



## Town of Montreat 2020 Highlights

As your Mayor, I bring you Montreat greetings! I hope you had a meaningful Christmas and are anticipating a hopeful new year. It has to be better than 2020! But despite the strange pandemic year, many positive things happened in Montreat—along with a few downsides. I'd like to share some highlights with you:

- Perhaps the greatest excitement of the year was the completion of the new Town Hall. Completed in less than a year and only slightly over budget (about \$20,000), the building greets all who enter Montreat. Proudly showcasing architectural features from old Montreat buildings, the Town Hall incorporates stone inside and out, shiny stone floors in the lobby like Anderson and Gaither, lots of wood features, roof lines like the Wayout building and an arched window like Assembly Inn. But it also has a very functional streaming system in the Community Room for streaming and recording meetings. Outside is a “pocket park” and rain garden. We hope you will take the opportunity to tour it once COVID is under control and the building is open to the public.
- We completed another building this year- the Public Works building. The long-planned and much needed facility is 50'x80' and takes the place of three 10'x14' metal sheds and outdoor work areas! Not only are there indoor work areas, but also space to store vital equipment in a protected environment. Several offices, a meeting/break room and a shower are other important features.
- On the downside, COVID affected the Town as it did so many others:
  - Our revenues were immediately impacted last spring by reduced gas and sales tax income, requiring us to use some of our “savings” to balance the budget.
  - As a result, our 2020-2021 (July-June) budgeted income and expenses are down \$284,035 over last year. However, state tax revenues have been a bit more favorable than we anticipated so far and we've kept our expenses below budget. We hope the trend continues.
  - Nearly all capital projects (anything over \$5,000) were cancelled for the year except several Town Hall/Public Works building projects and three Tropical Storm Alberto repair projects, which the state reimburses us 75%. Everything else has been cancelled or delayed. The Texas Road Bridge Phase I project was part of the postponements, but we are hopeful that it will be included in the next budget year.
  - The Town Hall opening and dedication was postponed, although we did have self-guided tours on July 4<sup>th</sup>.
  - Town Council meetings have been held either virtually or with minimal public attendance (10 people), and we have had to forego the Public Forum when we have been totally virtual.
  - But, we did try to bring some “relief” to Montreaters. The Town hosted a “Chalk Art” contest. Creative juices flowed onto the sidewalks and streets. 10 year old

resident Willa Roberts won the coveted prize: a gift certificate to Kilwin's Chocolates and Ice Cream.

- Back to the positives, our Planning and Zoning Commission completed a monumental task of reviewing and making recommended revisions on all the Zoning Ordinances. They began this task in the winter of 2019 and made their report to the Town Council last month. This dedicated team began meeting once per month, but accelerated their efforts to twice per month just to get through the ordinances in a timely way. We are very grateful to them for their important and detailed work.
- An historic event occurred on Oct. 23. The Montreat Tree Board and the Town Council worked with the American Chestnut Foundation to obtain and plant four chestnut tree seedlings around the town. In the early 1900's, 50% of all the trees in Montreat were chestnuts. Over the next 30 years, all were killed by the chestnut blight. We are excited about this first step in restoring an iconic species to the Montreat valley.
- Despite the dire budget situation, our Public Works team was able to complete a number of road projects. Lookout Trail, Kentucky Road, Texas Road, Wyck Road, South Carolina Terrace and Texas Road Spur were all paved or repaved.
- During the general election last month, I was re-elected to another four year term as your Mayor. Kitty Fouche and Jane Alexander will also continue on as Commissioners for their four year terms. Speaking for Kitty and Jane, we are extremely grateful for your support and confidence in us.
- Several other highlights include:
  - Montreat earned "Tree City USA" designation for the fifth year in a row. We earned the award due to our commitment to effective urban forest management. Thanks to the Montreat Tree Board for their important work in managing our trees.
  - We also received Firewise USA designation, demonstrating a commitment to mitigating the potential effects of wildfire.
  - We are in the midst of a stormwater study, which will develop a steep-slope stormwater management concept plan to help address flooding and infrastructure damage. Stormwater management is one of the most critical issues we face in Montreat.
  - Montreat Landcare recruited volunteers as part of their Citizen Scientist program to monitor water quality in Flat Creek. Weekly samples were taken then analyzed. Happily, our beloved Flat Creek is quite healthy.

On behalf of the Town Council and staff, I thank you for your support and encouragement. It means a lot to all of us. We wish you a safe and healthy 2021, and look forward to our being able to get together again. If you have questions or comments, please write me at [thelms@townofmontreat.org](mailto:thelms@townofmontreat.org) or call at 828/669-3852.



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