

# MINUTES

## Town of Blowing Rock

### Board of Commissioners

#### Special Meeting-February 27, 2007

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners held a special meeting on Tuesday, February 27, 2007. Attending were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Bobby Ball, Rita Wiseman, Keith Tester, Terry Lentz and Tommy Klutz. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, and Town Clerk Sharon Greene.

#### Call to Order

Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

#### Infrastructure Issues (Public Works/Water/Wastewater)

Council met with WTP/WWTP Supervisor Tom McRary to discuss his departmental plans, issues and accomplishments.

Mr. McRary updated Council on various equipment items that required maintenance and some new items that were installed. Items discussed were; the waste pump being rebuilt at a cost of approximately \$3,000, several valve replacements, the gauge on the Green Hill tank that was installed etc.

Mr. McRary advised that the Chetola Lift Station was in need of two new pumps which cost approximately \$2,800 each. Commissioner Wiseman recommended that both pumps be replaced.

Town Manager Hildebran advised that a shut-off valve was to be installed outside the water plant facility and one on Main Street to alleviate the town having to shut off water in large areas when problems occur. Commissioner Klutz asked if the shut-off valves were checked periodically to insure they were working properly. He also inquired about the cost for automatic valves. Mr. McRary stated that

automatic valves would cost around \$6,000-\$7000 each. He also stated that a valve exercise program was not in place, but one was needed.

Mr. McRary stated the Water Treatment Plant was in fairly good working order for its age. Council extended their gratitude to Mr. McRary for a job well done.

Town Manager Hildebran advised that the Town Engineer Doug Chapman was unable to attend to discuss CIP items due to the birth of his daughter, as well as the Public Works Director Johnny Lentz who was out of town attending a conference. Mr. Hildebran stated that meetings with them would be scheduled later to discuss other infrastructure items.

## **Planning Issues**

Next, Council met with Planning Director Kevin Rothrock to discuss the following departmental plans and issues:

- Consider flexibility with 5-units per acre residential density standard in Central Business District, but maintain current height, setback, parking and open space requirements
- Consider allowing totally submerged parking in Central Business District without counting toward 40' maximum height limit – but mandate performance bond and prohibit appeals to BOA due to difficulty of construction
- Proceed with annexation process of The Rock/Gideon Ridge area (note: seek zoning to insure viability of (2) significant tourism properties, but provides protection in the event of sale of property)
- Proceed with condemnations of dilapidated commercial structures
- Begin discussions with the property owners of dilapidated residential structures
- Continue with Landscape/Tree Ordinance revisions and consider at March 2007 meeting
- Continue to review and maintain Town Comprehensive Plan
- Discuss Building Permit Fee Schedule modification at upcoming Council/Planning Department annual meeting (consider modest water heater/furnace changeout fees)
- Proceed with CUP Tracking Database Software (include landscaping component & parking lot maintenance)
- Use Fire Inspector to assist in CUP compliance

- Monitor impacts of U.S. 321 Widening Project (work tourism partners)
- Continue with GIS (Geographic Information System) Layer Development
- Maintain current Short-term Rental Policy
- Proceed with Town Land Use Code Review (use outside assistance)
- Review Downtown Parking Requirements/Parking Study (including handicap spaces)
- Review Outside Dining Regulations/Outside Display of Merchandise (thorough review to consider the concerns of the various parties)
- Check on status of Napier Building
- Follow-up on inventory of historic buildings in CBD

Mr. Rothrock stated that residential density had been discussed and if changes were to be made it needed to be mandated by the Town Code. He also updated Council on the Gideon Ridge annexation process, stating that public notice was going to be sent to property owners in that area on April 5<sup>th</sup> and a Public Hearing would be held on May 8<sup>th</sup>. He also stated that public informational meetings would be held at Town Hall to educate residents on what to expect with this annexation. Commissioner Wiseman had questions with regard to the zoning of The Blowing Rock and the Gideon Ridge Inn. She asked if all the other properties would be zoned residential with The Blowing Rock and the Gideon Ridge Inn being grandfathered. Mr. Rothrock stated his department was looking into that.

Dilapidated structures in various parts of town were discussed. Mr. Rothrock advised that several structures on Ransom Street had been discussed and also a property located on Skyland Drive. Mr. Rothrock stated that he needed action from Council with regard to the dilapidated structure located on Hwy 221.

Mr. Rothrock advised the landscape ordinance was currently being worked on by a subcommittee of the Planning Board and hopefully would go before the Planning Board during their March meeting.

Other items that were discussed briefly were newspaper/magazine racks on Main Street, a permit tracking system, the master signage plan, etc. Mr. Rothrock also stated that his department felt that building permit fees needed to be amended and calculated by sq. footage of a structure instead of a set fee. He suggested that a fee for residential construction be \$0.49 per square foot and that commercial be \$0.67 to \$0.68 per square foot. Commissioner Lentz felt that \$0.50 to \$0.55 per square foot would be more appropriate for residential construction in this area, and \$0.70 per square foot for commercial. It was decided that the fee schedule would be further discussed during the upcoming budget process.

Mr. Rothrock advised that he had not received any complaints recently concerning short-term rentals.

Council also discussed the idea of utilizing the aid of a town fire inspector regarding CUP compliance. Commissioner Klutz recommended that a Level I Inspector be hired in the planning department. Commissioner Wiseman inquired if this was needed, with Mr. Rothrock stating that it would be very helpful. Commissioner Lentz stated that there was less and less property in this area that could be developed and that soon it would be mostly renovations, unless more property was annexed into the town limits. Commissioner Klutz stated he was thinking of the future and felt another person would be very useful. Town Manager Hildebran suggested that the Town contract with an area inspector during their off-duty times when help was needed.

An inventory of the historic properties in town was also discussed. Commissioner Ball suggested that this would be a good project for the Blowing Rock Historical Society.

### Fiscal Management (Administration/Budgetary) Issues

Town Manager Hildebran and Town Finance Officer Margaret Pierce were present to discuss the following administration/budgetary items:

#### Administration

- Consider Town Hall Building Window Replacement during this FY
- Consider Computer Hardware/Software Upgrades in FY 2007-08 budget process
- Continue to study the Cleaning/Janitorial part-time position

#### Budgetary

- Place Retirement/Longevity Bonus Policy revisions on February agenda for consideration
- Proceed with Employee Handbook Update and place on future Council agenda for consideration
- Continue to monitor competitiveness of salaries and consider during FY 2007-08 budget process
- Continue to monitor health insurance costs for retirees and consider a 15-year length of service minimum for retirement insurance coverage
- Continue to produce bi-monthly newsletter and place copies at post office

- Continue TDA set aside of 1/3 of monies for Town infrastructure
- Continue to maintain and fund Debt Service Schedule
- Continue to maintain and fund Fleet Capital Replacement Schedule
- Continue to monitor utility rates during Water/Sewer Capital Improvement Plan implementation to insure sufficiency
- Forward 2006 Town Accomplishments List to newspapers

Mr. Hildebran stated that quotes for the window replacements at Town Hall were due by March 12<sup>th</sup>. He also advised that employee handbook updates were being done. Mr. Hildebran advised that the Town was looking at a 20% increase for employee health insurance and stated that he was checking on other avenues that could be taken, such as approaching the General Assembly on a bill that would allow the Town to join the State Employees' Comprehensive Major Medical Plan. He stated that he would get in touch with local representative Cullie Tarelton regarding this issue if Council desired. **A motion was made by Commissioner Tester allowing Town Manager Hildebran to pursue legislation from the General Assembly requesting that the Town of Blowing Rock be allowed to join the State Employees' Comprehensive Major Medical Plan, seconded by Commissioner Ball. Unanimously approved.**

#### **N.C. General Assembly Letter of Request Attached as Exhibit A**

Town Manager Hildebran stated that police officers were receiving a 5% state mandated contribution towards a 401-K plan and he felt it would only be fair that general employees receive some contribution to a 401-K plan also. He also advised that the Town of Boone as well as Watauga County provided this benefit to their employees and it also helps with recruiting and retaining employees. Mr. Hildebran stated Finance Officer Pierce had calculated a one percent contribution, costing \$12,000.00 per year, just to get an idea on the figures. Mayor Lawrence stated he would like to see employees receive a higher percentage than one percent. It was consensus of Council to allow Mr. Hildebran to further pursue this issue.

Mr. Hildebran also advised that the Blowing Rock Community Library had requested more funding from the town for payment of staff. Mr. Hildebran stated they were currently receiving an annual amount of \$2,000.00. Council decided that an increase in funds would not be given to the library at this time.

Commissioner Klutz stated an increase in salary was needed in several instances. Commissioner Tester stated he would like for Mr. Hildebran and Mrs. Pierce to run some figures on a salary increase so that Council could see what impact it would have on the budget.

Town Manager Hildebran stated that on March 6<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 p.m., Council would hold their annual meeting with the TDA and immediately following, Council would meet with Public Works Director Johnny Lentz and Town Engineer Doug Chapman.

Before adjourning the meeting, a naming policy and an ordinance change regarding \$1.00 minimum underpayment/overpayment on taxes were also briefly discussed. Council requested the \$1.00 minimum policy be placed on the March agenda for consideration.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

**MAYOR** \_\_\_\_\_

**J.B. Lawrence**

**Attest:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Sharon Greene, Town Clerk**