Board members present: Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer

Commissioner Jane Alexander

Commissioner Kent Otto

Commissioner Alice Lentz

Commissioner Kitty Fouche

Board members present via

Zoom: None

Board members absent: Mayor Tim Helms

Town staff present: Alex Carmichael, Town Administrator

Angie Murphy, Town Clerk

David Arrant, Chief of Police

Barry Creasman, Public Works Director

Scott Adams, Zoning Administrator

Town staff present via Zoom: None

No members of the public were present at Town Hall but several were watching via Zoom. Mayor Pro Tem Widmer 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**

Commissioner Kitty Fouche moved to adopt the agenda as presented. Commissioner Kent Otto seconded and the motion carried 5/0.

**Mayor’s Communications**

Mayor Pro Tom Widmer expressed his gratitude, on behalf of the Town Council, for the Planning & Zoning Commission who have been working on Zoning Ordinance revisions for the past two years. The Planning & Zoning Commission held a productive meeting this morning and listened to a number of public comments and feedback which led to additional revisions of the Zoning Ordinance. Mayor Pro Tem Widmer stated that they will be bringing the revised changes to the Town Council at a future date. The changes must be adopted by July 1st based on state statute regulations.

**Meeting Minutes Adoption**

* March 3rd Town Council Retreat Part A Minutes
* March 11th Town Council Meeting Minutes
* March 17th Town Council Retreat Part B Minutes

**Town Administrator’s Communications**

Mr. Carmichael had no communications but Mayor Pro Tem Widmer asked for further information about the federal payment from the recent stimulus package. Mr. Carmichael advised there were no further updates at this time.

**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.

Julian Mims IV stated that he was opposed to the proposed construction of a hotel in Montreat. Mr. Mims IV stated that this hotel threatens the fundamental nature of Montreat as we know it.

Thad Ellett of 193 Mississippi Road stated that the current zoning wording protects Montreat as the refuge it was meant to be. Mr. Ellett also stated that he was in full agreement with the letter from Priscilla Hayner, Brendan Hayner-Slattery and Evan Williams, Esq. dated 4/5/2021.

Kyle Kirk expressed his displeasure at the responses of the Planning & Zoning Commission and the Town Council at last month’s meetings after receiving public comments.

Amy Diamond of 303 Georgia Terrace stated she shared the concerns expressed by the Montreat Stewards group. She feels that the proposed project was not well considered and that the community impacted by the construction was not well informed.

Anita Rose of 224 Tennessee Road felt the demolition of historic properties and the building of the proposed lodge would be a mistake. The traffic and congestion in this area of Montreat is already intense and a lodge would make the congestion worse. Ms. Rose also felt it would damage the character of the residential neighborhood beyond repair. She questioned another option that looks forward while respecting the legacy of Montreat.

Henry McCall Swink of Effingham, SC felt that the lodge/motel would not be a benefit for Montreat. Mr. Swink felt that it would only add to the commercialization of Montreat. Mr. Swink stated that this is not why he and others enjoyed and appreciated Montreat. Montreat is a place to go for peace and tranquility.

Robert Warner of Chapman Road reflected on the stated purpose of the I/R Zoning District given in the regulations which is as follows “to provide for a zone of transition between purely residential and purely institutional Districts.” The authors of the Montreat Zoning Ordinance further reinforced this element of “transition” with a specifically designated second purpose: “to provide for protected property values in areas which are predominately residential in character.” Mr. Warner felt that the development proposed by the MRA would permanently alter the character of the area, remove historical buildings and generate considerable noise reverberating up the hillside from HVAC systems, and traffic and crowds gathered outside.

Nancy Jones Fox of 314 NC Terrace felt that the proposed MRA lodge would impact the landscape and experience that is Montreat. Ms. Jones Fox stated that the current site of the proposed lodge is causing escalating conflict. Ms. Jones Fox feels that it is a time for all Montreators to learn of this conflict. She encouraged healthy, growth dialogue between all four entities of Montreat.

Jeff Richey of 305 Georgia Terrace felt that the proposed revisions to Montreat’s zoning ordinance would make it easier for the MRA to build its proposed lodge on Assembly Drive across from Robert Lake Park which he opposes. Mr. Richey believes that if ratified Montreat’s zoning ordinance will no longer protect his right as a cottager to the “use and enjoyment” of his property. Mr. Richey also feels that the proposed revisions will sweep away vital protections for property owners, decrease transparency and fairness in the construction permit issuing process and ultimately erode the legal structures that now stand in the way of any effort that will compromise Montreat’s character.

James Knox Simpson III of 149 Virginia Road expressed his concerns about the proposed construction project and especially with the method with which they were developed without prior notice or a period made available for public comment. Mr. Simpson feels this development will increase automobile traffic substantially. He believes that the destruction of current structures, excavation of the site and a prolonged period of construction for the project will impede foot traffic, be dangerous to pedestrians and also potentially could be hazardous to health in other ways. The effects on the environment are difficult to estimate, but certainly the impact on storm water is a potential issue in an area already subject to heavy rainfalls and periodic flooding. Also, the old structures scheduled for removal almost certainly contain high levels of lead based paint that could cause environmental contamination even with careful removal.

Bryant McEntire and family of 304 Georgia Terrace requested that the conditional use permit process remain in place for certain kinds of development in areas zoned as “Institutional/Residential.” Mr. McEntire believes the new ordinance significantly reduces opportunity for public hearing and comment, weakens or eliminates protections for Montreat residents, property owners, and the community. Changes also shifts the burden of proof to those opposing the application which Mr. McEntire feels is backwards. Three other requirements are omitted in the proposed ordinance: conflict of interest provisions as required by NC law, language to ensure the historical preservation is a factor in zoning and permitting decisions and specific environmental safeguards in line with the recommendations of the 2008 Comprehensive Plan.

Cynthia Simonds, a Black Mountain homeowner and frequent Montreat visitor, questioned what other locations or alternatives have been considered for the proposed lodge project. She also questioned whether the resources for this project could be directed towards upgrading current facilities. As a Black Mountain resident she is concerned about the downstream effects of this construction on Black Mountain storm water and watershed.

**Old Business**

There was no old business.

**New Business**

1. Resolution 21-04-0001 Surplus Property Disposal: Commissioner Jane Alexander moved to approve Resolution #21-04-0001 Authorizing Surplus Property Disposal. Commissioner Alice Lentz seconded the motion. Mr. Carmichael advised the Commission about the steps involved in selling surplus property. The property in questions is an old photocopier, six telephones and two utility sheds. These items will be sold on the government auction website [www.govdeals.com](http://www.govdeals.com). After the discussion the motion carried 5/0.

**Public Comment**

There was no additional public comment.

**Commissioner Communications**

Commissioner Kitty Fouche advised that the Presbyterian Heritage Center is opening for business on April 8th. They will be open Thursday – Friday (10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.) and Saturday (10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.) with additional days opened each month. They have webinars and in-person virtual programs.

Commissioner Kent Otto stated that he appreciated the evening’s public comments and he realizes that emotions are high. He once again stated his appreciation for the Planning & Zoning Commissions work on the zoning ordinance review. Commissioner Otto has pushed for the zoning ordinance review during his five years on Council. He finds it concerning that some of the Montreat neighbors are questioning the motives and integrity of the Planning & Zoning Commission and the Town Council. He would like to see this kind of discussion shut down and would like everyone to remember that we are neighbors today and will be neighbors tomorrow as well.

**Dates to Remember**

* Montreat Tree Board April 27, 2021 9:30 a.m. by Zoom Software
* Montreat Landcare May 5, 2021 9:00 a.m. by Zoom Software
* Planning & Zoning Commission May 13, 2021 10:30 a.m. by Zoom Software
* Town Council Meeting May 13, 2021 7:00 p.m. Location/Method to be determined

**Closed Session**

Commissioner Kitty Fouche moved to enter into Closed Session in accordance with NCGS 143-318.11(6) for discussion of a personnel matter. Commissioner Kent Otto seconded and the motion carried 5/0.

Upon returning to Open Session Commissioner Kent Otto moved to approve the offer of employment of Utility Maintenance Worker-Sanitation to Andrew Brown with a salary of $32,613. Commissioner Alice Lentz seconded and the motion carried 5/0.

**Adjournment**

Commissioner Kitty Fouce moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Jane Alexander seconded and the motion carried 5/0. The meeting was adjourned at 8:04 p.m.

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Tom Widmer, Mayor Pro Tem Angie Murphy, Town Clerk