

MINUTES

Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners

Tuesday, August 26, 2003

The Mayor and Board of Commissioners for the Town of Blowing Rock met in special session on Tuesday, August 26, 2003 at 4:00 p.m. Present were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Barbara Ball, Terry Lentz, Keith Tester, David Wray and Rita Wiseman. Also present were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Administrative Assistant Sonya Long and Mr. Gary Killroy, visitor. The purpose of this work session was to discuss the Emergency Services Study with Fire Chief Marc Hickman.

Mr. Hildebran suggested they should start with the Emergency Study recommendations by Sherman Pickard, and then they could review the annual report for Emergency/Fire Department.

Recommendations - Fire

1. Future – A portion of salary costs should be shared by the fire department corporation (Caldwell, Watauga) once equipment/apparatus is satisfactory.

Action: Once warranted, Staff will draft a letter request to both Caldwell and Watauga Counties for respective proportional costs.

The Board asked that the salary costs be reviewed every year.

2. The extra 24-hour shift off-duty (Kelly Day) is not required and should be discontinued. Pay any associated overtime as required – ½ time.

Action: On the surface, this is an appropriate suggestion. However, there are several reasons for the practice. If we were subject to FLSA (required at 5 full-time shift employees), staff would be limited to 212 hours in a 28-day work cycle without requiring overtime. With a 24/48 duty schedule, each 28-day cycle could create (2) employees with 216 hours of work and (1) employee with 240 hours of work resulting in a total of 36 hours of ½ time overtime pay. Since there are approximately 13 - 28-day – cycles during the year; and, excluding any usage of leave hours mitigating overtime, there is a potential for 468 hours of compensable ½ time pay.

A Kelly Day shift provides an employee a shift off after certain thresholds in order to avoid any overtime compensation. The Emergency Services Department provides a Kelly Day shift every 28 days to the 240-hour employee resulting in a total of 13 Kelly Day shifts per year (roughly 4 per employee).

Mr. Hildebran stated after meeting with the employees, the Kelly Day helps maintain the moral and it provides some balance to the vacation accrual system. After review, the Board agreed that the Kelly Day system utilized was probably satisfactory.

3. The department is encouraged to include the fire apparatus driver-operator training certification standard in its training program.

Action: The Department is currently providing the Driver-Operator Training Certification to its' membership (a course was held last week). This certification will be added to basic requirements for department members.

Mr. Hildebran reviewed examples of the amount of certification hours that are/would be required. Paid employees would be required to maintain those hours, whereas volunteers are encouraged to, but are required to maintain the minimum.

4. Require all members with 5 or less years of service and all new members to obtain firefighter Level I certification within a specified period.

Action: The Department will encourage all members to attain Level I certification and will add the Level I certification as a basic requirement within a specified period.

Chief Hickman pointed out that 216 hours are required for Level I Firefighter.

5. The department should utilize all shift personnel for fire inspections before adding any additional personnel. (Reorder task priorities – i.e. 6-month hydrant inspections are not necessary.)

Action: The Department will develop a schedule using all inspector-certified shift personnel to meet the State Inspection schedule.

Mr. Hildebran suggested the department create and maintain a schedule. In addition, we may possibly have a volunteer fill in for a shift so that one of the paid employees can do fire inspections. Mr. Hickman advised he would develop a schedule to meet the State requirements.

6. Classify properties according to fire risk in order to determine fire inspections needs of the town. (1 to 3 years inspection schedule determined based on risk)

Action: The Department currently utilizes software that classifies all commercial properties in Blowing Rock according to the State Fire Inspections Schedule.

The following is the state mandated inspections schedule as per Section 106 of the NC Building Code Volume 5 (Fire Prevention). This schedule outlines the frequency in which all commercial structures must be inspected.

- Once every year: Hazardous, Institutional, High Rise, Assemblies, and Residential occupancies except one and two family dwellings and only interior common areas of dwelling units of multi-family occupancies
- Once every two years: Industrial and Educational (except public schools which are inspected twice per year)
- Once every three years: Business, Mercantile, Storage, Churches and Synagogues

Chief Hickman reported that currently 64 structures are inspected yearly and 190 every three years.

2. The per call payment to on-duty career personnel should be reconsidered.

Action: This practice will be discontinued.

The Board agreed with discontinuing this item.

3. The practice of paying career personnel \$10 per call when responding on-duty should be reconsidered.

Action: As above, this practice will be discontinued.

The Board agreed with discontinuing this item.

4. The practice of paying elected officers of the fire department for calls not answered should be reconsidered.

Action: The non-profit Volunteer Fire Department organization will be advised of this recommendation.

Other

Hire certified volunteers on a part-time basis to cover station when career personnel are on leave (sick, vacation, training, etc.) to minimize overtime, provide a volunteer incentive, & insure adequate shift coverage.

Action: With the upcoming replacement of Firefighter/EMT David Trivette, the Town can probably save, at minimum, \$4,000 in salary associated costs. Staff requests that Council consider re-appropriation of \$3,000 of this savings for certified volunteers part-time staffing, with part-time pay rates set at \$150 for a 24-hour shift and \$75 for a 12-hour shift, which includes FICA. This would provide a great incentive for volunteer personnel to obtain additional certifications in order to qualify for this part-time duty. Essentially, the re-appropriation would provide an additional 480 hours of coverage and/or service.

Mr. Hildebran suggested looking at this sometime in the near future.

Recommendations – Rescue

5. Future – The Squad may want to consider some type of fee schedule for its services (if and when) donations fail to cover expenses.

Action: The Department will work the Town Manager to periodically review this recommendation. Since the department doesn't transport in Watauga County, this may not be a concern in the Watauga County service area.

Mr. Hildebran reported this would not be applicable in Watauga County but could be in Caldwell County.

6. Contact Caldwell County about providing equitable and direct funding for service rendered to Caldwell County.

Action: The Department and the Town Manager will draft a letter and send a copy of the Emergency Services Study to Caldwell County seeking additional financial support. Further, we will request a direct contract with Caldwell County instead of a contribution from the Lenoir Rescue Squad.

Mr. Hildebran stated he would be meeting with the Caldwell County Manager soon and would send him a copy of the service calls made in Caldwell County. Councilmember Wiseman asked that a copy be sent to Caldwell County Commission Chairman Herb Greene.

7. All members at the basic status should be required to obtain the intermediate status within a reasonable time frame.

Action: The Department will encourage all members to attain their Intermediate certification and will add the Intermediate certification as a basic requirement within a specified period.

Chief Hickman reported that it took 140 additional hours for the intermediate status and 36 hours to maintain it.

8. Based on cost-benefit of the areas served, an increased in funding from Watauga and Caldwell Counties is warranted.

Action: The Department and the Town Manager will draft a letter and send a copy of the Emergency Services Study to both Caldwell and Watauga Counties seeking additional financial support. In addition, we will formally request that Watauga County share costs and co-locate a Paramedic Base with the proposed Emergency Services Department on the U.S. 321 property.

Mr. Hildebran stated the Town would be asking for an increase in funding from Watauga and Caldwell County. He also suggested asking Watauga County to co-locate with Blowing Rock in the new facility.

Other

QRV \$50.00 stipend should be reported with an IRS 1099 form.

Action: The non-profit Volunteer Rescue Department organization will be advised of this recommendation.

Mr. Hickman stated he agreed and thought the recommendations were fair. His concern was with the amount of Certification hours that would be required from the volunteers. Mr. Hickman advised he shared the report with the other employees.

Mr. Hildebran reported the Town had received applications for the vacant position from three Fire Department volunteers and four from other individuals. He suggested that one of the councilmember volunteer to help with the interview process. The Board agreed that Councilmember Wray should do it since he had volunteered with the Fire and Rescue Department several years.

The Board discussed with Mr. Hickman the process in which fire hydrants are tested in town. Mr. Hickman stated they were flushed every six (6) months and were required to test every hrydrant every two years. Councilmember Wary suggested using the Public Works Department to help. Mr. Hildebran suggested using volunteers from the Fire Department with Chief Hickmans supervision. The Board also discussed with Chief Hickman the Fire Inspection process.

The Board discussed the proposed new Emergency Service building and location. Mr. Hildebran stated he would report to the Council once he received more information.

Councilmember Wiseman stated she had received complaints regarding the noise on the Town's property located on Highway 321 by-pass. The Town had been using this property to grind natural material from the storms last year. Mr. Hildebran stated that work should be completed soon.

The Board reviewed the Emergency Services Annual Report with Chief Hickman. Please see **Attachment**.

Councilmember Wiseman suggested coming up with something that the Town could do for all the volunteers.

Mr. Killroy, visitor, stated he was a firefighter in Florida and really appreciated the opportunity to sit in on the meeting. He asked that the Board look at other facilities around the High Country to see what type of facilities they have. His observation was that the Blowing Rock Fire/Rescue building was too small and in a poor location.

Other Business

Mr. Hildebran reported he had received a memo from the Parks and Recreation Department regarding the Trout Derby, sponsored by the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber has asked Parks and Recreation to take over the event. Councilmember Wiseman had concerns over the amount of people it would take to run the event and Recreation staff asking for donations and prizes.

After some discussion, Council asked that this offer be declined as presented.

The Board requested that staff draft Occupancy Tax legislation for possible Council consideration by the end of year.

Mr. Hildebran handed out the recommendations made by the Planning Board regarding Town Center. The Board asked that staff schedule a meeting with Chairman Greene to review those recommendations.

The Board reviewed with Mr. Hildebran the submittal process of building materials by an applicant requesting a Conditional Use Permit. The Board asked that staff make sure that all building materials are submitted before being heard by the Town Council.

Councilmember Wiseman reported she has received an email from Mr. John Aldridge, who lives at the corner of Morris Street and Chestnut. He is very concerned over the traffic congestion during school hours. Mr. Aldridge reported there had been a meeting with several people including the principal of the school to try and find a solution. The Town will receive more information on possible solutions.

Mr. Hildebran reported the Green Hill sewer is nearing completion and paving should be completed soon. The Maple Street wall will be completed by September 9th. Mr. Hildebran stated that Blue Ridge Electric had been out to Green Hill Circle to look at putting in street lights. He would report back to the Board once he hears from Blue Ridge. The south Main Street sidewalk will be completed this week.

With no further discussion or business, the Board adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

J.B. Lawrence, Mayor

Sonya Long, Administrative Assistant