

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF BLACK MOUNTAIN BOARD OF ALDERMEN
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING (BOARD RETREAT)
August 31, 2010**

THE BLACK MOUNTAIN BOARD OF ALDERMEN met in a special called session for the purpose of conducting a board retreat on Tuesday, August 31, 2010 at 10:00 a.m. in Lower Core 1 of Highland Farms Retirement Community, 200 Tabernacle Road, Black Mountain, NC.

With the unexpected absence of the mayor, and at the facilitators' suggestion, the five board members present elected to delay the start of the retreat until all members of the board could be present, and to reconvene the meeting in the same location at 11:45 a.m. over lunch.

Mayor Bartlett called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m. with the following members present:

Carl R. Bartlett, Mayor
Joan Brown, Mayor pro tem
Ruth D. Brandon, Alderman
Tim Rayburn, Alderman
Carlos Showers, Alderman
C. Michael Sobol, Alderman

Also present were:

Marcy Onieal, Town Manager
Steve Straus, Developmental Associates (retreat facilitator)
Heather Lee, Developmental Associates (retreat facilitator)

Introduction

After lunch and personal introductions, Facilitator Steve Strauss engaged the board in a broad and open-ended discussion about their:

- Hopes and concerns regarding purpose and outcome of retreat
- Individual visions for the Town
- Hopes and expectations for the Board itself as the recognized leadership of the community

By consensus, the board adopted the agenda, objectives and ground rules proposed by the facilitators. Ground rules included:

- Staying on task during the retreat session (no interruptions; stick to topic at hand)
- Checking out inferences with one another
- Sharing all relevant information, including those topics and issues previously considered "un-discussable"

- Agreeing to disagree with one another, without being disagreeable
- Requiring decisions or actions arising out of the retreat to pass only by unanimous consent, in order to foster the consensus and commitment necessary for members to follow through and hold each other responsible for their behaviors and actions outside the retreat setting

The board agreed to two specific objectives/tasks for completion by the end of the retreat:

1) Establishing expectations for effective working relationships as follows:

- For the board as a whole
- Between the Mayor and Board (and vice versa)
- Between the Board and Staff (and vice versa)

2) Identifying an important issue, project or concern for discussion and consensus-building, working toward making progress on an important town priority.

Facilitator-guided discussion

Having previously met for one-on-one interviews with all six members of the board, Mr. Straus reviewed the self-professed and universally-communicated description of board members' current personal and working relationships with one another as being difficult and uncomfortable and creating obstacles to effective leadership. Board members concurred that the one thing they could agree on is that things are not going well and their collective leadership is being perceived poorly by the community.

Mr. Straus led the board through a mini-training exercise designed to mirror what is often at play when groups of individuals find themselves in ineffective and deteriorating relationships. The exercise focused on the concept of a "*Drama Triangle*", in which individuals move around the triangle in three equally negative roles as "*Persecutor*", "*Rescuer*", and "*Victim*". He also led the board to an understanding of *Action Theory*, abbreviated as follows:

Governing Values → Action → Consequences

He noted that positive change must start with the board's governing values. As long as board members' core values are inconsistent with one another and/or are negatively inspired, the result is blinding behaviors and actions, which always result in negative consequences, such as self-deception, self-justification and self-fulfilling prophecies.

Board members then began to discuss specific instances of ineffective interaction among themselves around various issues, noting the frequent occurrence of the following negative behaviors and conditions that persist regardless of topic, such as:

- Lack of trust
- Taking offense, even when not intended
- Passive-aggressive behaviors and responses
- Sniping, baiting, gossiping, rumor-planting

- Rude response, behavior and demeanor to each other, staff and public
- Repetitive badgering of staff, speakers, each other
- Attempting to undermine decisions that are made by the majority
- Regurgitating the same complaint or objection long after a decision is made and the rest of the board has moved on
- Never reaching closure on any issue
- Ambushing each other and staff with surprise issues
- Behind-the-scenes maneuvering and manipulation instead of open discussion
- Showing disrespect through snide/side comments/personal attack instead of objective criticism
- Misdirected energies and attempts to micro-manage staff, issues, each other
- Constant paranoia
- Lack of active listening
- Harboring personal grudges

Setting Expectations

The facilitators suggested participants identify expectations on which they can unanimously agree, in order to redirect energies toward positive communication and behaviors and establish guidelines and standards of conduct and procedure by which they are all willing to abide. By unanimous consent, the board agreed to the following (this list does not include every suggestion made, only those accepted by clear consensus):

Board expectations of Board

Behavioral Expectations

1. If member has an issue with another, speak directly, one-on-one to each other rather than to others, in specific terms about the conflict and behaviors.
2. If you ask someone a question, give them the opportunity to answer the question before interrupting.

Procedural Expectations

1. Agenda items will not be accepted for a board meeting after the last working day of each month, except in dire emergency.
2. Change name of “agenda meeting” to “work session”, with no public comment to be allowed at work sessions.
3. Effective January 2011, work session will move to Thursday before Monday meeting at 5:30 PM., and this schedule will be re-evaluated after six months.
4. Mayor and Aldermen will no longer make opening statements at the beginning of meetings, because it delays public business and sounds like campaigning.
5. An agenda item for announcements and communications from mayor and aldermen will be included after all other public business has been handled.
6. Mayor and Aldermen will alert Town Manager or Clerk of an expected absence from a meeting as soon/early as possible, which will then be communicated to the entire board.
7. Members will use work sessions to introduce “new” topics or suggestions to each other for the first time, rather than introducing a new issue, proposal, request or complaint at regular meetings without prior notice to each other or staff.

8. If member has an unavoidable scheduling conflict with a previously scheduled board meeting, the board will attempt to reschedule, out of courtesy and convenience for all members, to the extent that rescheduling is practical and does not unnecessarily impede the conduct of public business.
9. Neither the mayor nor board members may call or schedule a special meeting without first contacting all members of the board to coordinate schedules.

Mayor's expectations of Board

1. All items included under *Board expectations of Board*
2. At meetings, aldermen should wait to speak until formally recognized by the mayor.
3. Aldermen should manage own behavior in such a way as to reinforce civil discourse.

Board expectations of Mayor

1. All items included under *Board expectations of Board*
2. Allow board members to speak first on issues before offering own opinion.
3. Focus more on the mayor's vital role as agenda-setter and consensus-builder, while deferring decision-making to the voting members of the board.
4. Maintain civil, courteous and professional decorum of public meetings by personal example and using gavel appropriately.
5. Utilize public comment timer and enforce time limits consistently and fairly.

Manager's expectations of Board

1. To abide by the mutual expectations identified and established between board and manager upon her hiring, and address any changing expectations regularly, openly and honestly.
2. Provide clear goals and program/policy priorities to staff without trying to micromanage daily operations.
3. Bring operational concerns to manager first before airing them publicly – most problems can be resolved quickly by staff without board or public involvement if just given the chance; being publicly ambushed and privately undermined are disincentives to effective staff performance.
4. Treat each other and staff with dignity and respect, committing to positive standards of conduct, in order to set an example of leadership for the organization and the community at large.
5. Concerns about manager/staff behavior or performance should be addressed with the manager directly and immediately so that issues may be quickly resolved; likewise, should staff expertise/communications be perceived as inadequate in enabling the board to make good, complete, well-informed decisions, let the manager know specifically what more you require rather than doing end runs around staff.
6. Recognize that board and staff are partners in a common goal, not adversaries.

Board expectations of Manager

1. Take care of personal needs and set reasonable work hours to avoid burnout.
2. Get out of office to check directly on town operations in addition to relying on staff reports (Manage By Walking Around), without going so far as to micromanage.
3. Continue participatory leadership approach and strong emphasis on employee development and succession planning.
4. Maintain good communications with Board, and effective staff response to public.

5. Continue to treat all board members with respect and impartiality despite deep divisions among board members themselves
6. Get agenda packets out to board members earlier – preferably 1 week before the regular meeting.
7. Screen agenda to weed out any items that can be handled administratively.

After considerable discussion and a final review of all items suggested for inclusion in the list of mutual expectations, the board unanimously consented to the list above and determined to review its progress toward more effective leadership at its regularly scheduled work session on February 10, 2011.

Priority and Strategy Development

Mr. Straus reported that several board members had mentioned during the one-on-one interviews that “economic development” was an issue of interest to the community. He suggested that might be an ideal topic around which the board could develop consensus, however, due to the late hour, the board decided to defer additional discussion to some future date.

After a brief roundtable discussion to evaluate the retreat, the mayor thanked the facilitators for their excellent guidance throughout the day and also thanked staff and Aldermen Brown for the lunch and logistical arrangements.

There being no further business, Alderman Brown made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:15 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Carl R. Bartlett, Mayor

Marcia D. Onieal, Town Manager

ATTEST:

Darlene Whisenant, Town Clerk

Prepared (in part) by:
Heather Lee and Steve Strauss, retreat facilitators
Developmental Associates, Chapel Hill, NC