

MINUTES

Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners

Tuesday, June 11, 2002

The Mayor and Board of Commissioners for the Town of Blowing Rock met in regular session on Tuesday, June 11, 2002 at 7:00 p.m. Present were Mayor J. B. Lawrence, Barbara Ball, Keith Tester, Rita Wiseman, and David Wray. Terry Lentz was ill and could not attend. Also present were Town Manager Don Holycross, Town Attorney Allen Moseley, Town Engineer Marion Rothrock and Town Clerk Barbara Beach. Other staff members attending the meeting were Director of Public Works Johnny Lentz, Police Chief Owen Tolbert, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Building Inspector John Warren, and Landscape Specialist Perry Davis.

Approval of Minutes

Upon motion of Ms. Wiseman, second by Mr. Tester, Council voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the meetings held on May 14, May 31, and June 5, 2002.

Public Hearings

1. Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2002-2003

Town Manager Don Holycross summarized the highlights of the proposed budget for fiscal year 2002-2003. He explained that this has been a difficult year to estimate revenues because of the state fiscal emergency, and the uncertainty of whether state shared revenues will be released in the new fiscal year. Due to the revaluation of property in Watauga County, the proposed budget contains a proposed tax rate of \$0.35 per hundred dollars of valuation, a decrease from the 2001 rate of \$0.47.

Mayor Lawrence opened a public hearing to receive comment on the budget. The following citizens addressed the Council: Lowell Thomas, Paul Peterson, Dennis Quinn, Mike Sweeting, Susie Greene, Carol Aldridge, Ron Oberle, Cecilia Pitts, Bunky Davant, Greg Grana, and Ken Barneby. Most were opposed to the proposed tax rate. Some asked that Council reverse their plan to fund the Recycling Department for only six months of the fiscal year. Jeff Collins from County Disposal System was present to ask that he be allowed to present a plan for his company to contract the recycling program. Mrs. Ball moved that the public hearing be closed. Mr. Tester seconded the motion, and all voted in favor of the motion. Each Council member spoke, relating his or her position on the proposed budget. Mrs. Ball stated that she and Mr. Lentz are totally against the proposed rate of \$0.35, and could provide an alternate plan to cut out funding for capital purchases to reduce the rate to \$0.295 or \$0.30.

Ms. Wiseman stated that she would like for the Council to be proactive, not reactive, and cited the need to set aside money for emergency services, increasing the Town's fund balance, and suggested phasing out the recycling department over a six month period

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Mr. Tester said he believed that Blowing Rock is a progressive town, and that we have the financial base for a progressive budget. He said the extra revenue generated by the tax rate is earmarked for necessary capital projects.

Mr. Wray stated his view that the Town needs to find a way to continue the recycling program, and we need to fund emergency services in a greater way.

Council continued to discuss the proposed budget, and allowed additional citizen input and questions from the assembly. Mr. Tester acknowledged that he would like time to consider the sentiment expressed by the citizens. He made a motion that at the conclusion of the regular agenda, Council recesses the meeting to the next evening to make their final decision at that time. Mrs. Ball seconded the motion, and Council voted unanimously to recess the meeting to Wednesday, June 12 at 7:00 p.m. for deliberation of the budget.

Mayor Lawrence called for a five-minute recess, and at 9:15, he reconvened the meeting.

Introduction of Landscape Specialist

Mr. Holycross introduced Perry Davis, who has been employed to fill the new position of landscape specialist. Perry has considerable experience in landscaping and Mayor Lawrence and the citizens welcomed him to employment with the Town.

Appointments to ABC Board and Planning Board

Mr. Wray moved that the appointments to the ABC Board and to fill a vacant position on the Planning Board be tabled to the July meeting. Mrs. Ball seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Draft Ordinance to Clarify Itinerant Merchant Regulations

Kevin Rothrock presented a staff report and a proposed ordinance to amend the Land Use Code to clarify provisions relating to itinerant merchants. The draft text would limit a permit for an itinerant merchant to one permit per location per year. Ms. Wiseman recommended by motion that the draft be sent to the Planning Board for review and recommendation. Mr. Wray seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

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2. Draft Ordinance to Clarify Regulations Telecommunications Towers

In response to prior suggestions from the Council concerning telecommunication towers, Mr. Holycross provided a proposed amendment to clarify provisions of the Land Use Code that apply to telecommunication towers. The proposal would require the use of alternative tower structures and stealth technology, and would require a conditional use permit for antennas that are part of a cellular network. Mr. Wray moved that the draft be referred to the Planning Board for review and recommendation. Mrs. Ball seconded the motion, and all members voted in favor of the motion.

3. NCDOT Enhancement Project

Mr. Holycross reported that NCDOT is soliciting applications for the 2002 alternative transportation enhancement program, and the deadline for applications is June 28. Marion Rothrock provided estimates in the amount of \$424,000 to construct a sidewalk on the south side of Morris Street from Main Street to the school, and on the east side of Morris Street from the school to Chestnut Drive and up Chestnut Drive to the hospital. Council agreed to eliminate that portion of the sidewalk to be located on the south side of Morris Street. If the application for funding is approved, the Town could receive up to 80% funding. Mr. Rothrock will compute cost estimates with the drainage system construction figured separately, and by consensus, Council agreed to table discussion of this item to the meeting on Wednesday evening.

4. Report from Town Engineer –Highway 221 Sidewalk Construction Project

Mr. Rothrock reviewed ongoing major improvement projects and the status of the work on each. Mr. Wray asked about the plans for the construction of the Highway 221 sidewalk. In response to Mr. Rothrock's reply that it is not ready yet for bidding, Mr. Wray moved that the Council vote to cancel the project. Mr. Tester seconded the motion. Ms. Wiseman stated that she believes if this project is cancelled, it will adversely affect our chances of receiving another grant from NCDOT. The vote was called, and all members voted in favor.

5. Draft Ordinance - Electric Franchise Tax

Mr. Holycross presented a draft copy of an ordinance that would levy a franchise tax against any provider of electric service within the Town. A few towns in the state have enacted legislation in an attempt to place pressure on the state to distribute the franchise revenues that it has been withholding. Ms. Wiseman questioned the exact number of towns that have levied the tax, and moved that Council table this matter to the end of June so that we can determine if this is a trend across the state. Mrs. Ball seconded the motion, and Council voted unanimously to approve the motion.

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Closed Session

Mayor Lawrence announced the completion of the regular agenda items, and Council convened in Closed Session to consult with the Town Attorney by authorization of North Carolina General Statutes 143-318.11(3).

After reconvening in regular session at 10:40 p.m., there was no further business, and Mayor Lawrence recessed the meeting to 7:00 p.m. Wednesday, June 12.