

MINUTES
Town of Blowing Rock
Annual Departmental Meeting
March 22, 2017

The Town of Blowing Rock Town Council held their annual departmental meetings on Thursday, March 22, 2017 at 5:30 p.m. at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street, Blowing Rock, N.C. Present were 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, and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pro-Tem Yount called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

JOINT MEETING WITH THE TDA

TDA Members present were Lorry Mulhern, Doug Matheson, Ex-Officio Members Ed Evans and Nicole Norman, Staff Members, Tracy Brown and Amanda Lugenbell. Newly appointed TDA member Lance Campbell was also present.

TDA Director Brown gave a power point presentation (Attachment A) to those in attendance. He began by saying Blowing Rock again experienced growth in traffic and sales in 2016. Mr. Brown advised a midyear survey of Blowing Rock businesses found that 61% of respondents saw an increase in sales and traffic as compared to the same period in the previous year.

Mr. Brown also stated that a survey was sent to all tourism related businesses in Town which showed a 65% increase in business over the previous year.

Mr. Brown advised there have been some questions about VRBO & Airbnb and explained these are private rentals and these revenues have helped grow revenue and add a product the Town didn't have before. Mr. Brown further explained a lot of tourist prefer to use this lodging method when they travel. Mr. Brown noted in 2016 occupancy tax revenue exceeded \$1 million dollars for the first time, which was up 15% from the previous year.

Marketing and Advertising were also discussed. Mr. Brown advised they will be using new photography for advertising and editorial use in 2016.

Website and social media had seen a 12% increase in users and 39% increase in mobile sessions. Mr. Brown advised their Facebook page currently had 45,016 fans. Mr. Brown noted Amanda Lugenbell posted a video on Facebook in October of the fall foliage that reached 5,798,271 people, had 2.6 million views, 19,000 reactions and 33,714 shares. He explained the reason the video was so significant is that it is free marketing and a

great way to advertise. Mr. Brown stated in 2016 the TDA began working on developing a new website to be launched in 2017.

In closing, Mr. Brown advised Council two Electronic Kiosks will be installed in the next few weeks, one in front of the 1888 Museum and one by the American Legion Parking Deck.

Council thanked Mr. Brown for his presentation. **TDA 2016 Review PowerPoint-Attachment A**

POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Jones began his update to Council by stating he was happy to report the past year was the first year the Police Department had been fully staffed in a very long time. Chief Jones advised his goal of building up his part time staff had been achieved and now as turn over occurs he can move a trained part time officer into full time without an interruption due to training time.

Chief Jones advised he was pleased with the video equipment the Police Department has purchased over the past few years. He said that there is one more piece of equipment he would like to get in the upcoming fiscal year, an automatic video download system. Chief Jones explained the current system is not automatic and can take hours to download whereas the proposed system would take a few minutes at most.

Chief Jones briefly discussed options for the ongoing speeding problem on Hwy. 321.

In closing, Council Member Sweeting asked Chief Jones what changes he would like to see happen in 2017 to improve his department. Chief Jones advised he would like to see more growth; continued emphasis on better training for his officers, continuing to keep turn over low, keep building the part time staff, continuing to make improvements and upgrades to the building. Chief Jones emphasized these are already being done, but he just wants to continue this in 2017.

Council Member Steele left the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

FIRE/RESCUE SERVICES

Fire Chief Kent Graham started his update by stating Station 3 is nearing completion and will be done sooner than expected. He advised the project is going to be under budget and due to that he should be able to get the station certified and get the equipment needed at no additional cost. Chief Graham stated Station 3 will be like Station 2, being an unmanned station.

Chief Graham advised the Blowing Rock Fire Department currently has 30 Firefighters total; 9 full time and 21 part time. Chief Graham also spoke regarding increased training requirements for employees as well as volunteer firefighters.

Council Member Sweeting asked Fire Chief Graham what changes he would like to see going forward in 2017. Chief Graham advised he would like to see an ambulance added. This topic was then briefly discussed.

Fire Chief Graham stated their ultimate goal was to continue offering Blowing Rock residents the highest level of service possible.

OTHER

None

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

MAYOR _____ **ATTEST** _____
J.B. Lawrence **Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk**

Attachments

TDA Annual Report Power Point Presentation- Attachment A