Board members present: Mayor Tim Helms

Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer

Commissioner Jane Alexander

Commissioner Kent Otto

Commissioner Alice Lentz

Board members present via

Zoom: None

Board members absent: Commissioner Kitty Fouche

Town staff present: Alex Carmichael, Town Administrator

Angie Murphy, Town Clerk

David Arrant, Chief of Police

Barry Creasman, Public Works Director

Town staff present via Zoom: Darlene Carrasquillo, Finance Officer

Scott Adams, Zoning Administator

No members of the public were present at Town Hall but several were watching via Zoom. Mayor Helms called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., and led the group in the pledge of allegiance and a moment of silence.

**Agenda Approval**

Mayor Pro Tem Widmer moved to adopt the agenda as presented. Commissioner Jane Alexander seconded and the motion carried 4/0.

**Mayor’s Communications**

Mayor Helms advised that the Town has a long series of processes that it must follow with regards to Planning & Zoning and building issues. These processes are set by precedent and have been approved by the State. Mayor Helms urged everyone to let the process play out.

Mayor Helms hoped everyone is planning on getting their COVID shots as well as honoring social distancing, maintaining good hand washing skills and wearing masks.

**Meeting Minutes Adoption**

* February 11th Town Council Meeting Minutes

**Town Administrator’s Communications**

Mr. Carmichael advised Council that he recently heard from the Land of Sky Regional Council and the Town of Montreat may be receiving a federal payment as part of the stimulus package that was recently signed by the President in Washington. Montreat may receive $250,000 but we haven’t received any further details or stipulations.

**Administrative Reports**

* Administration – This report was given in written format.
* Planning & Zoning – This report was given in written format.
* Police – This report was given in written format.
* Public Works and Water – This report was given in written format.
* Finance – This report was given in written format.
* Sanitation – This report was given in written format.
* Streets – This report was given in written format.

**Public Comment**

The following public comments were read into record by Town Clerk Angie Murphy.

G. Wayne Drummond, Manager of Georgia Lodge, questioned if an environmental impact study would be required before the proposed resort on Assembly Drive moves forward. Mr. Drummond also expressed this views on the MRA prioritizing this new lodge when they have their summer college staff paying to live in sub-standards, partially condemned lodges.

Kyle Kirk raised his concerns that MRA’s new lodge construction is not in the best interest of local residents, nor does he believe that the additional hospitality occupancy is necessary for the growth of Montreat. Mr. Kirk feels that public officials have failed to properly inform the public of the development plan and its harms.

Anne Hayner of 319 Assembly Drive feels that MRA’s proposed construction would destroy the quality of life in Montreat. It would degrade the environment by threatening water quality, land stability and wildlife. Construction of the hotel would erase irreplaceable Montreat history by tearing down two of the oldest buildings: Chestnut Lodge and Lord Apartments as well as Galax House. Ms. Hayner believes the lodge would shatter the peace and quiet of Montreat and replace it with noise, light and traffic.

Priscilla Hayner of 319 Assembly Drive expressed her strong opposition to the proposed development of a large lodge on Assembly Drive which is currently in the design stage by the MRA. Ms. Hayner expressed concern for the process and the apparent lack of engagement by public officials in an issue that is of great concern to those who love Montreat. She feels that the environmental impact, the razing of the oldest home in Montreat and the possible violation of existing zoning laws all raise very significant questions that need due consideration. Ms. Hayner urged the Council to find a way to open a robust community conversation and felt it would be appropriate to ask the MRA to hold off on any major development proposals. Ms. Hayner also expressed support for a Comprehensive Plan Update.

Kate Hayner of 319 Assembly Drive shared her concerns and objections with regards to the proposed development. Ms. Hayner felt that she and other neighbors were not consulted for input on this project. Ms. Hayner felt that the proposed location is in the heart of a very historic neighborhood and would remove three historic houses and impact the neighborhood adversely. Ms. Hayner felt this project does not align with the 2008 Town of Montreat Comprehensive Plan. She feels that this project will severely impact the quiet enjoyment of her family home.

Jeff Richey who owns 305 Georgia Terrace opposes the MRA development utterly and completely. Mr. Richey believes that if this plan moves forward his porch view will consist of the hotel’s roof, churning HVAC units and glimpses into rooms of unwary guests. Mr. Richey feels that Assembly Drive was not built to sustain the massive weight and abrasive impact of the cement trucks and other large construction equipment that will be coming and going for months at a time, drilling into the bedrock of the hillside where Galax House now stands, pouring concrete, discharging hydrocarbons, metals and radiation from the water-soluble uranium, radium and thorium that is present in concrete aggregate, leaching toxins and leaking runoff into the groundwater through Flat Creek, which flows just feet away from the proposed construction site.

Robert Warner who owns 346 Chapman Road, feels that the proposed lodge and conference center represents a prima facie violation of the Montreat Zoning Ordinance. The lodge is to be located in an I/R zone. The purpose of the I/R Zoning District is “to provide for a zone of transition between purely residential and purely institutional Districts”. Mr. Warner feels that a modern 33,000 square foot 50 room lodge at the location on Assembly Drive cannot rationally be referred to as “transitional”. To build the proposed lodge at this location would violate any honest reading of the I/R Zoning specified in the Montreat Zoning Ordinance in his opinion. It would simply turn an I/R zone into an Institutional Zone. Mr. Warner also referenced page 2 of the Town of Montreat Comprehensive Plan of 2008 and the Mission Statement of the Board: “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.”

**Old Business**

A. Texas Road Update: Public Works Director Barry Creasman advised Council that the Contractor had suggested a pre-formed block wall, such as Redi-Rock or Verti-Block, that has the appearance of stone. Mr. Creasman provided photographs which were included in the packet and answered a few questions from Council. Council then instructed Mr. Creasman to move forward with the project.

**New Business**

1. Appointment of Philip S. Arnold to the Audit Committee: Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer moved to approve the appointment of Philip S. Arnold to the Audit Committee for a term of two years to expire on January 31, 2023. Commissioner Jane Alexander seconded and the motion carried 4/0.
2. Appointment of Hugh Alexander to Audit Committee: Commissioner Jane Alexander moved to approve the appointment of Hugh Alexander to the Audit Committee for a term of two years to expire on January 31. 2023. Commissioner Kent Otto seconded and the motion carried 4/0.

C. Appointment of Eleanor James to Board of Adjustment: Commissioner Alice Lentz moved to approve the appointment of Eleanor James to Board of Adjustment for a term of three years to expire on January 31, 2024. Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer seconded and the motion carried 4/0.

D. Appointment of Bill Scheu to Open Space Conservation: Commissioner Alice Lentz moved to approve the appointment of Bill Scheu to the Open Space Conservation Committee for a term of two years to expire on January 31, 2023. Commissioner Jane Alexander seconded and the motion carried 4/0.

E. Appointment of Mason Blake to Planning and Zoning Commission: Commissioner Kent Otto moved to approve the appointment of Mark Spence to Board of Adjustment for a term of three years to expire on January 31, 2024. Commissioner Alice Lentz seconded and the motion carried 4/0.

F. Appointment of Mark Spence to Board of Adjustment: Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer moved to approve the appointment of Mark Spence to the Board of Adjustment for a term of three years to expire on January 31, 2024. Commissioner Kent Otto seconded and the motion carried 4/0.

G. Appointment of Mary Nell Todd to Open Space Conservation: Commissioner Alice Lentz move to approve the appointment of Mary Nell Todd to Open Space Conservation Committee for a term of two years to expire on January 31, 2023. Commissioner Jane Alexander seconded and the motion carried 4/0.

H. Budget Amendment #4: Town Administrator Alex Carmichael advised that $615 was being moved from the Police Department to the Sanitation Department to fund the purchase of two dog waste stations that will be installed at Assembly Drive/Greenway/Columbarium and Community Circle. This money will provide for two full stations but we will remove the dog bag box. Mr. Carmichael stated that the MRA mentioned the possibility of installing boxes at key trailheads. Commissioner Alice Lentz moved to approve Budget Amendment #4 as presented. Commissioner Jane Alexander seconded and the motion carried 4/0.

I. Discussion with Possible Action about Bagged Leaf Collection: Commissioner Alice Lentz moved to approve the following from the Firewise Committee with regards to leaf removal: the town’s definition of “contractor” should NOT include college students and local handymen, who are often hired by residents to clear leaves from their yards; that leaves are properly bagged and located at the roadside by college students and handymen be removed by the Town, as if the homeowner had done so. Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer seconded and the motion carried 4/0.

**Public Comment**

Emmie Hay Alexander Hancock who owns 307 Georgia Terrace reflected on her family’s long history in Montreat and questioned whether Montreat is a resort or a retreat. Ms. Hancock also feels there is no common, shared vision among the four stakeholder groups-Cottage Owners, Conference Center/MRA, College and the Town.

Paige Webb was recently informed that a lodge/hotel was going to be built in the near future. She believes with the development of the hotel that the Town will turn into a commercial destination rather than a place to disconnect and unwind.

David Kirk feels that the proposed hotel development on Assembly Drive would forever change the look and character of Montreat. Mr. Kirk feels the development would negatively impact the value of his home and more importantly his quiet use and enjoyment.

Jane Frith Warner stated that the addition of a hotel/conference facility across from Robert Lake Park will irrevocably change the tenor of Montreat. Ms. Warner believes that the people of Montreat should have a say in the future of Montreat.

Bryant McEntire of Montreat feels the Town Council should put a moratorium on this plan for the proposed lodge in order to reach out to their constituents and tax payers to gauge public sentiment.

Irena Hayner expressed her deep concern over the proposed lodge construction by MRA. Ms. Hayner reflected on Montreat history and how the new construction had the potential to change future memories.

Heather Williams stated that this proposed complex would disturb tree cover, groundwater, excavation of the steep hillside and the aesthetic mismatch of a giant corporate complex next to historic single family homes and small boarding houses would be a blight and an environmental menace.

**Commissioner Communications**

Commissioner Kent Otto offered comments about the 2008 Comprehensive Plan. Commissioner Otto believes it is time to go deeper in conversations with neighbors and institutions on what is the path this community is truly on.

**Dates to Remember**

* Annual Commission Retreat Part B March 17, 2021 1:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. Zoom Software Only
* Montreat Tree Board March 23, 2021 9:30 a.m. by Zoom Software
* Montreat Landcare April 7, 2021 9:00 a.m. by Zoom Software
* Planning & Zoning Commission April 8, 2021 10:30 a.m. by Zoom Software
* Town Council Meeting April 8, 2021 7:00 p.m. Location/Method to be determined

**Adjournment**

Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer moved to adjourn the meeting. Kent Otto seconded and the motion carried 4/0. The meeting was adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

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Tim Helms, Mayor Angie Murphy, Town Clerk