Board members present: Chairman Bill Scheu

Bill Roberts

Mason Blake

David Holcomb

Dan Dean

Sally Stansill

Allen Crawford

Board members absent: None

Town staff present: Adrienne Isenhower, Zoning Administrator

Alex Carmichael, Town Administrator

Angie Murphy, Town Clerk

Twelve members of the public was present. Mr. Scheu called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m., and led the group in a moment of silence.

**Agenda Approval**

Mr. Dean moved to adopt the agenda as presented. Mr. Blake seconded and the motion carried 7/0.

**Meeting Minutes Adoption**

The March 14th Joint Board of Commissioners/Planning & Zoning Minutes will be approved by the Board of Commissioners at their meeting on April 11, 2019.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment at this time.

**Old Business**

There was no old business to discuss.

**New Business**

1. Montreat Conference Center (MRA) – Richard DuBose: Mr. Dubose felt that the ordinances do not appear to acknowledge adequately the reality that Montreat’s central spaces are dominated by two large campuses that house the year-round programming of two nonprofit institutions. Zoning districts are outlined but the ordinances that apply to institutional development do not always reflect practical realities of how the campuses are used by both visitors and residents. Mr. DuBose’s impression was that the ordinances as established are complex beyond measure in part to bring some conformity to a valley that is almost totally non-conforming. It would seem that the appropriate course of action would be to provide more latitude to the town inspector and zoning officials where possible. Mr. DuBose stated that currently the prevailing winds are blowing for change and a strong case that Montreat does not need an exhaustively detailed, comprehensive system of tightly regulated development. Mr. DuBose also hopes that any future development will include consideration of environmental issues. He would like to encourage Town Commissioners to have another conversation about a possible storm water study. Finally Mr. DuBose felt that the complexity of the job before the Planning and Zoning Commission suggests a moderated solution for the interdependent community of Montreat, one that gives our inspector and officials the ability to deal capably with our non-conformity, one that sands down the hard edges of our existing zoning ordinances but gives some regard to their intent.

B. Montreat College – Jack Heinen and Joe Kirkland: Mr. Joe Kirkland read a letter on behalf of Dr. Paul Maurer, President of Montreat College. In the letter it was stated that Montreat College is grateful to the leadership of the Town of Montreat for recognizing both the need to update the town zoning ordinance, and the opportunity to do so with a fresh look towards the future. It is the college’s view that the Town of Montreat should answer a fundamental and important question: does the Town of Montreat want Montreat College to thrive? The college feels that the ordinance as currently written does not do much to help the college thrive. An example has been the college’s long-standing effort to place light-pole banners on the Duke/Progress Energy poles that exist along streets that pass alongside and through the college. The argument cited for many years is language from the zoning ordinance: that because the zoning ordinance does not explicitly permit them, they are therefore prohibited. The college can grow without light-pole banners but they are standard fare for colleges to have them. They are emblematic of the pride and good relationship that exists between a college and its town. And yet years of good-faith effort from the college have been met with persistent opposition. The answer to the question “does the Town of Montreat want Montreat College to thrive?” has large implications for the future of Montreat College. The answer will impact how the ordinance written with regard to parking, building codes as they relate to old buildings, new construction, wayfinding/signage, lighting, sound, and other matters.

C. 2008 Comprehensive Plan-Matt Ashley, Chair: Mr. Matt Ashley reflected on Montreat’s Vision as stated in the 2008 Comprehensive Plan which is “to seek ways to maintain and improve the quality of life, preserve the natural beauty and promote responsible growth while maintaining our community image, heritage and traditions.” Mr. Ashley stated that those who love Montreat have healthy memories of Montreat and they want to preserve those memories. The idea of stifling growth may come from trying to preserve those memories but Mr. Ashley felt that there needs to be a balance between the two. Mr. Ashley felt that the Town has done a great job with improving infrastructure.

D. Real Estate Industry – Chip Craig: Mr. Craig looked at a period of time between 2007-2009 when lots were selling for $180,000 and nine lots were sold in Montreat. Mr. Craig then looked at a period of time between 2017 and 2019 and lots were selling for $70,000 and 3 lots were sold. Land sales in Buncombe County have not rebounded to where they were before the recession and Montreat has really been hit hard. Mr. Craig stated that in his opinion people who are inheriting the houses are selling them off. Mr. Craig also stated that they, at Greybeard Realty, are selling as much as they used to sell. Mr. Craig feels that it is unfair that buyers have to hook up to water and sewer with the Town and it did not use to be that way. Several people bought property up Greybeard that are now considered to be unbuildable and the property is deemed worthless by banks. The steep slope ordinance and storm water ordinance are very restrictive. Mr. Craig encouraged the Commission to seek input from contractors.

E. Town Administration – Alex Carmichael, Adrienne Isenhower, Angie Murphy: Mrs. Isenhower listed issues that she has heard a lot about in her one year at Montreat. These include: water and sewer connections of the ETJ, the accessories use ordinance, garages versus carports, reasonable accommodations for accessory use, double frontage lots with required setbacks, non-conforming lots or structures and width and depth requirements. The parking and sign regulations also seem arbitrary and not really tailored to Montreat. Also it has been difficult keeping our membership up in the Planning & Zoning Commission and the number of members could be lowered within the ordinance. Mrs. Isenhower also felt that set-backs were a big issue that needed to be addressed. Mr. Carmichael mentioned lots with width and depth requirements and minimum squares footage requirements and storm water is the issue he has heard the most about from homeowners this year.

**Public Comment**

Emory Underwood of John Knox Road reflected on his set-back standards and mentioned the possibility of eliminating set-backs. Mr. Underwood felt that storm water was a very important issue as well.

Wade Burns of North Carolina Terrace stated that he did a serious of Town plats and he felt we needed an understanding of what our actual map of the Town is. Mr. Burns would like to understand the physical environment to what the Commission is trying to apply the zoning ordinance too. Mr. Burns also reflected on the value of the institutions as well.

It was decided to move the next meeting to 5:00 p.m. on April 24th.

**Adjournment**

Mr. Blake moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Crawford seconded and the motion carried 7/0. The meeting was adjourned at 6:56 p.m.

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Bill Roberts, Chair Angie Murphy, Town Clerk