite a bit of outside display and he felt there may need to be a limit. It was the consensus of Council for Planning Director Rothrock to bring the issue of possibly limiting outside display of goods and allowing sandwich boards in the Town Center before the Planning Board for review.

Town Manager Fogleman also asked for Council's thoughts regarding metal roofing in the General Business district of town. Council requested that Mr. Rothrock bring this item before the Planning Board as well.

Mr. Rothrock mentioned there were several dumpsters in town with inadequate screening that didn't meet Town Code requirements. Council directed Mr. Rothrock to send notices to the property owners who were out of compliance allowing a 2-year period in which to comply.

Mr. Rothrock briefly discussed the need to simplify setback requirements in the Town Code. Council agreed clarifications were needed in the ordinance regarding setback requirements.

Commissioner Pickett mentioned businesses along Main Street putting their garbage out for pickup gave Main Street an unsightly appearance because it might sit along the street for awhile before it was collected. Town Manager Fogleman stated a plan to hopefully alleviate that problem was in the works.

Planning Director Rothrock also discussed other items such as building height requirements, back-flow prevention efforts, and the need for 3-hour parking at Edgewood Cottage. Council asked that letters be sent to merchants regarding employee parking on Main Street.

Commissioner Sweeting voiced her concerns with the development of Valley Boulevard once the widening project was complete. She felt that Council should discuss this issue in further detail soon.

## **POLICE**

Police Captain Aaron Miller updated Council regarding several items pertaining to the Police Department. The first item discussed was a complaint from a resident who lived in the General Business district, regarding late night deliveries to businesses near her

home. Captain Miller advised that in 2008, the ordinance was changed prohibiting outside noise from businesses between the hours of 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. Captain Miller asked Council if they felt the ordinance needed to be changed further. Council members agreed the ordinance adequately enforced this issue.

Captain Miller said the Police Department had received 5,671 service calls in 2013 which was a slight decrease from 2012. He also said that all positions within the department were filled; however, there was a need for more reserve officers. Captain Miller felt a career advancement plan was needed so that officers could move up in salary and rank which would also help with employee morale.

Captain Miller updated Council regarding parking citations. He commented there was an increase in parking citations in 2013; however the department had received minimal complaints. He commended Mike Barfoot, the Parking Enforcement Officer, saying he was a good ambassador for the Town.

Town Manager Fogleman mentioned that Council had commented earlier in the work session they felt there was a need for more restrictive parking at Edgewood Cottage. Captain Miller said that area was being used as overflow parking as well as business employee parking and agreed signage would be helpful in that area.

Commissioner Matheson also suggested that 15-minute parking signs be installed in front of BRAHM. Commissioner Pickett agreed with Commissioner Matheson.

Captain Miller discussed the need for updates to their building such as outside painting, new floor covering, and most importantly, the need for evidence storage room improvements due to inadequate space. Council concurred there was an immediate need for adequate evidence space and directed Captain Miller to discuss this item further with Town Manager Fogleman.

According to Captain Miller, there was also a need for more updated technology support in the police department, due to their outdated electronic equipment. He stated grants had been applied for to help with the purchase of a server and hopefully he would know by the end of May if any grant money would be received.

Captain Miller said, according to the vehicle replacement plan, the department had received one new vehicle and should receive the other one by the end of the month. He informed Council that due to routine maintenance being done by employees in the Public Works Department, the Police Department was saving money on vehicle maintenance.

Captain Miller said the Police Department had also saved money on fuel because they had increased their foot patrol and reduced idle time on vehicles. Commissioner Pickett commented that he liked seeing more foot patrol around Town and felt that residents and merchants liked it as well. Captain Miller also mentioned the department had begun a bike patrol with future plans for other officers to receive training in that area.

The need for a viper communications tower location was discussed, Captain Miller stated that he continued to look for a suitable location. Captain Miller explained the viper communication system would be a great enhancement once a location was found.

Captain Miller expressed the need for officer safety equipment for the officers. He advised grant money might be available for these items. He also stated that he would like to get at least three (3) new handguns because the current ones were not as reliable as they needed to be. He also expressed there was a need for rifles. Commissioner Pickett questioned if two rifles were purchased, could they be interchanged between officers on duty until more were purchased. Captain Miller responded there could be qualification issues.

Commissioners Pickett and Sweeting both agreed that safety equipment for officers and an evidence room renovation were very important.

Captain Miller advised that the Police Department was working diligently on improving community outreach. He commented that he had received good feedback regarding their efforts.

Captain Miller also mentioned the department continued to work with the D.A.R.E. program, crime prevention, and in the past year the department had become a car seat checkpoint, in which residents could come by the department to have an officer check to make sure their children were restrained properly while in a vehicle.

Commissioners Sweeting and Pickett both commented the Police Department was doing a great job with community outreach.

Captain Miller stated that a vehicle such as a golf cart would be helpful in the department so that officers could interact with the public more and also save on fuel costs.

The next item discussed was the siren tower located in Memorial Park. Due to the tower being unsightly, the low hanging power lines and scaring visitors to the area who were not familiar with the siren, Captain Miller felt the siren had served its purpose and needed to be removed.

Mayor Lawrence also commented a policy needed to be in place should an emergency occur. Town Manager Fogleman stated that with the advanced communication systems in place today, the need for the siren is no longer present.

Council then had a brief discussion with Captain Miller regarding the change in the communication system. Captain Miller advised that he had received some complaints regarding a contact person not being available at the Police Department on weekends and had requested in the upcoming budget a part-time position to help with this issue.

Commissioner Yount stated that he had heard there was only one officer on duty at times and this concerned him greatly. Captain Miller explained their scheduling process and stated there were times where the department might be one officer down and the work schedule had to be changed to accommodate the problem and that was one reason for having more reserve officers. Commissioner Matheson agreed it was also a concern of his to have only one officer on duty at any given time.

Concluding the work session with Captain Miller, Council commended him on a job well done.

### **PUBLIC WORKS**

Town Manager Fogleman updates Council regarding changes made at the Water/Wastewater Treatment Facilities due to the untimely passing of Tom McRary. He advised that Mr. Wilcox and Mr. Blackburn had done an excellent job helping in that department. He also advised that James Townsend had been offered the position at the Wastewater Plant and the vacancy at the Water Treatment Plant was close to being filled. Mr. Fogleman also mentioned that the current plan being considered is to have a Plant Supervisor and both plants would be merged with the Public Works Department since the two divisions work so closely together.

Town Manager Fogleman also mentioned that NCDOT had mentioned making the intersection of Hwy 221 and Main Street a three-way stop instead of traffic lights and staff didn't think this would be a good idea; however he wanted to get Council's opinion. It was the consensus of Council that this intersection not be changed due to safety issues.

Public Works Director Mike Wilcox and Public Works Superintendent Matt Blackburn began updating Council regarding several matters within their department. Mr. Blackburn advised that there are still Inflow & Infiltration (I&I) problems and a sewer camera is needed. Mr. Blackburn stated that the City of Lenoir had been helping the Town with this issue, but they had problems as well. He also advised the Town could potentially be penalized as much as \$25,000 per day for I&I problems and these issues needed to be located and repaired. Mr. Blackburn also mentioned that one problem area had been found and repaired recently, but there were others.

Mr. Blackburn advised the Town's sewer camera was old and didn't work and it was also getting harder to find parts due to its age. He stated a new sewer camera would cost approximately \$50,000 to \$60,000. Mayor Lawrence stated it would probably pay for itself in a matter of 3-5 years. Mr. Wilcox agreed.

Mr. Wilcox and Mr. Blackburn stated there were old terracotta pipes in many areas of town that were brittle and cracking. Town Manager Fogleman advised that Town Staff was working with McGill Associates on the Capital Improvements Plan regarding these issues in order to prioritize the problems.

Commissioner Matheson asked what Mr. Wilcox and Blackburn felt were some of the biggest needs in their department. Mr. Wilcox stated that a truck with tower lighting, and the proper safety equipment was needed while employees were repairing water leaks especially at night. His main concern was employee safety. He also mentioned a used truck would suffice.

Commissioner Matheson asked Mr. Wilcox if he thought it would be useful to have the Town Mechanic position once again. Mr. Wilcox said that he would like to see that position back in place. It was the consensus of Council for Town Manager Fogleman and Public Works Director Wilcox to run the numbers on what was paid out in various town departments on vehicle maintenance to see if it would be feasible to once again have a mechanic position.

Mr. Blackburn also advised that a water audit would be scheduled in early spring to assess water loss in Town due to undetected leaks. Commissioner Yount asked if there were back flow indicators on any new meters that had been installed. Mr. Blackburn advised the Town had at least 150 radio-read meters that were installed by Mueller Systems at no cost in order for the meters to be tested and they all had a back-flow indicator.

Mayor Lawrence asked if the Town elected to install all radio-read meters what the payback period would be. Mr. Blackburn explained that it took six men at least 2 – 3 days in good weather to read meters. He advised that radio-read meters were \$150.00 to \$250.00 depending on the size. Town Manager Fogleman stated the payback period would be much shorter if the Town had monthly billing, but with bi-monthly billing it would take longer.

Commissioner Yount expressed that he was hearing good comments about the Public Works Department from the public. Mr. Wilcox agreed that he had excellent employees.

Commissioner Sweeting asked about the ditch repair schedule and leaf pick-up schedule. Mr. Wilcox advised a truck was sent out twice a week to retrieve leaves and 3 times a week to pick up brush. He also commented that McGill Associates is doing an assessment on ditch repairs needed in conjunction with the road paving schedule.

Commissioner Sweeting said the ditches along Chestnut Drive were in need of repair. Town Manager Fogleman also said that he had been in contact with NCDOT regarding the ditch from Chetola to Blowing Rock Inn.

Commissioner Sweeting asked about the Town extending sewer to the Laurel Park area. Mr. Wilcox explained that another lift station would be needed and several easements would have to be acquired before this could be accomplished.

Commissioner Sweeting asked about sewer to the homes that were currently not serviced by the Town's sewer system on Chestnut Drive. Mr. Wilcox stated that could be accomplished without the need for easements.

Council thanked Mr. Wilcox and Mr. Blackburn and commended them on a job well done.

### **FIRE DEPARTMENT**

Kent Graham, EMS Director began his update with Council by discussing staffing changes that had occurred in the past fiscal year and the enhanced level of service as well as the improved employee morale that had resulted from these changes.

Mr. Graham discussed information technology and explained that an assessment had been done in all Town departments to determine what improvements were needed. He commented that having one internet account instead of several would be more cost effective. Mr. Graham advised that a pre-planning assessment had been done regarding fiber-optic technology and much of the work such as burying the lines and installing conduit could be completed by Town Employees in order to save money.

Mayor Lawrence said that he had spoken with a representative of Blue Ridge Electric Company (BREMCO) regarding the fiber-optic line installation from Town Hall to the Fire Department. Mr. Graham commented that he would be in touch with BREMCO in the future.

Mr. Graham talked about the ambulance base distribution proposal that was presented to the Watauga County Commissioners in 2010. At that time, Blowing Rock had expressed to the County the need for an ambulance base in Blowing Rock; however they determined a base was needed in the Cove Creek area first. Mr. Graham advised that project was currently underway. Mr. Graham further explained the logistics regarding the need for at least a 12-hour ambulance to be located in Blowing Rock and advised he would pursue this matter further.

Town Manager Fogleman also commented that he had spoken with the County Manager regarding sales tax distribution, and was told this item was not on the County's agenda; therefore a change in distribution was not anticipated.

Mr. Graham then discussed the ongoing E-911 problem with residents who do not display their street addresses prominently making it difficult for emergency vehicles to find specific addresses when emergency assistance is needed. Mr. Graham stated a resolution to this on-going problem needed to be addressed.

Mr. Graham advised there would be work on the communications sight located on Green Hill because the equipment wasn't functioning at the level it should be. He commented there would be some general clean-up work completed in that area. Mr. Graham mentioned the building that housed the equipment was not adequate and needed to be replaced and the generator also needed replacing. Mr. Graham commented that he was currently working with Mr. Fogleman regarding building options.

Capital improvements were discussed by Mr. Graham. He advised the department was getting a new rescue truck hopefully by the end of April; however, the F.D.I.C. had asked if they could display the vehicle at a conference being held in Indianapolis. Mr. Graham said the vehicle would meet the department's needs well into the future.

The next item discussed was Fire Station III to be located at the corner of Aho Road and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Mr. Graham advised campaign efforts would begin soon to help fund this building.

Mr. Graham advised there were recent changes to the Fire Department's finance system. He stated that former County Manager Jim Ratchford had been the treasurer for several years and had done an excellent job, but he had retired in December and the department had filled that position recently.

Commissioner Sweeting commended Mr. Graham on the great job he was doing. Commissioner Matheson asked if there were other needs within the department. Mr. Graham mentioned that he and Town Manager Fogleman were working to clarify and "clean-up" various agreements between the Town and the Fire Department.

Town Manager Fogleman also advised that Mr. Graham and Matt McGuire were going to be the Town's official Information Technology (IT) contacts and they were working on updating the organization's technology structure.

The joint work session with EMS Director Graham concluded at this time.

Town Manager Fogleman updated Council regarding a special work session that was planned for Thursday, May 8, 2014 at 9:30 a.m. pertaining to the Town's Gateway Project. He advised that members of BRAAC would also be present along with students from ASU who were helping with the gateway plan.

**UPDATES**

Mr. Fogleman mentioned a notice had been sent from the Watauga County Board of Elections that "Early Voting" would take place for the first time in Blowing Rock the last few days of April and the first week in May.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further business to discuss, the work session adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

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

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