

Planning and Zoning Board

Minutes

Thursday, December 18, 2014

6:30 p.m.

The Blowing Rock Planning and Zoning Board met on Thursday, December 18, 2014 for their regularly scheduled meeting. Chairman West called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm. Members present were David Harwood, David Laughter, Lisa Stripling, Genie Starnes, Wes Carter, and Natalie Bovino. Alice Roess was absent. Staff members present were Planning Director Kevin Rothrock and Administrative Assistant Tammy Bentley.

Chairman West asked if there were any changes to the November 20, 2014 minutes. There were none. *Mr. Harwood made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Laughter. All members, except Ms. Stripling and Ms. Starnes who were absent at the November meeting, were in favor of the motion.*

Amendment to Sign Ordinance – Appalachian Ski Mountain

Mr. Rothrock gave the staff report. On December 9, 2014, Appalachian Ski Mountain was approved for construction of a welcome center on the corner of Highway 321 and Edmisten Road. The proposed freestanding sign will require some code modification in order to be approved as submitted or with a similar design. The proposed sign exceeds current height limits and separation between the back of the sign panels. The proposed ordinance would allow the 18' height, but does not change the distance of the sign panels.

Mr. Carter asked why an amendment and not a variance. Mr. Rothrock said that staff felt that this situation was unique enough to warrant an ordinance amendment. He added that Appalachian Ski Mountain is losing their current billboard due to the construction of the access road bridge to Chestnut Ridge.

Chairman West asked if anyone in the audience wished to speak. Mr. Brad Moretz, representing Appalachian Ski Mountain said that they are requesting the 18' height so the sign would be visible above cars and trucks across four lanes of traffic. He added that the additional separation also enhanced visibility. Mr. Moretz said that since the ski slopes are not visible from the road, that this sign would be essential. Mr. Moretz also told the Board that since the opening of the ski resort that Blowing Rock has become a year-round town with many restaurants and motels and hotels open all year and he feels that the resort creates economic opportunities for businesses. He added that the resort employs 400 people.

Mr. Carter asked if the sign is above the roof line of the welcome center. Mr. Moretz responded that the sign is about 2' below the roof.

Chairman West asked Mr. Moretz how the sign would be illuminated. Mr. Moretz replied that the illumination would comply with the ordinance.

Mr. Harwood asked Mr. Moretz if his intention was to have a ground mounted sign and a sign on the building. Mr. Moretz replied that the sign on the building is in the window and is allowed per the ordinance.

Mr. Carter suggested that the word "unique" be added before "tourism" in the proposed ordinance.

Mr. Laughter made a motion to approve the ordinance with the word "unique" inserted before the word "tourism", seconded by Ms. Starnes.

Mr. Moretz asked the Board to approve the sign design as presented. He told the Board that the base of the sign is longer and that the top is smaller; that they wanted architectural detail and not just a block sign.

Chairman West asked Mr. Rothrock what the angle of the wedge is. Mr. Rothrock said that the ordinance references separation in feet, not angles, and that the proposed ordinance does not increase the separation. Mr. Rothrock added that staff felt that a wider angle would make the face of the sign harder to see for traffic coming from the north.

Chairman West asked Mr. Rothrock how he would administer the current base size. Mr. Rothrock said that the sign is not measured at the base; that the sign face is measured.

Mr. Larry Greene, Architect for the project, said that he did not think the sign would be visible with a 3' wedge and that the proposed angle is much more visible.

Mr. Carter asked why the sign wasn't closer to the intersection. Mr. Moretz said that the sign is right up to the NCDOT right-of-way and it can't be any closer to the intersection.

Ms. Bovino said she thought the wider angle of the sign should be approved. Mr. Rothrock said that a distance would be easier to inspect. Ms. Bovino asked how much distance is required for the wider angle. Mr. Rothrock replied 10 feet.

Mr. Harwood noted that the sign exceeds the code by a lot. He asked what would happen if Appalachian Ski Mountain vacated the building and the Welcome Center use ceased. Mr. Rothrock said that the sign could not remain, that anyone besides Appalachian Ski Mountain would have to change the structure.

Mr. Harwood asked if the color was included. Mr. Rothrock said that the color was approved in the CUP.

Mr. Rothrock told the Board that if they wanted to approve the sign as presented that the separation would need to be changed.

Mr. Laughter amended his motion to approve the ordinance with the word “unique” before “tourism”, that the sign face not be separated by more than 10’, and that the length would not exceed 17’. Ms. Starnes seconded. All members were in favor.

Comprehensive Plan – Priorities List

The Board discussed their priorities list. The Board listed the gateways into town, moving the utility lines underground on Main Street, and completion of the Middle Fork Greenway as some of the top priorities. Mr. Rothrock told the Board that he would like to address accessory apartments in R-15 zoning districts.

Chairman West said that the Board should look at the short-term items and address as many of those as possible.

Mr. Rothrock asked the Board to email their priority lists, including short-term items. The Board agreed.

Other Business

Mr. Rothrock updated the Board on the Highway 321 and Chestnut Ridge projects. He also told the Board that the renovations to the American Legion building were underway.

Mr. Laughter made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Stripling. All members were in favor of the motion.

Chairman West adjourned the meeting at 8:15 pm.

Chairman Jim West

Tammy Bentley, Administrative Assistant