

MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING

FEBRUARY 24 AND FEBRUARY 25, 2003

The Mayor and Board of Commissioners for the Town of Blowing Rock met in special session at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina on February 24 and February 25. Present were Mayor J. B Lawrence, Commissioners Barbara Ball, Terry Lentz, David Wray, Rita Wiseman and Keith Tester. Staff members present were Town Manager Scott Hildebran and Assistant Town Clerk Sharon Greene. Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. The following items were on the agenda for discussion:

The first topic discussed was appointment of volunteer boards. Council members considered the names of several citizens requesting appointments. It was recommended that Mr. Cullie Tarleton fill the vacancy of Ms. Virginia Stacks as an alternate member on the Board of Adjustments. All current board members with expiring terms requested re-appointment. Therefore, Council recommended their reappointment. In addition, Council discussed the need for continual training for all Town Boards. No final action was taken at this time.

Administrative issues were next on the agenda for discussion. The Council discussed a proposed policy for town employees using cell phones. They recommended that if certain employees were permitted to have a cell phone, the Town Manager must monitor the monthly usage. They also felt that a \$15.00 fee would be appropriate for the town to pay towards the monthly bill, with the employee being responsible for the remainder.

Personnel matters were then discussed. Incentive certification pay was discussed for those employees that chose to further their training and receive certifications. Mr. Hildebran stated that a set fee of \$250 annually, per certification would assure that all employees were treated in a fair manner. The Council felt this would be more appropriate than the 2% fee they were receiving at present time.

It has been a long-time tradition for town employees to receive longevity pay during the month of November. Longevity pay has consisted of each employee receiving one percent for each year of employment with the Town, until the maximum amount of \$800 is reached. They also discussed that employees who left employment with the town and returned should receive longevity for prior years of service.

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It is also traditional that employees with 20, 25, or 30 years of creditable service with the town receive a service award bonus. Council suggested the amount for twenty years of service should be adjusted to \$500 instead of \$400. It was recommended that Council should consider the four proposed policies at the next meeting, and that the employee handbook be changed accordingly.

Mr. Hildebran recommended the town establishing an intern program. All Council members were in favor of this idea. No formal action was taken on this matter.

The Council then discussed departmental matters. Council was very appreciative of the hard work done on the monthly reports. The police department was noted for having one of the better report formats.

After some discussion by Council concerning the Emergency Services Department, they recommended that Mr. Hildebran contact the League of Municipalities and have them schedule a comprehensive fire management audit.

Council discussed the landscaping department and the need for equipment storage by this department. The "old Tate property" on Clark Street was mentioned as a place to build a storage building, or the basement of the Legion Building. Neither location was deemed feasible at this time. The consensus of the Council was the small house on the Tiller property would be the best storage area for now.

The Council recommended that the Manager determine if Public Works could demolish the roundhouse located on Wallingford Street.

The Council then discussed the Recreation Department. They felt the pool should be saved and repairs made over a length of time to restore it to a safe and proper working condition. Also a recommendation was made for Kim Oberle to check into the feasibility of selling business passes to merchants to raise money for renovations. An idea to have a fundraiser was also mentioned. Mayor Lawrence recommended looking into keeping the pool open later for people who were unable to make it there during work hours. No final action was taken.

The Council discussed the Planning & Zoning Department and directed Mr. Hildebran to ask that department to send out letters concerning short-term rentals inside town limits. Council strongly felt the town ordinance should be enforced evenly towards everyone.

Council discussed town directional signs. They suggested that four or five directory signs at various downtown locations should be erected in order to do away with the present directional signs.

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The Police Department was mentioned concerning the need for a digital camera. Mrs. Ball stated that Chief Tolbert should bring this before the Blowing Rock Foundation because she felt they would be willing to give a donation.

Council discussed the Public Works Department. Council asked about the replacement of curbing on Main Street, which is scheduled. Equipment needs were also mentioned, no final action was taken at this time.

Mr. Wray and Mr. Hildebran advised that are scheduled to look at a new 40 yard roll-off recycling container for the Recycling Department once they return from the Retreat. Council suggested that businesses should receive flyers stating what items are to be picked up by recycling. They also requested that the sanitation department to be instructed not to pick up cardboard. Cardboard should be broken down and picked up by the Recycling Department. At approximately 12:10 p.m., Mayor Lawrence recessed the meeting for lunch.

The meeting was reconvened at 1:15 p.m. for the second session of the day. Planning issues were to be discussed next. Mr. Tester felt the Town Comprehensive Plan should be a focus. He also felt that engineering fees should be monitored closely. Council also directed Mr. Hildebran to visit the Postmaster and see what the plans for the Post Office would be since their lease would be expiring soon. He was also directed to ask NCDOT to do a thoroughfare study for the town. Council also felt that outside consultation should be acquired by Ed McMahon or someone of a similar background regarding the keeping of the character of the downtown area.

Council discussed the sign ordinance amortization at this time. They suggested the deadline should be extended to March 11th and the implementation date extended to August 31, 2003. Council requested that this issue be placed on the next agenda.

Menu boards were discussed and Council felt they should be allowed with restrictions, at restaurants and real estate offices. The boards should not exceed 18 inches x 24 inches, or three square feet, must be attached to their buildings, and should be limited to one board per business. The Council felt an amendment to the Town Code should be pursued.

GIS was briefly discussed, and Council felt that after comparing prices and vendors on this project that the town should move forward.

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Council discussed property issues concerning a new EMS facility. They requested Mr. Hildebran to set up a meeting with the Clyde Keyes heirs to discuss their property that adjoins the town. Council looked at several plans for the Art & History Museum to be built on the Tiller property on Chestnut. The parking deck that would be built as part of this plan was discussed briefly. Council recommended that we move forward with a partnership with the Museum and was impressed with Schematic #3.

Financial and budgetary issues were discussed at length. Council discussed a local act for an increase in the Occupancy Tax from 3% to 6%.

An increase in Day Camp fees for out of town residents was discussed. Council felt the out-of-town fees should be increased to \$95/\$110. In-town residents should stay the same. Also town employees should be charged the in-town resident prices. Council also suggested that Mr. Hildebran speak to the Parks & Receptions Director Kim Oberle about the possibility of Assistant Director Jamie Schultz being Damp Camp director. A salary adjustment would be made if this arrangement were agreeable for everyone. It was also recommended that a drink machine be installed in the park near the restrooms. Council felt the revenue made from this would be worthwhile.

Cemetery fees were next on the agenda. Council felt that trying to acquire property adjoining the cemetery should be top priority at this time. They felt the fees for plots should be increased from \$600 for out of town residents to \$1250. Also, grave opening would be increased from \$225 to \$425. The in-town resident rate would be raised from \$100 to \$250 and grave openings would remain the same at \$225. At the next regular meeting, the new fee schedule will be considered for approval. No final action was taken on these items at the present

time. Mayor Lawrence recessed the meeting at 4:30 p.m. for a short period. They would later reconvene at 5:00 p.m. to meet with representatives from NCDOT.

After reconvening at 5:00 p.m. with Mr. Sam Erby, Len Hill, Missy Dickens, and Roger Sheets from the N.C. Department of Transportation, Council discussed the widening of U.S. Highway 321. They had concerns regarding blasting, large truck routes, inconvenience for residents and visitors, etc. They also wanted the town to secure all the enhancements to make this highway as beautiful as possible. They felt it would in the town's best interest if NCDOT talked directly with them during the highway construction, instead of a highway widening committee. Council was pleased with the meeting with NCDOT and plan to have monthly meetings if possible. After talking with the representatives, Mayor Lawrence adjourned the meeting at 6:15 p.m. until 9:00 a.m. the next day.

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Upon reconvening at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday morning, 7) Capital Issues were discussed. Council directed Mr. Hildebran to call NCDOT concerning the trail above South Main Street.

Council discussed new Christmas decorations for the Town. They reviewed several photographs of decorations that might be appropriate. They preferred the wreaths with cones and berries and the smaller bow. They also requested that the Town advertise the old decorations for sale.

The Rotary Club is donating a clock to the town for their 100th year anniversary. Council discussed where the clock should be installed. The corner of Park Avenue at the Library or in front of Town Hall where the large tree is presently located were discussed as the most appropriate places. Although the clock would be a wonderful addition to the town, Council felt it might be slightly larger than they anticipated. Mr. Wray and Mr. Lentz volunteered to construct a mock-up in the two areas mentioned, to see if the clock needed to be scaled down.

The website for the town was briefly discussed. The Council inquired about the monthly fee, which is \$18 a month. They were in favor of the website.

They also wanted the Art & History Museum committee to have scheduled deadlines to go by and felt that a 99-year lease might not in the best interest of the town.

They also wanted to schedule meetings with each department head individually to discuss department concerns and capital improvement projects for their departments.

At this time, occupancy tax audits were discussed. Council directed the tax collector to schedule at least three audits for the year.

There being no further business to address, the meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m. The Council would then go to a scheduled tour of the National Park Service facility in Asheville.

Mayor J.B. Lawrence

Sharon H. Greene, Assistant Town Clerk