

Responses for Pam's Picks (Sept. 28, 2017)
Rennie Brantz

(1) Why are you running for Boone Town Council (or Mayor) this year? What is your overall vision for the Town?

I am running for Mayor of Boone because I want to keep our community on a stable, progressive course. After 10 years service on the Boone Town Council and 2 years as Mayor, I feel I am well prepared to help shape our future in this direction.

Vision. As Mayor I will work to strengthen our sense of community and improve the quality of life for all our citizens. More specifically, I will support controlled economic growth, neighborhood preservation, diverse and affordable housing, and environmental protection. In addition I will work to revitalize our downtown including the Appalachian Theater project, promote a vibrant cultural life, support historic preservation, and seek closer cooperation with other public entities such as ASU and Watauga County. My goal is to build a better future by applying common sense solutions.

(2) What do you consider to be the most important challenge facing Boone and what are your ideas for addressing it.?

The most important challenge facing Boone is managing growth in a way that preserves our caring, small town character, environmental commitment, vibrant economy, and rich cultural heritage. This can be achieved by creating new opportunities for public input and participation, supporting service organizations that meet the needs of underserved populations, remaining a "green city," and updating our long-range plans periodically. To meet the growing influx of visitors and students, we must provide up to date information through an effective Town website, smart Kiosks downtown, and expanded parking opportunities. Important also will be closer cooperation between the Town of Boone, Appalachian State University, and Watauga county in the areas of housing, transportation, and public services.

(3) Do you believe the Town is effectively protecting established, traditional Town neighborhoods from incompatible development? Please explain.

Boone has been reasonably successful in protecting established, traditional neighborhoods like Grand Blvd. from incompatible development. But traditional neighborhoods are under increasing threats from AirBnB households in R-1 neighborhoods that rent out individual rooms by the night. To counter this disruptive population creep into R-1 neighborhoods, new regulations will be needed to control one-night rentals. In addition,

regulations for traditional R-1 neighborhoods labeled "Neighborhood Conservation Districts" need to be enforced more rigorously. And absentee landlords need to be held accountable for actions of their tenants. Finally, discussions are needed with Appalachian State University about residence hall construction, since additional student housing on campus would reduce the pressure and incentive for renting rooms to students in R-1 districts.

(4) What are your ideas for providing more affordable workforce housing in Boone?

Affordable housing in Boone is in very short supply. I learned recently that only 2 Town employees out of a total of 180 live in Boone, mainly because housing is so expensive. One possible response strategy would be to offer redevelopment incentives to owners of older student apartments to transform them into affordable family apartments. Another possibility would be to seek federal grants for developing low cost senior and veteran housing.

(5) Do you support or oppose the Town's "Planned Development" ordinance? Please explain.

I support the "Planned Development" ordinance because it encourages more public input in the development process, including neighbors within 300', makes more information available to the entire community through public hearings, simplifies the development process, offers developers more flexibility, requires developers to explain how negative impacts of a development will be mitigated, and involves the Town Council in the final approval process,

(6) Do you believe Boone is approving too many/too few high-density, rent-by-the-bedroom housing developments? Please explain.

We have reached capacity in the area of student rental bedrooms. The rush to build more student bedrooms results in large part from ASU's decision not to build more dormitories for a growing enrollment. Changes in University policy would help to fix this.

(7) Do you support or oppose building developments of over four stories in height (approximately 43 feet) in Boone? Please explain.

Buildings above four stories do not fit with our small town, mountain character. They also block out the mountain views and add more traffic to our narrow streets. Boone zoning policies such as "Conditional Districts" and "Planned Development" should not allow new structures over four stories.

(8) What does "a sustainable environment" mean to you? And what specific steps would you take to move Boone forward towards your vision of sustainability?

A "sustainable environment" means living in harmony with nature and our diverse communities. It includes wise use of scarce resources, shifting from fossil fuels to solar and other renewable resources, and reducing waste through recycling. Important also to a sustainable environment are environmental education programs for all ages and "green jobs" in a changing economy. A sustainable environment should also include recycling, expanded outdoor recreation opportunities, and reduced pollution. One simple way to advance sustainable environment would be to introduce a 10 cent fee on every plastic bag used by customers at our grocery stores, with 4 cents going to the store for administering the program and 6 cents to the town to fund environmental education and conservation programs like the Watauga County Food Hub and Women in Agriculture program.

(9) Do you support or oppose committing the Town to million dollar or more expenditures without a referendum? Please explain.

It depends on the situation. In a natural emergency it might not be possible to hold a referendum when people need shelter, food, and medical attention immediately. But for new developments like an industrial park or a new municipal services building, I think citizens should have a chance through the ballot box to voice their opinions.

(10_ Do you believe that the Town of Boone should follow its own ordinances in public property development? Please explain.

Yes. However, if ordinances are out of date, silent on an issue, or unrealistic, then they should be reviewed, corrected, and updated. This complicating element exists at the Boone Mall which floods regularly. Our ordinances require businesses to replace rusted out piping with the same type of pipe that will eventually fail. The real permanent fix would be to daylight the stream, something our ordinance does not allow. The Boone Mall problem is more complicated but reminds me of how difficult it can be sometimes to follow antiquated ordinances.