

**MINUTES**  
**Town of Blowing Rock**  
**Town Council Mid-Year Retreat**  
**June 25, 2018**

The Blowing Rock Town Council held a Mid-Year Retreat meeting on Monday, June 25, 2018. The retreat was held at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street, Blowing Rock, NC. Present were Mayor Charlie Sellers, Mayor Pro-tem Albert Yount and Council Members Jim Steele, Sue Sweeting, Doug Matheson, and Virginia Powell. Others in attendance were Town Manager Ed Evans, Finance Officer Nicole Norman, Town Engineer Doug Chapman, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner, who recorded the minutes.

**CALL ORDER**

Mayor Sellers called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m.

**DISCUSSION TOPICS**

**Cone Road Site, Public Works Site & Wastewater Plant**

Town Manager Ed Evans gave some back ground on the Cone Road storage site. He advised that about six months after he began as Town Manager, he learned it was a priority to get the site cleaned up and that staff has been working to clean the site up ever since. He said they have hauled off hundreds of tons of leaves, debris, asphalt and concrete, etc. Manager Evans explained the need for the site and that this is the only place to leave waste and/or materials until staff has a chance to take it to the proper place. He further explained the need to build a storage building on the site to be able to put a lot of the items in and get them out of public view. Council discussed the trees that have planted are a great buffer and suggested adding slats to the gate at the entrance of the site to help hide the contents from the public eye. Council advised Manager Evans to make it a top priority to have staff continue to clean up the site and keep it clean.

After further discussion Council all agreed to putting slats in the gate at the entrance and build a storage building on the site.

**Sunset Drive**

Town Manager Evans gave background on the Sunset Drive Project. Sunset Drive has been a priority for the Town since at least 2013 when the Town Council was working on the Main Street Streetscape. McGill analyzed and studied Sunset in 2014 to get initial estimates for upgrading it to the same standards as the new Main Street streetscape. A decision was made later to get a master plan for Sunset and Destination by Design (DbD) was awarded the contract to develop a plan for Sunset, with citizen and Council involvement. That plan culminated in a presentation by DbD in 2017.

At the completion of the work by DbD, the Council considered how to move forward and the topic was considered at the January 2018 Retreat in Asheville. At that time, Council

directed the manager to provide some options for moving forward with the project. Manager Evans discussed options of: 1) doing necessary upgrades to bring Sunset to the same standard as Main Street, 2) adding duct bank to #1 to eventually burying the power lines, 3) doing #1 in phases or sections, and 4) consideration of major aesthetic design, such as that from DbD, and 5) doing a plan such as DbD's with duct bank. This would provide options from which the Council could choose, in accordance with the study and based on funds available for the project. The project was included in the Bond Referendum in 2014 and funds were allocated for study, engineering, water, sewer.

Council reviewed and discussed several options. Council all agreed the best option is to get this project started and to start with the basic necessary infrastructure of the project.

Council Member Matheson made a motion to go with the first option which is the basic option; new water/sewer lines, curb and guttering, new sidewalks and road repair and requested that McGill Engineering do a draft conceptual drawing to be presented at the July 10<sup>th</sup> Council meeting. This was seconded by Council Member Powell. For: Council Members Matheson, Powell, Sweeting and Steele. Against: Mayor Pro-Tem Yount.

### **Electric Vehicle Charging Station**

Manager Evans advised in 2016, the Town worked with Blue Ridge Electric Membership Corporation to install an electric vehicle charging station with space for two vehicles at the Wallingford Parking Deck. After installation, the Town received one year of network service from ChargePoint at no cost to the town. This is a service that cost \$560 per year, with discounts for extended renewal periods. ChargePoint is a service that allows users to find electric charging stations, and pay if there is a charge. Our one year of free service provided with the installation is over on June 30. A decision must now be made on how to move forward. Manager Evans advised to renew the network services provided by Chargepoint, the cost is \$560 per year. He said we have an option to recoup some or all this cost by implementing a per session charging fee of some amount and stated that Blue Ridge Energy suggested \$5.00. Another option is not to renew network services with Chargepoint. With this option, users can still use the EV charger and it will still work just fine. Anyone with a RFID card from any charging network will be able to unlock the charger and use it. The Town would not be able to charge for using the charger or monitor station usage with this option, nor would the support number on the charger accept calls unless we renew the network services.

Council discussed and Council Member Sweeting made a motion to charge \$5.00 for one year and see what the results are, seconded by Council Member Matheson. For the motion: Council Members Sweeting, Matheson, Powell and Steele. Against the motion: Mayor Pro-Tem Yount. Motion approved.

### **Budget Amendment**

Finance Officer Nicole Norman reviewed the Budget Amendments request. Council Member Sweeting made a motion to accept the Budget Amendments as presented, seconded by Mayor Pro-tem Yount. Unanimously approved.

### **Planning Board (Ordinance Discussion/Review-Building Height, Density etc)**

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock said recently there have been requests to evaluate our current Land Use Ordinance for standards affecting Town Center and Central Business such as building height, setbacks, density, and parking. These standards dictate building mass and design on properties in downtown that are relatively small and have unique characteristics.

Staff suggestion is to eliminate the residential density requirement for Town Center and Central Business. The building height, setback, commercial design, parking and stormwater/impervious surface standards in the Land Use Ordinance already limit the mass and size of buildings.

All of the above Land Use Code standards, and others, can be evaluated for modifications that might reduce the number of waivers requested on development projects. Staff and Planning Board will gladly study these development standards and propose some draft ordinance amendments for Council consideration. However, even with an amended Land Use Code, each development will have something that may not fit into the regulation framework. In those instances, conditions imposed with a conditional rezoning application and waivers for a conditional use permit application are expected since even good projects may not fit into the “regulatory box”.

Council discussed and Council Member Sweeting made a motion to send to Planning Board to study further, seconded by Council Member Powell. Unanimously approved.

### **Parking Ordinance Discussion**

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock said that when the downtown parking standards were re-written in 2010, there was an emphasis on allowing changes in use to be allowed from one to another without requiring additional parking, except for restaurants with 12 or more seats. To apply the ordinance to additions and new construction, there had to be an established baseline for calculating parking requirements. He said he remembered specifically asking Council at that time if we should just credit each existing building at the time of ordinance adoption with the amount of parking they would have based on the amount required by ordinance when an application is made. Since the parking requirement was going to be reduced going forward from 2010, there was some concern that the existing buildings would not be credited with as much as they would have under the old ordinance. Council agreed with that, knowing it was easier to provide credit at the prevailing rate, not what the rate used to be and trying to figure that ratio out 10 years in the past.

Since 2010, we have had two (2) CUPs that have gone through the development process and have been credited with the amount of parking they would need based on the existing use. One was Mellow Mushroom, the other was Bob Lovern for the Moody Building. I have attached both of the calculation sheets for those projects. Continuing to follow precedent with these projects, and what Council agreed to back in 2010, Mr. Rothrock calculated the existing building with parking spaces based on the existing, or most previous use. This calculation is provided when a development application is made (CUP,

Conditional Zoning, or Zoning).

Council made a motion to have Planning Board review the current standards for crediting of parking in the ordinance, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Yount. Unanimously approved.

### **Sewer Study**

Manager Evans reviewed a request from a citizen on Chestnut Circle asking to be added to the Town's wastewater collection system. Town Council addressed the specific request and issue and realized they did not have a policy or plan for meeting future needs for sewer service in areas that are presently unserved. Council knew there were areas without the service, but did not know if it could be made available. Council directed staff to study the issue and determine what, if anything, can be done to provide service.

The study took the form of an analysis of all properties in town that have water service, but are not paying for sewer service, thus resulting in at least an assumption that sewer service is not available to those properties. The list contains 368 names, although we know that it can be whittled down once we drill down into the list. The resulting list allowed us to create a map to provide a visual representation of areas without sewer service. This aids in identifying patterns or clusters of properties near one another, making it easier to see where we might improve the system and positively affect the greatest number of potential customers. We know that some of the properties have sewer service available, but are content with using their septic systems. We also know that some of the properties do not need any sewer service as they don't have houses or businesses. The map provides a first step to do further analysis, requiring us to commit funds for engineering to see if we can provide service, and if not financially feasible, why.

After discussion the consensus among Council was to have staff drill down into the data to make it more reflective of any who did not have sewer who wanted it and create a draft policy.

### **Sign Ordinance – Progress Report**

Town Manager Evans updated Council that staff hired Benchmark Planning Consultants to rewrite our sign ordinance and make it compliant with the Reed vs. Town of Gilbert Supreme Court decision from 2015. Vagn Hansen with Benchmark had completed a revision of the City of Concord's sign ordinance while the Reed case was being decided. He then re-wrote the ordinance and it was adopted as one of the first in NC to be consistent with the Reed decision.

Vagn has written the first draft of the Blowing Rock Ordinance and it will be discussed with the zoning subcommittee of the Planning Board on June 27<sup>th</sup>. After review and modification, the draft will be presented to the full Planning Board for review and recommendation, with eventual review by Town Council and a public hearing in the coming months.

### **Main Street to Bass Lake Sidewalk – EFLAP Grant Progress Report**

Manager Evans gave Council an update. The town applied for a federal grant with the

Eastern Federal Lands Access Program that received favorable approval. The grant proposal was to build a sidewalk from Main Street at Speckled Trout Café to Bass Lake. Moving forward with the project has been frustrating and slow. The project proceeded as quickly as we could figure out how to proceed, but got hung up in design and engineering. The approval from the NCDOT took a very long time and when we thought everything was finally ironed out, a project manager at the NCDOT told us, for the first time, that we needed ROW agreements with the affected property owners.

The ROW agreements require appraisals, which have been ordered by McGill Associates, Inc from an appraisal firm in Asheville who specializes in ROW appraisals. Once the value of the ROWs is determined, negotiations will be required to obtain those ROWs. Hopefully, some ROW owners will gift their ROW to the Town. If they do not, there will need to be a price negotiation. The Town is still waiting to hear back that the appraisals.

### **Middle Fork Greenway – EFLAP Grant Progress Report**

Manager Evans reviewed the Town applied for a grant on behalf of the Middle Fork Greenway Project, spearheaded by Wendy Patoprsty. The grant was sought from the Eastern Federal Lands Access Program or EFLAP for short. It received favorable standing and was approved. This grant was to provide funds to build the portion of the Middle Fork Greenway that is in the Blowing Rock town limits. This project, like the Bass Lake Sidewalk Project, has been frustrating and slow. The original cost of the project was calculated by a local firm. During the Memorandum of Understanding review of the project, it was determined that many things had changed from the original application.

The changes included a new route of the Middle Fork New River, which had changed due to flooding waters in October 2017. This made some of the original survey work obsolete and it must be surveyed again. Additionally, it was determined in the review that part of the retaining walls used in the engineering were not going to be adequate for the project and that new designs would be necessary. This caused a cost overrun of between one half million and one million dollars according to recent estimates. Those numbers must be firmed up with additional spending being required by the Middle Fork New River Greenway organization, and those expenditures cannot be counted as match money for the project.

Consequently, more surveying and more engineering will be required to get this project underway. We are waiting for resolutions to the problems, which are being worked out between the NCDOT and the engineering firm.

### **Automated Meter Infrastructure**

The town sought a way to provide a valuable service to water account holders by providing a way for water meters to be read remotely and frequently. The advantage to the customer was readily seen in the presentation from Metron Fornier as they set up some trial accounts in Blowing Rock. The automatic reading of the trial meters proved that the service was valuable, as it recorded water use hourly and data could be retrieved electronically. This advantage uncovered many water leaks not known to the account

holders. A decision was made to implement this technology, but it was at least two years after it was introduced. Metron Fornier was one of the few vendors who offered this technology initially. However, soon after several companies offered the new technology. After Council approved moving forward with the technology, Manager Evans inquired to other companies and it became apparent that there were competitors in that market that were not previously known. Therefore, the implementation of the technology was delayed, giving the Town time to investigate additional providers. The Neptune Company provided information as well as the Sensor Company. Not long after that, Manager Evans learned that electric companies could also provide a solution to this technology. He advised he approached Blue Ridge Energy and learned they were just beginning to get into what was a new technology based on the same way they had been reading electric meters for a decade. They also wanted to be considered, but were not ready to release the technology. They thought they could be ready in around six months, but it has taken longer than they thought. They still want to be considered and believe they could be ready by next summer. If their technology does become available, it is likely to be the cheaper of the options as the head they would put on a water meter to read the meter electronically would be cheaper than other vendor's products because it would only need to transmit a signal from the water meter to the electric meter. It would not involve cell towers nor radio antenna towers. There is no guarantee that it will become available from BRE, but they want to provide the service and are working toward that provision.

The consensus of Council was to wait for at least (6) six more months to see if Blue Ridge Energy will in fact have an automated meter reading service available for reading water meters simultaneously with electric meters

**Blowing Rock Visitor App**

Manager Evans briefly demonstrated the new Blowing Rock Visitor App that was developed by the High Country Council of Government (HCCOG).

**Mobile 311**

Manager Evans briefly explained the new work order system, Mobile 311.

**ADJOURN**

At 6:05 P.M. with no further business to discuss, Council Member Sweeting made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Council Member Powell. Unanimously approved.

**MAYOR** \_\_\_\_\_ **ATTEST** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Charlie Sellers** **Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk**

**ATTACHMENTS**

**Budget Amendment Ordinance 2018-08 – Attachment A**