Town of Beech Mountain

Planning Board Meeting Minutes January 5th, 2009

Call to Order:

Chairman Paul O'Connell called the meeting to order at approximately 9:05 A.M. Other board members present in attendance were Andy Porter, Bill Watson and Brian Barnes. Town Councilmember Alan Holcombe was also present for the meeting, as well as various members of the public and Bob Oelberg, a landscape architect involved with creating a streetscape design.

Adoption of Agenda:

Brian Barnes made a motion that the agenda be adopted. The motion was seconded by Bill Watson and carried with no opposition.

Approval of Minutes:

Bill Watson made a motion that the minutes of the December 1st meeting be approved. The motion was seconded by Brian Barnes and carried with no opposition.

Discussion of Possible "Streetscape" Project:

Town Planner James Scott opened the discussion of the possibility of a streetscape beautification/ sidewalk project being pursued on Beech Mountain Parkway. He emphasized that the intent of this meeting was to be a "starting point"- to initiate the dialog necessary as a first step towards such a project. He also iterated his opinion of the importance of such a project for our town, its businesses, its residents, and its visitors.

To begin with, Mr. Scott displayed a sidewalk design plan that had been obtained from the Department of Transportation. This plan had been created for the Town some years ago and had subsequently been lost. Mr. Scott stated that he felt a modified version of this plan would be more attainable for the town, and would also present an opportunity for the Town to create a more inspiring streetscape that served to reflect more on some of the unique characteristics that make Beech Mountain a special place. Therefore, he proposed a phased implementation of the project that would concentrate in the immediate present on a "gateway" to the Town that would extend from Elderberry Ridge Rd. to Vasarely's restaurant. He also cautioned against creating a design simply to fit a budget, but rather advocated that if a design was inspiring, funding sources may become available.

Next, Mr. Scott reported on information gathered from talking with the Town of Banner Elk about a similar project that they had recently completed. He then outlined the process for working with the DOT to complete such a project.

Then, Mr. Bob Oelberg spoke about a design that he had created for the streetscape. He began by describing the process of landscape modeling with a 3D modeling program. He reiterated that his work was expanding upon the basic design by the DOT, without simply "brushing it aside." He then displayed two movies of the area

involved. The first was the entire 1300 foot stretch of land that would be involved in the proposed phase I streetscape-- as it is today. During the first movie, Mr. Oelberg noted on many areas of the current streetscape that needed improvement. These included:

- that the "gateway" to Beech Mountain had the scale of a village, but that buildings lacked architectural continuity.
- Buildings lack a consistent "massing" along the street front,
- The area lacks a definite beginning and end.
- He noted that there were no definite edges of roads, shoulders, entrances, and parking areas.
- The streetscape lacks "human scale" elements
- No pedestrian circulation system combined with a lack of clear direction for automobiles lends to safety considerations
- Clutter from overhead utilities

The next movie was a 250 foot section of that same area as it could look after the streetscape. The main characteristics of this design were:

- A more inconspicuous stormwater conveyance system
- Pedestrian crosswalk "moguls" to gently slow traffic without being a nuisance to automobile traffic
- Driveway entrances constrained to better control traffic
- Fencing/ stone columns that "frame" landscape views
- Use of native/ natural vegetation unique to Beech Mountain
- Rock "outcrops" and berms
- Dwarf conifers and Beech trees
- Creation of a corridor/ edges similar to Banner Elk, but using natural edges rather than buildings
- Unification of diverse uses along the landscape
- Diversion of attention from the overhead powerlines by incorporation of human scale elements and ground level interest

Following the presentation, Brian Barnes noted that he liked that pedestrians were presented with options by walkways being on both sides of the street, and noted that the design reminded him of Hilton Head, SC. Andy Porter questioned whether the entire design was incorporated within the 60 foot right of way, to which Mr. Oelberg replied that it was. Bill Watson noted that in other sections of the road it may not be possible to keep the walkway on both sides, especially moving past the Phase I section. Randy Feierabend noted that future phases of plans would continue the walkway to Kat's overlook, and then on to Ski Beech. Paul O'Connell asked whether any unpaved "greenways" were to be incorporated into this plan. James Scott stated that it was our intent to connect the walkway to the town's existing trail network. Randy Feierabend stated that part of this gateway could include two main pathways, one following the main road and the other tying into the trail system. He noted that the current national

atmosphere greatly supported healthy, outdoor activity, and such a pedestrian system would be very well received in this environment. He also noted the differences between our preliminary designs and a "downtown" environment- including the fact that we would accentuate the natural atmosphere. He also talked about the possibility of having signs as you climb Beech Mountain parkway towards town that stated the elevations of competing resort activities. Andy Porter questioned whether the DOT would mandate a curb and gutter for safety reasons. Randy Feierabend stated that those requirements may only pertain to DOT enhancement grant funding. Mr. Oelberg stated that he thought that the stormwater swales would serve this purpose. Brian Barnes questioned how such a walkway would be handled in winter weather. Randy Feierabend stated that the town would use its equipment to remove snow. To wrap up the discussion, Paul O'Connell stated that he thought the plan looked good and recommended that we continue the process, and stated he thought that money may be available for an inspiring project.

Discussion of Zoning Issues for "Group Homes"

Chairman Paul O'Connell opened the discussion by stating that this issue had come up in the past, and had never been resolved with finality. He foresaw that this issue may again come up in the future, and therefore wanted to address it now.

Mr. Scott explained that he had performed some research on the issue and had found the following facts:

- The Fair Housing Act prevents towns from making it more difficult for a "group home" to locate somewhere than it would for other groups of unrelated people.
- Our ordinances defines a "family" to be up to 5 unrelated people. Therefore a group home with 5 people or less would technically be able to locate anywhere a "family" could.
- Our ordinances are silent as to where groups of greater than 5 unrelated people can locate—therefore it is prohibited. Group homes of greater than 5 people would not be allowed in the town.

It was the Planner's position that due to these facts, the board should consider not altering the current ordinances by creating a location/ zone in which large group homes could locate. He stated that doing so would in fact invite the location of these establishments.

Mr. O'Connell stated that even group homes with 5 or less people could be an incongruent land use and could cause problems in a residential district. Brian Barnes raised the possibility of re-defining a "family" as up to two unrelated people. Other members of the board stated that there were many groups of up to five unrelated people who lived together in the Town who did not cause problems, such as Ski Patrollers.

Mr. Scott said he would look into the legality of amending the definition of "families." He also stated that directing all group homes to a certain zone as a conditional use with appropriate standards may also be an option. Mr. O'Connell suggested that those options be researched further and moved to table the discussion until the next meeting.

Discuss Board Member Compensation

Mr. O'Connell opened the discussion that he used to sporadically receive checks as compensation for serving on the board. Mr. Scott stated that he had searched the Town Ordinances and Resolutions, and had not found any written authority for paying board members other than the Tree Committee, who had language regarding compensation in their charter.

Councilmember Alan Holcombe stated that he felt that a resolution authorizing payment to board members should go before the Town Council. He felt that it was only fair, because the Board of Adjustments had been paid for years.

Paul O'Connell questioned how much work would be generated for the town by putting all board members on the payroll. Alan Holcombe stated that it would not be much work. Mr. Scott stated that that was why the Town Manager had recommended payments be annually or quarterly. Alan Holcombe stated that any resolution should be drafted such that board members had the opportunity to "opt out" if they so desired.

Paul O'Connell said he was in favor of such a resolution if the funds from those board members who "opted out" could be diverted into a town beautification/ streetscape fund. Brian Barnes also stated that he would be in support of such a resolution only if funds could be diverted to a beautification fund. All other members of the board were in agreement with this idea. Andy Porter moved that a resolution be sent to Town Council to this effect. Paul O'Connell seconded said motion and it passed with no objections.

Adjournment

Having no further business, Bill Watson moved that the meeting be adjourned. Said motion was seconded by Brian Barnes and carried with no opposition.

Respectfully Submitted,

James Scott Secretary to the Board