

MINUTES
Town of Blowing Rock
Town Council Meeting
February 11, 2020

The Town of Blowing Rock Town Council met in regular session on Tuesday, February 11, 2020, at 6:00 p.m. The meeting took place at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street, Blowing Rock, N.C. Present were Mayor Charlie Sellers, Mayor Pro-Tem Sue Sweeting and Council Members Albert Yount, David Harwood, Doug Matheson and Virginia Powell. Others in attendance were Town Manager Shane Fox, Town Attorney Allen Moseley, Town Engineer Doug Chapman from McGill Associates, Public Works and Utilities Director Matt Blackburn, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Fire Chief Kent Graham, Police Chief Aaron Miller, Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown, Finance Officer Nicole Norman and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner who recorded the minutes.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Sellers called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

REGULAR AGENDA ADOPTION

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Council Member Matheson. Unanimously approved.

MINUTE APPROVAL

Council Member Matheson made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 6, 7 & 8, 2020 Council retreat meetings, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting. Unanimously approved.

Council Member Powell made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 14, 2020 regular Council meeting, seconded by Council Member Harwood. Unanimously approved.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting made a motion to approve the closed session minutes from the January 14, 2020 Council meeting, seconded by Council Member Matheson. Unanimously approved.

CONSENT AGENDA

Blowing Rock Police Department requests revisions to Chapter 6, Motor Vehicles and Traffic, of the Blowing Rock Town Code. Changes would assist the Police Department in dealing with parking issues. **Revisions to Chapter 6 of the Town Code – Attachment A**

Budget Amendment – to account for various items – **Budget Amendment #2020-01 – Attachment B**

Shriners Parade – The Oasis Shriner’s are requesting to have a civic parade on Saturday, June 6, 2020 at 2:00 p.m. They will organize the parade the same way the Parks and Recreation organizes their annual parades. The line-up will be on Clark Street and the route will go from 221 to Main Street and end at Ruple Memorial Church.

Council Member Matheson made a motion to approve consent agenda as presented, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Mayor Sellers recognized the girl’s and boys’ basketball teams from Blowing Rock School for both teams recent championship wins. Mayor Sellers presented a resolution to the teams on behalf of the entire Town Council. **Blowing Rock School Resolution #2020-02 – Attachment C**

SPEAKERS FROM THE FLOOR

Robert Hess, 823 Laurel Lane, spoke regarding pickle ball and how it could help with economic development for the Town. Mr. Hess advised he does not play pickle ball, but some of his friends he plays bridge with are very active in the pickle ball community. Mr. Hess advised he had distributed to Council an article from High Country Magazine as well as an article written by his friend Chris Cobb. Mr. Hess acknowledged at Council Retreat, Council had discussed and had not set pickle ball as a priority on the list for the upcoming year. He further acknowledged he understood that, but just wanted Council to think about how this could be a boost for economic development for the Town.

Mayor Sellers thanked the Mr. Hess for his input.

PRESENTATIONS:

1. Village Foundation Presentation – Legion Hill Project

Jim Pitts and John Aldridge with the Village Foundation jointly presented a conceptual rendering for a Park Connector behind the American Legion. The concept includes handicap-accessible walkways behind the American Legion Building, including access to the parking deck beside of the American Legion and Memorial Park, greenspace and benches for seating and an amphitheater for small performances or educational purposes. The idea for the project originally came from the Virginia Tech masterplan from the students who studied the best ways to utilize the space. Mr. Pitts advised this area is highly underutilized, is overgrown and the current pedestrian connections are unsafe.

Mr. Pitts explained the main “sex appeal” for the project is the amphitheater which not only would provide great seating with a beautiful view of the lake, but also could seat up to 50-100 people for small performances. He further explained this would be a space the Town doesn’t currently have in Blowing Rock as well as something that almost no mountain town offers.

Mr. Aldridge advised the Village Foundation is requesting a concept approval from the Town so they can move forward trying to get funding for the project. Mr. Aldridge further advised this is going to be a heavy lift for the Village Foundation as the estimate cost for the project is \$750,000 to \$800,000. He explained there will have to be big gifts, multiple six figure gifts, not small gifts to achieve their goal.

Mr. Aldridge explained what the Village Foundation needs from the Town;

- Need the Town of Blowing to say this project is one of its top priority projects in the next couple of years
- Strong pro-active support from the Town of Blowing Rock in a public-private partnership to “lock arms” with the Village Foundation and the community to get this project done
- Requests the Town provide engineering and for the Town to have a survey done

Mr. Aldridge explained the foundation would like for this project to be done, if possible, with private funding. He further explained doing something of this nature with public funds can sometimes be “a can of worms”.

Mr. Aldridge advised if the Foundation goes out and tests the project and finds it’s just not a feasible project, they will come back to the Council and let them know. He advised if funding is able to be raised the board will come up with a final rendering to bring back to Council for final approval in January of 2021, construction would start soon after and should be completed by fall of 2021. Mr. Aldridge noted “this is a big vision, but if you don’t think big you do ever do anything big”.

Council Member Matheson stated he hope that anytime the Town goes into a public-private partnership with any project that both parties go in “whole hog”. He further stated that he loved the concept and idea of this project.

Mayor Sellers advised for many years nothing positive happened in this area of Town and with the renovation of the American Legion, Robbins Pool and improvements around the lake the one area lacking is this space. He further advised he felt this may be the “missing link” to that area.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting stated she thought it was a great idea and thanked the Village Foundation for their work.

Council Member Harwood thanked Mr. Pitts and Mr. Aldridge, the Village Foundation, the Chamber, the Chamber EDC for their time and hard work. He asked Mr. Pitts to enlighten him on the Town providing engineering and where that would stop and start. Mr. Pitts advised it would start with a ground survey to put all the needed information on a map to confirm the project makes sense to be done. He advised the only other engineering would be for grading and drainage to make sure it meets the appropriate standards.

Council Member Powell advised she loved the project and loved the grassy areas. She further advised this project is number six (6) on the Council's priority list from Retreat.

The consensus of Council was to approve of the concept for the project.

2. 321 Entrances to Main Street

Manager Fox advised several years back the Sunset Gateway project came about. Town Council looked at several different design and options. Eventually landing on what some felt was the final product with McGill and the improvements to Sunset Drive streetscape. Since that time there have been more conversations about Sunset Drive and beautification that could be had there. Around Council Retreat time, several Council Members asked staff to come up with some plans for beautification ideas not only Sunset Drive, but several other areas of Town. Landscaping staff was asked to look at the entrances to downtown along 321 and come up with a design cost estimate for each entrance. After some very preliminary renderings given at retreat, Town Council instructed staff to create improved renderings and a cost estimate for Council consideration.

Chris Pate with landscaping presented those renderings for the proposed areas in Town via PowerPoint.

Manager Fox advised contractors to have come up and looked at the space and the estimated cost is approximately \$200,000.

Council Member Matheson asked if both sides of the Sunset and Hwy 321's landscaping would match. Mr. Pate advised it would, but he wasn't able to do renderings yet on the Glenwood Office Building side because of the utility poles and a few large cable ties.

Mayor Sellers asked how many locations would be landscaped for the \$200,000. Manager Fox advised Valley Blvd at the north entrance, south entrance, Sunset, the Fire Department and each "Welcome to Blowing Rock" signs if the Chamber approves as the signs belong to them.

Council Member Powell asked Mr. Pate if he had a chance to look the Hwy 221 sign. Mr. Pate advised he hadn't, but that sign was just recently completed and was in good shape.

Council Member Harwood thanked Mr. Pate and the rest of staff that had a hand in creating the renderings as he found them to be very helpful.

Council Member Powell asked Kim Hartley who was in the audience if her and her dad Keith McDonald, owner of the service station on the corner of Sunset and Hwy 321, had a chance to look at this plan and if so, what their thoughts were about the design. Ms. Hartley advised they had, and they liked how soft it looked and that there isn't a massive structure on the property. She further advised they love that its natural, not tall but rather a lower design because their business depends on traffic to stop and that their business needs to be visible, which was a main concern of theirs. Ms. Hartley further advised they

really liked the natural landscaping to really show off Blowing Rock and loved the consistency of the design throughout Town.

Council Member Matheson asked Mr. Pate if he had looked at the bridge area on Sunset Drive. Mr. Pate advised it was an area that could be addressed and tied in together with the landscape plan.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting stated the idea of a rain garden in that area had been discussed to help with water and storm water in that area and would be beautiful as well.

Mayor Sellers advised Council had all received a letter from the Blowing Rock Chamber and felt it needed to be noted that the Chamber had spent a fair amount of time and money on conceptual drawings for many years. He advised Council may want to think about that and consider Mr. Pate and the Department Heads have a conversation with the Chamber going forward.

Council Member Harwood stated he had spent a lot of time on this the past two (2) weeks, he had met with a lot of people to try and get the history of this project. He further advised he still wasn't sure he had a clear picture of the history and how it's got to where it is today. He stated he does know that the Chamber, the EDC and some funding from the Village Foundation had transpired and that transpired prior to staff's involvement. He explained he felt to be fair, Council needed to allow the Chamber to present their proposal which they had wanted to do originally at the end of last year.

Council Member Harwood advised his recommendation was for Council to "push pause" on staff's proposal and allow the Chamber the opportunity to present their design to Council after which Council can talk about next steps after hearing both options.

Council Member Powell explained her understanding of the history of the project goes all the way back to the strategic plan five (5) years ago and had been given input from both McGill Engineers as well as Benchmark. She further explained all of Council have had the opportunity to see the Chamber's plan, have talked to them about it and felt that is why their project was probably put on hold. She advised she felt it was time to move forward with staff's design for the project. She further stated this has been going on for five (5) years. Council Member Powell stated this plan is a beautiful way to not only focus on Sunset Drive, but also six (6) other areas as well for around \$200,000.

Council Member Powell made a motion that Council move forward with the Town's plan and get the project going as soon as possible to get as much done as can be this spring, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting.

Further discussion:

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting stated she felt Council's all had the opportunity to see the Chamber's plan, she thanked the Chamber for that, but felt there were problems not only with the conception but also that the money for the project was going to come from TDA

funds that included the Town's money. She stated the Chamber wanted full ownership of that money, which she didn't feel in allowing would make her a good steward of the taxpayer's money. She stated that was one of the reasons she wasn't in favor of their project.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting advised Council asked Mr. Pate to go ahead and look at this and she is in favor of what he has brought before them. She felt it was pulling everyone together, there are a lot of needs in the Town and \$200,000 is a lot easier to swallow rather than \$750,000 to \$825,000. She reiterated she is in support of the Town's design.

Council Member Harwood advised he felt the motion was inconsiderate and was somewhat of a "slap in the face" to the EDC and what they have done. He further advised he felt the decision was hasty and he didn't understand the rush. He explained he wasn't sure that the money that came from the TDA is actually earmarked appropriately for all the entrances. He further explained his understanding was the funds were earmarked for this entrance in particular and nothing else, so he wasn't sure that the motion is even in line with what the money was earmarked for. He restated he was confused about the hastiness of it and was confused why Council can't give their good friends at the Chamber an opportunity. He further stated it was his understanding the design Council originally saw has since been revised and would like to see it in a public forum.

Council Member Yount stated what the Chamber advised to him was a lot of money had been spent. He stated he wasn't sure if that money had been subtracted from what he was hearing this project was going to cost the other way. He further stated he didn't truly know what the Chamber was going to present until he sees it and as of, yet he hasn't seen it.

Council Member Matheson advised he took a little offence to Council Member Harwood's statement. He explained he personally had been meeting with the Chamber on this project for eight (8) to nine (9) months and on his side, there was not anything hastily done. He further explained there were a few things he had requested the Chamber do that had never been done, so in his opinion it wasn't a "slap in the face".

Council Member Matheson explained he was looking at it from the taxpayer's side, where is the Town going to "get the most bang for our buck" as well listening to the people who have come and talked to him about their concerns. He stated in his opinion Council was not making a hasty decision.

Council Member Harwood stated the first time he saw staff's design was in January at Retreat and this is February. He further stated he felt if the Chamber has been working on their design for eight (8) months and this design has only been on the table for a month it's hasty to decide on it this soon in his opinion.

Council Member Matheson advised in his opinion this design looked better in a month than the other design did in eight months.

Council Member Yount advised Destination by Design had done three (3) designs, but never got it exactly where Council wanted it and the Town paid \$40,000 for those designs.

Council Member Powell stated with all respect to Council Member Harwood's thoughts, her hope was this could be something the Town and Chamber could "lock arms: and work together on. She further stated she would like to spin this all in a positive manner and move forward.

Council Member Harwood advised before he was on Council, he sat at every Council meeting for twelve (12) years in the audience and knew what had transpired, he knew that thousands and tens of thousands of dollars has been spent on designs that were never used. He further advised Council now has a design from someone who wants to collaborate with the Town, the Town hasn't had to pay a dime for those designs, and he felt they deserved "their day in court". Council Member Harwood stated he hasn't made up his mind yet either way and would like to see both designs before he decides so that all options are considered or have all parties collaborate.

Council Member Matheson stated he would like to review for the record at the December Council meeting when he made the motion to pull the Chamber's presentation, he asked that all parties collaborate.

Mayor Sellers stated to clarify the TDA funding is for all entrances. Council Member Harwood thanked Mayor Sellers for the clarification.

With no further discussion the motion stood: Council Member Powell made a motion that Council move forward with the Town's plan and get the project going as soon as possible to get as much done as can be this spring, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting. In favor of the motion: Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting and Council Members Powell and Matheson; Against the motion: Council Members Yount and Harwood. The motion was approved.

BUSINESS MATTERS:

1. Board Appointments

Council voted on each Board appointment by ballot. The following appointments were made:

- **Planning Board:** Wes Carter, Bill McCarter and Pete Page
- **Board of Adjustment:** Lance Campbell and Jerry Starnes (Full Members) and Jim Steele and Sarah Murphy (Alternate Members)
- **ABC Board:** Susie Greene
- **TDA Board:** Tim Gupton
- **BRAAC Board:** Melissa Pickett

Council Member Harwood made a motion to approve the newly appointed board members, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting. Unanimously approved.

2. Sunny Side CUP Amendment

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock advised Amber Fairbetter is requesting a minor amendment to the conditional use permit for Sunny Side Day Care to expand the day care into the remaining portion of the building at 8100 Valley Blvd, beside of Papa's Joe's. The current CUP limits the day care center occupancy for up to thirty (30) children. Mrs. Fairbetter is requesting to expand the day care into the remaining portion of the building to allow up to forty (40) children. Approximately 1/3 of the remaining portion of the building is already used for storage and bathrooms, which will remain.

Twelve (12) spaces were required with the approved CUP. The day care expansion will require three (3) additional spaces. There is sufficient room to provide at least three (3) spaces with two (2) spaces being located on the left side of the building, vacated by the previous tenant. Child drop off and pick up is conducted across the front of the building with access to both Valley Blvd and Church Street.

A playground area remains fenced and secured behind the building. This area must provide at least seventy-five (75) square feet per child for recreation use. The playground area may need to be expanded to accommodate additional children, according to the NC Department of Health and Human Services.

There are additional NC State Building Code requirements that may have to be satisfied for day care operations. Those items may include: plumbing modifications, electrical changes, access ramps, and additional smoke detectors. Additionally, the entire building and front fencing needs to be repainted and some landscaping added to the front and right side of the building.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting made a motion to approve as presented, seconded by Council Member Matheson. Unanimously approved.

Council Comments:

Council Member Yount advised he was asked by a neighboring business owner to make sure the applicants are required to paint the exterior of the building. Mr. Rothrock advised that was part of the CUP and when weather permits that will be done.

Council Member Powell stated this daycare has a wonderful reputation in the community, she loves seeing it grow and seeing them work with the Town to make that happen.

Sunny Side CUP Amendment – Attachment D

3. Bass Lake Sidewalk Contract Award

Doug Chapman from McGill and Associates reviewed the Bass Lake sidewalk plans with Council. Plans include a retaining wall, drainage, curb and guttering which will help keep

people from trying to park on the shoulder. Mr. Chapman explained the sidewalk will conclude at the gravel driveway at the start of the historic property.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting asked Mr. Chapman to explain why the sidewalk will end there because some people have questioned why the sidewalk won't extend all the way to the iron gate. Mr. Chapman explained the reason is because the Park Service won't allow the Town to go any further because if they did it would be intruding on historic property which isn't allowed.

Council Member Powell asked how the sidewalk with work in conjunction with the existing bike lane and if it will cause any issues. Mr. Chapman explained and advised the bike lane will remain.

Mr. Chapman advised the budget for the sidewalk is \$1.2 million which included \$922,500 for construction and \$92,300 for contingency. Funding for the project includes a \$980,000 EFLAP grant thru DOT and \$242,000 of Town funds from the GO Bond. He advised the public bid opening for the U.S. Highway 221 Sidewalk Improvements project was held on January 30, 2020. A total of four (4) bids were received, and Country Boy Landscaping, Incorporated of Harmony, North Carolina, submitted the lowest responsive bid with a total base bid amount of \$976,959.00. He further advised McGill's recommendation is the bid be awarded for this project to Country Boy Landscaping, Incorporated in the amount of \$976,959.00 which is within the budget and allows \$37,000 for contingency.

Mr. Chapman advised this project has to follow DOT's requirements and their requirement for the next step is for the board to pass a resolution for the intent to award subject to DOT's approval.

Mayor Sellers asked Mr. Chapman to review the timeline for the project with Council. Mr. Chapman advised the contractors have been advised the Town requests the Main Street section to be completed first. Provided all is in line with DOT's expectations, construction will begin mid-March. He advised the anticipated completion date for the Main Street section is May 29th and for the entire project is September 16th.

Mr. Chapman noted the contractors can work on any part of the project, but just have to have the Main Street section completed by May 29th.

Council Member Matheson made a motion to approve the bid, seconded by Council Member Powell. Unanimously approved.

4. Parade Discussion

Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown advised the Town sponsors two parades a year, one for the 4th of July, and a Christmas parade during Thanksgiving weekend. Our parades begin at 2:00 p.m. and are typically finished by 3:00 p.m.

Each year the visitors to the Town parades continue to grow. In 2019 there was over 30,000 people in Memorial Park attending the 4th of July festivities, including the parade and there was over 20,000 in Memorial Park for the Christmas Parade.

The Town currently allow cars to park on Main Street during the parades. In order to allow for more visitors, staff would like to request no parking on Main Street during the parade. Also, would like to request moving the parade time to 10:00 a.m. as well, which would shorten the amount of time that there is no parking on Main Street, and it would allow staff to block parking late at night and be opened back up before noon.

The Tourism Development Authority sent out a survey to the Blowing Rock businesses asking what time they preferred the parades to take place, 10:00 a.m. or 2:00 p.m. The majority of the responses would like an earlier time for the parade which would allow parking to be opened up for visitors after the parade.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting asked if the Shriners were aware of the time change since Council had just approved their request. Ms. Brown advised they were aware and advised it would be fine for them going forward. She further advised the parade for them this year would still be at 2:00 p.m. as the parade time change begins with the 4th of July parade.

Council Member Matheson advised he would be working on a satellite parking location as well as with AppalCart for earlier pick-ups during parade days to help get people into the downtown area with the elimination of parking on Main Street during that time. Council Member Matheson asked for staff to ensure it was well advertised to get the word out for the options that will be made available.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting made a motion to approve as presented, seconded by Council Member Harwood. Unanimously approved. **Bass Lake Sidewalk Contact Award Resolution – Attachment E**

5. Monthly Financial Report

Finance Officer Nicole Norman gave the monthly Financial Report from January 2020.

OTHER BUSINESS

- Mayor Sellers – extended thoughts and prayers to the Davant Family with the recent passing of Mrs. Harriet Davant. He advised at the March meeting the family will be invited to the Council meeting and be presented a Resolution to honor Mrs. Davant.
- Council Member Yount – asked Manager Fox to give a brief update on the status of a traffic study for Greenhill Road. Manager Fox advised staff had reached out to Rainy-Kemp and Associates to begin work on a traffic study. Manager Fox further advised when details are received it will be passed along to Council.
- Doug Matheson- advised he and Manager Fox will be attending an AppalCart meeting next week.

- Manager Fox – Reminded of the following upcoming dates and noted the location change to the American Legion is due to the early voting for the Primary Election being held in the Council Chambers.
 - Board of Adjustment meeting is February 19th at 5:30 p.m.
 - Planning Board meeting is February 20th at 5:30 p.m.

Council took a ten-minute recess before going into executive session.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 8:25 p.m. Council Member Matheson made a motion to go into executive session *NCGS 143-318.11. (a)(5) – discussion of potential property acquisition*, seconded by Council Member Yount. Unanimously approved.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:00 p.m. Council returned to open session. There being no further business to discuss, Council Member Yount made a motion to adjourn at 9:00 p.m., seconded by Council Mayor Pro-Tem Sweeting. Unanimously approved.

MAYOR _____
Charlie Sellers

ATTEST _____
Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk

ATTACHMENTS

- Code Revisions for the Police Department – Attachment A**
- Budget Amendment #2020-01 – Attachment B**
- Resolution for Girls and Boys Basketball Teams – Attachment C**
- Sunny Side CUP Amendment – Attachment D**
- Bass Lake Sidewalk Contact Award Resolution – Attachment E**