

Planning and Zoning Board

Minutes

Thursday, December 18, 2008

6:00 p.m.

The Blowing Rock Planning and Zoning Board met on Thursday, December 18, 2008 for their regular scheduled meeting. Chairman West called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Members present were, Debbie di Santi, Greg Grana, Ada Webster, Sue Sweeting, Web Alexander and Jim Steele. Staff members present were Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Public Works Director Johnny Lentz and Administrative Assistant Sherrie Pitts.

Ms. Sweeting made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. di Santi seconded the motion. All members were in favor of the motion.

Items of Business

Downtown Streetscape Improvements

Mr. Rothrock gave an overview to the Board of the proposed downtown streetscape improvements for Main Street.

Town Engineer Doug Chapman of McGill Associates gave a slideshow presentation on the proposed downtown enhancement. He explained and discussed photos of current locations and issues with these locations. He also talked about hardscapes, street trees and landscaping. The photos were visual enhancements showing sidewalk improvements with "brick" pavers along the curb side of the sidewalks as well as in the crosswalks. The photos also gave a conceptual line of vision with power lines and poles removed.

Karen Herterich, business owner, commented and advised against stamped concrete as an option to pavers. She stated they had used stamped concrete and due to weather and chemicals breaking and damaging the concrete it had to be replaced after two years. They replaced with pavers and have not had any further trouble in seventeen years.

Chairman West commented that if cobblestone were used he would like it to be as smooth as possible for people that are not completely stable on foot.

Mr. Jim Ford, Landscape Architect for McGill, discussed the slide photos and using stamped concrete or cobble pavers. He talked about some of the towns they had visited with similarities to Blowing Rock and some with unique characteristics. One town had an old fashioned drinking fountain along a sidewalk. Mr. Ford commented on different parking signs and using bulb-outs at crosswalks and some bulb-outs with shrubbery to eliminate pedestrian crossings.

Chairman West asked about the pavers and bulb-out created at the edge of the park at the museum building and how it would affect piling snow in that location.

Public Works Director Johnny Lentz commented that it would not be used to hold snow, if necessary they may have to use a parking space late at night and remove the snow pile the morning after.

Ms. Sweeting and Mr. Grana expressed concern about the crosswalk on Main St. at Laurel Lane. Comments were that motorists ignore pedestrians at that crosswalk and that pedestrians had a hard time safely seeing motorists due to close proximity of a parking space.

Mr. Alexander had a concern about the area at the edge of the park that is frequently used by vehicles unloading goods being turned into a bulb-out crosswalk area.

Ms. Herterich requested the Board think carefully about the tree type and canopies and how the height of the lower branches could be hazardous for pedestrians. She also commented that it might be beneficial to have groups of people adopt areas, it could help with the cost of purchasing benches and trashcans for specified sections of Main Street.

Mr. Ford discussed some of the slides showing different types of benches and trees.

Mr. Grana asked if bicycle stands were a consideration possibly in a bulb-out. This may help keep bicycles out of the walk way and from being chained to lampposts and trees.

Mr. Ford pointed out the use of mast arms for stoplights and cross walk lights at Main Street and Sunset Drive.

Chairman West was excused from the Board at 6:40 pm.

Mr. Chapman said that when the plan was started there was no plan to remove any parking spaces, but with DOT requirements and some of the bulb-outs some spaces will be removed.

Mr. Chapman explained power lines and the differences and difficulty of moving above or below ground. He commented that the cost for underground was twice as expensive and lasted half as long. There was some discussion about power lines being put underground versus going behind the buildings.

Mr. Steele commented that the current plan and phases cover Main Street from Hwy 221 to Chestnut Drive. He thinks the power lines from Hwy 221 north to Chetola should also be considered within one of the phases.

Vice-chair Sweeting said she was not certain where Council wanted the Planning Board to go with the information they had received tonight. Mr. Steele believes that Council would like opinion of the Planning Board on moving the power lines, comments on the crosswalks, creating the bulb-outs, trees locations and loading zones.

Mr. Grana asked for comments from Mr. Rothrock. Mr. Rothrock stated that there were 4 options on utilities: 1) put lines underground, 2) put lines behind buildings above ground, 3) put lines behind buildings underground, 4) do nothing and leave lines as they are.

Mr. Grana commented that he supports the power lines being moved behind the building overhead Ms. di Santi concurred. They both agreed if the lines were not addressed there was no need to move forward with the rest of the plan.

Vice-chair Sweeting stated that she would like to see the power lines underground.

Mr. Alexander said ideally he would like to see the lines underground, but for visual improvements he would like them at least behind buildings above ground.

Ms. Webster mentioned that she liked the pavers in the crosswalks.

Mr. Steele's consideration was to move the utilities behind buildings either above or below ground. He liked the crosswalk pavers, but would like fewer trees. Mr. Steele commented that he did not like the mast arms for signal lights at Sunset Dr. He would like to see delivery times regulated to help minimize traffic congestion.

Ms. di Santi agreed with putting power lines behind buildings. She liked the bike racks and the trees. Ms. di Santi preferred crosswalk pavers and did not like stamped asphalt. She liked adding a crosswalk at the Martin House. She had the same opinion of pedestrian and driver visibility difficulty at Laurel Lane. She also liked the delivery regulation. Ms. di Santi mentioned she would like someone to look into the dead/dying hemlocks on Laurel Lane at Main Street with the rejuvenating plan.

Mr. Grana asked what DOT's opinion was. Mr. Chapman stated that DOT has reviewed and would like to see the project done in phases.

Mr. Grana commented that he would support Council getting the entire project concept approved with DOT.

Vice-chair Sweeting stated that the Planning Board understands this is a conceptual plan. The reflection of this Board to see:

1. power lines behind the buildings
2. crosswalks pavers, and take visibility into consideration
3. tree locations with plantings addressed in regard to vehicles and wheelchairs
4. sign recommendations consolidate signs as much as possible
5. bike racks to help make streets more bike friendly
6. signal light pole, smaller diameter, to be as aesthetic as possible
7. recommend delivery guidelines
8. Planning Board supports the total conceptual plan to be approved by DOT

Adjourn

Mr. Grana made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Webster seconded the motion. All members were in favor of the motion.

With no further business the Planning Board adjourned at 8:03 PM.

Sue Sweeting, Vice Chairperson

Sherrie Pitts, Administrative Assistant