

MINUTES
Town of Blowing Rock
Town Council Meeting
June 13, 2017

The Town of Blowing Rock Town Council met in regular session on Tuesday, June 13, 2017, at 6:00 p.m. The meeting took place at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street, Blowing Rock, N.C. Present were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Mayor Pro-tem Albert Yount and Council Members Jim Steele, Sue Sweeting, Doug Matheson and Ray Pickett. Others in attendance were Town Manager Ed Evans, Town Attorney Allen Moseley, Town Engineer Doug Chapman, Finance Officer Nicole Norman, Planning and Inspections Director Kevin Rothrock, Public Works and Utilities Director Mike Wilcox, Fire Chief Kent Graham, Police Captain Aaron Miller, Parks & Recreation Director Jennifer Brown and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner, who recorded the minutes.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Council Member Sweeting made a motion to adopt the agenda, seconded by Council Member Pickett. Unanimously approved.

SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS AND REPORTS

Highway 321 Valley Boulevard Construction Update

Kipp Turner of Maymead Construction began his monthly update on the Highway Widening Project by stating traffic was opened into a four-lane pattern all the way to Greenhill Road. Mr. Turner advised the traffic switch will help keep traffic moving during the weekend. Mr. Turner further advised lane closures will still occur during the week to allow finishing of shoulder work, back filling and driveway tie-in's. Mr. Turner stated removal of the barrels should help traffic to move much smoother.

Mr. Turner advised crews are continuing to install remaining caps and aluminum railings on the retaining wall in front of the golf course. Mr. Turner further advised crews have started prep work for staining of the wall.

Mr. Turner stated additional drainage and wall work currently is in process in front of the Holiday Inn and drainage work has been completed in front of Blowing Rock Furniture.

Mr. Turner advised below The Rock Road excavation work being done in the curve is in preparation for the retaining wall. Mr. Turner stated he has gotten numerous questions regarding that curve and how the road will come through the curve. He stated with the work being done it should be clearer how the road will come through.

Mr. Turner advised the wall work below Cone Orchard Road has continued and should be completed within the next few weeks. Mr. Turner further stated guard rail work has begun at Greenhill Road and will be installed down to Old Orchard Road.

Mayor Lawrence thanked Mr. Turner for his update.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Council Member Pickett made a motion to approve the minutes for the regular meeting held on May 9, 2017 and Budget Work Sessions held on May 31, 2017 and June 1, 2017, seconded by Council Member Sweeting. Unanimously approved.

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Recommended Budget for Fiscal Year 2017-2018

Town Manager Evans presented via PowerPoint an overview of the budget process, priorities of the budget, revenue streams, expenses and highlights of the budget including the final phase of the Cost and Pay Study, GO Bond debt and Automated Meter Infrastructure (AIM) for water meters. Town Manager Evans explained meetings were held with department heads and Council to discuss upcoming needs for the FY 2017-2018 Budget and the proposed budget was originally presented to Council at the May meeting. Town Manager Evans advised two (2) separate work sessions were held on May 31 and June 1 to discuss details associated with the budget.

Mayor Lawrence asked for public comments or questions. Betsy Wilcox asked for an explanation of where the money being used for the Fire Department's additional staffing comes from since the Town is just a pass through. Town Manager Evans explained it comes from the counties, Watauga and Caldwell, from the Ad Valorem tax which is part of the sales tax.

David Rogers asked Town Manager Evans to clarify the difference between Administration and Finance and Central Government. Town Manager Evans advised Administration and Finance is everyone who works in the office and Central Government is operations as a whole.

Karen Herterich asked if Caldwell County pays Blowing Rock to service the Blowing Rock Fire District in this area correctly. Ms. Herterich explained the reason she was asking for clarification is because two (2) years ago, Caldwell County doubled the tax assessment on Caldwell County properties and she hoped by the county doing this it would mean they doubled their contribution to the Blowing Rock Fire Department as well since Blowing Rock provides all the services to these residents. Fire Chief Kent Graham advised the funding pass through is provided half from Caldwell County and half from Watauga County. Ms. Herterich asked how many residential properties and how many commercial properties does that cover for the Caldwell County's portion. Fire Chief Graham advised

very few are commercial properties and approximately 250 are residential. Ms, Herterich stated she is very dissatisfied with the feeling that both counties use Blowing Rock as a "Cash Town".

Charlie Sellers stated the Blowing Rock Attraction pays approximately \$17,000 to Caldwell County in property taxes each year, he explained he doesn't think that is fair to the Town since all the services they receive are from the Town. Mr. Sellers advised he felt the purchase of water meters should be a Town responsibility and not the home owners. Town Manager Evans explained the proposal is for the Town to cover the cost of the new water meters that need to be replaced and the additional cost to the consumer would be for the meter head which will benefit the consumer greatly. Mr. Sellers suggested to keep in mind some residents do not own a computer so therefore they would not utilize this tool and felt it would not be a benefit to them. Finance Officer Nicole Norman advised Holly Autry, Utility Billing Administrator, will have access to the Dashboard in addition to the consumer and will be able to monitor the water meters as well. Ms. Norman further advised a pilot of the program has been being done in certain areas in Town and has been determined to be a great feature to prevent issues from going on undetected.

Rita White asked if there would be any administrative cost savings in switching to the automated water meters. Town Manager Evans advised the work level would be basically the same so no savings would be made, this would just be an additional tool that would benefit the consumer greatly.

George Wilcox gave a detailed statement regarding the proposed tax increase and bond related projects that would be done using funds from the proposed .03 cent tax increase. Mr. Wilcox advised he strongly recommended careful consideration be given to push all except the top priority bond financed projects out until later in the approved ten (10) year bond period. Mr. Wilcox advised he felt the proposed tax increase was excessive in conjunction with the Watauga County tax increase.

With no further questions or comments, Council Member Pickett made a motion to close the public hearing, seconded by Council Member Sweeting.

Mayor Pro-tem Yount thanked Town Manager Evans and Finance Officer Nicole Norman for all their hard work on the first honest budget of his time on Council. Mayor Pro-tem Yount stated the Town is the prettiest it's ever been and the business of the Town is tourism. He advised he didn't feel the Town should go back on the neglect of the Town. Mayor Pro-tem Yount further advised years ago, before any of the current Council was ever on the board, North Carolina put a Memorandum of Understanding of Hwy 321 on the Town which states when the road is completed the Town will be responsible for mowing the grass and clearing snow off the sidewalks on Hwy 321. Mayor Pro-tem stated he wanted to remind everyone all of Council are tax payers as well.

Council Member Steele stated he wanted everyone to understand even if the budget is passed there are certain items in the budget that don't necessarily have to be done. He

explained Council will prioritize the things absolutely needed, not the things necessarily wanted. Council Member Steele advised the Council isn't just tax and spend and that Council does care about the Town and how the tax payer's money is spent.

Council Member Matheson explained one of the biggest items funded in this budget is the fourth (4th) and final implementation of the Cost and Pay Study. Council Member Matheson further explained when this study began three (3) years ago, it was embarrassing to Council when they learned what Town employees were making compared to other Town's around. He advised he was glad to be finishing the process and finally bringing employees up to where they need to be to be a competitive market.

Council Member Sweeting advised going through the budget process it was apparent the choices were to cut personnel or cut services and as a Council it was decided not to do either of those. Council Member Sweeting explained Council is being charged with maintaining equipment, which hasn't really been done in the past due to not having money in the budget. She explained this is a very expensive task, but feels it's a must to protect the citizens. Council Member Sweeting advised she too was not initially for the .03 cent tax increase and she tried to find some sort of fluff in the budget, but couldn't find any. She commended Town Manager Evans and Finance Officer Nicole Norman on all their hard work and stated she stood behind the budget.

Council Member Pickett concurred with Council's comments. He advised he read the budget for a month and more than once and couldn't find any fluff. Council Member Pickett stated he too stood behind the budget.

Council Member Matheson made a motion to adopt the FY 2017-2018 budget as presented, seconded by Council Member Sweeting. Unanimously approved.
Attachment A- FY 2017-2018 Budget PowerPoint

Mayor Lawrence thanked Town Manager Evans, Finance Officer Nicole Norman and Council Members for the hard work and thought they put into the budget.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Destination by Design – Gateway Update

Teresa Buckwalter gave an update on the Sunset Gateway design project. Ms. Buckwalter reviewed the highlights from the stakeholders and public meetings which were held in May. Ms. Buckwalter briefly reviewed potential next steps which included looking at design development for the streetscape and the gateway concept to take those to the next level and continued stakeholders engagement. Council thanked Ms. Buckwalter for her update.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Watauga County School Superintendent

Watauga County School Superintendent Dr. Scott Elliott updated Council on the drain repair project at Blowing Rock School. Dr. Elliott explained the reasoning for the repair is due to not being able to fully utilize the class room space in the school due to the ongoing flooding issue. Dr. Elliott advised the project should begin within the week and take approximately three (3) to four (4) weeks to complete. Council Member Sweeting asked if Town Engineer Doug Chapman had reviewed the plan. Mr. Chapman advised staff had reviewed the plan, but he had not done so yet. Council Member Sweeting advised she would like for him to review the project since he knew what is in the plan for Sunset Streetscape and maybe he could be some assistance to tie work together with the School project and the Town's future project.

Council thanked Dr. Elliot for his update and advised him the Town would help out in any way they could with anything the school may need.

2. EFLAP Grant – Bass Lake Sidewalk

Town Engineer Doug Chapman gave an overview of the Blass Lake sidewalk project which includes construction of concrete curb and gutter and 5-foot wide sidewalk along US 221, from Main Street to the Bass Lake pedestrian entrance. Mr. Chapman reviewed an aerial photo of the project plan. Mr. Chapman advised the complete design of the project should take approximately six (6) weeks to complete and should be ready by the end of July. After completion, the design will be reviewed by NCDOT since it is a NCDOT project which should take a minimum of six (6) weeks, after which the project will then be bid out to contractors. Mr. Chapman advised that 80% of the project is being funded through the EFLAP Grant.

Council thanked Mr. Chapman for his update and advised they look forward to seeing the design and the project begin.

3. Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation – Resolution

Resolution supporting the reopening of facilities at Doughton Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway was presented to Council. Council Member Sweeting made a motion to approve the Resolution of support, seconded by Council Member Pickett. Unanimously approved. **Resolution Approving Reopening of Facilities at Doughton Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway - Attachment B**

MANAGER'S REPORT

Town Manager Evans gave a brief report to Council:

- Local road paving – Hilltop Way, Norwood Circle, Country Club, Country Club Lane, Chestnut Circle and Chestnut Drive temporary patching.
- Flooring Donated by the Bridge Club
- Flowers – hanging baskets and planters have been placed along Main Street and Sunset Drive and are out for the season. Thank you to Chris Pate and Ricky Hudson for all their hard work to make Town beautiful.

- BRAAC Town Clean-up occurred the week of May 15th-19th. We want to express our appreciation to all the citizens who came out to help the clean-up and make the Town beautiful.
- Town Employee work day May 18th. We want to thank all the Town employees who came out to put forth their physical labor to help make the Town look great.
- NCDOT complied with the Town's request and began ditch work repair on Main Street between Chetola and Hill Street.
- Water Plant Chemical feed room repairs have been completed.
- Town Inspector John Warren completed his required courses to obtain his Fire Inspector Level II certificate.

SPEAKERS FROM THE FLOOR

Lorry Mulhern and Steve Irace from the Green Park Inn spoke regarding the ongoing speeding issue on Highway 321. Ms. Mulhern advised she felt as though the speeding was significantly higher since the highway had been opened into the four lanes. Ms. Mulhern stated she had guests complaining about the traffic noise and requesting refunds because of it. Ms. Mulhern expressed her feeling was the Town needed to get the speeding issue under control. Ms. Mulhern also stated there is only one speed limit sign and that sign is bent over and can hardly be seen. Mr. Irace reiterated what Ms. Mulhern had said about the speeding issue on Hwy 321. Mr. Irace voiced his concern with the Sunset Gateway project and advised he would like to see a focus be shifted toward the North and South Gateways to the Town. Mr. Irace explained that the Blowing Rock sign below Green Park Inn is in much need of repair and he felt that was very important since it is one of the main Gateways into the Town. Mr. Irace further explained he felt when fixing the sign perhaps do so in a way that could be utilized as the South Gateway to the Town as well as to enforce the speed limit of 35 MPH. Mr. Irace urged Council to do something about the speeding issue before a serious accident happens.

Mayor Lawrence thanked Ms. Mulhern and Mr. Irace for their comments.

OTHER BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

MAYOR _____
J.B. Lawrence

ATTEST _____
Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk

ATTACHMENTS

FY 2017-2018 Budget PowerPoint-Attachment A
Resolution Approving Reopening of Facilities at Doughton Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway – Attachment B