

Town of Blowing Rock

Planning Board

Minutes

Thursday, April 17th, 2025

5:30 p.m.

The Blowing Rock Planning and Zoning Board met on Thursday, March 20th, 2025 for their regularly scheduled meeting. Members present were Chris Squires, Steven Cohen, GK Naquin, Brooks Mayson, Lindsay McClanahan-Cook, Brandon Walker and Woody Hubbard. Staff members present were Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Zoning Officer Brian Johnson and Support Specialist Taylor Miller.

Meeting called to order at 5:29 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Brandon Walker made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by GK Naquin. All members in favor.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Steve Cohen made a motion to approve the March 20th, 2025 minutes, seconded by Brooks Mayson. All members in favor.

1. Workforce Housing Discussion

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock introduced the workforce housing discussion. Town Council would like for Planning Board to create a subcommittee to explore the issue, how it applies to Blowing Rock and maybe suggest some code changes at some point. There were some articles provided in the packet for Planning Board members that included information about other communities in North Carolina that have implemented some workforce housing codes and changes. Some communities use overlay districts to encourage or incentivize the reservation of workforce housing and development projects. Some add flexibility to their zoning ordinance which allows for a wider range of housing choices in other zoning districts that you wouldn't typically have. For example, allowing accessory dwelling units in all zoning districts.

There is legislation being proposed in the NC General Assembly right now that would require local governments to allow accessory dwelling units in all zoning districts. Mr. Rothrock said he proposed a couple of years ago that accessory units be allowed in R-15 because there are some that exist currently that are grandfathered in, and it would be a good way for people to have live-in help or have family stay with them. The town was not ready for that at the time, so the code was not changed.

Some communities have removed residential density limitations from their jurisdiction. About 3 or 4 years ago, the town removed residential density limitations from Downtown.

Mr. Rothrock said that he provided some information on what Buncombe County, Chapel Hill and Davidson have done regarding workforce housing. He stated what Chapel Hill and Davidson have done and it's unlikely we will follow them.

There are varying definitions of workforce housing across the state. We will need to come up with a definition for workforce housing that fits Blowing Rock.

Steve Cohen asked about the definition of inclusionary zoning in one of the articles provided for the board to review. He questioned if it was being encouraged or required – he wants to know if it's mandatory or voluntary. Mr. Rothrock said there were three different types of inclusionary zoning – 1) voluntary, 2) conditional and 3) mandatory. Mr. Cohen stated that he did not want anything related to workforce housing to be mandatory.

Brandon Walker asked if we were talking about workforce housing or affordable housing. He noted that in the Buncombe County article, they kept saying workforce housing, but they were really talking about affordable housing and those are two different things. Mr. Rothrock said he understood what Mr. Walker was asking and that the articles were just information about what other communities are doing about workforce housing, the articles do not define what we want to do moving forward.

Steve Cohen referenced some of the information Town Manager Fox, talked about at the Town Council meeting. He said based on income in this county, the mortgage rate came out to somewhere around \$1,200 a month and that we need to figure out how to encourage developers to come up with units that are more in the range of \$1,200-\$1,500.

Brandon Walker asked if all this information had been discussed with the town attorney and the legality of 100% workforce housing and potential conflicts of interest. Mr. Rothrock said the town attorney has been involved and will assist us through the whole process.

Mr. Rothrock stated this meeting isn't to figure out if we are for or against workforce housing, it's more to study it and try to put together some possible scenarios for what works. One scenario might be that it's not right for us, but we want to start the work and figure out how it could work.

Lindsay Cook asked if the committee could further define what workforce housing is? Mr. Rothrock said yes.

Steve Cohen asked about whether the town has spoken with anyone from the county to figure out how to get bus service from Boone into town once or twice a day. Lindsay Cook said yes. AppalCart does not have a budget to provide that service and keep the service free. Lindsay said that the subcommittee that is going to be formed could certainly talk to the AppalCart director about that as an option.

GK Naquin asked if we are able as a town to give incentives to developers who would take a cut in profit on workforce housing. There's also not a lot of land or pieces of property for this to happen on. The only big piece of property this could happen on would be Shoppes on the Parkway. Mr. Rothrock said that Mr. Naquin is right about not having very much land. There could be

opportunities for redevelopment like the Woodland's site. Mr. Naquin suggested the committee should look at land that this would work on. Woody Hubbard stated he thought this would most likely include the ETJ because the land per acre would probably be cheaper.

There was a lot of interest in being on the subcommittee from all members. It can be three or four members.

Lindsay Cook stated she is currently involved with the Watauga Housing Council, so this is all very familiar to her. Woody Hubbard is our representative for the ETJ and feels like this is a project that might be done in the ETJ. Steve Cohen stated he has experience with Florida trying to do this same thing but stated he would be at the subcommittee meetings even if he's not a member. Brandon Walker stated he owns a lot of property here and some of it is developable in the way that fits this.

The four suggested members of the subcommittee will be Lindsay Cook, Steve Cohen, Brandon Walker, and Woody Hubbard.

A motion was made by Brandon Walker to create this subcommittee to discuss workforce housing and provide scenarios or recommendations regarding potential changes in the town regarding workforce housing. Seconded by Steve Cohen. All members in favor.

Mr. Rothrock gave a quick update about the Commercial Design Standards information Mr. McCarter sent on Brevard and their code changes. We considered using the consultant they used to change their code but they were not cheap, and it is not a part of our budget this year so we are going to keep it in-house. Brian and Taylor are both working on things and using the Brevard information as inspiration.

Mr. Rothrock stated in the next 2-3 months we will see a straight re-zoning request near the Horse-Show Grounds and possibly the Hampton Inn project. Mr. Rothrock has also spoken to the Laurel & Pine owners and they are reconsidering what they are doing on that property, maybe something less dense than what was approved before.

Meeting adjourned at 6:05 p.m.

Chairman Chirs Squires

Support Specialist Taylor Miller