Board members present: All parties were present by Zoom or phone.

Board members via Zoom: Wade Burns

 Bill Scheu

 Mason Blake

 Allen Crawford

 Dan Dean

 Sally Stancil

Board members absent: David Holcomb

Town staff present via Zoom: Scott Adams, Zoning Administrator

Alex Carmichael, Town Administrator

Angie Murphy, Town Clerk

Susan Taylor Rash, Town Attorney

No members of the public were present but several members were watching via Zoom. Mr. Scheu called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m., and led the group in a moment of silence.

**Agenda Approval**

Wade Burns moved to adopt the agenda as presented. Dan Dean seconded and the motion carried 6/0.

**Meeting Minutes Adoption**

Mason Blake stated that the minutes from the February 4th meeting were a little unclear with regards to vested rights for Conditional Zoning. Mr. Blake went on to say that his motion from that meeting was to approve a two year statute of limitations for all conditional zoning approvals with a two year extension if approved by the Council. Mr. Scheu will get with the Town Clerk and make the changes and the minutes will be resubmitted at the April meeting for approval.

**Continued Presentation/Discussion on Zoning Setbacks**

Mr. Scheu mentioned that the setbacks discussion that will occur at this meeting does not involve the proposed Lodge by the Mountain Retreat Association. This discussion has been ongoing for over two years now with the Ordinance Revisions. Mr. Scheu also stated that the Commission was not going to take a position on the proposed project and as of late an application had not been submitted to the Town for the project.

Mr. Adams stated that he has had several residents around Town who want to do minor renovations but they seem to be stymied by conflicts with the setbacks and minimum lot sizes. Mr. Adams noticed that in the current ordinance and the proposed ordinance that the term “yard” and “setback” are used interchangeably. Mr. Adams suggested using the term “setback” solely. Mr. Adams stated that the ordinances do not differentiate between vertical and horizontal expansion. Mr. Dean suggested that maybe the Commission needs to go back and readdress the definition of “building” and “structure”. Mrs. Susan Taylor Rash advised that the current Zoning Ordinance does not have a clear definition of vertical expansion. Mrs. Taylor Rash also advised when Staff does not have a clear set of rules and regulations to fall back on then the improvements are not allowed and a variance would then be needed.

Mr. Dean suggested letting the Council know that there are some details that need further investigation in the proposed Ordinance for clarification purposes. Mr. Scheu stated that the Commission would move forward with next week’s presentation to Council but would let them know that there are a few areas that still need some work. Mr. Scheu suggested an additional two hour special meeting in April to discuss these items further.

**Public Comment**

 John Fox raised his hand in the Zoom meeting and expressed his concerns about the MRA Lodge proposal. Mr. Fox feels there is a better place for this to happen in Town.

The following comments were submitted in email form and were read aloud by Town Clerk Angie Murphy.

Wayne Drummond, manager of Georgia Lodge, wrote and asked if an environmental impact study would be required before the proposed resort on Assembly Drive moves forwards. Mr. Drummond feels one should be required. Mr. Drummond finds it hard to believe that MRA would prioritize this new resort when they have their summer college staff paying to live in sub-standard, partially condemned lodges.

Kyle Kirk wrote and inquired if the proposed new regulations for setbacks was to cater specifically to the planned Lodge development. Mr. Kirk also asked for exact examples of any other properties within the community that have stated that they would benefit from changing the current zoning. Mr. Kirk feels that this change in zoning has the possibility for misuse through furthered development of the MRA’s planned lodge.

Priscilla Hayner of 319 Assembly Drive felt if the setback discussion was intended to address a newly planned structure that could reach to the road or to the edge of the neighbor’s property then she would be opposed. Ms. Hayner also mentioned that she felt an update of the 2008 Comprehensive Plan, with significant public input, would be a better time to reevaluate zoning parameters.

Irena Hayner expressed her concerns over changing the current zoning setback requirement. She felt the required setback is in place at least in part to protect the integrity of the Montreat scenic view from Assembly Drive, as well as to protect the view from neighboring properties as they sit on their porch and look at the mountains.

Jane Frith Warner shared her concerns over changing the current zoning setback requirement. She asked the Board to protect the natural environment of Montreat, including the space between buildings, the trees and the natural landscape. She mentioned that eliminating potential zoning problems for a construction project would not be a good reason to the Montreat standards.

Anne Hayner of 319 Assembly Drive stated she was opposed to any zoning setback changes which would allow more leeway for large new structures, such as the proposed hotel on Assembly Drive, to further encroach on the quality of life of the community.

Kate Hayner felt that the required setback allows for homes to not be impacted by other homes or buildings that would negatively impact the view as well as the peaceful enjoyment of one’s home.

John J. Fox III of 314 North Carolina Terrace stated that he was adamantly opposed to any setback maneuvers which would allow any large structure to be built.

Heather Williams of 319 Assembly Drive expressed her concerns about the large lodge and conference center that MRA has announced it will build next to her family’s narrow lot. She stated that Montreat land prices are really high and could be its ruin if rules about new construction are changed to suit the MRA’s campaign to build a large lodge and conference center in an historic part of town characterized by small cottages and boarding houses. She also stated that the new construction would have significant environmental impacts.

Robert Warner of 346 Chapman Road feels that the proposed lodge cannot be built in its proposed location. He believes if it is built it will violate any honest reading of the I/R Zoning specified in the Montreat Zoning Ordinance. He referenced several emails we have received in opposition of the new proposed lodge and urged the Commission to listen to the people.

Richard DuBose, President of the MRA, stated that the MRA is not intending to build a resort in Montreat but rather an extension of their hospitality that they already provide with the Assembly Inn and other lodges in Town. There is a rumor going around that over the next 5-10 years that the proposed project will overtake nearby property owner’s homes and properties. Mr. DuBose stated that this was indeed just a rumor. Mr. DuBose also stated that summer staff workers have been staying in recently renovated lodges. Mr. DuBose plans to comply with all the environmental requirements as set forth in the Montreat Zoning and Stormwater Ordinances. The current proposed plans for the lodge complies with the current setback standards as set forth in the current Ordinance. The MRA Board will be meeting the following week and they plan to take every comment under consideration.

Kate Hayner stated that in a Zoom meeting with several other neighbors that Richard DuBose implied the MRA would own her home and the Georgia Lodge within 10 years.

**Adjournment**

Dan Dean moved to adjourn the meeting. Wade Burns seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 11:42 p.m.

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Bill Scheu, Chair Angie Murphy, Town Clerk