

**Town of Blowing Rock
Town Council 2018 Annual Retreat
January 20-22, 2019**

The Town of Blowing Rock Town Council met for their annual retreat on Sunday, January 14, 2018 at 2:00 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 Interim Town Manager Jim Freeman, Finance Officer Nicole Norman, and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner, whom recorded the minutes.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Sellers called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, January 20th and welcomed everyone. Council Member Sweeting made a motion to open the meeting, seconded by Council Member Steele. Unanimously approved.

Financial Items:

FY Budgetary Overview & Projections, Debt & Bond Status and Capital Budget Reserves – Finance Officer Nicole Norman reviewed mid-year financial reports with the board and explained this is an early review. Ms. Norman explained the budgetary projections were very conservative but felt the Town finances were in good shape. Ms. Norman gave an update to the debit service and provided a status summary review for each phase of the Bond including allocation of those funds in the various stages. Council discussed options to work toward a reserve fund for resident areas asking for sewer. Council also suggested a reserve account for sidewalk repairs.

Town Auditor – The Town's current Auditor, Misty Watson CPA, has taken a full-time position with Watauga County and will no longer be available to finish her audit contract with the Town. Council discussed, and the consensus was to have staff contact the previous Audit Firm, Combs, Tennant and Carpenter to get a three-year informal proposal and report back to Council at the February meeting.

Credit Card Payments – Staff updated Council on the current status of the acceptance of credit cards for payment. Council discussed whether or not the Town should absorb the approximate 2% cost of accepting credit cards as a method of payment or charge a fee to the consumer each time. The consensus among Council was to get a proposal from the software company to add an automatic fee to the consumer for use of credit cards.

AMI Meter – Council discussed and reviewed the AMI Meter pros and cons. The vendor the Town has been working with for the trial period is not necessarily the only option the Town has. Council requested staff get an RFQ (Request for Qualifications) from several other companies and bring back to Council for review.

Administrative Items:

Board Appointments - Council reviewed and discussed the applicants for the Volunteer Board appointments. Council directed staff to re-advertise the ABC Board and BRAAC Board since only one application had been received for each. The Board appointments will be discussed further, voted on and appointed at the February Council Meeting.

Art Policy – Council advised they had reviewed the changes to the policy that had been made by BRAAC. Council did not yet take action to approve accepting the changes recommended by BRAAC. They directed staff to seek an opinion from the Town insurance company regarding the Town’s liability and bring back for Council to decided how to proceed.

Town Manager Hiring Progress – Council reviewed the timeline as well as details concerning the process. The consensus was for Council to continue with the process on their own. Council will have a Special Meeting on February 18, 2019 at 1:00 p.m. to start narrowing down the applicants.

Council recessed for the day at 5:45 p.m.

On Monday, January 21st at 8:15 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 Interim Town Manager Jim Freeman, Finance Officer Nicole Norman, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown, Interim Police Chief Aaron Miller, Town Engineer Doug Chapman from McGill and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner, whom recorded the minutes.

Project Activities:

Sunset Bid Results – Town Engineer Doug Chapman reviewed with Council the estimated bid results for the Sunset Street Scape. The bid is approximately \$1 million dollars over budget. Council discussed cost cutting options. Several Council Members advised they felt this street was a disgrace to our Town and the repairs are very much needed and needs to be done right. The sewer issue on Ransom and Sunset was also discussed and Council asked Mr. Chapman to look at incorporating that piece into the project. Council discussed with staff funding options to bridge the gap between the bid and the estimated cost, which has been budgeted. The consensus was for Mr. Chapman to review and present to Council at the February meeting.

Gateway: Council briefly discussed the previously proposed “Gateway”.

Shuttle Continuance and Route – Council discussed the previous route and ridership for the shuttle last year. Council agreed it wasn’t well utilized but didn’t feel it had been given a fair chance. Council discussed some enhancements including a new route, better signage and starting earlier in the season. The consensus was to meet with Craig Hughes at AppalCart to work on another route and start the first of May.

Bass Lake – Doug Chapman gave an update on the current status of the project. Mr. Chapman advised this is federal money and there are certain guidelines that have to be followed and it's a huge process. Mayor Sellers advised he would get with Virginia Foxx, Deanna Ballard and Cullie Tarlton to see if they could help speed up the process.

Middle Fork Greenway Update – Planning Director Kevin Rothrock briefly gave Council an update to the project.

Virginia Tech Plan Revisit – Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown discussed with the Board the proposed improvements to the area on the back side of Memorial Park near the Recreation Center and old Fire Station. The proposal included using the conceptual plan provided by Virginia Tech and would include; waterproofing the old Fire Station, sidewalk and stairs which are currently a safety hazard. Council directed staff to get a cost estimate and bring back at a near future Council meeting for further discussion and direction.

Dog Park – Council briefly discussed the pros and cons to having a public dog park in Town. The idea was dismissed due to various factors including cost, maintenance and liability.

321 Project & Landscaping – Mr. Rothrock updated Council on the status of the utility work on the 321 Project. Ms. Brown reviewed NCDOT's landscape plan with Council and reminded Council NCDOT will maintain for 18 months. Council discussed coming up with a plan on how to maintain this project once the 18-month warranty is up. It was discussed that trees can't be put in the median because there are utility lines running down the center median which have a concrete seal over them. Council discussed options for preparing for the possibility of hiring new personnel for landscape maintenance along Hwy 321. The possibility of contracting out was also discussed and Council asked staff to include that pricing in when this is discussed again in the near future.

Fire – Interim Manager Freeman advised Council had requested an updated plan. Council Member Steele advised he brought this up because of what happened in CA with the wildfires and wanted to make sure the Town did have a plan in place. Council discussed the ambulance as well.

Organizational Matters:

FY 19/20 Recreation and Landscape – Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown reviewed with Council how Parks and Rec and Landscaping became one department. The pros and cons were discussed, and it was determined it currently seems to be working as is. Council left the Manager in charge of determining the best fit for the future of Landscaping and whether or not it should be made into an individual department.

The meeting recessed from 12:00 p.m. until 1:30 p.m. for lunch.

Planning and Inspections – Planning Director Kevin Rothrock reviewed short-term rentals with the Board. Council discussed with Mr. Rothrock what he can and cannot approve as far as duplexes without input from Planning Board and Council. The HMC Zoning District was discussed and changing the use table. Council agreed a legal opinion was needed to be sought before changing the ordinance or amending the zoning map.

Police – Council discusses with Interim Police Chief Aaron Miller the SRO (School Resource Officer) and options for approaching the county to help with funding that position. The future of the contract with Watauga County for the Town's dispatch services was also discussed. Mr. Miller advised he was content with the county continuing the 911 service but would like to bring the dispatch service back to Blowing Rock. Council directed staff to work on getting some numbers together to better make a determination. This will need to be revisited before June 30th.

Police and Planning Parking – Council discussed various option for helping resolve the parking issue. Interim Police Chief Miller discussed doing a survey to get the Public's thoughts on paid parking. Council discussed the private/public partnership for parking solutions.

Potpourri Discussions:

Energy Efficiency – Council discussed several options and agreed the Town currently works hard to conserve energy where they can. It was the consensus of all that focusing more attention on energy efficient vehicles was a better money saving priority than the use of solar panels for Town owned buildings.

Professional Services – Interim Manager Freeman discussed with Council a few options to help reduce costs associated with these services. The consensus was to get a RFQ (Request for Qualifications) from a smaller local firm to work on the smaller projects and use McGill Engineers for larger projects.

The meeting was recessed at 5:00 p.m.

On Tuesday, January 22nd at 8:10 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 Interim Town Manager Jim Freeman, Finance Officer Nicole Norman, and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner, whom recorded the minutes.

Council, Manager and staffed worked on developing a priority summary of items in which they wish to accomplish. Council determined the top five items for staff to start working toward accomplishing in the next 6 months. The entire summary will be reviewed by staff to determine which department will be working on the priority item and a revised summary will be given to Council at the February meeting.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NONE

ADJOURN

At 10:40 a.m. with no further business to discuss Council Member Sweeting made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Council Member Powell. Unanimously approved.

MAYOR _____

Charlie Sellers, Mayor

ATTEST _____

Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk