

Town of Beech Mountain
Planning Board Meeting Minutes
May 31, 2011

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, John Hoffman, and Brian Barnes. Utilities Director Robert Heaton and Town Building Inspector Stan Hanna were also present for the meeting.

Adoption of Agenda:

A motion was made that the agenda be adopted. The motion was seconded and carried with no opposition.

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made that the minutes be approved. Said motion was seconded and carried with no opposition.

Discussion of Underwood Building:

James Scott requested that Stan Hanna be able to present an update about the Underwood building, as there have been many questions regarding the site and its uses. Currently, there is a discrepancy between whether or not the building is within town limits, thus subject to town ordinances regarding building and safety codes. The bank that provides financing for the building determined that it lies within town limits; therefore, Mr. Hanna conducted an inspection of the building. During the inspection, Mr. Hanna was informed of the owner's wishes to open a restaurant in the current structure. A restaurant would require water and sewer services only provided by the town. After a discussion with the town attorney and the bank's attorney, it was agreed upon that if the site will be developed into a restaurant, the site will need significant improvements to meet applicable building codes for fire separation, etc. Until that time, however, the owner will continue to work with the town, the bank, and his attorney to decide the best course of action.

Discuss of Meter Boxes and Pipes for Water Valve Cutoff:

James Scott directed the discussion towards water cutoff pipes, specifically the appearance of the pipes and what could be done to improve them. One possibility for improving the overall aesthetics of the pipes is cutting them closer to the ground, which would reduce the amount of pipe exposed. According to Utilities Director Robert Heaton, this is not a feasible action, as the pipes are required to be that height for easy access for the Utilities Department. Another possible solution is to paint the pipes so that they will blend in easier with their surroundings. By applying a special paint that bonds to plastic to the pipe, the town will be able to reduce the visibility of the pipes.

Some possible options would be having the town purchase some cases of paint from a hardware store and resell them to residents at Town Hall. The key areas of concern are the properties located on the main roads in town, such as Beech Mountain Parkway. These lots are the most visible, as are the pipes that run along the roads. The possibility of painting just those pipes, and providing additional paint through the town could be an option. While the Utilities workers are already stretched thin, it is also possible to have volunteers or those required to work community service hours (through the Police Department) paint the pipes. A final option would be to allow residents to paint their own pipes, but restrict the colors available (darker green or brown). Some pipes that were painted approximately six years ago were observed, and it was agreed upon that this was a viable option.

Discussion of Wind Energy Systems:

James Scott explained that another builder wishes to establish a wind energy system on a telecommunication tower. As communities continue to develop, as explained by Mr. Scott, it has become important to outline the differences between how an ordinance is to be interpreted. More and more, ordinances around the country that do not specifically prohibit activities allow residents to continue with those activities. If a town wishes to prohibit residents from doing those activities, they must amend the ordinance to forbid that activity. In this case, the town must decide whether or not to allow wind turbines. It was discussed that the North Carolina Mountain Ridge Protection Act of 1983 exempts “windmills,” and that there have been various interpretations of whether that was meant to apply to wind turbines.

James Scott presented the Board with what he felt were the three most reasonable alternative courses of action in this regard. The first option would be to prohibit wind turbines altogether, the second would be to allow wind turbines as a Conditional Use if they met certain criteria designed to minimize their negative impact on surrounding properties, and the third option would be to amend the Town’s current Telecommunication Tower ordinance such that wind turbines were covered under those standards. Currently, the Town of Beech Mountain allows telecommunication towers in R-1 and R-2 districts with a conditional use permit from the Board of Adjustment. But the discussion turned towards the need for wind turbines altogether, regardless of the addition of a telecommunication tower.

Some important topics included in the discussion about the possible location. Allowing them exclusively in R-1 districts, as to prevent the installation of turbines in highly dense areas is one of the more important topics. Discussions also involved the buffer for the wind turbine, and the ability for the turbine to withstand the harsh weather experienced on Beech Mountain. A motion was made to do more research and revisit the topic at a later meeting. Said motion was seconded and carried with no opposition.

Discussion of Sign Enforcement:

Chairman O’Connell wished to discuss the apparent lack of sign enforcement in the Town. It appears that occasionally, some unpermitted signs do not receive the same treatment as others. The Board was informed that sign enforcement is not selective, but can get behind when Town Hall staff is busy.

Call to Adjournment:

Chairman O'Connell called for the adjournment of the meeting. Said motion was seconded and carried with no opposition.