

**Town of Montreat
Board of Commissioners
Meeting Minutes
February 10, 2022 – 7:00 p.m.
Zoom Meeting with in person attendance**

Board members present: Mayor Tim Helms
Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer
Commissioner Jane Alexander
Commissioner Mason Blake
Commissioner Kitty Fouche
Commissioner Kent Otto

Board members present via
Zoom: None

Board members absent: None

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: None

Approximately eight members of the public were present at Town Hall and several more were watching via Zoom. Mayor Tim 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

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

Mayor's Communications

Mayor Tim Helms mentioned that the Town of Montreat had recently had two snow events. The first snow the crews ran three trucks with five men rotating twelve hour shifts for three days. They did this with very few hours of sleep. During the second storm crews ran two trucks with two employees for six hours. During the first storm the wind was a huge problem blowing snow back into the roads.

Another problem that was encountered was cars parked in the road. Mayor Helms advised that during snow storms cars must be parked out and off of the roadway. Mayor Helms also stated that 46 tons of sand and 9,600 pounds of ice melt were used during these storms. Mayor Helms thanked Public Works Director Barry Creasman and his team for all of their hard work.

Meeting Minutes Adoption

- January 13th Town Council Public Forum Meeting Minutes
- January 13th Town Council Meeting Minutes
- January 31st Special Meeting Minutes

Town Administrator's Communications

Mr. Carmichael took a moment to introduce Ben Blackburn, retired City Manager of Cherryville and Lowell, who was in attendance. Mr. Blackburn is a candidate for the Interim Town Administrator position for the Town of Montreat.

Administrative Reports

- Administration – This report was given in written format.
- Finance – 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.
- Sanitation – This report was given in written format.
- Streets – This report was given in written format.

Public Comment

Mr. Seth Hagler of Mountain Retreat Association (MRA) thanked Alex Carmichael, Town Staff and especially Public Works Director Barry Creasman for help in removing some problem trees.

Dr. Mary Standaert of 118 Shenandoah Terrace read a portion of a letter that she wrote to a member of the Montreat Audit Committee. Dr. Standaert mentioned again that she found that the late audits were very concerning. Dr. Standaert mentioned again that the fund balance had fallen to 16% which is well below historical levels and below the 35% which was set by Council several years ago. Dr. Standaert expressed her concerns that this issue wasn't raised in public despite tax increases two years in a row. Dr. Standaert expressed her displeasure that fund balance had been used to cover operating costs.

Old Business

There was no Old Business to discuss.

New Business

- A. Presentation of Fiscal Year 2020 Audit by Carter, P.A.: Lavonia Reese of Carter, P.A. introduced herself and her auditing firm to the Town Commissioners. Mrs. Reese stated that there were numerous issues in preparing the FY 19/20 audit including: prior auditor communication, remote working environment for both parties, antiquated software and extended medical absences. Mrs. Reese stated that Carter, P.A. has been in constant communication with the N.C. Local Government Commission. Mrs. Reese also stated that the Town of Montreat is not the only municipality that is late with their audit. Mrs. Reese stated that Carter, P.A. did issue their Internal Control Letter which identified problems with the accounting software, tracking of fund balance restrictions, document retention and segregation of cash duties. Mrs. Reese stated that they have an aggressive but doable plan in moving forward with the remaining audits. Mrs. Reese went on to review the highlights of the audit. She stated that the Town of Montreat is in a good financial position. The audit has been accepted and certified by the State of North Carolina.

- B. Hiring of Ben T. Blackburn, Jr. as Interim Town Administrator: Commissioner Kitty Fouche moved to appoint Ben T. Blackburn, Jr. as Interim Town Administrator at the rate of \$50 per hour plus mileage. Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer seconded and the motion carried 5/0. Mayor Tim Helms administered the Oath of Office to Mr. Blackburn.

- C. Planning & Zoning Commission Appointment: Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer moved to appoint Jean David to a three year term ending on January 25, 2025 to the Planning & Zoning Commission as an alternate 2 member. Commissioner Kent Otto seconded and the motion carried 5/0.

- D. Budget Amendment #5: Mr. Carmichael explained that this Budget Amendment would move \$12,500 from Streets Capital Outlay to the Stormwater Program. The monies will be used to fund the Stormwater Plan which is a requirement of our MS4 permit. Commissioner Kitty Fouche moved to approve Budget Amendment #5 in the amount of \$12,500 to pay for Stormwater Services Contract. Commissioner Jane Alexander seconded and the motion carried 4/1 with Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer voting in the negative.

- E. Stormwater Contract: Commissioner Jane Alexander moved to approve Stormwater Contract with Land-of-Sky Regional Council in the amount of \$12,500. Commissioner Mason Blake seconded and the motion carried 5/0.

F. Discussion of Manager-Council Form of Government: Mr. Carmichael stated that currently the Town of Montreat operates under a Mayor-Council form of government and under that form of government there is not a lot of direction under state statutes. In a Manager-Council form of government you solidify the role by state statute because law specifically gives authority to the Manager. One example of a change would be that the Manager would be in charge of hiring/firing staff. Another example is that it would take the political dynamic off the staff level of the organization. Mr. Carmichael stated that the current form of government is an unstable environment for the administrative staff. Mr. Carmichael stated that switching to the Manager-Council Form of government would create a stable environment for recruitment. The job responsibilities would be written into state statute and roles would be codified. Mr. Carmichael stated that the role of Manager is more prestigious and would likely increase the candidate pool. Mr. Carmichael stated that if the Commissioners wanted to switch to a Manager-Council form of government it would be at least a three month process. A resolution of intent would be written and a public hearing would need to be advertised and held and then at the third meeting a vote could be held on the manner.

Public Comment

Dr. Mary Standaert of 118 Shenandoah Terrace thanked Commissioners Blake and Widmer for their precise and timely questions about the audit. Dr. Standaert stated that the Commission will soon be entering into the Budget process and that they will be flying blind because they do not know what the financial status is at the time due to the lateness of the audits. Dr. Standaert also commented that the finance officer should have been at this evening's meeting and that agenda meetings should be reinstated.

Commissioner Communications

There were no Commissioner Communications.

Dates to Remember

- Montreat Tree Board Meeting, Tuesday, February 22nd at 9:30 a.m. in the Town Hall and by Zoom Software
- Board of Adjustment, Thursday, February 24th at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Hall with in person attendance and by Zoom Software
- Montreat Landcare Committee, Wednesday, March 2nd at 9:00 a.m. in the Town Hall with in person attendance and by Zoom Software
- Planning & Zoning Commission, Thursday, March 10th at 10:30 a.m. in the Town Hall with in person attendance and by Zoom Software
- Town Council Meeting, Thursday, March 10th at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Hall with in person attendance and by Zoom Software. The Public Forum will begin at 6:30 p.m.

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- Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Meeting, Monday, March 21st at 10:00 a.m. in the Town Hall and by Zoom Software
- Montreat Tree Board Meeting, Tuesday, March 29th at 9:30 a.m. in the Town Hall with in person attendance and by Zoom software

Adjournment

Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Kitty Fouche seconded and the motion carried 5/0. The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m.

Tim Helms , Mayor

Angie Murphy, Town Clerk