

**Town of Montreat
Board of Commissioners
Public Forum Meeting Minutes
October 13, 2022 – 6:30 p.m.
Town Hall**

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

Board members absent: None

Town staff present: Ben Blackburn, Interim Town Manager

A few 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. Jim Gibbs, President of the Mt. Mitchell Bear Hunting Club and Mill Creek Wildlife Club, believes that Montreat does not have a bear dog problem but rather a bear problem. The Hunting Club has been hunting their land for almost 80 years and they have never had a problem with their dogs wandering onto Montreat property. Last year a problem occurred with bear dogs in a residential neighborhood in Montreat. These dogs were not the dogs of the Mt. Mitchell Bear Hunting Club but rather the dogs of another group of hunters illegally hunting in the area. It's of Mr. Gibbs opinion that the sensationalizing of this incident brought the bear problems to the forefront of everyone's mind. The Club is aware that there is no hunting allowed in Montreat and the letting out of dogs in Montreat will not be tolerated. Hunters from all clubs need a mechanism and a procedure to legally and peacefully retrieve their dogs without disturbing the citizens of Montreat. The Mt. Mitchell Bear Hunting Club has taken steps to rectify this problem. The Club plans to hunt further from Sourwood Gap and Montreat. The Club has printed decals to show who they are and which Club they belong too as well. These decals will be displayed on all vehicles. They have agreed to register with the Montreat Police Department and notify the Department when they have to enter the Town to retrieve their dogs. Mr. Gibbs recommends that all Clubs strive to do the

same to minimize problems. Mr. Gibbs states that the proposed ordinance and associated fines place an undue threat and potential damage to the continued operation of the Club and as a result have a potentially negative impact on Club members and citizens of Montreat. Mr. Gibbs feels the ordinance is an over reach and will place hardship on the Mt. Mitchell Bear Hunting Club but on other area clubs, the citizens of Montreat and the Montreat Police Department. Mr. Gibbs requested that the Board of Commissioners delay tonight's vote on the new and revised ordinances and instead see how things go this bear season. Mr. Gibbs stated that the Club had been good neighbors of Montreat and its citizens for generations and look forward to continuing to be good neighbors for generations to come. Mr. Gibbs does not believe that fines are the solution to the problem but rather mutual respect, understanding and cooperation to be the solution. Mr. Gibbs reiterated that Montreat does not have a bear dog problem but rather a bear problem.

Arrington Cox of 203 Virginia Road visited this evening on behalf of Montreat Landcare. Ms. Cox is the Chair of the Bearwise Committee on Montreat Landcare. Ms. Cox advised that the Montreat Landcare Committee is working toward making Montreat a Bearwise Community.

Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer advised that there were five documented incidents with bears and bears dogs in that last week of 2021. Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer also stated that he did not feel that the incidents has been sensationalized at all. Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer admits that it's probably the "rogue hunters" who caused the problems in Town but the Town cannot pass ordinances just on one group of hunters. Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer looks forward to a partnership between the Town of Montreat and the Mt. Mitchell Bear Hunting Club.

Commissioner Mason Blake also understand that it's probably not a Mt. Mitchell Bear Hunting Dog problem but rather a hunting bear problem in Montreat. Hunting in Montreat is a problem. Commissioner Blake hopes Mr. Gibbs and his Club will work with the Town of Montreat.

Adjournment

Commissioner Jane Alexander moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Blake seconded and the motion carried 5/0. The meeting was adjourned prior to 7:00+ p.m.

Tim Helms, Mayor

Angie Murphy, Town Clerk

