

Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners

Tuesday, May 25, 2004

The Mayor and Board of Commissioners for the Town of Blowing Rock met in special called session on Tuesday, May 25, 2004, at 4:00 p.m. Present were Mayor J. B. Lawrence, Commissioners Barbara Ball, Terry Lentz, Keith Tester, Rita Wiseman, and David Wray. Also present were Town Manager Scott Hildebran and Town Clerk Barbara Beach.

1. Blowing Rock Historical Society

Mrs. Ginny Stevens, representing the Blowing Rock Historical Society, appeared before Council to request approval of a plan to stabilize the Edgewood Cottage located on the former Tiller property. The group has found documentation indicating that artist Elliot Daingerfield designed the house, and that it was his first home in Blowing Rock. Mrs. Stevens requested that Society members be allowed to clean up the property, remove the addition that has been added on the back of the house, and secure the original building until they can move forward to present a plan for preservation of the cottage. They envision a complementary structure to the proposed Blowing Rock Art and History Museum.

Mr. Hildebran agreed that it will be necessary to clear and clean the site, and Council members approved furnishing a dumpster for the cleanup. Mrs. Stevens confirmed that Council members would be invited to tour the site to provide input into the next step in the preservation process after the cleanup is complete.

2. Tourism Development Authority Budget Update

Mr. Tester summarized recent budget work accomplished in the TDA meetings. He elaborated on the budget structure developed and used by the Authority, and presented the proposed TDA budget for fiscal year 2004-2005 to the Council. He advised Council that one of the first projects the TDA will launch is a consumer survey to gather information on visitors. He also reported that he and other members of the TDA had visited several towns in western North Carolina. The subcommittee focused on observing the structure of TDA groups, visitor centers and related matters in those towns.

Council members commended the TDA for their work.

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3. Budget Work Session

Mr. Hildebran reviewed changes to the FY 2004-2005 budget proposal for various line items as requested by Council during the budget work session held on May 12. He increased the line item for gasoline expense for affected departments an average of 20% to keep up with rising costs.

Mrs. Beach reported that she has continued to audit the telephone bills and has found that BellSouth has overcharged the Town for service. At her request, BellSouth customer representatives are processing a credit in the amount of \$6,000.

Mr. Hildebran presented a report outlining the impact of the proposed increase in water/sewer bills for selected users for the next fiscal year. The worksheet also showed the effect of a tax increase of one cent for each of the specified customers. He advised that even with a projected increase of 9%, Blowing Rock's water/sewer rates remain low in comparison with other towns and cities. Mr. Tester inquired how Mr. Hildebran would publicize a proposed increase in water and sewer rates. Mr. Hildebran replied that it could be announced in a press release, newspaper article, and on the Town web site. Mrs. Ball countered that it is important that citizens be made aware of the necessity to meet USDA average rates to qualify for grants to fund capital needs in the department.

Mr. Hildebran also submitted a report on fund balance for the Town over the past seven years. He noted that many governmental units had experienced a decline in fund balance as a result of cuts in state reimbursements to local governments.

Mr. Tester voiced his opinion that money should be designated each budget year to fund balance, and asked that Council approve an allocation to fund balance in the amount of \$65,000, instead of the proposed \$50,000. Instead of raising taxes, he advocated cutting expenses by \$15,000 or by using less conservative estimates of tax revenue. Mr. Hildebran stated his preference for cutting expenses. Mr. Tester also suggested that Council develop a policy to deal with this issue, and Ms. Wiseman stated her opinion that this should be the first order of business for the next Council retreat.

After discussion, Council agreed by consensus to follow Mr. Tester's suggestion to earmark \$65,000 to fund balance by trimming expenses an additional \$15,000.

Mr. Tester suggested that since BRAAC has a surplus of funds at this time, the elimination of that appropriation could save \$5,500 and that Council could discuss similar budget cuts. Mr. Hildebran noted that the Tourism Development Authority is funding this appropriation.

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Council members shared their concerns that the BRAAC surplus is designated for the cemetery entrance, not for appearance activities in the central business area. Council members discussed the lack of baskets on Main Street and whether flower plantings have improved over previous years. Council also discussed whether the Town could do the annual planting, and agreed that they will further review the matter at another meeting

Lowell Thomas asked to speak. He expressed appreciation to Council members for their diligence in planning for the future of Blowing Rock and offered his support to them. Mr. Sonny Howard suggested that Council consider scheduling a public hearing in between the budget work sessions to allow citizens more opportunity for input into the budget process. Council agreed to consider this idea at the next retreat.

At the conclusion of these agenda items, Mr. Wray made motion that Council convene in closed session to discuss personnel matters by authority of North Carolina General Statutes 143-318.11(6). Mr. Tester seconded the motion, and members voted unanimously in favor.

Upon reconvening, Mayor Lawrence announced Council had conducted a performance evaluation of Town Manager Hildebran. Council members agreed unanimously to provide Mr. Hildebran a \$3,000 bonus to be paid prior to June 30, 2004.

There was no further business, and Mayor Lawrence adjourned the meeting at 5:20 p.m.

J. B. Lawrence, Mayor

Barbara G. Beach, Town Clerk