

Town of Beech Mountain
Planning Board Meeting Minutes
July 24, 2012

Call to Order:

Vice-Chairman Andy Porter called the meeting to order at 9:05 AM. Other Board Members present in attendance were, James True, Matt LaVigne and Planning Director James Scott. Present Chairman Paul O'Connell came in at 9:15 AM. Town Councilwoman Cindy Keller was also in attendance.

Adoption of Agenda:

James True made a motion to adopt the agenda. Matt LaVigne seconded and the motion was carried with no opposition.

Approval of Minutes:

James True made a motion to adopt the minutes from the previous Planning Board meeting. LaVigne seconded and the motion was carried with no oppositions.

Discuss Parking Regulations:

Vice-Chairman Andy Porter pointed out the first thing on the agenda is "Parking Regulations." He noted that one issue of parking is at Fast Eddies' Hot Dogs. They are trying to expand parking due to Fast Eddies adding more seating. Andy Porter mentions that Fast Eddies and other establishments at Beech Towers use parking that is adjacent but actually located on Ski Beech property. He states that he has never seen that parking area full. James Scott agrees that the parking "problem" exists more on paper than it does in real life- which is one reason why he feels that the ordinance should be modified. James Scott points out that Fast Eddies is short several spaces before their expansion and will be at least 20 spaces short after their expansion. Andy Porter points out that about 9/10 of the year they could use parking down around the entrance of Ski Beech if needed. James Scott states that Town Manager Randy Feierabend has pointed out to him time and time again that some things in our ordinance seem like they were copied from Main Street North Carolina and that they don't always work well in a resort community.

The current parking regulations, in section 154.132 "Off-Street Parking" requires that an establishment provide the number of parking spaces required for that particular use, as defined in a table that lists different uses and the amount of parking that each requires. The ordinance also specifies that if the required parking cannot be obtained on the property of the use, off-site parking can be obtained if 1) it is provided on an adjacent lot and 2) if a permanent, non-revocable easement is obtained. Mr. Scott states that although Ski Beech has no objection to Beech Towers using their parking, they have declined to give such an easement.

James Scott then discusses how he has researched parking regulations in other resort towns and has also done some studying on best practices in planning publications. He states that these resources have provided him with several ideas for modifications to our ordinance that

might help the parking regulations work better. James Scott goes over the changes he has made in the ordinances:

- 1: To allow a "Parking Study" plan to help provide adequate details on how actual demand may be accommodated. If a formal parking study identifies a lesser amount of parking is sufficient, then the parking could be lowered to that amount.
- 2: In lieu of providing the required number of parking spaces, property owners in the may elect to pay an impact fee in an amount set forth on the schedule of fees established by the Town Council of Beech Mountain, as they may amend from time to time. This fee would be applied toward creation of public parking or toward other projects that would reduce the need for parking, such as walkways, bike lanes, etc.
- 3: Simply reduce the amount of parking called for by certain uses. For example, for restaurants, reduce required parking to one space for each 5 seats or stools, plus one space for each 2 employees on the shift of the largest employment. For, multi-use buildings or shopping centers, reduce parking requirement to one parking space for each 250 sq. ft. of gross floor area.

Mr. Scott also discussed some other potential changes. He discussed how the other jurisdictions that he had studied also allowed for off-site parking, but did not require that the parking be on an adjacent lot (they instead required that it be within a certain distance) and they did not require that the easement be permanent and non-revocable. The Board discussed the potential problems that could arise from a non-revocable parking easement.

James True asks why can't the Town's current commercial facilities simply be grandfathered in and just say they were here before we got here as a town. He recommended that they make the parking plan exactly the way James Scott proposed for new establishments, but have current establishments grandfathered unless they do any kind of building expansion. James Scott explains that we can grandfather some existing things but he was cautious about having a "double standard."

After much discussion the Board felt that more study was needed to resolve the parking issue. They recommended that Mr. Scott study the amount of parking provided by current establishments as it compares to the amounts required by the ordinance. They recommended grandfathering current commercial entities or making the ordinance more reasonable for them. Further discussion was tabled until next month's meeting.

Discuss Comprehensive Planning:

James Scott opened by stating that this month he had focused on the Community Design, Image, and Character portion of the Comprehensive Plan. He stated that this had been a difficult chapter to work on. What it was intended to be about was, in general, the "character" of the town, with specific focus on the aesthetic appearance of the town and the laws and regulations that serve to further these goals.

Mr. Scott said that in the Comprehensive Planning Survey, aesthetics and community appearance were identified as items that are very important in Beech Mountain. He discussed that the town currently did many things that helped improve the towns character and appearance. These things included capital beautification plans and projects such as the streetscape project, the

dogpark, and multiple beautification projects in town. He also discussed how the town addressed many aesthetic- oriented issues through its regulations and ordinances, such as nuisance laws and minimum housing standards. He acknowledged that the scope of this chapter had become quite broad.

The chapter began with a background section that discussed the qualities that made up the “character” of Beech Mountain and why it is important to maintain and accentuate that “character”. The first goal discussed under this chapter is to “Preserve, protect, and continually enhance the friendly small town resort “Character” of Beech Mountain through local rules and regulations.” The first policy that James Scott proposed to this end is to “Continue and Strengthen Community Regulations.” Mr. James Scott went on to describe the Town’s current Zoning Ordinance and its focus on regulations designed to keep up public appearance. He also discussed that in many ways the current Zoning Ordinance was troublesome, with discrepancies, vagueness, omissions, difficult wording, and failure to recognize some of the unique characteristics of Beech Mountain, such as its fluctuating seasonal population. A strategy listed in the plan was to eventually perform a major, comprehensive overhaul of the Zoning Ordinance, and Mr. Scott recommended that this be done with the assistance of a professional firm.

The second major policy to achieve the goal of preserving the Town’s character is to “Restore or Replace the Decaying and Aging Structures in Beech Mountain”. He mentioned that he felt that this is one of the most substantial issues that faces the aesthetic appearance of Beech Mountain. He proposed strategies of continuing to vigilantly enforce minimum housing codes and condemnation of unsafe structures as well as developing incentives for rehabilitating or replacing decaying structures. The Board felt that some of the incentive strategies proposed were not realistic and would not work on Beech Mountain. For example, the Board felt that second homeowners would not qualify for any State or Federal programs to rehabilitate derelict housing. They also felt that programs to loan money to accomplish needed housing repairs were a bad idea. This was noted and will be removed from revisions in the plan. Andy Porter suggested that the Town start by just sending out letters to notify people of the condition of their home. These letters didn’t have to be to the level of starting the condemnation process, but could provide an initial notification to owners that certain problems had to be addressed. This could be called an “awareness program.”

Next, summer intern Brandon Davis presented the work he had done over the summer regarding the development of a set of guidelines or recommendations for architectural standards for the Town of Beech Mountain. He was especially cautious to say that the intent of these standards, if adopted, could be to serve as some broad, foundational, minimum standards for new development or redevelopment within the Town’s commercial district. It was not intended that these guidelines apply to residences, but it was mentioned that a booklet or brochure could be created to give to prospective builders or renovators merely as recommendations.

Mr. Davis’s standards included recommendations for sidewalks in the commercial districts of Beech Mountain. He stressed that the Town should strive to retain its “rustic” appearance. His guidelines covered recommendations for the types of materials used, the type of roof and siding, colors, etc. that would achieve this look. He also showed some imaging simulations that depicted how certain buildings in town would look with “rustic” architectural

elements incorporated. There were some comments from the Board and from others that they disagreed with some of the design choices proposed.

It was agreed that more work was necessary on this chapter before it should be incorporated into the plan.

Storage Containers:

This item involved consideration of adoption of ordinances that regulated large storage containers on lots in the Town. James Scott stated that he had attempted to incorporate the changes to the proposed ordinance as discussed in the previous meeting. He then read over the proposed ordinance and opened the floor for comments.

The Board discussed that the basis of the ordinance was that a storage container of size larger than 343 sq. ft. (7' x7' x7') could not remain on a property within Beech Mountain for periods of longer than 30 days. James Scott said that the size determined by the smallest size of commercial "POD" available. Also, he felt that the Town should not regulate storage containers that were small enough to fit in a standard pick up truck.

Having no modifications to the proposed ordinance, the Planning Board moved to send the item to the Town Council for consideration.

Sign Regulations:

James Scott reminded the Board that they had resolved to take the sign ordinance section by section each month to review it and try to improve wording and clear up and discrepancies or shortcomings. This month the Planning Board was to consider the "Residential Signs" chapter (Section 154.274). James Scott reviewed some proposed amendments. They included:

- Making the material and style requirements for residential signs the same as for other types of signs.
- Changes to address numbering requirements, especially for situations where houses or buildings are not visible from the road. These changes also mandated address numbers be posted on new construction sites as soon as a permit was obtained, instead of the current practice of waiting to ensure they were up before a Certificate of Occupancy was issued.
- Removal of the provision that allowed for (large) off-premise residential signs. He mentioned that this provision was put in for the Pinnacle Inn and Woodland Meadows signs which are actually not in the Town limits.

Andy Porter made a motion that the amendments be presented to the Town Council for review. Said motion was seconded by James True and carried with no opposition.

The Board then continued discussing signs and reviewed Section 154.278, Semi-Temporary Signs. James Scott first proposed that the name of this chapter be changed to "Contractor Signs" rather than "Semi-Temporary" signs. Cindy Keller questioned why this type of sign had different standards than Real Estate Signs. James Scott agreed and thought that the standards should be similar. Paul O'Connell questioned whether contractors who were only working on a job for a week should really be required to purchase a sign as nice as real estate

signs. James True questioned whether such signs should be allowed at all, given that they had advertising on their truck, etc. After some discussion, the Board agreed that the standards for contractor signs should be the same as for real estate signs, and that if a contractor wanted to spend the money for a nice sign and obtain a permit, they should be allowed to. They discussed that the permit fee for these signs should be waived because the contractor would already be paying for a building permit.

Other Business:

Chairman Paul O'Connell stated that this would be his last meeting with the Planning Board. He stated that due to his schedule and other pursuits, he would be resigning and he tendered James Scott a formal written resignation. The Board wished Mr. O'Connell well, and thanked him for his long service to the Planning Board.

Call to Adjournment:

Chairman Paul O'Connell called for a motion to adjourn. Andy Porter so moved and James True seconded. Said motion was carried with no objection.

Respectfully Submitted,

James Scott
Secretary to the Board