

**Town of Montreat  
Board of Commissioners  
Special Meeting  
September 18, 2014  
Upper Anderson Auditorium**

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Commissioners present: Mayor Letta Jean Taylor  
Mayor Pro Tem Mary Standaert  
Commissioner Martha Campbell  
Commissioner Tim Helms  
Commissioner Jack McCaskill  
Commissioner Ann Vinson

Town staff present: Ron Nalley, Town Administrator  
Misty R. Gedlinske, Town Clerk  
Steve Freeman, Public Works Director  
Barry Creasman, Senior Water Operator  
Stefan Stackhouse, Finance Officer  
David Currie, Building Inspector/Code Administrator  
Jack Staggs, Chief of Police

Approximately 200 members of the public were also present. Mayor Taylor called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and gave the invocation.

**Agenda Approval**

Mayor Pro Tem Standaert moved to adopt the meeting agenda as presented. Commissioner Helms seconded and the motion carried 5/0.

Mayor Taylor stated that the purpose of this meeting was to hear Architectural Design Studios' comparative evaluation of four potential Town Hall sites located within Montreat's municipal limits. She said that instead of appointing a task force or "blue ribbon" committee, the Board had chosen to solicit comments from all residents concerning the location of the new Town Hall. She explained that citizen comment cards were mailed the previous day to every household receiving a Montreat water bill. Anyone who resides in Montreat but does not directly receive a water bill is encouraged to call, email or visit the Town Services Office to obtain a printed comment card or arrange to have one mailed. The return portion of the card is pre-stamped and must be postmarked by September 26, 2014 in order to be included in the ad hoc tabulation committee's report. No electronic or facsimile responses will be accepted. The comment cards are intended as a means to gather written public comment on the four potential Town Hall sites, but are not to be viewed or used as ballots or votes. North Carolina General Statutes authorize holding a referendum to decide matters such as alcohol sales or general obligation bonds, but not site selection for municipal facilities. While public comment and input is welcome and encouraged, the Board of Commissioners has the final decision-making authority to select a Town Hall site. Following tonight's meeting, ADS' presentation will

be posted to the Town’s website as a reference for those who were unable to attend this meeting or would like to review the materials in more detail.

**Presentation to Council: Town Hall Project Site Evaluations**

Architectural Design Studios representatives Mike Cox and Amy Dowty reviewed their firm’s comparative evaluation of the following four potential Town Hall sites:

**Site A:** Above the Gate - A hillside lot just inside the Montreat Gate and adjacent to the Truck Route, owned by the Town of Montreat;

**Site B:** Pratt Park - A landscaped area of Greenspace along Assembly Drive, jointly controlled by the Town and the Mountain Retreat Association;

**Site C:** Next to the Post Office – an undeveloped lot owned by the Mountain Retreat Association, bordered by Assembly Drive, Collegiate Circle and Georgia Terrace;

**Site D:** Florida Terrace – an undeveloped site composed of three adjoining lots owned by the Town of Montreat, located next door to Sylvan Heights Lodge and across the street from the Anderson House property owned by Montreat College.

A scoring system of green and orange stars was used to assign a value to each site based a number of criteria including location, site configuration and access, environmental issues and impacts on project cost. Two green stars indicated the most favorable score of “very good,” followed by one green star for “good,” one orange star for “poor,” with the lowest score of “very poor” represented by two orange stars.

**Location:** This category was composed of four criteria, including proximity to the Town’s center area near Lake Susan, proximity to the Montreat Gate, prominence, and ease of pedestrian access. Based on these criteria, the scoring for each site was as follows:

	<b><u>Green Stars</u></b>	<b><u>Orange Stars</u></b>
Site A (Above the Gate)	3	3
Site B (Pratt Park)	4	2
Site C (Next to Post Office)	5	1
Site D (Florida Terrace)	1	6

Sites C and D scored well for their proximity to the Town’s central area, while Sites A and B were closest to the Montreat Gate entrance. Sites B and C were the most visible and closest to

**Montreat Board of Commissioners  
Special Meeting Minutes  
September 18, 2014**

---

Assembly Drive, and Site C also received the highest score for ease of pedestrian access. Site A received only one green star for pedestrian access due to the high volume of vehicles travelling through the adjacent Truck Route. Site D received the lowest scores for prominence and ease of pedestrian access.

**Site/Access:** This category was composed of six criteria, including lot size and shape, current zoning regulations, slope, availability of public utilities, vehicular access, and parking. Based on these criteria, the scoring for each site was as follows:

	<u>Green Stars</u>	<u>Orange Stars</u>
Site A (Above the Gate)	1	9
Site B (Pratt Park)	5	2
Site C (Next to Post Office)	2	4
Site D (Florida Terrace)	6	3

Site A's irregular, bisected shape renders much of the site unusable for construction of a Town Hall facility. Although Site B is the largest lot, portions of it are too narrow to accommodate a structure and are further limited by a power line easement through the front of the property. Site C has the smallest lot size of the four sites, which poses challenges to locate both a building and adequate parking facilities on the site. Site D earned two green stars for its large, regular lot shape. Setback requirements further limit the buildable area for Site C to less than 9,000 square feet, and less than 5,000 square feet for Site A. Sites A and B would also require rezoning to allow construction of a municipal facility in either of these locations. Although retaining walls would be needed on all four of the sites to some extent, Site D would require the greatest amount due to its greater degree of slope. Public water and sewer lines are available to all sites, and electrical lines are adjacent to all locations except Site D.

Site A scored lowest for safe vehicular access due to its proximity to the Truck Route. Site B could be accessed from Virginia Road instead of Assembly Drive, but this would require a significant amount of site disturbance. Site C could be accessed from Georgia Terrace or Collegiate Circle, although there were concerns about increased vehicle congestion on Georgia Terrace due to potential conflicts with Post Office traffic. Collegiate Circle is a one-way street, and some vehicles may have difficulty making a left turn from Collegiate Circle onto Assembly Drive due to the angle of this intersection. Site D provides safe vehicular access from Florida Terrace, but is not directly accessible from a major street. Parking on Site A would need to be divided into two areas on opposite sides of Kanawha Drive, connected by a crosswalk. Site C would likely be limited to fewer than 17 spaces to reduce site disturbance and minimize tree removal. Both Sites B and D could provide at least 17 parking spaces in a single area with good visibility from the lot entrance.

**Montreat Board of Commissioners  
Special Meeting Minutes  
September 18, 2014**

---

**Environmental Issues:** This category was composed of seven criteria, including site impact, solar orientation, stormwater, surface water, soils, and subsurface water. Based on these criteria, the scoring for each site was as follows:

	<u>Green Stars</u>	<u>Orange Stars</u>
Site A (Above the Gate)	6	2
Site B (Pratt Park)	2	8
Site C (Next to Post Office)	4	3
Site D (Florida Terrace)	6	2

Site A scored highest in terms of site impact, as this property has no existing trees that would need to be removed. Most of the vegetation on Site D would also remain undisturbed. Developing Site C would require removing the majority of the existing trees. Because Site B is a dedicated, landscaped park, it received the lowest site impact score. Site A also had the most favorable solar orientation for its southeastern exposure, with Site D's western exposure scoring lowest. Sites A and C would require more costly underground catchment tanks for stormwater management due to Site A's slope and Site C's limited size. Less expensive retention basins could be used on Sites B and D, although Site D may require a small supplemental catchment tank. Sites C and D have no surface water challenges, while Sites A and B have active creeks or gullies that would require culverts or other measures to control. Clay soils and a high water table are also anticipated on Site B, which may present additional development challenges. Geotechnical reports for Site D indicate no subsurface rock that would affect foundation grading, although this information would need to be confirmed by traditional soil boring tests.

**Costs:** This category was composed of four criteria, including design constraints, building form, potential delay, and construction costs. Based on these criteria, the scoring for each site was as follows:

	<u>Green Stars</u>	<u>Orange Stars</u>
Site A (Above the Gate)	1	6
Site B (Pratt Park)	4	3
Site C (Next to Post Office)	1	3
Site D (Florida Terrace)	4	2

Site A's creek mitigation needs and Site D's more extensive retaining walls resulted in the least favorable design constraint scores. Electrical power lines would need to be relocated or buried

**Montreat Board of Commissioners  
Special Meeting Minutes  
September 18, 2014**

---

on Sites B and C. Site B would accommodate a single-story building, in exchange for a greater amount of site disturbance. Sites C and D would utilize a two-story building design, although Site C's layout and footprint would be more narrow and less efficient than Site D. Site A would require a three-story design due to the lot's small size and greater slope.

Ms. Dowty then summarized the potential cost differential for each site in two ways, first assuming an equal construction schedule for each site, and then factoring in the additional costs and potential project delays caused by property acquisition, building redesign and/or rezoning procedures.

	<u>Cost Difference Assuming Equal Construction Schedule</u>	<u>Potential Project Delay</u>	<u>Cost Difference Adjusted for Project Delays</u>
Site A (Above the Gate)	+100,000 to +\$200,000	3 Months	+\$145,000 to +\$245,000
Site B (Pratt Park)	-\$150,000 to -\$200,000	12 Months	-\$10,000 to -\$60,000
Site C (Next to Post Office)	-\$100,000	9 Months	-\$10,000
Site D (Florida Terrace)	\$0	None	\$0

**Cumulative Scoring Results and Summary:** Ms. Dowty then presented a cumulative tally of the positive and negative scores given to each site. She noted that this information was an unweighted comparison, with each factor being given an equal degree of emphasis. Each tallied star is equivalent to one positive or negative point.

	<u>Total Green Stars</u>	<u>Total Orange Stars</u>	<u>Total Points</u>
Site A (Above the Gate)	11	20	-9
Site B (Pratt Park)	15	15	0
Site C (Next to Post Office)	12	11	+1
Site D (Florida Terrace)	17	13	+4

**Site A (Above the Gate):** Although it scored well for environmental impact, ADS staff did not feel this was a viable Town Hall site. This property would be the most expensive to develop, and its configuration, access and parking were deemed critically poor.

**Site B (Pratt Park):** This is a viable site that scored very well for location, configuration and access. It received the lowest score for environmental impact due to the loss of dedicated public park space, and the site also carried the longest potential project delay due to property acquisition, rezoning procedures and building redesign. Estimated development costs were less

than Site D, although land purchase costs were unknown and could not be included in this calculation. Property acquisition also could not be guaranteed.

**Site C (Next to Post Office):** This viable site scored highest for location but poor for environmental impact, configuration and access. Estimated development costs were marginally less than Site D, but did not include the unknown land purchase price. Property acquisition also could not be guaranteed.

**Site D (Florida Terrace):** This viable Town Hall site scored lowest for location but very well for environmental impact, and highest for site configuration and access. Estimated development costs are roughly equal to Site C, and there is no anticipated delay in proceeding with this location.

### **Question and Answer Period**

Mr. Cox asked any members of the public with questions or comments concerning the site evaluations to approach the microphone and state their names and addresses for the record. No time limit was placed on the duration of an individual speaker's comments.

Mr. Emory Underwood of 120 John Knox Road felt that it may be possible to site a Town Hall facility on the Pratt Park site in a way that preserves much of the existing landscaping and character. He also asked if providing only a limited number of on-site parking spaces and using neighboring areas for overflow parking would make this site more viable. Mr. Cox explained that current Montreat Zoning Ordinance language required seven parking spaces for a facility based on its proposed square footage, and that any additional spaces would be provided at the Board's discretion.

Mrs. Mary Jo Clark of 407 West Virginia Terrace supported evaluation of the proposed alternative Town Hall site outside the Montreat Gate. She asked whether ADS staff were aware that the vast majority of taxpayers in Montreat are extremely disappointed in the Board's behavior regarding the Town Hall project. She said that both she and many other community members preferred the site outside the Gate, and felt disenfranchised by the Board's refusal to have this location professionally evaluated. She asked ADS for a response to her claim that the Montreat community viewed their firm as disrespectful of the community's opinions regarding this issue.

Mr. Cox explained that while he was aware of the controversy surrounding the Town Hall project, the Board of Commissioners had asked his firm to evaluate only the four sites included in tonight's presentation, and said that discussion should be limited to questions and comments regarding those sites.

**Montreat Board of Commissioners  
Special Meeting Minutes  
September 18, 2014**

---

Mayor Taylor reminded the public to hold their applause so that all who wished to speak would have an opportunity to be heard.

Mr. Robert Bruce Cumming of 399 West Virginia Terrace said he remained undecided on the Town Hall location issue, but trusted the process the Board was using to make a decision on this issue.

Mrs. Jan Fountain McRae of 130 Eastminster Terrace supported evaluation of the proposed alternative Town Hall site outside the Montreat Gate. She did not feel that the Board had adequately explained its refusal to evaluate this property. She stated that her family had been coming to Montreat since the early 1900's, and that she had never heard any complaints about the current Town Services Office being located outside Montreat's municipal limits.

Mr. Lindy Cannon of 300 Georgia Terrace said that his uncle paid \$5,000 in 1934 to Dr. Anderson to ensure that the lot next to the Post Office would remain undeveloped and would be dedicated in perpetuity as a park for use by the people of Montreat. Mr. Cannon stated that although his uncle would not accept a deed for the property or allow the park to be named in his honor, the transaction is mentioned in written correspondence between his family and the Mountain Retreat Association. He said that development of the property had never been allowed in the past despite several efforts. He believed that the Mountain Retreat Association should not have offered the property as a potential Town Hall site, and hoped that the Board would respect his family's intent for the property remain as an undeveloped park space by choosing a different location for the Town Hall facility.

Mr. David Berry of 372 Arkansas Terrace offered his regard for the Cannon family, and said he supported evaluation of the proposed alternative Town Hall site outside the Montreat Gate. He said he would like the Board to take an opportunity during one of their meetings to ask which Town Hall site the public preferred, or provide some other means of input such as a poll or survey. He asked ADS staff whether the Town Hall evaluation criteria should have included a category to rate the safety of each proposed site, given the close proximity of the Montreat College's campus and Montreat Conference Center's facilities and the potential need to travel through these areas to reach the Town Hall. He also asked whether ADS found a discrepancy between the Florida Terrace site's official zoning designation and the residential character of the surrounding neighborhood.

Mr. Perrin Wright of 399 Appalachian Way felt there was a need to discuss the appropriateness of using dedicated greenspace areas as potential Town Hall sites. He believed that certain areas had been platted as greenspace partly because they were unsuitable for building, but also because the community wanted these areas preserved in their undeveloped state. He felt that while none of the proposed Town Hall sites were ideal, Florida Terrace was the only location that was not a greenspace area. He questioned whether destroying a dedicated park space or

building the new facility in a highly visible location at the Gate entrance was consistent with the community's long-standing focus on greenspace preservation.

Mr. Les McLean said he had visited each of the four proposed Town Hall sites and felt that all were less than desirable. He believed that Florida Terrace was the least appropriate site due to development costs, sedimentation control, and public safety concerns. He advocated evaluation of the proposed alternative Town Hall site outside the Montreat Gate, believing this to be a more feasible location that would offer increased security by locating the Police Department at the Town's entrance. Mr. Cox responded that in his experience, there was nothing unusual about the Florida Terrace site in terms of development challenges, and that it was by far not the most difficult site he had ever encountered during his work as a professional architect. Ms. Dowty said that vehicular and pedestrian safety was a large component of each site's access score. She also reiterated that Police Department staff spent the majority of their time patrolling the entire Town's streets rather than stationed in one place, and that this practice will continue regardless of the new Town Hall's location.

Rev. Sam Hope did not believe that a new Town Hall was needed, and felt that the Town should continue renting any necessary meeting space from the Mountain Retreat Association.

Mrs. Anne Seaman of 425 Appalachian Way asked whether separating municipal functions into two smaller buildings in separate locations would improve the overall scoring for some of the proposed sites. Ms. Dowty said this would reduce the building footprint of each structure and allow for reduced site disturbance at each location, but would increase the project's overall cost.

Mr. Tom Lentz of 115 Eastminster Terrace said he was disappointed that the alternative Town Hall site outside the Montreat Gate had not been evaluated. He questioned how Lake Susan had been chosen as the Town's center. He also requested clarification of the exact building square footage proposed for the new Town Hall facility, and whether a requirement of 17 parking spaces had been used in the evaluation of all four proposed sites. Ms. Dowty confirmed that the proposed building square footage for the new Town Hall was between 6,000 and 7,000 square feet, and that 17 spaces were used as the basis of the parking criteria. Mr. Lentz felt that the property outside the Gate would have the greatest level of prominence and ease of accessibility. He also said that a 7,000 square foot facility would be nearly as large as Black Mountain's Town Hall, which he felt was much too big for Montreat given the Town's smaller population. He advocated construction a single-story facility with fewer bathrooms, smaller office spaces, Council chamber and lobby area to reduce the project's cost. He also felt that the only Town Hall location that would enhance the Town's appearance was the location outside the Gate.

**Montreat Board of Commissioners  
Special Meeting Minutes  
September 18, 2014**

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Mrs. Robin Melvin of 246 Texas Road Spur thanked ADS staff for their work on the Town Hall project and for their evaluation of the four proposed sites inside Town limits. She said she believed that if the Board had solicited community input on core values, the alternative location outside the Gate would also have been evaluated. She then asked ADS staff how they would rank each of the four sites inside the Gate based on their suitability as a Town Hall location. Mr. Cox said that while he would encourage the Board and community to form their own opinion on this issue, based on his professional evaluation of all the combined criteria, he believed that Florida Terrace was the most suitable of the four evaluated sites by a wide margin. Mrs. Melvin said that she expected this answer, but also expressed her disappointment in the results of ADS' evaluation because of the level of public opposition to the Florida Terrace site.

Mr. Peter Boggs of 338 Chapman Road spoke in favor of evaluating the proposed alternative Town Hall site outside the Montreat Gate. He praised ADS staff for their evaluation of the four sites inside the Town limits, but felt that their presentation did not reflect that the majority of Montreat community members were opposed to constructing a new Town Hall on Florida Terrace.

Rev. Ann Jones of 314 Chapman Road felt that the current Town Services Office location was working well, and felt that no one had yet given a sufficient explanation of why the new Town Hall facility must be located inside the Montreat Gate. She also asked how many times in the last year the Montreat Police Department had used the Town of Black Mountain's evidence storage facilities. Chief Staggs explained that Montreat was not allowed to use Black Mountain's evidence storage facilities due to jurisdictional conflicts, and that adequate, secure space was needed to process and store the nearly 300 pieces of evidence currently in Montreat's police custody. Rev. Jones also expressed concerns about access to the Florida Terrace site during emergencies or inclement weather, and did not understand why the Town's staff should be separated into different facilities. She supported professional evaluation of the proposed alternative site outside the Montreat Gate, as well as appointment of a blue ribbon committee with additional time to study this issue and find ways to build public consensus.

Mrs. Lucile Jackson of 109 Westminster Terrace expressed her love of Montreat and her respect for all of its community members. She thanked ADS staff for their presentation, and spoke in favor of the Florida Terrace Town Hall site.

Mr. Bob Cunningham of 162 Virginia Road disagreed with some of findings in ADS' evaluation, stating that some of the estimated project delay costs seemed inflated and that the overall scores for some sites were unrealistically high. He felt that the potential delay caused by selecting a site other the Florida Terrace should not be considered as having a significant negative impact on the project. He also questioned whether the roadway path at the intersection of Virginia Road and Assembly Drive could be restructured to improve the safety scores for both Pratt Park and the hillside lot just inside the Montreat Gate. Ms. Dowty

explained that the only way to significantly improve the vehicular and pedestrian safety and access in these would be to alter the position of the Montreat Gate and adjoining Truck Route, which was not a feasible option.

Mrs. Janie Moore of 100 Frist Road felt that the level of public controversy surrounding the Town Hall project was unwarranted, and encouraged those opposed to the project to reduce the level of emotion and rhetoric in some of their statements. She also felt that some of the arguments against the project fostered a negative, elitist image of the Town among residents of neighboring areas. She described the current Town Services Office as inadequate and disrespectful to Town staff, and felt that Montreat needed an independent Town Hall facility with appropriate office and meeting spaces located within its own municipal limits. She did not believe that the Florida Terrace site was difficult to locate or access, or posed additional public safety concerns. She felt that the proposed building design was attractive and well-planned, and that the finished facility could have a positive effect on neighboring property values. She praised the current and prior Board members for their work on the Town Hall project over the past several years, and thanked Architectural Design Studio staff for tonight's presentation.

Mr. Ashton Phelps of 433 Kentucky Road supported professional evaluation of the proposed alternative Town Hall site outside the Montreat Gate. He felt that the number of orange stars assigned to each of the four proposed sites indicated that none of them were acceptable as a Town Hall location, and that the Town was not ready to move forward with this project.

Mrs. Ann Rogers of 527 Calvin Trail thanked both ADS staff members and the Board of Commissioners for their work on the Town Hall project. She described her own personal core values of preserving greenspace areas such as Pratt Park, and maintaining an attractive entrance to the Town. She spoke in favor of the Florida Terrace Town Hall site, stating it provides adequate office, meeting and parking space in a location that she did not feel was remote or inaccessible. She was also concerned about the potential flooding risks associated with the proposed alternative Town Hall site outside the Montreat Gate.

### **Ad Hoc Committee Appointments**

Mayor Pro Tem Standaert moved to appoint Bill Straughan, Bill Hollins, Linda Stroupe and Emory Underwood to serve from September 29 through October 3, 2014 as an ad hoc committee to record responses to the Town Hall project citizen comment cards. Commissioner Vinson seconded and the motion carried 5/0.

### **General Discussion**

Mayor Taylor reiterated that ADS' presentation will be posted on the Town's website for public reference, and the comment cards were intended only as a means of receiving public input,

**Montreat Board of Commissioners  
Special Meeting Minutes  
September 18, 2014**

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rather than as a vote or ballot. The Board of Commissioners will take the response cards and all other comments made concerning this issue into consideration as they make the final decision on the location of the new Town Hall facility. She also noted that instead of an official Town Hall, Montreat currently has a Town Services Office as a work space for Town staff and must rent meeting space from the Montreat Conference Center or Montreat College.

Ms. Dowty noted that printed handouts with information and graphics from tonight's presentation were available to those who were unable to access the information electronically.

Commissioner Helms and Mayor Pro Tem Standaert encouraged rental tenants and other Montreat residents or registered voters who do not receive a Montreat water bill at their homes to call, email or visit the Town Services Office to obtain a printed comment card.

Commissioner Vinson expressed her reasons for wanting the Town Hall to be within Montreat's town limits by stating that none of the eight other locations in which she and her husband had lived required them to travel to another town or city to conduct their public business. She felt that Montreat was not more unique than any other community, and had the same obligation to all of its residents to conduct its business responsibly as an incorporated municipality.

Commissioner Campbell said that the Town Hall was likely the biggest investment the Town would ever make. She quoted excerpts from a book entitled "A Pattern Language" by Christopher Alexander to underline her belief that a local Town Hall should be "community territory for the group it serves, made in a way which invites people in for service and to spontaneously debate policy" and that "the open space around the building is shaped to sustain people gathering and lingering."

Commissioner Helms said that the controversy surrounding the Town Hall issue was unlikely to go away, and felt that the Board should at least evaluate the proposed alternative location outside the Montreat Gate.

**Adjournment**

Mayor Taylor stated that tonight's meeting had been scheduled to last from 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m., and called for a motion to adjourn.

Mayor Pro Tem Standaert moved to adjourn the Special Meeting. Commissioner Helms seconded. The motion carried 5/0 and the meeting was adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

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Letta Jean Taylor, Mayor

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Misty R. Gedlinske, Town Clerk