

MINUTES
Town of Blowing Rock
Town Council Meeting
June 10, 2025

The Town of Blowing Rock Town Council met for their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, June 10, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. The meeting took place at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street, Blowing Rock, NC. Present were Mayor Charlie Sellers, Mayor Pro-Tem Doug Matheson, Council Members Cat Perry, David Harwood, Melissa Pickett and Pete Gherini. Others in attendance were Town Manager Shane Fox, Town Attorney Joey Petrack, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Public Works Director Matt Blackburn, Parks and Recreation Director Jennifer Brown, Police Chief Nathan Kirk, Landscape Director Cory Cathcart, IT Director Thomas Steele, Emergency Services Director Kent Graham 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. Mayor Sellers verified attendance via roll call.

THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

MINUTE APPROVAL

Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson made the motion to approve the minutes from May 13, 2025, regular & closed session and May 27, 2025 budget work session, seconded by Council Member Pickett. Unanimously approved.

REGULAR AGENDA ADOPTION

Council Member Gherini made a motion to adopt the regular agenda, seconded by Council Member Perry. Unanimously approved.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Blowing Rock ABC Store – Travel Policy
2. Fireworks Permit – Blowing Rock Country Club
3. Police Weapon Surplus
4. Utility Write-off Resolution

Council Member Harwood made a motion to approve the consent agenda as presented, seconded by Council Member Gherini. Unanimously approved.

SPEAKERS FROM THE FLOOR

Gigi Poole – 147 Dogwood LN spoke about workforce housing as her first introduction to the topic was at the winter retreat in January. She thinks there are more important issues that need to be considered with workforce housing such as monitoring and what is the demand for this type of housing.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Police Chief Nathan Kirk recognized officers Jeffery Dylan Walton and Nathan James Mitchell and gave some background on each other their accomplishments since they started at the police department earlier this year. Town Clerk Hilari Hubner administered the oath of office to both officers and Chief Kirk presented each with a Blue Line Bible provided by Samaritan's Purse.

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Bennett Property – RZ 2025-01 – R-15 to HSG Ordinance #2025-04

Zoning Enforcement Officer Brian Johnson stated Mr. and Ms. Zachary Bennett are requesting a rezoning of two vacant lots adjacent to their residence at 1194 Laurel Lane from R-15, Single-family to HSG, Horse Show Grounds. Lots 5 and 6 are part of "The Creeks at Mayview", a 6-lot subdivision. Lot 5 is 0.771 acres, and Lot 6 is 0.699 acres.

The current zoning is R-15 – Single-Family – which is intended to be a low-density residential district in which single-family residences constitute the predominant use. Multi-family dwellings and mobile homes are prohibited in this district.

The proposed zoning is HSG- Horse Show Grounds – which is a zoning district designed to accommodate equestrian activities such as horse shows.

As stated in the application, Mr. and Ms. Bennett would like to build a small barn and keep a horse or two on the property. The current R-15 zoning does not allow this, but the proposed change to HSG would allow. The property does border the horse show grounds.

At the May 15, 2025 Planning Board meeting, the Planning Board made a recommendation to approve the rezoning.

Subject to the remaining provisions of this section, the height of a building or structure in any residential district (R-15, R-10, R-6, or RMH), may not exceed thirty-five (35) feet. Similarly, the eave height of a building or structure in the R-A district or any non-residential district (HMC, HSG, OI, or PGS) may not exceed thirty-five (35) feet and the overall height of the building or structure shall not exceed fifty (50) feet.

Mr. Johnson stated notices had been sent out to fifteen (15) neighbors within a hundred and fifty (150) foot radius with no responses from any of those property owners.

Mayor Sellers asked if the applicant would be required to put sewer in.

Mr. Johnson stated it would be an option, but would not be a requirement. He further stated with the HSG zoning they could not have any type of residential dwelling on the property as residential is not allowed in the HSG zone.

Council Member Harwood asked what the fencing requirements are in HSG.

Mr. Johnson noted the town ordinance does not have any fencing requirements, however if approved and it goes to a zoning permit process there are some permits with the Army Core of Engineers that will have to be done per their requirements due to the stream on the property as well as having livestock on the property.

Council Member Harwood mentioned if this property were to be rezoned then essentially the remaining R-15 would be an island in the middle of HSG.

Mr. Johnson stated that would be correct.

Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson asked if this would coincide with everything the horse show grounds properties have.

Mr. Johnson explained this request is compatible with the horse show grounds.

Council Member Gherini stated he had attended the May 15th Planning Board meeting and as he recalled there was discussion of the applicant riding horses from their property to the horse show grounds. He wanted to discuss that request further.

Applicant Mr. Zach Bennett (1194 Laurel Lane) stated they purchased the property several years ago and have worked with both State and Federal agencies working on the creeks, getting everything back natural as that is the headwaters of New Year's Creek and it was important to get that area opened back up and flowing. He further stated it was decades of trash, trees, debris etc. and they have spent a great deal of time and money cleaning that all up. Mr. Bennett noted one set of neighbors were present during the Planning Board meeting and spoke in favor of his request. He further stated rezoning will help prevent the other areas his from being developed and will turn into green space surrounding the horse show grounds. He explained that will help protect the area around the horse show grounds which was his goal to begin with. He stated he and his family are very involved with the horse show and are on the horse show board, etc. Mr. Bennett explained as far as riding horses there is a path going directly from their property to the horse show grounds, as well as a cut through from the horse show grounds to the Cone trail off Laurel Lane that has been utilized for decades and decades by the Horse Show.

Mayor Sellers opened the public hearing.

Council Member Harwood asked if there were any HSG properties owned by anyone other than the Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show.

Mr. Johnson stated currently there are not any other properties with that zoning.

Council Member Harwood further asked when the HSG zoning was established.

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock stated it goes back to the original zoning established in 1984.

Council Member Harwood wanted an understanding on what could happen on a HSG property, he explained he had read through the use table and didn't see anything about shows. He asked if the Horse Show was a special use permit.

Mr. Johnson stated there wasn't a special use permit for the Horse Show.

Council Member Harwood inquired how a Horse Show was held on property that does not have permitted use.

Mr. Johnson stated it's because it's been held for over one hundred years.

Mr. Rothrock noted it was grandfathered in as the Horse Show started long before zoning regulations were put into place.

Council Member Harwood stated he wasn't trying to be argumentative or get off subject, he just wanted understanding on what could be done on a HSG zoned property.

Mr. Johnson stated changing from R-15 to HSG does eliminate a lot of uses.

Council Member Harwood asked if HSG was inherently a public event oriented use.

Mr. Johnson didn't think it was, the Horse Show for that one property is specific to that property and didn't think it was specific to the public but only to that one event.

Mr. Rothrock noted HSG district is designed to accommodate equestrian activities such as horse shows.

Council Member Harwood mentioned that looking at the use table the activities are pretty limited.

Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson made a motion to close the public hearing, seconded by Council Member Gherini. Unanimously approved.

Council Member Harwood made a motion to deny the request. He explained the charge to the Town Council is listed in section 16-23 it's clear that Council cannot make this decision based on whether the change would help or hurt the private owner of this property. The council really needs to make the decision based on how this change would affect the whole community and not take into account Mr. and Ms. Bennett's advantages or disadvantages in this. In his opinion, the private use of this is inconsistent with public oriented use of HSG and his motion to deny this request is based on those reasons.

With no second to Council Member Harwood's motion the motion failed.

Council Member Perry made a motion to approve the applicant's request, seconded by Council Member Pickett. For the motion: Council Members Perry, Pickett and Gherini and

Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson. Against the motion: Council Member Harwood. Motion passed.

2. Parking Enforcement – Ordinance Update and Passport Parking #2025-05

Town Manager Shane Fox reviewed at the May 13th regular meeting, Council discussed parking enforcement and prior to that meeting it was discussed at Winter Retreat. Based on the parking study approved in the fall of 2024, Ms. Meredith McLaurin's recommendation made towards parking enforcement was as follows; consistent parking enforcement, modifying the current three (3) hour parking limits to two (2) hour time limit on public streets, with the addition of enforcing three (3) hour parking time limit at the Maple Street parking lot, adjust the fines for parking violations and go to a license plate reader system which is much more effective for monitoring.

Chief Nathan Kirk stated at the last meeting he had presented a vendor, Passport, for Council to consider contracting with for a more effective parking enforcement option. He further stated right after that meeting, he was contacted by another vendor, T2 Systems UPSafety PE Solution that has better options and is a better vendor in his opinion.

Chief Kirk reviewed the details offered by T2 Systems. He further reviewed the comparisons between Passport and T2 Systems. T2 Systems; Year 1 - \$15,595.08, Year 2 - \$7,066.08, Year 3 - \$7,066.08. Passport; \$12,000 for the software only – then billed annually, plus fees and equipment Year 1- \$14,600 - \$15,440. T2 Systems is the better option to save money and be able to accomplish what the town is trying to do.

Mayor Sellers asked for clarification if the current budget had funds available to support this endeavor.

Manager Fox explained it was not in the current budget or the new FY budget due to the timing and not knowing how Council wished to proceed. He further explained, if approved, staff could bring a budget amendment before Council at the summer retreat for approval to proceed.

Mayor Sellers opened the public hearing.

Robin Miller, President of the Blowing Rock Chamber spoke on behalf of the business community and requested Council consider leaving the parking time at three (3) hours for the time being. Ms. Miller explained some businesses are still feeling the repercussions from hurricane Helen and business owners would like to see the approach of consistent enforcement first, implement great technology and then move forward with next steps. She further stated the business community would like to request more time to provide collaborative input on parking solutions.

Council Member Gherini stated he had received several emails from people voicing their concerns of reducing the parking time limit and felt Council needed to be sensitive to those concerns. He would ask Council to consider leaving the parking time at three (3) hours for the time being until the full scope has been looked at before making any big changes.

Council Member Harwood stated from his understanding the reason for recommending the parking time limit to change from three (3) hours to two (2) hours was to help rotate parking spaces more frequently. He further stated if someone was going to be here longer than two (2) hours they need to go to one of the two hundred eighty (280) non-timed parking spaces. In his opinion, what he didn't think had been considered was how to get that message out there to the public. He stated he too had received some calls and emails with the same concerns about changing the parking time limit as it would make it hard to get a lunch/dinner and/or shopping outing done in that amount of time. Council Member Harwood explained he would be ok with that as long as people knew where they could park and felt there was a mis-step in the communication on the town's part and asked if there was a thought to providing that information through signage.

Town Manager Fox stated yes, but to what extent of signage has not yet been determined. He explained Wayfinding signage will be coming soon as it was approved on the Town's end, but been delayed due to NCDOT approval. He further explained the signage will depend on what area the parking areas are and will have that area's information.

Police Chief Kirk noted T2 Systems can customize digital information to provide whatever information the Town wishes to share and can be added on the Town's website, social media etc.

Mayor Sellers mentioned some of the people who visit Town are older and don't always understand the technology aspect and are more inclined to just park wherever they find a parking spot.

Town Manager Fox stated for the record the enforcement areas other than Maple Street parking lot, are the same areas the town has enforced parking time limits for years. The Town can always add more signage, but reminded with Wayfinding signage coming the need to provide too much signage wouldn't be a good idea.

Council Member Pickett made a motion to close the public hearing, seconded by Council Member Perry. Unanimously approved.

Council Member Pickett stated in the past the parking enforcement hasn't been cohesive, and she thinks this is strategic baby steps to accomplish goals along the way.

Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson mentioned enforcement is the biggest thing he would like to see happen. He mentioned he's seen a lot of delivery trucks parked blocking crosswalks and would like Council to consider a designated area on Main Street and Sunset as a loading zone.

Council Member Pickett made a motion to increase parking fines, for the Town to purchase the software package and equipment from T2 Systems, leave the parking time limit at three (3)hour parking, leave the enforcement areas as they are currently and change the parking hours to 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Monday-Saturday and 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. on Sundays, seconded by Council Member Perry. Unanimously approved.

3. 2025-2026 Budget

Town Manager Shane Fox reviewed the proposed 2025-2026 budget via power-point presentation.

Mayor Sellers opened the public hearing.

Janie Sellers (412 Wonderland Dr) – spoke as both a resident and Vice-Chair of the Blowing Rock Civic Association. Ms. Sellers stated residents are pleased that the proposed budget doesn't have a property tax increase. Ms. Sellers further stated she understands the town's diverse revenue sources with a great amount coming from visitor spending. While she appreciates that boost in the economy, it is a good opportunity to make the point about the relative contributions taxpayers make. She noted in the steps leading through the budget process, there had only been one opportunity for public input and that was at this meeting. She encouraged Council to think about revisions in the process for the future so public comments can be offered earlier on in the budget process. She concluded by thanking the Council for their attention, for a balanced budget, for public safety, service levels and infrastructure improvements residents have been enjoying.

Jenny Miller (490 Goforth Rd) – wanted to express her appreciation to Council and staff for doing a wonderful job and stated anyone who wanted to come tonight and express their thoughts or concerns on the budget could. Ms. Miller thought from the previous comment that there would be a crowd packed going out the door ready to speak, but there isn't. She credits that to Manager Fox's newsletters to the residents keeping everyone informed, Town Council being present with everything they get out to the community making the residents well informed on what goes on. She further noted there is an ample amount of time for public input on the budget and recalled budgets in the past being presented with only a small number in attendance and/or speaking. Her opinion about that is the Town does such a great job getting communication out to the public. She further noted the Town of Blowing Rock taxpayers get a "whole lot of bang for their buck". Ms. Miller concluded by thanking Council, Manager Fox and staff for all they do.

Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson made a motion to close the public hearing, seconded by Council Member Gherini. Unanimously approved.

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

OFFICIAL REPORTS & COMMENTS

- Mayor Sellers – June 15th the Main Street paving project will begin – work will be done at night, June 24th Mid-Year Retreat 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m., parade is July 5th at 10:00 a.m., July 8th Council meeting the North Carolina Department of Cultural and Natural Resources will be present to discuss historic preservation- what citizens can do to preserve historic properties, the benefits of doing that, what can prevent something from being torn down etc. Asked that any questions citizens get them to a Council Member, Manager Fox or Planning Director Kevin

Rothrock and they will get those questions to the presenters so they can prepare answers to answer at the July meeting. He thanked Manager Fox and staff for all their hard work on the budget process and noted this makes his 8th budget – when he came on board the town was short eight (8) employees and there was a lot of work that needed to be done. His hats off to Council and to Managers for moving the town forward.

- Council Member Perry – Thanked Manager Fox, Finance Director Tasha Brown and all the Department Heads for their hard work putting together a very stable and balanced budget.
- Council Member Harwood – Echoed Council Member Perry's comments, he offered his apology for not being at the budget work session as it was unavoidable. He thanked everyone who offered well wishes for his mother and stated it meant a lot to him.
- Council Member Pickett – None.
- Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson – Thanked staff for their hard work on the budget.
- Council Member Gherini – Stated he and Mayor Pro-Tem Matheson are meeting with the NCDOT next week to talk about Hwy 321 and the Aho/County Waste site facility about accidents with hopes the chief engineer will be able to give some insight to that area. The Economic Development meeting will be on June 19th in Boone – Scott Elliott is the Governor's representative on all things Hurricane Helene flood related and thinks that will be an interesting conversation. He too echoed what all have said and thanked Manager Fox, Finance Director Tasha Brown and staff for their hard work on the budget.
- Town Attorney Joey Petrack – None.
- Town Manager Shane Fox – Gave updates on Maple Street paving, Green Street & Maple Street paving, Memorial Park and Summer Retreat will be held June 24th 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at Town Hall.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

None

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:15 p.m. Council Member Perry made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Council Member Harwood. Unanimously approved.

MAYOR _____
Charlie Sellers, Mayor

ATTEST _____
Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk

Attachments

Utility Write-Off Resolution – Attachment A

Bennett Property Rezoning – Ordinance #2025-05 – Attachment B

Parking Ordinance - #2025-05 – Attachment C

FY 2025-2025 Budget Ordinance – Attachment D