Committee members present: Mayor Tim Helms – Chair

John Casper

Richard DuBose

Mari Gramling

Dr. Bill Seaman

Dr. Paul Maurer

Committee members absent: Maggie Elliott

Daniel Hewitt

Town staff present: Kayla DiCristina, Zoning Administrator

Special Guest:

The Chair called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. There were several members of the public present with several more watching via Zoom Meeting Software.

**Agenda Approval**

Mari Gramling moved to approve the agenda as presented. John Casper seconded and the motion carried 4/0.

**Minute Approval**

Dr. Bill Seaman suggested two minor corrections that will be addressed with Town Clerk Angie Murphy. Mari Gramling moved to approve the February 7, 2023 minutes as amended. John Casper seconded and the motion carried 4/0.

**Finalize Draft Vision Statement Objectives**

Ms. DiCristina stated that she wanted to start the meeting by finalizing the Draft Vision Statement Objectives and then spend the majority of the meeting time discussing implementation.

Dr. Bill Seaman had previously emailed Ms. DiCristina about the Environment 1 Objective and elaborating on the term “fire safety”. It was decided by the Committee to add “indoors and outdoors” after the words “fire safety”. Dr. Seaman also brought the word “burden” to Ms. DiCristina’s attention. Dr. Seaman suggested using the alternative word “responsibility”. It was decided by all to utilize the word “responsibility”.

Dr. Bill Seaman had also brought to Ms. DiCristina’s attention that under Environment 2 the entity of Landcare should be replaced with Tree Board. Ms. DiCristina advised that an entity did not necessarily need to be named. The Committee agreed to switch Landcare with Tree Board.

Environment 3, 4 and 5 were reviewed with no changes.

Environment 6 was deleted.

Environment 7 established the need to explore conservation easements as an avenue for land protection.

In Environment 8 the Steering Committee requested that a few sentences be added to the plan to explain the Small MS4 NPDES permit.

Environment 9 was moved to implementation.

Environment 10 involved inventorying the Town’s current stormwater infrastructure and identify opportunities for system improvements and expansions.

Environment 11 was moved to implementation and Environment 12.

Environment 12 involved creating a voluntary stormwater control measure and flood risk mitigation program, with established goals, that includes educational opportunities and outreach efforts.

Environment 13 moved to implementation and Environment 12.

Environment 14 was deleted.

The following “New” Objectives were added by Zoning Administrator Kayla DiCristina who felt they were relevant concerns brought about by the public engagement comments.

New Environment 15 Investigate implementing viewshed protection regulations in Montreat.

New Environment 16 Examine the existing Hillside Development Ordinance and ensure it is enforceable, practical and sufficient at its purpose with consideration to the burden placed on those building on property in Montreat.

New Environment 17 Support and implement the goals and recommendations for the Town of Montreat in the Buncombe and Madison County Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan. This was proposed by the Steering Committee after the 2/7/23 meeting based on additional examination of community survey responses. Mr. Casper suggested adding a link directing people to the Hazard Mitigation Plan that Montreat is a part of.

Development 1 Support private property owners in the creation of conservation easements and/or deed restrictions on land with recreational value to the public. The Steering Committee requested that recreational value be defined in the plan with examples.

Development 2 was deleted.

Development 3 Investigate implementing a maximum lot coverage standard in the Montreat Zoning Ordinance to cap the percentage of a lot that can be developed.

Development 4 was deleted.

Development 5 Work in cooperation with the Town, Montreat College, the Mountain Retreat Association, and local organizations to develop and implement a wayfinding plan including educational signage.

Development 6 was moved to implementation.

New Development 7 Preserve, protect and enhance the character of Montreat by evaluating and improving existing allowable uses, densities and, and dimensional regulations in each Zoning District.

New Development 8 Investigate implementing development restrictions per Zoning District on short term rentals. This was proposed by Staff after the 2/7/23 meeting and was based on additional examination of community survey responses. After much discussion it was decided to change New Development 8 to the following: Investigate development regulations per zoning district on short term rentals with consideration of existing short term rentals and potential funding of revenue streams.

Community Character 1 and 2 were deleted.

Community Character 3 Support current and new activities with regional and state partners to educate the public about the value of historic properties and landmarks.

Community Character 4 and 5 were deleted.

Community Character 6 was moved to Transportation 6.

Community Character 7 Support private-public partnership opportunities to fund and support trail maintenance.

Transportation 1 Moved to Development 5.

Transportation 2 Calm traffic and lower speeds by partnering with regional transportation agencies to conduct a study of feasible options. This plan may include, but is not limited to posting and advanced warning signs near the Montreat Gate, seasonal speed tables near the campus, or additional stop signs.

Transportation 3 Periodically examine the availability and demand for parking in the Town of Montreat. Develop strategies as needed to address parking issues. Special consideration to seasonal parking needs should be included.

Transportation 4 was deleted.

Transportation 5 Investigate developing a freight plan in partnership with local and regional partners. This plan may include designated truck routes, drop-off/delivery zones, and a permit system for overweight vehicles to be charged a fee.

Transportation 6 Update and implement the Town’s Bicycle, Pedestrian and Greenways Master Plan.

Richard DuBose thanked Ms. DiCristina for passing out the list of assumptions for the 2008 plan at the last meeting. Mr. DuBose asked Ms. DiCristina to speak to the following assumptions: “Montreat’s seasonal population is increasing” (assumption from 2008 plan) and “Montreat is growing, both in seasonal and full time populations. Montreat’s popularity is increasing. More tourists, hikers, short-term, weekend visitors. Montreat must plan for future growth” (assumption for 2023 plan). Ms. DiCristina advised that she took this assumption directly from the survey that MS Consultants took which listed data directly from the public and from data that Ms. DiCristina provided on zoning permits issued in the Town. Mr. Dubose read from page 37 of the 2008 Comprehensive Plan specifically the section that includes the following: “The Town’s institutions drive the need for municipal services which creates a problem because the Town’s institutions are tax-exempt”. Two large institutions in Montreat, the College and the Conference Center, drive the need for municipal services yet do not adequately contribute to the Town’s property base. The MRA and the College are the two institutions that dominate the Town driving and demanding the needs for services such as water and sewer. These statements were stated as facts in the plan. The assumption is as follows: the MRA and College plan to grow in the future. Mr. DuBose looked at the MRA’s strategic plan from 2008 and his predecessor, George Barbour (who was on the 2008 Comp Plan Steering Committee), predicted that the summer youth conferences would grow by 23% between 2008 and 2014. Mr. DuBose stated that the summer youth conferences did not grow by 23% between 2008 and 2014. Mr. DuBose passed around a graph that showed the actual summer and annual statistics. Mr. DuBose feels that an assumption made in the 2008 plan is that institutional growth is liable to increase a burden on Town resources. Mr. DuBose thinks that the community’s belief that Montreat is growing in seasonal population is because the institutions said they would. Mr. DuBose states that the institutions continue to say they will grow because they hope they will grow. Mr. DuBose stated that the MRA has declined in summer burden and managed to maintain during the rest of the year. Mr. DuBose feels that Montreat has changed since 2008 and while recommendations are being made, they are being made based on recommendations in the 2008 plan which haven’t been addressed or studied. Mayor/Chair Helms still sees that the population is growing with people coming in from Marion, Asheville, and more using the trails and visiting in day trips. Ms. DiCristina suggested doing something in implementation to make people more aware of growth trends.

Dr. Paul Maurer brought up some questions about the 2023 assumptions relating to housing being expensive in Montreat (assumption #2), Montreat having an older population (assumption #3) and Montreat experiencing more hazardous weather (assumption #5). Dr. Maurer believes that the housing prices are reasonable for what Montreat has to offer. Dr. Maurer believes the prices are market driven just like everywhere else. Dr. Maurer suggested that assumption 3 should include college students/younger population. Dr. Maurer also suggested that assumption 5 is not really true statement compared to other places in the United States. Ms. DiCristina noted all these suggestions and will reach out to the Consultants to see where the statements were derived from.

There was a brief conversation surrounding implementation and it was decided that Mayor/Chair Tim Helms, Zoning Administrator Kayla DiCristina and Interim Town Manager Ben Blackburn would meet and discuss some implementation strategies and report back to the Steering Committee.

The next meeting will be held on Friday, March 17th from 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

The Mayor/Chair thanked everyone for their commitment and hard work to this Committee.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**Adjournment**

John Casper moved to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Paul Maurer seconded and the motion carried 4/0. The meeting was adjourned at 2:18 p.m.

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Tim Helms, Chair Angie Murphy, Town Clerk