



## **BRCA 28605!**

### **Underground Utilities Resource Center**

**Blowing Rock Civic Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and improving the quality of life in Blowing Rock by evaluating civic issues, educating, and engaging residents on key issues, working with the local government and the business community, and encouraging citizens to be involved and vote.**

**The Underground Utilities Task Force is proposing burying the overhead utilities along Main Street at a projected optional additional cost of \$4-\$7 Million of taxpayer monies. This important project is out for bids and expected to be voted on in the very near future. BRCA is providing our members and registered voters with current information and an easy and convenient platform for voicing your position on this important topic. Please review the following details and make your voice heard to**

our Town Council members. **It is important that they hear from each of us on this important issue ASAP.**

## **Blowing Rock Council Members Contact Info:**

Mayor Charlie Seller [mayor@townofblowingrocknc.gov](mailto:mayor@townofblowingrocknc.gov),

Mayor Pro-Tem Doug Matheson [dmatheson@toobr.us](mailto:dmatheson@toobr.us)

Councilman Albert Yount [ayount@toobr.us](mailto:ayount@toobr.us)

Councilman David Harwood [धारwood@toobr.us](mailto:धारwood@toobr.us)

Councilwoman Melissa Pickett [mpickett@toobr.us](mailto:mpickett@toobr.us)

Councilman "Pier" Pete Gherini [pgherini@toobr.us](mailto:pgherini@toobr.us)

**To view the latest presentation on  
Underground Utilities from the Task  
Force:**

**[Task Force Underground Utilities Presentation  
LINK:](#)**

The following is an itemized list of **current identified Capital Needs already identified** over the next ten years from the Town of Blowing Rock. This information sourced from Town Manager Shane Fox.

Town of Blowing Rock - STREETS, STORMWATER, and SIDEWALKS														
10 Year Capital Improvements Plan														
CATEGORY / IMPROVEMENT	CURRENT COST	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEARS	YEARS	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11 TO 15	16 TO 20	
		2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029	2029-2030	2030-2031			
<b>Road Paving</b>														
Paving 10% every 3 years beginning in 2030	\$5,500,000											\$687,500	\$728,750	\$5,104,688
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$5,500,000</b>													
<b>Culvert Replacements</b>														
1 Replacement every other year - \$20,000 each	\$100,000		\$21,000		\$22,000		\$23,000		\$24,000		\$25,000	\$53,000	\$87,000	
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>													
<b>Road Failures</b>														
1 Repair every other year - \$60,000	\$300,000	\$61,500		\$64,500		\$67,500		\$70,500		\$73,500		\$238,500	\$174,000	
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>													
<b>Paving Ditches</b>														
200 LF every other year - \$50/LF	\$50,000		\$10,500		\$11,000		\$11,500		\$12,000		\$12,500	\$26,500	\$43,500	
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>													
<b>North Main Street Sidewalk</b>														
Phase 1 - Hartleys to new Inn walk	\$250,000		\$262,500											
Phase 2 - new Inn walk to Hill Street	\$250,000		\$262,500											
Phase 3 - in front of 7 acre parcel	\$800,000								\$980,000					
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$1,300,000</b>													
<b>Valley Boulevard Parking Lot</b>														
Surface lot on property beside Fire and Rescue	\$1,000,000			\$1,075,000										
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>													
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$8,250,000</b>	<b>\$61,500</b>	<b>\$556,500</b>	<b>\$1,139,500</b>	<b>\$33,000</b>	<b>\$67,500</b>	<b>\$34,500</b>	<b>\$70,500</b>	<b>\$36,000</b>	<b>\$1,053,500</b>	<b>\$725,000</b>	<b>\$1,046,750</b>	<b>\$5,409,188</b>	

**Street, Stormwater, and Sidewalks total 10-year Capital Needs identified: \$5,409,188.00.**

**Town of Blowing Rock - WATER AND WASTEWATER  
10 Year Capital Improvements Plan**

CATEGORY / IMPROVEMENT	CURRENT COST	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEARS	YEARS	
		1 2021-2022	2 2022-2023	3 2023-2024	4 2024-2025	5 2025-2026	6 2026-2027	7 2027-2028	8 2028-2029	9 2029-2030	10 2030-2031	11 TO 15	16 TO 20
<b>Water Treatment Plant</b>													
Phase 1	\$1,500,000		\$1,575,000										
High service pumps, finish water pumps, piping/valves, SCADA Part 1													
Phase 2	\$925,000						\$1,086,875						
Flocculators, mud valves, second filter, effluent flow meter, SCADA Part 2													
Phase 3	\$325,000										\$430,625		
Window and handrail replacement, pipe gallery drain and ventilation													
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$2,750,000</b>												
<b>Wastewater Treatment Plant</b>													
Phase 1	\$790,000		\$829,500										
Replace bar screen and influent pumps, SCADA Part 1													
Phase 2	\$725,000						\$851,875						
Digester Aeration System, SCADA Part 2													
Phase 3	\$510,000										\$675,750		
RAS Piping, building roof, EQ basin improvements, basin leak repair													
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$2,025,000</b>												
<b>Water Line Replacements</b>													
Cast Iron Water Lines	\$8,500,000						\$1,997,500					\$8,128,125	
Galvanized Water Lines	\$4,400,000								\$1,778,700			\$3,276,625	
PVC Water Lines	\$2,000,000												
Main Street Water Line	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000									\$2,650,000		
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$18,900,000</b>												
<b>Water Meter Replacement</b>													
2,400 meters	\$1,200,000		\$600,000	\$600,000									
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$1,200,000</b>												
<b>Sewer Line Replacements</b>													
VC Sewer Lines	\$6,500,000										\$2,153,125	\$5,433,594	
Main Street Sewer Line	\$800,000	\$800,000											
Mayview Force Main	\$300,000		\$322,500										
Main Interceptor Sewer to Cornish	\$1,050,000										\$1,391,250		
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$8,650,000</b>												
<b>Mayview Pump Station</b>													
Pump Station Replacement	\$1,000,000		\$1,075,000										
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>												
<b>Grandfather Lift Station</b>													
Lift Station Upgrades	\$50,000							\$58,750					
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>												
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$34,575,000</b>	<b>\$4,800,000</b>	<b>\$4,402,000</b>	<b>\$600,000</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$3,995,000</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$1,778,700</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$7,300,750</b>	<b>\$16,838,344</b>

**Water & Wastewater 10-year Capital Needs identified:  
\$16,838,344.00.**

**Town of Blowing Rock - PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN**  
**10 Year Capital Improvements Plan Summary**

CATEGORY / IMPROVEMENT	CURRENT COST	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEARS	YEARS	
		1 2021-2022	2 2022-2023	3 2023-2024	4 2024-2025	5 2025-2026	6 2026-2027	7 2027-2028	8 2028-2029	9 2029-2030	10 2030-2031	11 TO 15	16 TO 20
<b>Memorial Park</b>													
Update existing public restrooms	\$110,000	\$110,000											
New public restrooms	\$335,000	\$335,000											
New picnic shelter	\$135,000		\$135,000										
Update Tennis courts/Pickleball courts	\$269,000		\$269,000										
Relocate Volleyball court	\$60,000		\$60,000										
New Cornhole boards & Shuffleboard court	\$20,000		\$20,000										
Playground addition	\$116,000	\$116,000											
Landscaping	\$40,000		\$40,000										
Site work and utilities	\$200,000	\$200,000											
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$1,285,000</b>												
<b>Broyhill Park</b>													
Safety railing around road bridge	\$4,000	\$4,100											
Assess and repair sidewalk as needed	\$10,000		\$2,100		\$2,200		\$2,300		\$2,400		\$2,500		
Add railing next to metal grate in sidewalk on Laurel Ln.	\$1,500	\$1,538											
Trail improvements on path to Davant Field	\$40,000			\$44,000									
Lake Dredging Study	\$35,000		\$36,750										
Dredge sediment	\$200,000			\$215,000									
Stone around lake edge	\$105,000			\$112,875									
Replace Walking Bridge	\$7,500			\$8,063									
Replace Pier	\$20,000			\$21,500									
Seating in Gazebo	\$5,000			\$5,375									
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$428,000</b>												
<b>Davant Field</b>													
Install shade structures for dugout areas	\$5,000				\$5,625								
Add signage with distance demarcations on paved path	\$1,500		\$1,575										
Performance/event stage	\$15,000					\$17,250							
Accessible sidewalk from restrooms to paved path	\$12,000		\$12,600										
Grading and drainage improvements at pavilion & restrooms	\$38,000				\$42,750								
Stream bank stabilization and erosion control	\$105,000			\$43,000									
Replace Restrooms	\$400,000					\$460,000							
Replace Bat Netting	\$5,000				\$5,500								
Repair Skin on Supports	\$5,000		\$5,250										
Pavilion Signage	\$7,500			\$8,063									
Plastic Area under Pavilion	\$10,000					\$11,500							
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$539,000</b>												
<b>Robbins Pool at Broyhill Park</b>													
Expand parking	\$200,000									\$250,000			
Repair rock columns	\$25,000	\$25,625											
Replace marlite coating inside pool	\$100,000		\$105,000										
Repair pool gutters	\$15,000		\$15,750										
Playground improvements	\$150,000				\$168,750								
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$490,000</b>												
<b>Annie Cannon Gardens</b>													
Landscape improvements	\$26,000	\$5,125	\$3,150	\$2,150	\$2,200	\$2,300	\$2,350	\$2,400	\$2,450	\$2,500			
Remove stage	\$5,000				\$5,500								
Renovate water feature	\$4,500		\$4,725										
Repair wood timbers on stairs	\$5,000	\$5,125											
Replace bench seating	\$10,000				\$5,500			\$6,000					
Wall improvements along New Year Creek	\$100,000		\$30,000		\$110,000								
Restroom Building	\$400,000			\$430,000									
Retaining Wall along existing stage	\$80,000				\$88,000								
Close Road and Parking Create ADA Access	\$500,000				\$550,000								
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$1,130,500</b>												
<b>Glen Burney Trail</b>													
Signage along trail	\$5,000			\$5,000									
Trailhead	\$100,000				\$110,000								
Cascade Overlook	\$250,000										\$331,250		
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$355,000</b>												
<b>Legacy Trail</b>													
Stone stairs across from Mac House													
Resurfacing	\$50,000							\$60,000					
Signage, Lighting, more landscaping	\$25,000							\$30,000					
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$75,000</b>												
<b>Koerschner Memorial Garden</b>													
Update features/plantings	\$10,000							\$12,000					
Stairway to Laurel Lane	\$15,000							\$17,625					
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$25,000</b>												
<b>American Legion Building</b>													
Connectivity Improvements	\$1,000,000					\$1,125,000							
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>												
<b>Blowing Rock Clubhouse</b>													
Restroom Upgrades	\$15,000		\$15,750										
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$15,000</b>												
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$5,342,500</b>	<b>\$802,513</b>	<b>\$756,650</b>	<b>\$851,025</b>	<b>\$922,900</b>	<b>\$1,344,375</b>	<b>\$493,350</b>	<b>\$19,975</b>	<b>\$112,800</b>	<b>\$2,450</b>	<b>\$255,000</b>	<b>\$331,250</b>	<b>\$0</b>

## Parks & Recreation Master Plan Current Cost Projection **\$5,342,500.00.**

**Current identified NEEDS already on the table for funding over the next decade for Blowing Rock: \$27,590,032**

**Audited Blowing Rock Financial Statement Presented January 2023 (Note page 47 Outstanding Debt):**

<https://www.townofblowingrocknc.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/11067/638086210163870000>

**Total Outstanding Blowing Rock Current Debt Service per 2022-2023 Budget Appendix 4: \$13,220,476.00.**

## **A letter from a concerned citizen dated 12/12/22 to Council:**

**Re: Proposal to bury above ground power lines in downtown Blowing Rock**

### **Background:**

**My understanding is that this proposed project has been on and off the Town Council agenda for a number of years and that it now appears to have the support of 3 of our 5 Council members as well as the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce.**

### **Position:**

**As a Blowing Rock homeowner and taxpayer with considerable commercial and industrial real estate development experience, I have very serious concerns about this proposed project.**

- 1. We have more pressing infrastructure needs.**

- a. We have lived through two serious water main breaks in the past 12 months, 27 in the past 10 years.**
    - i. Without a comprehensive approach to repairs and upgrades to our aging water/sewer system, these breaks and loss of service will continue. The downtown water/sewer lines are only one piece of the puzzle. The work to be done in Mayview is another piece. There are more pieces.**
    - ii. At some point, insurance carriers are going to take notice of our water system failures. The risk is huge. File a claim for wind damage and the underwriters can tell you how hard the wind was blowing when the damage occurred. They will figure this out and at some point, underwrite accordingly.**
  - b. We have endless issues with storm water drainage and culverts that need a permanent fix vs. repair crews being dispatched over and over to clean out problem spots and repair road damage caused by drainage and culvert failures.**
  - c. We have a dire need for better ambulance service which we will probably end up paying for on an incremental basis for at least a short period of time.**
- 2. Based on my experience as a real estate developer, I do not believe that the initial budget numbers presented for this project are realistic. I developed**

**the Graystone Eye/Fresenius Kidney Care project on Hwy. 105 in Boone, so my experience includes working in the High Country. It is an understatement to say that geology and stormwater issues were challenging. I knew what I was getting into and had I not protected this project with very well-structured leases which shifted this risk to the tenants, this project would have been a disaster. Blowing Rock will enjoy no such protection if this project proceeds. Blowing Rock will in effect be the tenant and on the hook for a project whose cost cannot be accurately quantified on the front end.**

- a. The total cost estimate for the proposed power line project as provided to the Town Council is \$3.941 million which includes “synergies” by doing the work in conjunction with the Main Street water/sewer project of an estimated \$3 million. I am guessing that this might be the cost of a common trench. We all need to better understand the synergies. Synergies are often oversold and disappointing at the end of the day.**
- b. Burying power lines in the same trench as water/sewer lines is not as simple as it sounds. Significant separation either horizontally or vertically is required. There is a lot more latitude in shifting water/sewer lines as needed than there is with high voltage underground power lines.**
- c. There is a significant lack of contingency dollars for adverse soil conditions, i.e., rock shown in**

**the cost estimates I have seen. The Town Council has already spent \$117,000 on a feasibility study. It did not include any geotechnical work that I am aware of. The above referenced budget included a contingency of \$52,500 for rock removal. It was a guess at best and somewhere between woefully light and wishful thinking given the geology of where we live. I think this contingency amount should probably be closer to \$1 million.**

- d. No bid for this work is going to include a firm up front (i.e., guaranteed not to exceed) number for this cost and there will be a cost. This project will require a 3-foot wide by 6-8-foot-deep trench in Blowing Rock and separation from anything else in the trench by 3 feet of flowable fill, i.e. concrete. We will get into this project and the cost will be a lot more open ended than some will want to believe, and Blowing Rock taxpayers will be on the hook.**
- e. Finally, there is no guarantee that this project is even doable from an engineering standpoint. We really have no idea what it will cost.**

### **3. Funding is an issue.**

- a. There is talk of using some of the financial reserves that the Town of Blowing Rock has correctly created to fund at least part of this project.**

- i. This appears to me to be a very poor and unintended use of these funds given that they are needed for the aforementioned endless repairs to our infrastructure. Underground power lines will do nothing to reduce these ongoing costs.**
  - ii. Tapping reserves for unintended purposes and pet projects is a very slippery slope. My suspicion is that the total “reserves” amount to a fairly small number at the end of the day.**
  - iii. Reserves probably bulge in December when most property taxes are paid. They look ok when the fiscal year ends (end of June). They are probably downright skinny at the end of October. Town expenses are steady, the cash coming is predictable in terms of amount, but it is extremely seasonal.**
- b. We have been living in a world that generally requires secured financing, i.e., hard collateral. Underground utilities will be a tough sell as collateral.**
- c. Interest rates are not helping and probably won't for a very long time. Tim Gupton created a relatively simple excel spreadsheet model that paints the picture well – I encourage you to plug in a more current interest rate into the model. I ran it at 6-7%. It is not a pretty picture. Furthermore, financing is not a layup. My guess**

**is that this could end up as a multi-bank deal. Experience tells me that if we need relief at some point, a group of lenders is going to be more difficult to deal with than a single lender.**

- d. It is clear that Blue Ridge Electric has no interest in spending its own money on this project. I don't want to spend mine either. In my experience, utility providers actually prefer above ground power as repairs are easier, quicker, less disruptive, and indeed cheaper.**
- e. The next revenue stop is simply higher property taxes. It is really the only option.**
- f. I do not see a payback on taxpayer dollars that would be spent on this project.**

#### **4. Other Considerations/Timeline**

- a. Power poles and transformers will have to be replaced with green boxes that will either be placed above ground or buried. These will be very expensive. They are cheaper to set above ground but aesthetically I think they may prove to be only marginally more appealing than power poles and transformers.**
- b. Above ground green boxes (in a likelihood protected in many instances by equally attractive yellow pipe bollards) will reduce already scarce parking spaces. Easements will be required for many of these boxes.**

- c. Who is going to pay for these boxes and bollards – our downtown businesses that will be required to reconnect? There appears to be some money in the current cost estimate that addresses this significant issue. I am guessing that paying for them will fall to Blowing Rock homeowners.**
- d. Power poles are generally shared, i.e., they started out as power poles. Telephone lines were added way back in the day. More recently cable and fiber have been added.**
- i. To take a pole down requires all parties using the pole to agree to do it. In (my personal) experience, the electric utility providers have moved much more quickly than the other pole users.**
  - ii. There are poles downtown that are shared by up to six service providers. You have to have them all on board – so more buried lines...somewhere. They can be buried much shallower, but they can't share a trench, that much I am certain of. The preliminary cost estimate allows for some of this.**
  - iii. The question again is who pays for it. In fairness to Blue Ridge, this is not in their scope of work. I have doubts that the service providers will jump at the opportunity to pay for this. So, we are back**

**to the customers (businesses) and taxpayers.**

**e. At least some of the traffic lights will probably require mast arms vs. street corner pedestals.**

**i. NCDOT paid for mast arms as well as a lot of other good work on aesthetics going through Blowing Rock as part of the widening of 321 so the cost was pretty much invisible. It is hard to argue that they don't look great.**

**ii. NCDOT will weigh in on where lights need to be centered (i.e. in the line of traffic and overhead) vs pedestaled on corners. It is a safety issue (the likelihood of someone not familiar with the area a running red light that is on a corner pedestal is much higher than the chances of running an overhead centered light).**

**iii. I fought the mast arm vs. pole and wire battle when I built a few roads to open property up for industrial/commercial development in Hickory. They are stunningly expensive.**

**iv. It never ceased to amaze me the number of folks that showed up at the table just in time to try to help me spend my money. I received stacks of unsolicited "eye candy" that reminded me of the presentation that**

**was made to the Town Council. Lots of candy, no money for the vending machine.**

**5. Finally, with regard to the Power Point presentation presented for this proposed project I make the following observations:**

- a. It strikes me as an oversimplification across the board.**
- b. It is an “apples to orange” comparison when viewed with pictures from other towns. I encourage you to look past the “eye candy”.**
- c. I cannot speak to all of the downtowns pictured, but being from Hickory and Catawba County, I can speak to Conover.**
  - i. Conover is much larger than Blowing Rock.**
  - ii. Conover’s tax base includes a significant amount of industry.**
  - iii. Conover has an excellent working relationship with our County.**
  - iv. Conover has an excellent water/sewer system. Like Hickory, Conover invested in critical infrastructure before buying power lines. Hickory did the same thing and took it to another level, including building a sewer system that sells its services into southern Caldwell County and all the way to Mooresville on the other side. For Hickory it is actually a money maker. The current state of Blowing Rock’s water/sewer system**

is an immediate known risk to our collective futures.

- v. Critically important is that “wants vs. needs” projects such as burying power lines were done in Conover and Hickory in the correct sequence and as result, property taxes were not affected.

In conclusion, as stewards of our great town and tax dollars, I respectfully encourage all of you to address the major issues we have by starting with the ones that are most pressing and offer quantifiable paybacks. Needs vs. Wants. The power line project needs to wait.

## **A Concerned Blowing Rock Native Letter to the Editor**

**TO: Editor Watauga Democrat  
12/08/2022**

With the passing of our beloved Blowing Rocket, I hope you will allow Rock residents an opportunity to comment in print about some of our more pressing issues.

One of these issues is the burying of the utility lines along Blowing Rock's Main Street. I think is a fine idea and I would love to see it happen--but happen only after several more pressing issues have been addressed.

**Supporters of the idea point out that the 100-year-old water and sewer lines must be replaced, Main Street must be excavated, and this would be the least disruptive time to remove the power poles and bury the lines.**

**Sometimes they forget to mention that the water and sewer lines are being funded through grants and will not require five cents more tax money from residents. Burying the power lines will cost Blowing Rock residents something like three to seven million dollars that will have to be paid by Blowing Rock taxpayers in the form of higher taxes that will cost the average taxpayer several thousand dollars just to make Main Street a bit more attractive.**

**And beautifying the already award winning town seems to be the only real benefit.**

**Will replacing poles and overhead lines with six or eight big green power boxes add much? And parking places are already hard to find. Will giving up six or eight prime parking spaces benefit shoppers or merchants? I don't see how.**

**Our town board needs to spend our tax money wisely. And we need to be asking first if raising homeowner's taxes is even wise. And if the town needs more money not available through grants what should our priorities be?**

**The July waterline break that drained the water tank dry**

**and left a town full of tourists with no water serves as a good reminder that many water and sewer lines other than those along Main Street are past their useful life and could go at any time. Would it not be more useful to spend money on essential infrastructure like pipes than a pretty project**

**I almost forgot to mention Blowing Rock's need for full time ambulance service. The county wants the town to pony up over \$300,000 a year for a service we are already paying for. As I do the math, the money some want to spend burying a few hundred feet of overhead power lines would pay for ten, fifteen, perhaps even twenty years of ambulance service. So, the choice here would seem to be bury the lines now. or bury a few people a year who die waiting for an ambulance. Tough choice, right?**

**It would be great if the supporters of the power line removal could find funding elsewhere. Watching this, as a physician, I feel like a patient I've just told he desperately needs heart surgery is telling me he's going to have a hair transplant and tummy tuck first--because his pipes might stay open a bit longer.**

**Concerned Native Citizen**

**Please reach out to Council Members and voice your position (pro or con) as soon as you can. They need to**

**make sure they are representing the interest most desired by our voters and property owners before this important issue comes up for a vote (to our knowledge no public hearing required at this point).**

**Blowing Rock Council Members Contact Info:**

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