



The Banner Elk Citizen

March 2010

Drinking Water Capital Improvement Plan

Banner Elk has historically had the lowest water rates in the High Country as well as having been awarded best tasting in the High Country. For the past several years Banner Elk has received many monetary benefits from development. Unfortunately this “wind fall” has stopped and new stronger requirements from the State are now being enacted.

The Town of Banner Elk Utilities Department has been working to meet the State’s new requirements for “full-cost” pricing. Traditionally, water rates have been subsidized by property taxes and often these dollars and utility dollars had some overlap. These practices, as well as several other practices which kept water rates low, are no longer acceptable by the State’s new requirements. These new requirements will shift approximately \$76,000 of debt payments to the utilities.

Banner Elk has also seen a substantial drop in its revenue stream mainly due to the lack of new development in the past two years. New development in previous years generated one-time impact fees of approximately \$200,000 per year. The vast majority of this money has been saved for capital projects such as the sludge press, rehab of the disputed Grandfather Home sewer lateral and a water main loop. The current and past fiscal years saw very little impact fees, which have resulted in a 20% decrease in revenue. It should be noted that while revenue has dropped 20% since FY 06, expenses have been kept in check, only increasing 2%.

Banner Elk has been holding discussions at its regularly scheduled Council meetings on how best to deal with the new requirements and loss of revenue while ensuring a solid future for our drinking water. The Town has passed a \$1.25 surcharge on each meter for Capital Improvement Projects. This would be a monthly fee that could be reduced when development returns. This revenue stream will cost a resident \$15 per year and will generate approximately \$20,000 per year for the purpose of replacing aging equipment that produces our drinking water.

Town Council Priority Items for Next Two Years

At the Towns recent retreat a list of priority items was generated to help give direction to the Town staff. While a general priority was given to the items for the sake of working on them at the retreat, it does not mandate overall importance.

Top items to be dealt with in the next two years are: Working on what will happen to the old elementary school, working on the development of affordable housing to support middle class full time residents, working to establish bike lanes and support safe bicycling routes, adding to the greenway, and working to complete a Comprehensive Land Usage Plan. Also mentioned in the top of the priority list was the Centennial Celebration for Banner Elk in 2011.

Mid level priorities were as follows: Working on a community center, annexation of property currently being served by Banner Elk, ensuring fiscal integrity for the town and its assets, working to better promote Banner Elk as a livable community and continued support and partnership with Lees-McRae College.

Items of ongoing interest are: continued updating and proactive research into ordinances to protect our community, transportation issues, finishing current developments, finish the ETJ expansion, supporting the business community and keeping low sewer and water rates.

Growing Pains

The Town of Banner Elk is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Master Land Use Plan and as part of this process is exploring expanding the ETJ which has not be updated since 1973. The Planning Board, the Planning Department and the Division of Community Assistance began looking at designating zoning for the 435 parcels that are in this newly annexed ETJ jurisdiction. Property owners have been contacted by the Town as to the proposed zoning of their property and they have attended a recent Public Hearing.

Being part of the ETJ in the Town of Banner Elk means that properties are subject to the Town's zoning ordinance. The state grants this power so cities and towns can influence growth and protect property values. This process has nothing to do with annexation or taxations. If you are part of this newly annexed ETJ area and think you might be interested in being part of the Town of Banner Elk, please contact Cheryl Buchanan at (828) 898-5398, ext: 227.

Get Involved with your Community.....

Promotion of a Viable Healthy Community will be the topic at a meeting held at the Banner Elk Elementary School. The Town will be seeking input on the school in relation to its future use for the community. Please attend this vital meeting March 16th at 6:00p.m at the school's cafeteria.

A planning committee is now meeting to work on Banner Elks Centennial Celebration which happens in 2011. An input meeting will be held March 11th, everybody is welcomed to attend or submit ideas via email at jjm224@gmail.com. Many great ideas, projects and events have already been submitted.

The Friends of Tate-Evans Park will be holding its third meeting on April 8th at 4:00 p.m. to plan for the opening of the park as well as make budget recommendations for the upcoming fiscal year. For additional information on these and other events please email jjm224@gmail.com or check townofbannerelk.org

Banner Elk inaugural Bicycle and Greenway Trail committee meeting was held in February. This committee plans to meet the first Thursday of every month, to help work through issues with bicycling and pedestrian movement.



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