

MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor J.B. Lawrence and Blowing Rock Town Council

From: Kevin Rothrock, Planning Director

SUBJECT: Amendment to Sign Ordinance - App Ski Mtn Welcome Center Sign

DATE: February 4, 2015

BACKGROUND

Town Council held a public hearing on January 13, 2015 to review and consider a draft ordinance that would have provided flexibility for Appalachian Ski Mtn to have a larger ground-mounted free-standing sign at the corner of Hwy 321 and Edmisten Road. After the public hearing, the Council made a motion to send the draft ordinance back to Planning Board for further study and consideration of an ordinance that would apply to broader area of properties along Hwy 321 where the posted speed limit is greater than 35 mph.

The Planning Board held a special meeting on January 29th to study and consider free-standing sign alternatives within the corridor along 321 with posted speed limits greater than 35 mph. Planning Staff prepared a staff report and powerpoint presentation that included a table highlighting current Land Use Code sign dimensional standards and regulations from Watauga County’s sign ordinance. This table also lists the proposed dimensions of the App Ski Mtn sign previously submitted and designs received during the week of the Planning Board meeting. (see below)

Freestanding Sign Summary				
	Sign Area		Sign Structure	
	Size	Height	Height	Length
Watauga County	50 sq ft	N/A	35	N/A
Blowing Rock Ground Sign greater than 35 MPH	35 sq ft	6	8	10
	45 sq ft	6		
Blowing Rock Column Sign greater than 35 MPH	45 sq ft	10	12	N/A
	60 sq ft	10	12	N/A
App Ski Sign				
Previous Plan	53 sq ft	17.5	18	16.5
Current Plan	65.3 sq ft	17.5	18	16.5

STUDY AREA

The area under consideration for freestanding sign options in the area with a speed limit greater than 35 mph is mainly from the northern edge of the current corporate limits extending north along Hwy 321 through the ETJ. There are a few properties along this stretch that are in the Town's corporate limits including Roots Restaurant, the former New River Inn property, and satellite annexed properties owned by Appalachian Regional Healthcare Services (ARHS). The remaining properties are zoned GB, General Business, but are in the ETJ. A large portion of this area is controlled by the National Park Service and Blue Ridge Parkway. Note also that the blue dashed line represents the part of Hwy 321 with posted speed limit over 35 mph and within the Town's jurisdiction. (See attached pdf map – separate document)

CURRENT CODE AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

As presented at the Planning Board special meeting, the following table lists some possible flexibility considerations for ground-mounted and column signs. The columns show what is currently allowed for sign structure height and sign area height in the General Business zoning district. The additional columns to the right list 50% percentage increases in sign structure and sign area height.

		100% (current)	150%	200%	250%	300%
Ground-Mounted Sign	Sign Area Height	6	9	12	15	18
	Structure Height	8	12	16	20	24
Column Sign	Sign Area Height	10	15	20	25	30
	Sign Structure Height	12	18	24	30	36

PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATION

Upon review of the information presented at the January 29th special meeting, the Planning Board made a recommendation to make minor revisions to the original draft ordinance that was presented to Town Council in January. Based on review of the most recent App Ski Mtn sign design which included sign area space for a visitor/tourism-related tenant, the Planning Board recommendation now includes increasing the overall sign area from 60 square feet to 70 square feet. The Planning Board is further recommending adding more supporting language in the ordinance preamble recognizing the impact App Ski Mtn has on the local economy as a winter vacation destination. Finally, the recommendation includes clarification that the draft ordinance would not preclude other tourism-related tenants from utilizing the proposed welcome center on a year-round basis.

The Planning Board initiated some conversation on amending the sign ordinance related to multiple occupancy buildings. There was discussion that additional study and clarification could be taken up at the February meeting.

ATTACHMENTS

- Revised draft ordinance (highlighted) for App Ski Mtn Welcome Center Signage
- Map of study area along Hwy 321 with posted speed limit over 35 mph
- Most recent sign design from App Ski Mtn – received February 3, 2015

If you have any questions, please email me at krothrock@townofblowingrock.com or call me at 295-5240.

ORDINANCE NO. 2015-01**AN ORDINANCE TO MODIFY SIGN REGULATIONS SPECIFIC TO THE
APPALACHIAN SKI MOUNTAIN WELCOME CENTER**

WHEREAS, the Article 17 of the Land Use Ordinance provides sign regulations within the Town of Blowing Rock's planning and zoning jurisdiction; and

WHEREAS, Appalachian Ski Mountain has been a unique tourism partner with Town of Blowing Rock and the overall Blowing Rock and High Country community for over 50 years, helping to identify the area as a winter vacation destination; and

WHEREAS, Appalachian Ski Mountain has displayed a directional billboard across from the Hwy 321/Edmisten Road intersection for over 40 years; and

WHEREAS, with the pending removal of the billboard triggered by bridge construction for an access road, Appalachian Ski Mountain will lose an effective directional sign that cannot be replaced due to a federal law protecting scenic byways (Blue Ridge Parkway); and

WHEREAS, Appalachian Ski Mountain is authorized to construct a welcome center on the corner of Edmisten Road and Hwy 321; and

WHEREAS, Appalachian Ski Mountain draws thousands of visitors to the area and many of those visitors are traveling at night, needing clearly recognizable signs and landmarks; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Blowing Rock Land Use Ordinance limits the overall height of an on-premise ground mounted sign and limits sign face separation; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Board and Town Council find there should be exceptions to the sign ordinance limitations based on the historic and unique tourism benefits associated with Appalachian Ski Mountain; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Board and Town Council confirm that the regulation of directional signage is consistent with the 2014 Comprehensive Plan Update.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of the Town of Blowing Rock, North Carolina, that:

Section 1. Section 16-17.12.3 of the Land Use Ordinance is hereby added and will read as follows:

"Section 16-17.12.3 Appalachian Ski Mountain/Tourism-Related Welcome Center Sign. Due to its unique tourism/directional-related significance based on skier traffic

volume and nightly activities, the Appalachian Ski Mountain Welcome Center, or other visitor/tourism information entity, shall be allowed to construct a ground-mounted freestanding sign up to 18 feet from the ground. The overall length of the sign shall not exceed 17 feet. The sign face shall be limited to 60 70 square feet per side based on the posted speed limit exceeding 35 mph, similar to allowances in Section 16-17.12.2.2. The sign faces shall not be separated by more than 10 feet. All sides of the base of the sign shall be landscaped to a height not less than 3 feet above grade.

Unless otherwise specified herein, this sign shall meet the size, style, height, materials, and design criteria in Section 16-17.12 and shall be located outside the NCDOT designated right-of-way. The sign colors are regulated by Conditional Use Permit No. 2014-04, approved on December 9, 2014.

The sign shall meet all requirements of this Article with regard to lighting, maintenance and safety."

Section 2. Severability; Conflict of Laws. If this ordinance or application thereof to any person or circumstance is held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications of the ordinance which can be given separate effect and to that end, the provisions of this ordinance are declared to be severable. All ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict with this ordinance are hereby repealed.

Section 3. Effective Date. This ordinance shall be effective upon adoption.

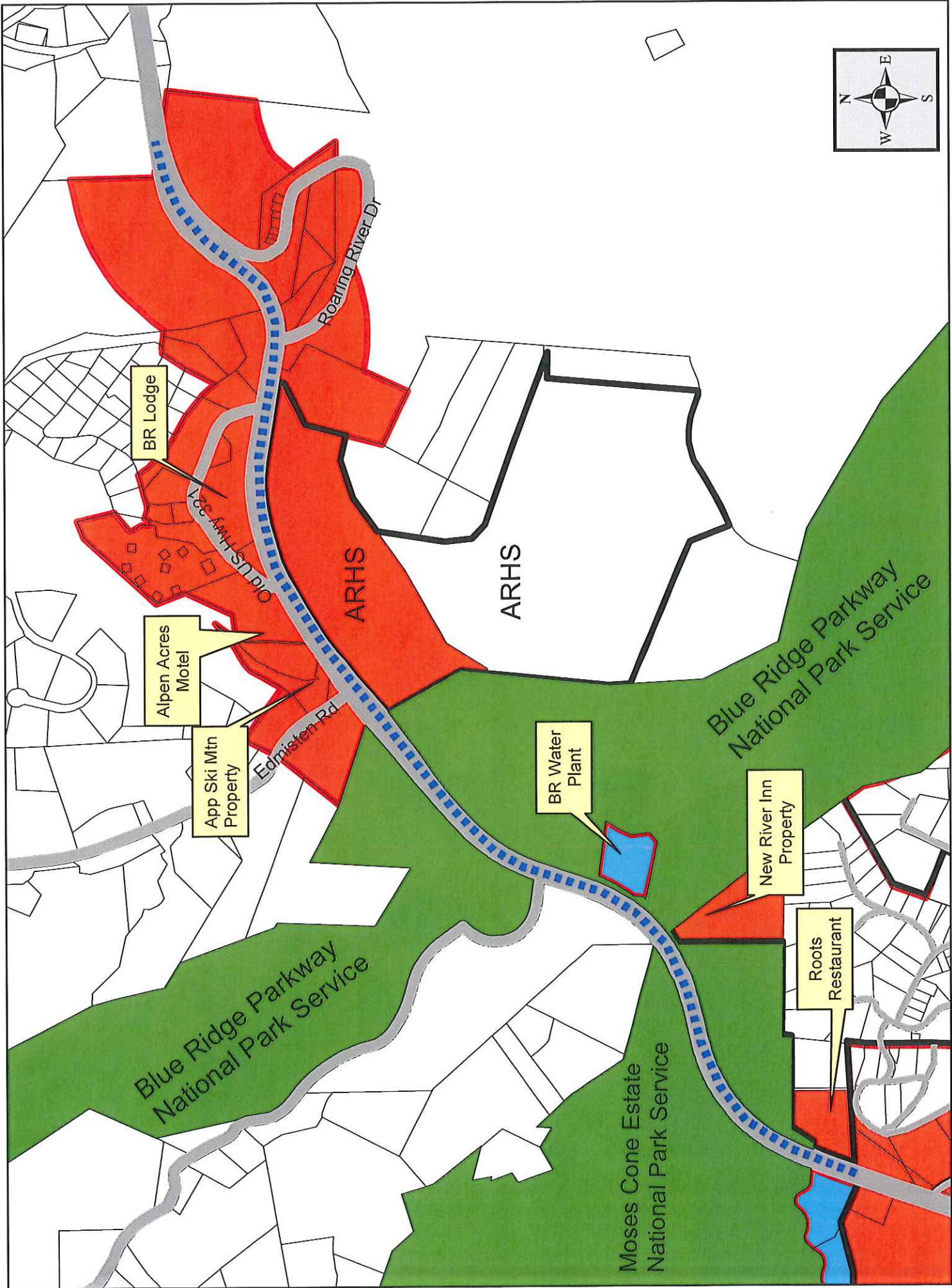
Adopted this the ____ day of _____, 2015

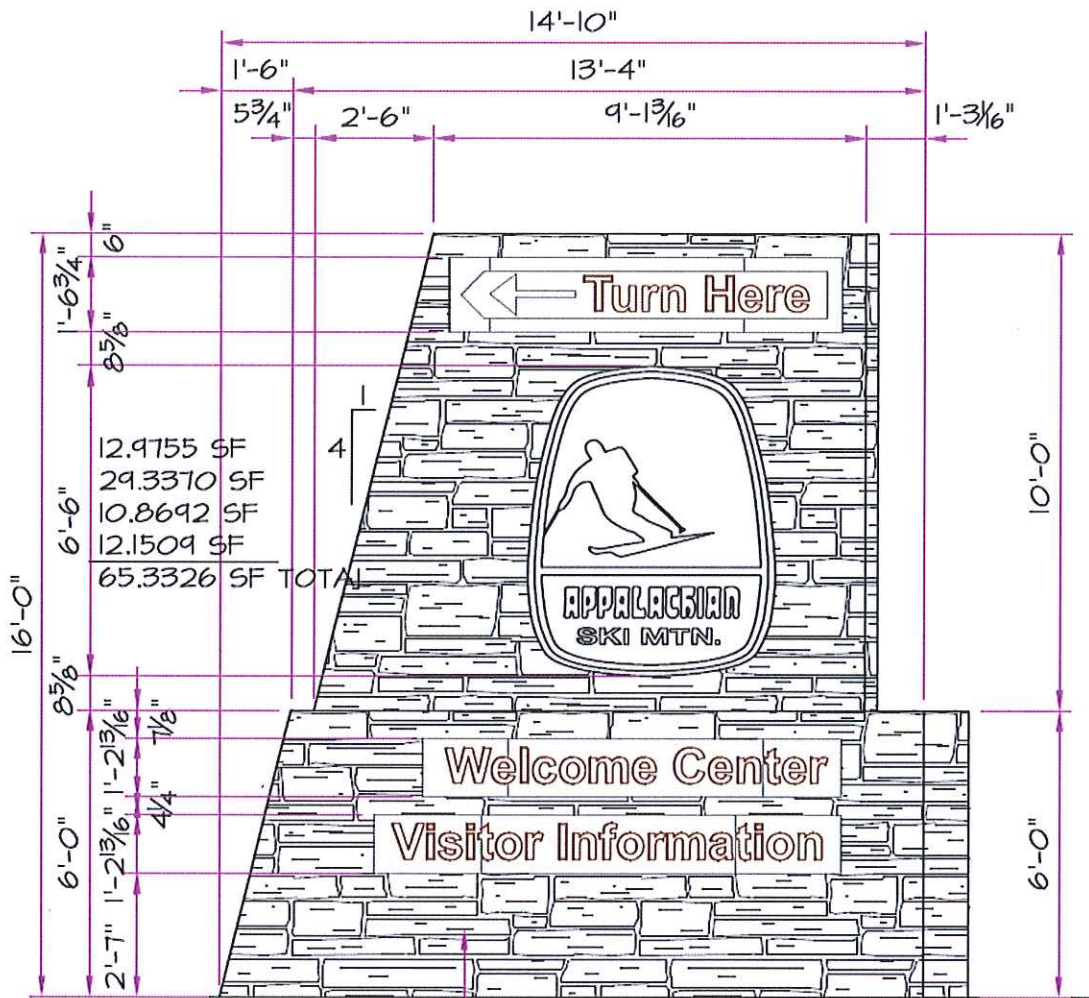
TOWN OF BLOWING ROCK

J.B. Lawrence, Mayor

ATTEST: _____
Sharon H. Greene, Town Clerk

Hwy 321 Corridor
Speed Limit over 35 MPH





ELK STONE