

**MINUTES - SPECIAL MEETING
BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
MARCH 12, 2004**

A special meeting of the Boone Town Council was called to order at 8:15 p.m., Friday, March 12, 2004, in the Burris Room at the ASU Broyhill Inn and Conference Center. Mayor Velma C. Burnley presided. Council members present were Mayor Pro-Tem Loretta Clawson, Graydon Eggers, Lynne Mason, Bunk Spann and Dempsey Wilcox. Staff present were Town Manager Greg Young; Town Clerk Freida Van Allen; Finance Director Joyce Watson; Assistant Finance Director Amy Davis; Public Utilities Director Rick Miller; Public Services Director Blake Brown; Police Chief Bill Post; Planning Director John Spear; Fire Chief Reggie Hassler; Resource Director Jim Byrne and Personnel Director Peri Moretz.

The purpose of this meeting was the Council's annual retreat.

DEPARTMENTAL NEEDS

Town Manager Greg Young opened the retreat by summarizing the departmental needs for the upcoming years indicating that space-needs, employee retention, additional personnel and a water study are priorities. Town Manager Young said he hoped to hire a consultant to perform a space-needs analysis this fiscal year. He said Council in the past wanted to sell the old Town Hall, but based upon current needs Council may want to keep that property until a location for a new Fire Station can be found. Fire Chief Reggie Hassler said he is concerned about rapid development and the Fire Department's coverage east of Boone. Mr. Hassler said he has been saving money towards a new station but finding suitable land is difficult. Council member Spann asked if the Town has resources to provide a space-needs analysis. Town Manager Young replied that he hoped to enlist the services of an outside consultant at a cost between \$30-\$50,000. Council felt that Staff should do as much as possible in house in order to reduce the cost of a consultant. Town Manager Young said land is so cost prohibitive that he is hoping the consultant could help the Town better prepare to utilize existing space. Town Manager Young said he hopes to have space-needs analysis proposals submitted before the budget workshops.

Town Manager Young said another pressing need is additional personnel. For example, new landscape regulations were recently adopted, and a landscape/arborist will need to be hired. Planning Director John Spear said presently his staff is handling the additional work, but with spring and summer upcoming an additional person will be needed. Council authorized Town Manager Young to begin the hiring process for the landscape/arborist.

Council discussed at length the employee-retention problem. Mayor Burnley pointed out that Council has funded two major pay studies over the years but has never fully funded the recommendations.

Public Utilities Director Rick Miller discussed the need for a hydraulic and water system study. Mayor Burnley said once this study is completed the Town of Blowing Rock and ASU will be apprised of our ability to provide them more water. Council agreed to add the study to the April agenda and begin the process for hiring a consultant to prepare the hydraulic and water system

study.

CAPITAL PROJECTS DISCUSSION

Howard Street Project - Town Manager Young presented a power- point presentation. A hard copy of the presentation is located in the March, 2004 Council Packet Information File. Town Manager Young said Council has identified this as the number one project capital project. After several years' delay, the project is back on track. Town Manager Young said that W.K. Dickson presented some preliminary figures on the cost of the project and a timeline for construction. He said some of the cost estimates may be high or could be deleted, but not until certain commitments are made in the future. Council member Wilcox said some of the costs can come from the water and sewer and Powell Bill funds. Mayor Burnley indicated that previously New River Light & Power officials have said they would could consider placing their utilities underground. That commitment needs to be reaffirmed. Town Manager Young said there may be grant opportunities to alleviate some of the cost concerns. Council member Wilcox felt raising the hotel/motel tax would present problems. Council member Mason indicated that raising the tax should be pursued as a contribution towards a tourist destination. Council member Wilcox said that the DBDA, private contributors, New River Light and Power, Powell Bill and Water and Sewer funds can all be used towards financing the project in order to reduce the costs down. Council member Wilcox suggested presenting the revenues for the project, along with the expenditures. He also suggested receiving verbal commitments from the interested parties regarding the project. Council member Mason said she could think of several good reasons to complete the project. Council agreed to put the matter on the Council agenda in a couple of months for a final decision and to schedule a community information session.

ANNE MARIE/ELIZABETH DRIVE PARK

Resource Director Jim Byrne presented a power-point presentation on the project. A hard copy of the presentation is located in the March, 2004 Council Packet Information File. Resource Director Byrne said he is proposing to lease the County 12.55 acres for recreation proposes. The Town would retain about 17 acres to be used as passive recreation, such as nature trails and picnic areas. Resource Director Byrne said FEMA will probably allow some impervious surface in the area. He also indicated that if Council likes this idea, a committee should be appointed to begin the lease negotiations. Resource Director Byrne said a passive recreation park would not be costly to build or maintain. Council agreed that this option would be the best and agreed to establish a committee at the April Council meeting. Council member Mason asked that Jim Byrne or Sam Furgiuele obtain the conditions that will need to be included in the lease. Mayor Burnley suggested apprising the County of what is being proposed in order to gauge interest in participation.

GREENWAY EXPANSION

Town Manager Young suggested that we reserve money toward a match from State grant funds. Council discussed at length funding for the expansion project.

Mayor Burnley declared a break at 12:15 p.m. Council reconvened at 1:30 p.m.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Council member Mason said the number one issue that she hears concerns neighborhoods, specifically, traffic, noise, parking and occupancy violations. Planning Director Spear said occupancy violations are difficult to prove. He said there are rental licensing programs that can be implemented only for single-family residences in single-family neighborhoods. Planning Director Spear said the Town needs to investigate the costs of the program versus the outcome. Planning Director Spear said that usually there is a rental licensing board that hears any complaints or violations. Council member Mason suggested setting up a task force to review the options. The task force would include neighborhood citizens, rental managers, ASU, Planning Staff, some Town Council and Planning Commission members. Council member Clawson felt the issue is dire and the Town must do something to resolve it, even if it is a rental licensing program. Council discussed at length rental occupancy violations and a licensing program and finally agreed that a task force formation should be on the April agenda.

Council member Mason asked if there is anything we could do about unoccupied residential properties. Council discussed what the minimum housing code and community improvement code regulates. Council member Wilcox suggested completing an inventory of unoccupied residential properties. Council member Mason suggested investigating what other municipalities do.

Council member Mason asked when the dates are scheduled for the neighborhood meetings to discuss traffic issues. Public Services Director Blake Brown replied that the meetings will probably be scheduled for the end of April.

GROWTH PLAN

Council member Mason felt that the comprehensive plan needs to be updated. Planning Director Spear said the Planning Commission has been reviewing the comprehensive plan and will be suggesting some changes to the plan. Council member Mason felt an updated plan should be a priority.

Council member Wilcox said the Town should offer some incentives to owners of dilapidated property that needs re-development. Council member Wilcox said some times property owners just add a coat of paint to buildings rather than re-develop there because of our regulations. Planning Director Spear said regulations could be developed to allow for small business redevelopment. Council suggested having Planning Director Spear investigate developing some regulations for buildings under 2000 square feet.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Council member Mason said she represented the Town on the Affordable Housing Task Force, and then reviewed the latest report of statistics. The conclusion of this group is that population groups from \$41,000 to \$65,000 are having a difficult time finding affordable housing. The group is at an action stage and at a point to realize if the Town Council supports affordable housing. Town Manager Greg Young said the Town's ability to fund affordable housing is

limited basically to CDBG grants and that medium-income housing cannot be supported because there are no municipalities with a population of 60,000 in the County. Planning Director Spear said there are zoning techniques that can be used to require a certain number of affordable housing units within new developments. However, municipalities usually have to provide some sort of compensation for these units and legislation for this inclusionary zoning may be required. Council agreed to continue dialogue on the subject even though the Town is limited in affordable housing funding.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL PLANNING GROUP

Council member Mason said when added “Intergovernmental Planning Group” to the agenda she was unaware of the establishment of a Community Council. Council member Mason said there are issues of mutual concern that need joint planning.

PLANNING COMMISSION

Council member Mason asked Planning Director Spear what the Planning Commission’s role is specifically. Planning Director Spear replied that Sam Furgiuele had researched the legality of the Planning Commission to issue Conditional Use Permits and found that they may not be legal. Planning Director Spear said the Planning Commission works hard but has very little time to complete long-term planning and that we probably need to evaluate whether or not the Planning Commission should continue as a development and review board. Council member Mason wondered if it is necessary to have both boards. Council agreed that the process could be streamlined but felt this matter needs more study and suggested investigating what other municipalities do.

SUPPORT OF ARTIST GUILD

Council member Clawson presented some statistics on the total economic impact of the arts in Watauga County. She said the Arts Council is planning to lease the old Mountain Times building for studio space for artists. There will be a gallery, a classroom, workshops and a retail shop in the building. Council member Clawson said the Arts Council is hoping to have the space open by this summer and hoped that the Town Council would support the project. Council member Clawson said eventually this project will be self-supporting and that the Arts Council hopes to raise \$250,000.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Council member Mason, seconded by Council member Clawson, Council moved to adjourn at 4:55 p.m.

VOTE: Aye-All
Nay-None

Town Clerk

Mayor