Board members present: Mayor Tim Helms

Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer

Commissioner Kitty Fouche

Commissioner Mason Blake

Commissioner Jane Alexander

Commissioner Kent Otto

Board members absent: None

Town staff present: Ben Blackburn, Interim Town Administrator

Angie Murphy, Town Clerk

Scott Adams, Zoning Administrator

Approximately eleven members of the public were present. Mayor Tim Helms called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m., and led the group in 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.

**Public Forum**

Mr. Philip Arnold of 530 Magill Drive expressed his concerns that the legal battle over the lodge is draining the finances of the Town. Mr. Arnold, an active member of the Audit Committee, stated that the Town was spending money that they don’t have. Mr. Arnold questioned how the Town Council will deal with the deficit as the legal bills are well over $100,000 and still rising. Mr. Arnold was disturbed that the lodge opposition had decided to continue their battle in court and wondered if the financial impact on the Town was even a consideration of theirs. Mr. Arnold stated that as long as the red ribbons tied around trees in support of the opposition are hung it will remind him that this battle is bleeding the Town financially. Mr. Arnold wondered if the plaintiffs would be willing to reimburse to the Town future attorney bills as it might be a way to win back some hearts and minds that they might be starting to lose.

Mr. Tom Frist of 98 Frist Road expressed his sadness that the funds reserved for the Texas Road Pedestrian Bridge Project were reallocated to pay for legal fees for the lodge issue. Mr. Frist stated that he would love to see some beautification efforts begun now on the bridge. Mr. Frist offered to donate $1,500 towards flowers and beautification on the bridge. Interim Town Administrator Ben Blackburn commented that monies have been earmarked in the FY2022-2023 budget for the Texas Road Bridge Project. Mr. Blackburn also stated that the Town had applied for two grants that would lend funding towards the Bridge.

Mr. Bryant McEntire of 158 Virginia Road suggested parking meters at the Greybeard Trailhead and reserved parking spots for Montreat citizens. Mr. McEntire questioned how the change of government would be decided and stated his belief that it should be a referendum vote. Mr. McEntire also felt that there’s plenty of blame to go around with reference to the attorneys spent and the lodge issue at large.

Dr. Mary Standaert of 118 Shenandoah Terrace thanked the Town Council for giving the Board of Adjustment members, who are all volunteers, the support and legal advice needed during the Special Use Permit Hearings surrounding the lodge controversy. Dr. Standaert went on to say that the Town’s financial problems didn’t start with the legal fees. Dr. Standaert stated that audit for FY 2020 was turned in a year late among other issues. Dr. Standaert then stated that the Town is in this position because the fund balance has dropped below the mandatory reserve amount of 35%. Mayor Helms stated that the Town’s fund balance has grown significantly since the 2019-2020 audit and is projected to be at 32% of the annual budget as of 2020-2021 FY audit. Mayor Pro Tem Widmer stated that the fund balance fell so low because the 2019-2021 budget included large expenses surrounding the Town Hall and Public Works Buildings. Commissioner Kent Otto thanked Dr. Standaert for her comments about the Board of Adjustment members and expressed his disappointment in the verbal attacks that the Board of Adjustment members have received from friends and neighbors.

Mrs. Grace Nichols of 527 Suwannee Drive, Chair of the Landcare Committee, gave the Town Council and the Black Mountain News thanks for their support of last month’s Native Plant Sale.

**Adjournment**

Commissioner Kent Otto moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Kitty Fouche seconded and the motion carried 5/0. The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

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Tim Helms, Mayor Angie Murphy, Town Clerk