

MINUTES

Town of Blowing Rock

Board of Commissioners

Special Meeting – August 22, 2006

The Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners held a special meeting on Tuesday, August 22, 2006 at 9:00 a.m. to discuss several items. Present were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Bobby Ball, Keith Tester, Rita Wiseman, Terry Lentz, and Tommy Klutz. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Finance Director Margaret Pierce and Deputy Town Clerk Sonya Long.

Call to Order

Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Discussion Items

1. Electronic Payment Acceptance

Town Manager presented the Council with information regarding the costs and options for accepting credit or debit cards for payments the Town receives.

Mrs. Pierce explained that there would be fees associated with offering this service and several factors would decide which company or system the Town would contract with. One of the more favorable options is the Official Payments Corporation. The company is internet based, which would allow the customer to pay Town bills online or via a toll free number. Fees would be charged directly to the client and the Town would receive the full amount owed. The customer would not be able to walk-in and pay directly with a card, but we could place them on the company's website to make the payment.

Mrs. Pierce stated the funds would be settled directly to our bank account daily. Other electronic payment options through commercial banks for walk-in transactions would require the Town to pay the fees, which would be based on the amount of usage and average dollars of transactions each month. Several other municipalities in North Carolina are using the Official Payments Corporation and would recommend them.

The Council agreed using the Official Payments Corporation would offer convenience to the customer and cost savings to the Town.

*With no further discussion, Commissioner Wiseman made a motion to approve using Official Payments Corporation, seconded by Commissioner Klutz. **Unanimously approved. (Attachment #1-Contract with Official Payments Corp.)***

2. Utility Billing Outsourcing/Newsletter Capability

Town Manager Hildebran explained to the Council that in 2004 the privacy laws changed regarding water/sewer accounts to restrict account information. This information is not subject to the same public information release requirements. He stated that the Town feels postcard billings do not meet the privacy requirements.

Town Manager Hildebran recommended converting to a letter sized billing with a return envelope provided. He also recommended that the billing be outsourced to SouthData. They would print out the bills, tri-fold them, insert the bill and a return envelope, sort by US Postage regulations, and mail them out at a discounted postage rate of \$.29. The estimated cost for this billing service is less than \$1,800.00 annually plus the discounted postage. There would also be the capability to include a 2 page, 2-color newsletter with these mailings as often as the Town desires. The bills would go out two days after they receive the download file.

Mrs. Pierce stated she called other municipalities that are with ICS, our accounting software and SouthData. They seem to have a great working relationship and expressed great compatibility with both software programs. This will lower our initial setup costs with ICS and SouthData since data changes are already written and tested.

Regarding the newsletter, the Town would download the file to SouthData, and they would print, fold and insert with the water/sewer bills. The postage would not change, but there would be an additional cost of \$.10 each.

Commissioner Tester made a motion to approve outsourcing the water/sewer bills to SouthData along with the newsletter. Commissioner Ball seconded the motion. **Unanimously approved.(Attachment #2-Proposal from SouthData)**

3. Forest Service Update

Town Manager Hildebran updated the Council on the latest information regarding the Forestry Globe Project. Mr. Hildebran along with Mayor Lawrence, Commissioner Ball, Commissioner Tester and Watauga County Commissioner Keith Honeycutt, would be meeting with Congresswoman Foxx later in the week to try and get the area designated as a "Scenic Area."

Commissioner Ball stated that the Environmental Law Center, a non-profit group, would be helping in preparing a draft bill to present to Congress regarding the designation and that Grandfather Mountain was very much for this bill.

Everyone thanked Commissioner Ball for the hard work and dedication she has put forth for this major issue. Mayor Lawrence stated they should include in the draft bill a distance perimeter for the view shed. Commissioner Ball pointed out that if the designation were to pass, nothing would change on the 20,000 acres.

Other Items

1. Town Manager Hildebran stated the Town has been working with the NC Department of Transportation regarding the wayfinding road signage program. NCDOT has expressed concern about the safety of the proposed signage. Mr. Hildebran proposed contracting with former NCDOT Boardmember Mr. Sam Ebry to help the Town discuss possible solutions to this problem.

Commissioner Wiseman made a motion to approve the contract with Mr. Erby up to \$1,000, seconded by Commissioner Ball. **Unanimously approved.**

2. Commissioner Wiseman reported to the Council the new plans for the four laning of Highway 321, Valley Boulevard. These plans now show graded slopes along the highway instead of rock retaining walls.
3. Town Manager reminded the Council of the High Country Council of Government meeting on September 1, 2006 at Linville Ridge at 6:00 p.m.

Town Manager asked to go into Closed Session at 9:35 a.m. to discuss several personnel issues. Commissioner Klutz made a motion to enter into Closed Session by authorization of NCGS 143-318.11 (3), seconded by Commissioner Tester. **Unanimously approved at 9:36 a.m.**

The regular meeting reconvened at 10:15 a.m.

Commissioner Klutz asked for an update on the Town beginning debris pick-up on a regular basis. Town Manager Hildebran reported he had checked with other towns and the fees charged. The Commissioners agreed they would like to see the Town implement this as soon as possible and charge the citizens a reasonable amount to pick the debris up. Mr. Hildebran stated staff would draft a proposal for consideration in the near future.

Commissioner Wiseman asked that someone from the Town call Mark Crumpler, owner of the Brass Exchange in regards to his concerns on parking enforcement.

Adjournment

With no further business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

Mayor _____

J.B. Lawrence

Attest: _____

Sonya Long, Deputy Town Clerk