

Draft
Town of Blowing Rock
Town Council 2018 Annual Retreat
January 14-16, 2018

The Town of Blowing Rock Town Council met for their annual retreat on Sunday, January 14, 2018 at 1:00 p.m. at the Doubletree Inn in Asheville, North Carolina. Present were Mayor Charlie Sellers, Council Members Albert Yount, Jim Steele, Sue Sweeting, Doug Matheson and Virginia Powell. Also present were Town Manager Ed Evans, Finance Officer Nicole Norman, Executive TDA Director Tracy Brown and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner, whom recorded the minutes.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Sellers called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. on January 14 and welcomed everyone. Council Member Matheson made a motion to open the meeting, seconded by Council Member Sweeting. Unanimously approved.

Short Term Rentals Helper Software and Short Term Rentals Discussion

TDA Executive Director Tracy Brown met with the Board to discuss a platform the TDA is currently looking at called STR Helper. STR stands for Short Term Rental. This company monitors short term rentals in municipalities and what goes on as far as properties that are being rented as short-term vacation rentals. There is a need to have a company monitor daily to keep up with who is renting where and make sure property owners are staying in compliance with the Town's rules and regulations. The cost of the STR Helper is \$14,500. The TDA Board voted at their last meeting that the TDA is willing to pay half if the Town will support with half of the fee. The TDA feels as though it is just as important for the Town to know what is going on as it is for the TDA to know. A few of the Council Members expressed that if the Town is only getting a third of occupancy tax revenue that they should only pay one-third of the fee, if they were to decide in favor of supporting this request. Council discussed occupancy tax revenues and Air B&B and VRBO's contributions. Council Member Matheson advised the TDA is going on with this project, but just asking the Town to go in half and to update an ordinance with more "meat" to support the cause. Council discussed the purpose of this was not to allow short term rentals throughout Town, just to better control and regulate the areas that currently allow short term rentals. Council determined to bring this to the February Council Meeting with some of their questions and concerns. Council also directed the Planning Board to address the Town's ordinance, review other nearby Town's ordinances as a guideline. They also asked for the Planning Board to trash, recycling, trash cans and parking for those who are renting short term.

Council looked at Lake Lure's short-term rental process and reviewed for a guideline to follow.

Council Meetings Agenda Process

Manager Evans reviewed with Council the timing of submitting items to be placed on the agenda each month. He reviewed the process and explained the hurdles sometimes faced in meeting the deadline and being able to get the packet out in time. Council discussed receiving the agenda for review two Monday's before the Council Meeting so they can provide input. They added they wanted the Council Packet to go out to Council the Wednesday prior to the Council Meeting. Council also discussed the Monday deadline would also be the cutoff for anyone in Town wishing to have an item on the Agenda.

Candidates for Open and Expired Board Seats

Council reviewed and discussed the applicants for the Volunteer Board appointments. Council directed staff to come up with an application for the interested applicants to fill out and turn back in. Council could then review and contact the applicants as they wish with any additional questions they may have. Board appointments will be discussed further, voted on and appointed at the February Council Meeting.

Economic Development Director – Manager Evans advised he had received a letter and application from someone requesting to be considered for hire as the Town's Economic Developer. Manager Evans advised he heard of the Chambers plans to possibly hire an Economic developer in the future and he had discussed with Chamber Director Charles Hardin their plan. Mr. Hardin advised this was something the Chamber had thought about doing in the future, but that would be several years out. Council Member Sweeting explained she wanted to discuss this because she didn't want the Chamber to be the only one involved in Economic Development. She felt as though it's a topic the residents should be involved in as well. Council discussed the main economic engine of the Town is Tourism. They further discussed summer residents as an economic driver and how the town is at capacity on busy weekends. An Economic Developer primary role is to create businesses and retain business. Manager Evans advised he felt in his opinion that Blowing Rock is too small a Town for an Economic Developer. The majority felt this would be more appropriate for a County level.

Council Recessed at 5:00 p.m.

On Monday, January 15th at 8:00 a.m., the meeting was reconvened. Those present were Mayor Charlie Sellers, Mayor Pro tem Albert Yount, Council Members Sue Sweeting, Jim Steele, Doug Matheson and Virginia Powell. Staff present were Town Manager Ed Evans, Finance Officer Nicole Norman, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Doug Chapman from McGill and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner, whom recorded the minutes.

Planning and Inspections

Comprehensive Plan – Planning Director Kevin Rothrock discussed with Council the idea of expanding housing options to:

- Allow at least eight (8) units per acre in the downtown area by amending the current ordinance.
- Allow duplexes in all districts where currently allowed with a zoning permit instead of conditional use permit.
- This request is just for duplexes (2 units on one Lot)

Council Member Sweeting stated she would like for Planning Board to consider involving the neighbors and allowing them to have input. After discussion Council directed Planning Board to review and decide whether or not to bring back to Council at a future Council Meeting.

Moody Building – Planning Director Kevin Rothrock briefed Council on the current status of the Moody Building. The owner, Bob Lovern, has still not done anything with the building and hasn't painted the building which was Council's request at the September meeting. Mr. Rothrock advised Mr. Lovern has one more month left on his CUP extension which was also given at the September Council Meeting. Council discussed what kind of recourse they could have for him not following through with what he was supposed to do. Council concluded that in this case there isn't anything, but suggested that this might be a good item to go to Planning Board and let them come up with some type of recourse that could hold individuals accountable for not following through with such projects. Council advised they would like Mr. Rothrock to try and urge Mr. Lovern to paint the building and further stated when his CUP expires in March he will no longer be given any more extensions for the project.

Trash Cans – Council discussed putting an ordinance in place for leaving trash and recycling cans out. Council discussed that in some areas this is a huge issue due to trash/recycling cans being out several days prior to designated pick up day, the cans and trash are blowing over, animals are getting into it, etc. and/or leaving cans out for days and weeks after the garbage day. Council agreed to send to Planning Board for their review; when trash/recycling can be put out, when cans need to be put back in and not over filling the cans, have them prepare a draft ordinance to come before Council at a future Council Meeting.

Sunset Drive Streetscape – Council discussed the Sunset Streetscape and where to go with the plan. Council Member Steele advised taking all the information from all the meetings and compiling it into a list and do a "A, B, and C" type option plan and go from there. Council agreed that was a good approach to take and would discuss further at the Mid-Year Retreat and make a final decision then. Council briefly discussed the main entrances into Town. Council Member Powell asked what the three entrances are, Kevin advised North Main, Sunset and South Main. Council Member Powell advised in her opinion the three entrances to Town are North Main, South Main and Highway 221. Council Member Matheson advised the Town isn't saying these are the only entrances, but NCDOT's involvement led to those being considered as three (3) main entrances. Council talked about putting a fourth entrance sign on Hwy 221 in the future. Final instruction: Take Jim's "ABC" approach, have Manager Evans work on creating that list and will finalize and decide at Mid-Year Retreat.

Chestnut Development – Council discussed the Chestnut Development project and if the height of the condos were in compliance with what was approved. Mr. Rothrock explained the developer is in compliance with what was approved and with landscape it would lessen the impact. Council was in agreement that none of them realized how high they were going to be when they approved the project initially. Mayor Sellers advised he felt that a valuable lesson was learned by all involved and in the future not allow something like this again.

Morningside Project – Council briefly touched on the topic, and Kevin explained that it would not be appropriate to discuss prior to the upcoming Town Council meeting where the project would be presented.

2017 Permit Recap – Planning Director Rothrock reviewed the 2017 permits with Council.

Public Records and Sunshine Laws

Manager Evans reviewed in length with Council Public Records and Sunshine Laws. Council was provided multiple pages of information to keep and reference back to as needed. Manager Evans expressed the importance of Council using their Town generated emails for the purpose of public records. Council discussed rules of meeting procedures, closed session, written ballots and official meeting vs two Council Members meeting to discuss Town business

Mayor and Council Statutory Roles

Manager Evans reviewed with Council the roles per statute for Mayor and Council and that they can only do what Statutes allow them to do. Manager Evans provided Council with a description of each role for reference.

The meeting recessed from 11:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. for lunch.

Memorial Tree/Memorial Bench Draft Policy & Discussion – Manager Evans advised he and Parks and Recreation staff looked at five (5) requested towns and cities, and a few additional locations, that currently have a Memorial Tree program to gather ideas. Manager Evans provided a list of pros and cons for options. Manager Evans further advised this could be for any trees in Town, not just trees in Memorial Park. Council also reviewed options for donations for park benches in Memorial Park. Council Member Sweeting advised in her research she has found it would be best for the Town to be responsible for the location of the trees, have a few options of tree species that were applicable for the Town so if someone wanted to choose the type of tree and get the maintenance cost within the cost of the tree. Discussion surrounded the location of the donor plaques and where would be the best place to display those such as a kiosk. Manager Evans advised staff will work on a revised draft of the tree policy and would welcome Council's suggestions to be incorporated and presented at the February Council Meeting.

Doug Chapman – McGill Engineering:

Supervisory Control and Data Acquisitions (SCADA) – Town Engineer Doug Chapman from McGill discussed with Council SCADA equipment which would electronically monitor the water and sewer plant. The trend is to look at electronic monitoring which would be much more efficient for Wastewater plant staff. Doug looked into this for staff and presented his findings to Council for information as a future consideration and the reasons it would be beneficial to the Town. Manager Evans advised this was just for Council's information and no further date to discuss had to be decided. Council Member Sweeting advised she would like to know what pump stations currently have and do not have generators and she would like to know what current security systems are on the water tank, water treatment plant, pump station and waste water plant.

Village Drive – Mr. Chapman advised when paving was done on Village Drive it caused a standing water issue for the parking area at the Village Green condos. Mr. Chapman, Manager Evans, Public Works staff as well as Kipp Turner from Maymead Construction have been out to look at the problem. After discussion Council agreed this is an issue that the Town needs to address. Council agreed to let McGill provide a solution to fix the problem.

Phase 1 & 2 Bond Paving – Council reviewed and discussed the paving schedule and the logistics of how the paving schedule has taken place and the scoring process used to decide what roads to pave, and in what order. Mr. Chapman advised the schedule for advertising bid requests would be on January 19, with bid opening on February 6, and bid award for paving to be at the February Council Meeting.

Sourwood Lane Water Line – Council discussed the condition of Sourwood Lane. Mr. Chapman advised Sourwood has waterline repair as well as paving scheduled to be done on this road this spring and summer. Council discussed the possibility of making Sourwood a one-way street. After further discussion Council agreed to first allow work to be completed and go from there on what to do next.

Watauga County Veteran's Memorial

George Brudzinski with the Military Officers Association of America MOAA addressed the board regarding a donation request. He asked the Council to consider donating \$10,000 to the Watauga County Veterans Memorial being constructed in the Town of Boone. Council thanked Mr. Brudzinski for his time. Council will discuss at the February Council Meeting what action they would like to take going forward to support this project. No action was taken.

Water Treatment Plant – Doug Chapman from McGill reviewed the history of the water plant improvements. Mr. Chapman explained several improvements that are needed in the immediate future including; replace corroded bolts, painting piping, replacing high service pumps with control valves and necessary electrical, removing miscellaneous

items no longer in use and replacing large pressure control valve. The biggest priority according to Mr. Chapman is to install a Main plant isolation valve at a cost of approximately \$40,000. Mr. Chapman advised this was not part of the bond list, but this is being generated by a staff concern and needs to be addressed. Council discussed in length the details of how this request has come about. Council Member Matheson advised he felt this was the top priority over anything that has been discussed thus far. Council Member Steele concurred and stated he was embarrassed that the Water Plant repairs were overlooked during the whole bond process. Council advised to bring this to the February Council Meeting for further discussion.

Sidewalk to Bass Lake (Federal Lands Access Program FLAP Grant) – Doug Chapman advised the final revisions have been submitted to NCDOT for final approval. If approved, McGill can begin advertising for bids February 5, bid opening March 6, Bid Award March 13 and work can begin in April, with work throughout the summer. Council Member Sweeting asked Manager Evans to contact Susie Greene and update her on the plan since this project will be going on in front of her property.

Chestnut Circle and Laurel Park Sewer Feasibility – Preliminary Info – Manager Evans explained there has been an interest expressed from a few citizens that they would like to be added to sewer. Council discussed the options and the areas in question. Manager Evans advised staff has gone as far as they can with the project and if Council wishes to continue it is to the point of needing engineering input. Council discussed further and decided to address this at the February Council meeting and direct staff how they would like to proceed. Council Member Sweeting asked Manager Evans if he could contact the citizens in these areas and see who was interested.

Automated Meter Infrastructure Update – Manager Evans advised the Town is currently working with several companies and all have similar dash boards, one of those companies being Metron, the original company the Town began working with. Manager Evans advised if Council is ready to move forward staff is ready to get a RFP (Request for Proposal) to the companies and get some numbers and move forward from there. Council discussed and deferred further discussion to the Mid-Year Retreat.

The meeting was recessed at 5:10 p.m.

Traffic

Speeding – Manager Evans reviewed information from Police Chief Tony Jones regarding the ongoing speeding issue on Highway 321. Council Member Powell advised she felt when NCDOT landscapes the highway that should help with the speeding. Manager Evans advised when the Skyland traffic light is installed there will also be a flashing light to warn about the traffic light ahead. Manager Evans advised that the Police Department is constantly working to keep speeding down. They know it's a priority, but also know they will never be able to completely eliminate it. Council would like to discuss electronic speeding signs at the March Council Meetings.

Council briefly discussed parking and decided to discuss further how to enforce the parking issue at the March Council Meeting.

Public Works

Report on Stockpile Yard – Council was advised clean up continues at the stockpile yard including; hauling off the old tar building, debris accumulated from various projects and leaves that had accumulated. The storage building that was to be constructed has been put on hold due to a few onsite constraints:

1. There is a large culvert running from the west side of the property to the southeast. This culvert carries the creek under Cone Road and thru approximately 150 feet of the property at which point the creek is daylighted.
2. There is also a sewer line that runs along the north side of the property which limits the available space to construct a building.

Staff has considered placing a storage shed/building closer to the new Public Works Facility and would prefer this building closer. Staff is still exploring options.

White Line Stripping – Public Works continued painting white lines until the weather prevented it. They will continue to paint all of the Town streets and are currently at approximately 50% completion. Work will continue as weather allows. Manager Evans advised staff has reviewed and have been advised to increase the thickness of the paint line and to consider adding glass beads to increase the reflectivity of the lines. Council will discuss further at the February Council Meeting.

Ducks and Swans – Council discussed a request that was generated by a few citizens whom had an interest in providing a home and food for the Town's resident ducks and swan. The desire would be to build houses and provide a vending food dispenser. Council discussed and decided against the idea due to the fact it would create problems with other wild animals and could be a health hazard to residents and visitors.

Miscellaneous Topics

Employee Education – Manager Evans explained the Town does not currently have a policy that requires an education minimum. The current Personnel Handbook/Policy does not have anything requiring employees to have a high school diploma or a GED. Council discussed not making this a requirement for an entry level position, but if someone would wish to advance to a supervisory level position then have an education requirement in place. Council will discuss further a future Council Meeting.

Pickleball Courts – Council briefly discussed several options for the placement of Pickleball Courts. Currently the pickleball players are sharing the lower basketball court. Council discussed the possibility of making the tennis courts into a dual tennis/pickleball court. Manager Evans will have staff do some research and to see what options are available.

Extending WiFi – Council briefly discussed and reviewed the WiFi has been extended through Main Street. Manager Evans further advised the Town is still awaiting grant money to extend WiFi down Sunset Drive. Council Member Powell asked about extending WiFi to the Library. Manager Evans advised since the Town does not own the Library property that would have to be discussed with the ones who run the Library.

Old Fire Station Update – Council briefly discussed the status of the Village Foundation's request for use of the Old Fire House for a theater. Currently they are looking at the cost and looking at alternative options if they cannot make the numbers work for this location.

Laurel Lane Closure – Manager Evans gave Council a heads up about a phase two request from the Village Foundation that will be coming before Council at the February Council meeting which includes temporary closure of Laurel Lane.

Chetola – Salt – Manager Evans advised the Town has done some research to see where the original agreement was for the Town to provide salt to Chetola. Town staff have been unable to find any written documentation backing up the reason this has been done over the years. Council Member Matheson advised the reason this was started back in the 80's was an exchange for trash pickup. Council directed Manager Evans to investigate further.

Police – Entrusted with Keys for School Gym and citizens houses – Manager Evans advised over the years the Police Department have been entrusted with keys to citizens houses as well as the keys to the Blowing Rock School Gym. Manager Evans further advised the Police Department doesn't feel comfortable with this and would like to relinquish these duties. Council discussed and felt this was something the Town Police Department shouldn't be doing. The citizens aren't paying for this service and it is interfering with some businesses that do caretaking.

Underground Electric for Sunset and Main Street – Manager Evans talked to Mike High from Blue Ridge Energy and they are working on a preliminary cost for information only, to go forward with underground wiring that would be part of the Sunset Streetscape "A,B,C" plan that was previously discussed.

Request for Meeting Space – Council Member Sweeting requested she would like to restart her meetings on Tuesdays prior to the Town Council Meeting starting in May and going through November. Council Member Sweeting asked to hold the meetings at Town Hall. Council advised one other Council Member could join her for the meetings, but no more than that due to running into problems with meeting laws. Council discussed and Manager Evans advised he would have a meeting space available for Council Member Sweeting at Town Hall.

Council Member Powell advised she would like to bring up moving the Public comments up higher on the agenda rather than keeping it at the very end of the agenda. Council

discussed and discussed moving the Public Comments to immediately before “Old Business” and see how it goes.

Virginia Tech Conceptual Plan – Manager Evans advised the Town has a March 31st deadline to apply for a grant from the Broyhill Foundation. BRAAC voted at their recent meeting to look at using a portion the Virginia Tech Conceptual Plan of improving the back of the American Legion. In order to proceed the Town needs a cost estimate. BRAAC put forward \$3,000 for McGill to work on a cost estimate so the Town can have that available to apply for a grant with the Broyhill Foundation. Manager Evans wanted Council to be aware and make sure they were on board.

Glenn Burney Trail – Manager Evans updated Council on the closure of the Glenn Burney Trail. Manager Evans advised he would be meeting with the North Carolina Emergency Management to see if the Town can get any money to help with the repair of the bridge that was washed out on the trail. Manager Evans explained the work that needs to be done will be extensive and the trail will remain closed until the repair is completed which could be as late until sometime in May. Council Member Sweeting asked if all the damage to the trail had been accessed. Manager Evans advised he and Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown had hiked it and accessed the damage and advised people are still using the trail even though it is closed. Council Member Sweeting advised she would like to keep the closed signs up until staff is confident everything is fixed to protect the Town due to liability. Manager Evans advised he will have his meeting with North Carolina Emergency Management to get a cost on fixing the bridge and he will bring back to Council at a later date for a decision on how to proceed.

Shuttle and Public Transportation for Blowing Rock – Council briefly discussed options for a shuttle in the Town. Manager Evans advised before staff does any extensive research is this a topic Council is serious about. Council advised they would like to proceed with researching and see whether or not this is a feasible option and would like this to be on the March Agenda.

Blowing Rock Pedestrian and Cyclist Audit – Manager Evans advised this for Council’s information, a study was done and the results were Blowing Rock was a very walkable Town.

Tactical Plan for 2018-2019

Manager Evans advised the Tactical Plan needed at least two hours or more to discuss and would be better to hold a special workshop at a later date to discuss.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 11:45 a.m. Council Member Matheson made a motion to go into Closed Session to discuss performance of the Town Manager, pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11 (6), seconded by Council Member Powell. Unanimously approved.

Following Executive Session, Council re-entered the regular meeting at 12:30 p.m., no action was taken. Rather, the Council would address at the February Council meeting.

ADJOURN

With no further business to discuss Council Member Steele made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Council Member Sweeting. Unanimously approved.

MAYOR _____ **ATTEST** _____

Charlie Sellers, Mayor

Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk

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