

MINUTES

Town of Blowing Rock

Board of Commissioners

Work Session, October 28, 2003

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, October 28, 2003 at 4:00 in a special work session. Present were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Rita Wiseman, Terry Lentz and Keith Tester. Commissioners Barbara Ball and David Wray were out of town. Staff members present were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, and Assistant Town Clerk Sharon Greene.

Pavement Study:

The first item discussed was a pavement study survey of town streets by B&F Consulting, Inc. Evaluated in this survey were 29.63 miles of town streets and according to the study 34% of the streets needed maintenance. The estimated cost for these repairs would be approximately \$227,775. Town Manager Hildebran presented Council with a street maintenance document for their review. Commissioner Wiseman asked that Country Club Road be added to the document and that it be up-dated every five years. After making these changes Commissioner Wiseman made a motion to accept this document, seconded by Commissioner Lentz, with unanimous approval.

A copy of the **2003 Pavement Study Survey** is on file in the Clerk's office for review.

Water Treatment Plant Spill:

The Town Manager gave the Council an overview of the mishap that occurred at the Water Plant on October 15 and all follow-up action taken.

On October 15, 2003, the Town, through several inadvertent actions, experienced water plant basement flooding and subsequent caustic soda tank line breakage, which eventually drained into the Middle Fork of the South Fork of the New River.

High winds early Wednesday morning (October 15 – recorded locally at 55 mph) created a "power blip". This in turn caused the pumps to trip and the backflow devices to malfunction and the basement of the facility to flood with up to 30 inches of finished water.

Two 4,500-gallon fiberglass tanks, one partially filled with 3,000 gallons of 25% sodium hydroxide - or caustic soda - solution and the other an empty Out of Service Tank, were connected by a line. As the floodwater rose, the flotation of the empty Out of Service Tank broke the connection/valve to the partially full tank containing the caustic soda solution; and the partially-filled tank began to leak. The valve and connection, located on the rear of the tanks, were under the rising water.

The Operator, unknowing of the caustic soda leak or of a need for a discharge permit, began pumping the floodwater out of the basement in order to stabilize the plant and ensure the safety of the Town's drinking water. The Operator was unaware the two tanks were connected due to the empty tank being out of service for the past 15 years.

Once it was realized there was caustic soda released, all pumping was discontinued. An estimated 150,000 gallons of floodwater containing the caustic soda had already been pumped into a drain area that eventually led to the Middle Fork of the South Fork of the New River. Due to the high PH in the water, this resulted in an aquatic life kill in the river.

Town staff contacted the Division of Water Quality, Watauga County Emergency Management and the Town of Boone and informed them of the incident. Other agencies were also contacted through the auspices of Watauga County Emergency Management, including the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Western Branch Office of North Carolina Emergency Management.

The N.C. Division of Water Quality has notified the Town of three violations as a result of the spill, with each possibly resulting in a penalty of \$25,000. The Town Manager advised Council that he has drafted an appeal to the State of N.C. detailing what corrective action the Town has taken or plans to take to prevent future accidents and to also minimize any penalties.

The Town has taken the following steps to modify the Water Plant to implement fail-safe measures to prevent future flooding and any related discharges, and made efforts to mitigate future impacts of the accidental discharge.

The Manager stated the following water plant facility upgrades have been completed and/or under contract:

- Installed Alarm System near basement floor. Alarm will sound at 1" above floor level.
- Removed 25 HP Air Compressor/Replaced with 5 HP Air Compressor that can be operated during peak demand hours- located Compressor outside of the basement area.
- Repaired valve accuator on finished water pump, which permits automatic use.
- Repaired broken fluoride line.
- Will Repair High Service Valve Actuators and Replace UPS.
- Will Install Sump Pump in Waste Sump to keep water away from Waste Pump.
- Will Remove empty Out of Service Caustic Soda Tank.
- Will Rewire Valve Actuators on Finished Water Pumps to close if power is interrupted.

In addition, the Town has made contact with and will assist the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission in the restocking and restoration of the Middle Fork of the South Fork of the New River - in an effort to reestablish a healthy aquatic life to the water.

Finally, the Town realizes there were costs incurred by the State of North Carolina in investigating this mishap and agrees to reimburse the State for costs incurred as a result of this accident.

After a brief discussion, the Council moved on to the Agenda Items.

Blowing Rock Occupancy Tax:

The Occupancy Tax is scheduled for Public Hearing on November 11, 2003. Town Manager Hildebran presented Council with several items for their review concerning occupancy tax. A draft Resolution levying a 6% Occupancy Tax, a draft Ordinance establishing a Tourism Development Authority, and TDA by-laws were presented to Council for discussion.

After a lengthy discussion regarding the draft Resolution and the establishment of a TDA and the by-laws, Council decided to discuss the issue further at the Public Hearing in November.

Draft Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority Ordinance

Attached as Exhibit "A"

They also requested the following changes to the draft documents:

1. TDA members must be "voting residents of the Town".
2. At least one member of the Authority shall be a Town of Blowing Rock "elected official".
 3. Initial terms of appointments will be staggered in which "one of the members appointed from Group One and Group Two shall be for a two-year term" and the other appointed from Group One and Group Two will be a three-year term. This will ensure that the Group One and Group Two appointments will not expire at the same time and provide overlap.
4. Attendance requirements-any member, who misses more than "two (2) consecutive meetings without an excused absence, may be replaced.
5. Powers and Duties will include a requirement – "to submit a proposed annual

Budget to the Blowing Rock Town Council for their review and comment prior to the Authority's formal budget adoption; and shall at least hold joint travel and tourism planning/goal-setting session with the Blowing Rock Town Council".

6. "Committee members may be non-TDA members."
7. Beginning January 1, 2004, the TDA shall appropriate occupancy tax funds as

designated in the adopted FY 2003-04 Annual Budget by the Council. "All remaining tax proceeds for FY 2003-04 shall be placed in a reserve account and may not be appropriated until the new Fiscal Year. However, the Authority may contact for background market research and studies, which enable the Authority to better understand the travel and tourism industry in the Town as well as the impacts of travel and tourism on the Town".

Council felt the TDA should be in place by January 1, 2004 and applications for membership should be accepted in the near future.

Master Sign Plan:

A draft proposal from Southwood Corporation to develop a Comprehensive Town Signage Plan was presented to Council for their review. The plan would review all town signage, develop an integrated public information/wayfinding system, improve signage durability and maintenance, and create opportunities for sign production cost savings. The Town Manager suggested this project could be funded with TDA funds.

The signage plan would be implemented in several stages. After an initial \$6,000 retainer, the Town would agree to spend \$30,000 over a 5-year period. However, Council could also terminate this agreement at their discretion and pay only for the plan.

Commissioner Tester made the motion to move ahead with the Planning Phase of the contract, seconded by Commissioner Lentz. All members were in favor of the motion.

Comprehensive Town Signage Plan Attached as Exhibit "B"

There being no further business, the work session was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

MAYOR _____

J.B. Lawrence

Sharon Greene, Assistant Town Clerk