

MINUTES

Town of Blowing Rock

Board of Commissioners

Special Meeting- September 10, 2007

The Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners held a special meeting in conjunction with the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce Executive Board on Monday, September 10, 2007 at 4:00 p.m. The meeting was held in the Council Board Room at 1036 Main Street. Present were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Bobby Ball, Keith Tester, Terry Lentz, Rita Wiseman and Tommy Klutz. Staff members present were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Emergency Services Director Kent Graham, and Town Clerk Sharon Greene. Chamber of Commerce Executive Board Members present were President Pam Vines, and President-Elect Bill Hall. Others present were Chamber Director Charles Hardin, and TDA Director Tracy Brown,

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Vision 20/20 Task Force Initiatives.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 4:08 p.m. and welcomed those in attendance.

DISCUSSION ITEM

Chamber 20/20 Vision Initiatives

1. Town Council – Concerns and/or Possible Duplications/Conflicts

Chamber Director Charles Hardin gave a brief history of the Chamber stating in January 1927 the Chamber was formed to promote tourism for this area. Mr. Hardin spoke of the Chamber's excitement in 2003 when the Tourism Development Authority was formed. He stated at that time the Chamber felt the need to redefine their mission.

Mr. Hardin spoke of the Chamber's involvement in the development of the Blowing Rock Leadership Challenge and of their interest in the economic development in Blowing Rock. As stated in the 2004 Town Comprehensive Plan, economic development was an issue that needed addressing. Mr. Hardin felt the Chamber and the Town could create a public/private partnership and work together. He advised that Blowing Rock was a very successful community, but stated "current success did not guarantee future success". He spoke of the many changes in the environment and that other communities were emulating Blowing Rock and there was competition from these other communities. Even though Blowing Rock was very successful it was no longer the only tourist area around.

Mr. Hardin advised approximately five months prior, the Vision 20/20 Initiatives were created by a very diverse group of people with approximately 150 years of combined residency, working with initiatives derived from the 2004 Comprehensive Plan which each member of the group was required to read. Mr. Hardin spoke of the Chamber's mission to protect the village character of Blowing Rock and their desire to work in a collaborative effort with the Town. Mr. Hardin spoke of the following initiatives:

1. Town Center/Retail – What was wanted for Blowing Rock, how to get it, and how to keep it- recruitment of new businesses in the downtown district to achieve an even balance
2. Historic Preservation – Extend manpower and money to protect historic property located in town
3. 321 By-Pass – Entrance to Blowing Rock the most underdeveloped and vulnerable area of Blowing Rock – decide what is wanted, how to get and keep it
4. Resource Development – Research facts, gather information, apply for grants and funding with the Town's permission

Mr. Hardin stated the Chamber wished to collaborate with the Town in all aspects developing a secure partnership.

Pam Vines, Executive Board President, and Bill Hall President-Elect, also reiterated the fact that the Chamber wished to work with the Town in a collaborative effort concerning economic development.

Mayor Lawrence thanked them for their comments and asked if anyone had questions or comments they would like to share.

Commissioner Lentz advised that he felt the Chamber's main function was to promote business in Blowing Rock and that he was unsure as to why a subcommittee was formed trying to perform many of the duties of town boards without Council's knowledge. Mr. Lentz stated that historically Council appointed members to various Town boards. Commissioner Lentz felt that Council was being micromanaged by this subcommittee.

Mr. Hardin agreed that a joint session between Council and the Chamber was probably needed sooner and this subcommittee was formed to add additional support to Council and Town staff and they did not wish to infringe upon previously determined objectives of the Town.

Mrs. Vines stated the Chamber was initially interested in finding out and researching this effort and seeing if it was possible. The idea of forming a subcommittee was decided upon after receiving input from many people interested in aiding the Chamber with this effort; by implementing and showing support. The intent was never to micromanage but to gather ideas and move forward with their plans.

Commissioner Lentz mentioned the Blowing Rock Appearance Advisory Commission approaching Council offering their help in beautifying the town and the decision to create such a board with members appointed by Council. Mr. Lentz felt the Chamber was overlapping the Town in their initiative regarding the 321 By-Pass, stating this area had been discussed by Council and Town staff for many long hours and worked with N.C.D.O.T. and executed an agreement on amenities to be provided. It was hard for him to digest that special interests groups were discussing other plans for this area.

President-Elect Bill Hall stated no action had been taken by this subcommittee and there was no intention of doing anything without Council's involvement. He felt there had been some misunderstanding regarding the subcommittee's intentions.

Commissioner Ball stated after spending the past 14 years on the Town Council and being a resident of Blowing Rock for the past 24 years, she felt insulted by several emails that had been circulating around town regarding issues that Council and Town staff had worked very hard on. She felt these people should run for office if there were issues they wished to change. Commissioner Ball affirmed that Town staff, volunteers on Town boards, as well as Council had worked hard trying to maintain what Blowing Rock is presently.

Mr. Hall stated he was not aware of the emails that Mrs. Ball was referring to, and it was never the intent of this group to undermine Council. Commissioner Lentz stated that Public Hearings were held while developing the comprehensive plan and lots of hard work had gone into the planning. Mr. Hardin responded that there were areas of the comprehensive plan that remained to be done and they were

there to assist Council. Commissioner Lentz stated the Chamber needed to work at getting the businesses in town currently not members of the Chamber to join. Mr. Hardin stated the chamber would like to have all businesses located in town as members but businesses come and go in town and the chamber used to promote tourism but the TDA is now doing that. Several members of Council felt the areas in which Mr. Hardin spoke of had been in progress for years. Mr. Hardin apologized if Council was insulted by the Chamber initiatives but they were only researching and trying to find what was available so they could bring these resources to Council to aid in the progression of these initiatives.

Chamber President Pam Vines stated the Vision 20/20 committee consisted of business people in town and she felt they had done a good job. Mrs. Vines stated she did not want the Town to lose its quaint character and felt the chamber needed to help businesses find a spot on Main Street so there would be a variety of businesses in this area. Commissioners Ball and Lentz agreed that was the chambers job.

Commissioner Lentz felt Council should be informed of plans made by the Chamber if they were going to be using Town properties. He stated that "Mitford Days" had already been planned and advertised to the public before Council was approached about the use of Town properties during this event.

Commissioner Wiseman stated that Council wanted to work with the Chamber but she had a problem with the Vision 20/20 committee soliciting money without Council's approval. She also stated she was approached by a Vision 20/20 member regarding the initiatives and it was announced that she endorsed the Vision 20/20 Initiatives 100 percent. Ms. Wiseman stated she did not endorse anything that overlapped what the Town was already doing or any fundraising efforts that were being done without Council's knowledge.

Commissioner Wiseman mentioned several comments she had heard regarding rent along Main Street, which according to Ms. Wiseman was market driven not something the Town could change. She spoke of other comments regarding the primary fire district which is regulated by the state not the town, and the density and height standards. Mrs. Vines stated that several things had been discussed during their Vision 20/20 committee meetings but they had not materialized.

Commissioner Klutz stated the Vision 20/20 Committee and the Town had a common interest and he felt they could work together to accomplish their goals. He also mentioned several comments he had heard that he did not agree with, but there were certain areas of the comprehensive plan that needed to be addressed.

Commissioner Lentz advised that in his opinion the subcommittee was trying micromanage the Town. He stated that Council was open to suggestions and could accept them or not, the same as other committees in town such as the TDA, Blowing Rock Appearance Advisory Commission, etc.

Commissioner Tester stated the Vision 20/20 concept was good and the meeting between Council and the Chamber should have happened sooner. He also stated that in looking back on the decision to increase Occupancy Tax in 2003 and the development of the TDA, in his opinion this decision jerked the heart and soul from the Chamber of Commerce requiring them to redefine their goals. He wished Council had taken a little more time thinking about the consequences of creating the Tourism Development Authority and how it would take away Chamber responsibilities. He also spoke of the stressful relationship between the Chamber and the TDA and felt the Vision 20/20 initiatives if done correctly could supplement what Council and staff were doing.

Commissioner Lentz responded that Watauga County would have received 3% occupancy tax if the Town had not voted to enact this.

Commissioner Tester stated that two thirds of occupancy tax money was to be spent on the promotion of tourism. He spoke of Blowing Rock being a quaint town with quaint shops, but the environment was changing and the motels in town did not have the 21st Century technology that people were looking for today.

Commissioner Ball felt the Chamber needed a clear understanding as to where they stood and she did not feel they should overstep or duplicate what the Town was already working on.

Chamber President-Elect Bill Hall stated it was never the intention of the Chamber to duplicate the Town and he apologized for this misunderstanding but he felt they could all work together and accomplish what was best for Blowing Rock.

Commissioner Wiseman wanted to know what direction to go at this point. It was decided that Town Manager Hildebran and Chamber Director Charles Hardin should meet and discuss what direction the Chamber should follow and how they could assist the Town.

Commissioner Klutz spoke of the need to preserve Blowing Rock and he did not feel Blowing Rock needed to be compared to other towns or cities, and Blowing Rock had gotten to where it was today by itself.

Commissioner Ball mentioned that she did not understand why people moved into Blowing Rock and then felt the need to change it.

Commissioner Tester stated it did not matter if a person was a resident in town for 1 year or 25 years as long as they paid taxes to the Town they had a right to voice their opinions.

Mayor Lawrence thanked everyone for attending the meeting and stated that Council was always open to suggestions.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

MAYOR _____

J.B. Lawrence

Attest: _____

Sharon Greene, Town Clerk