

Blowing Rock Appearance Advisory

Minutes

November 7, 2019

Town Council Chambers 9:00 a.m.

Members Present: Melissa Pickett, Curt Andrews, Bo Henderson, Carol Knapp, & Chris Wetmore

Staff Present: Shane Fox, Chris Pate, Baker Stanley, & Jennifer Brown

Guests: Charles Hardin & Roger Nelson

Begin: 9:00 a.m.

End: 11:45 a.m.

Approve October 3, 2019 - Bo made a motion to approve the October minutes, Curt seconded, and there was a unanimous vote to approve.

Sunset Project (Charles Hardin) - Mr. Hardin stated that since the last meeting he had taken BRAAC's and Town Council's suggestions to create new renderings of the proposed Sunset Gateway at Valley Boulevard with two options. Option One has moved the proposed pillars farther from 321 and in Option Two they are closer. His preference is Option Two. Curt asked how high the pillars were compared to those at Mayview Plaza. Mr. Hardin replied that they are 13 feet on Valley Boulevard compared to 6 feet at Mayview Plaza. He explained the rationale for pillars on 321 being taller is that traffic travels at higher speeds, therefore the perspective is different from the highway compared to Main Street.

Mr. Hardin continued with the other updates including moving the pavers to the bridge and adding an educational component by installing a sign that will tout the features of the New River, such as its being the second oldest river in the world, flowing from south to north.

Melissa asked if the stone was going to match stonework about Town or if it instead would be the same that was used on Mayview Plaza. Mr. Hardin stated that the stone on the bypass was no longer available. Melissa asked if the stonework would mimic the stamped concrete stone look on the bypass because she would expect to have more uniformity at least along Valley Boulevard. Mr. Hardin replied that it would look more like the Mayview stonework. Melissa asked if we really wanted to start a new look along Route 321 that was related to Mayview or if we should keep a more original look of Blowing Rock. Curt stated that he appreciates continuity; however, he is unsure if residents or visitors would actually correlate Mayview Plaza with the Sunset Gateway project.

Bo asked who designed the project and Mr. Hardin stated it was the same company who designed Mayview Plaza. Curt shared that he had grown up on the Atlantic coast and felt that the proposed tower looks more like a lighthouse and is therefore foreign to the mountains. He then asked if the adjacent properties had been shown the proposed plans and, if so, what were their comments. Mr. Hardin stated that representatives from the complex that houses Four Forty 4 were very excited and felt that it will improve the value to their commercial property. Chris Wetmore asked if the proposed pillars would block their business and Mr. Hardin stated that was one reason for the updated conceptual drawings. Curt asked about Kim and Keith Hartley's (Citgo Station) feedback. Mr. Hardin replied that he had not spoken with them yet.

Chris Wetmore stated that he was concerned that this project would add burden to Town resources and if this project were to be approved that Town Council would ensure that the budget, including staffing, will reflect maintaining this project. Curt opined that public-private partnerships are often desirable; however, to date there have been no plans to support the maintenance of these projects upon completion. He asked Mr. Hardin if he had considered raising on-going monies to support maintenance costs to which Mr. Hardin replied, "no". His feeling is that they will provide the money to plan this project, TDA will fund the implementation, and the taxpayers will support maintenance and upkeep.

Bo stated that he loves the concept and embraces what it is attempting to accomplish; however, residents are sick and tired of our streets being torn up. While he understands the need for construction, after the current projects have been completed, he and many others would like to see a couple of years without construction. He asked why this project wasn't planned and implemented in coordination with the design and execution of the Sunset project. Mr. Hardin stated that originally it had been discussed before the Sunset project, but the design was not accepted so it was put on the back burner. He added that the Sunset project was approved quickly, was definitely needed, but was approved before they designed a new gateway. Bo and Curt both expressed that they did not like their tax dollars being wasted by tearing up what had recently been completed on the Sunset project in order to implement the proposed gateway project. Mr. Hardin did not know labor and material costs for recently completed work that would be demolished and replaced.

Bo questioned designers' direction for the proposed project as he does not think that the project looks anything like Blowing Rock and is instead very similar to the design of gated communities, such as those of Cashiers, North Carolina. He further stated that if the goal was to have continuity with what Blowing Rock "looks/feels" like then this design is certainly not it. For instance, he stated that instead of tapered columns, they need to be straight as that is consistent with how the majority of columns are built in Blowing Rock. He also said the stonework is not "Blowing Rock" style.

Chris Wetmore asked how long he estimated to complete this project if approved. Mr. Hardin replied that the street would not be closed and estimated that most likely work could begin in March and be completed by the end of May while most seasonal residents are away. Bo noted that full-time residents will still be here and would have to endure.

Curt asked what they had learned from the Mayview project and would they do anything differently on this project, such as plans for laying pavers. Mr. Hardin responded that they would address such things in the contract and consider having them work at night to lessen the impact on traffic and completing in a timelier manner than was the case with Mayview Plaza.

Bo asked where the picture was taken for the rendering. Was the photographer standing on the road or was s/he in automobile? Mr. Hardin stated that the picture was taken from a standing position. Bo responded that if that perspective was accurate, the columns would look taller and potentially block more of the properties when sitting in a car.

Melissa then asked if this project would ultimately be funneling more traffic on a narrow road with a busy intersection at Main Street. She stated that after the Sunset streetscape is completed it may even be narrower in some areas than it is now. Mr. Hardin stated that he thought the road would be wider after the project was complete, though no one present shared that understanding.

Curt raised the color of the pavers, noting that those that were laid on Mayview Plaza had not been the approved color; however, now that they are dirty and worn, they look much better in that they are grayer rather than the non-conforming yellow. Chris Pate added that he would like to have the paver

number and construction plans to ensure that what is ultimately approved is what will be and is installed.

Carol asked if the columns could be stacked stone instead of stone that is front faced. Mr. Hardin responded that some stone could not be purchased any longer and if they could find the stone it would be newer than what is in Blowing Rock currently.

Bo made a motion to not approve the Sunset Gateway project and Curt seconded it. During discussion Chris Wetmore asked if we should suggest that they make changes to their design and come back, or should we just say "no." After discussion Bo updated his motion and stated that he would like for the Economic Development Committee to readdress the design of the project with a more reflective design of Blowing Rock, such as with gray stacked stone and straight columns. Carol seconded it and there was a unanimous vote to approve.

Frescos in Blowing Rock (Roger Nelson) - Roger Nelson presented examples of fresco paintings and described the history of frescos. He stated that typically they are painted in churches; however, they can be complementing to most modern-day buildings. They are put on steel backings and can be of most any size. He stated he is a believer of public art pieces and would love to offer a free fresco to a Town building. He suggested the American Legion or the Town Council Chambers wall. Melissa asked Mr. Nelson for a rough estimate on what the cost would be to create a fresco. Mr. Nelson stated that typically a fresco can cost anywhere from \$50,000 to \$100,000; however, he would like to apply for grant money and possibly find donors to cover the Town's project.

Curt asked if he has had any discussion with BRAHM about creating a fresco there and Mr. Nelson stated that he had not because most art pieces in a museum are movable and that a fresco is permanent. Curt then asked if he had thought about healthcare buildings. He stated that the company he used to work for sponsored paintings in pediatric floors to make for a more peaceful and calming area. Mr. Nelson stated he would love to look into that and requested to get information from Curt. Carol mentioned the Foley Center and suggested that he contact them as well.

Chris Wetmore asked Mr. Nelson to clarify what he was desiring from the BRAAC. Mr. Nelson stated he would like to find a place to paint a fresco, then he would consult with BRAAC or a small group of representatives from the Town to design the fresco after which he would seek funding, and lastly, he would gather the art guild that would create the painting.

Melissa stated that BRAAC would discuss the feasibility of such a project at December's meeting and would be in touch with Mr. Nelson.

Budget Update/Annual Fundraising Collection/Hanging Basket Collection - Jennifer reported that she did not have the official report from finance; however, she was able to read the revenue that has been collected from the Parks & Recreation software. She stated that approximately \$27,355 has been collected for general donations, hanging baskets, planters, and the cemetery, which exceeds the projected budget.

Christmas Decorations - Jennifer stated that last year BRAAC paid for the tree to be decorated for Christmas. She has received a quote of \$3,495.79 to contract decorating the large blue spruce in front of Town Hall. This includes all lights, installation, maintenance, replacement if needed, and removal. Bo made a motion to approve, Curt seconded and there was a unanimous vote to approve.

Other Business - Chris Pate thanked BRAAC for all of their support for getting a new survey and Master Plan for Memorial Park. Chris displayed the new survey and stated that the Master Plan was in the process of being created.