Committee members present: Mayor Tim Helms – Chair

John Casper

Richard DuBose

Maggie Elliott

Mari Gramling

Dr. Bill Seaman

Dr. Paul Maurer

Committee members absent: Daniel Hewitt

Town staff present: Kayla DiCristina, Zoning Administrator

Angie Murphy, Town Clerk

Special Guest:

The Chair called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. There were several members of the public present with several more watching via Zoom Meeting Software.

**Agenda Approval**

Dr. Paul Maurer moved to approve the agenda as presented. Richard DuBose seconded and the motion carried 6/0.

**Minute Approval**

Dr. Paul Maurer moved to approve the February 20, 2023 minutes as presented. Richard DuBose seconded and the motion carried 6/0.

**Review Draft Plan Sections 1-3**

Ms. DiCristina advised that during today’s meeting the Committee would be reviewing the Draft Comprehensive Plan Sections 1-3. Ms. DiCristina also advised that it was still very much a working rough draft and asked the Committee to focus on content rather than spelling, punctuation and grammar.

John Casper questioned who Trillium Properties was in relationship to the Comprehensive Plan. Ms. DiCristina explained that Trillium was a sub-consultant for MS Consultants. Ms. DiCristina briefly reviewed the Plan Overview Section which discusses Planning Process, Timelines and an Overview of Why we do Comprehensive Plans. There were no questions about content.

The next section discussed was Community Context. Dr. Bill Seaman felt that in some areas there was information missing. Dr. Seaman suggested information such as utilities, tax rate and governance. Dr. Seaman also stated that he felt like people who were not as intimately acquainted with the Comprehensive Plan process might need find more quantitative information helpful.

Population was discussed next and Mr. Richard DuBose had a series of comments. Mr. DuBose has given the topic of population a lot of thought since the last meeting. Mr. DuBose stated that there is a relatively small amount of year round residents with the population reaching the highest around the July 4th holiday. Mr. DuBose also mentioned that the trails see an upsurge of activity during good weather but those people aren’t necessarily residents and are not counted in the population per se. Mr. DuBose stated that when addressing parking issues at the trailheads that the hikers generally do not realize that the parking is on private property while the trails are on public property. Mr. DuBose feels that there should be a statement about how the complexities of these issues play out in the community. Ms. DiCristina agrees that there should be additional language addressing this matter but also points out that under the next section, Tourism, the Consultants did address the growing population with regards to the trail systems. Mr. DuBose stated that he was looking for differences between the 2008 and the 2023 plan and he feels that the growing popularity of WNC has definitely changed since 2008. Dr. Paul Maurer, of Montreat College, asked if the population data included the Montreat College students because having more students enrolled and on campus could drive the population numbers up substantially. Dr. Maurer suggested that more information in this section about how population is defined could be very helpful. Ms. DiCristina suggested that Dr. Maurer provide his enrollment numbers to the Consultants for a better snapshot of how population could change.

Ms. DiCristina advised that she had received a comment to build out the Tourism section a little more and add case studies talking about the variability of daily visitors compared to full time/part time visitors. Mr. DuBose stated that the graph under Housing of the relative median home value of homes in Montreat to other places in Buncombe County/North Carolina does not really show how the community is changing. Mr. DuBose suggests longitudinal data on how home values have risen here relative to other areas would be more informative. Mr. DuBose also advised that the MRA has some of this data available. Ms. DiCristina felt that adding longitudinal data would be helpful and the data could be pulled from tax cards. Mr. DuBose also posed the question of how the rental market is changing in Montreat. The MRA knows anecdotally that their conferees are finding it harder and harder each summer to find housing to rent but they do not know why. Mr. DuBose admits that he does not know where to go to find this data but feels that it would be worth exploring. Ms. DiCristina will take this concern to the Consultants to see if they can locate reliable data.

The map pages were next and Dr. Bill Seaman suggested adding “North Carolina” so that readers would realize where Montreat and Buncombe County are located. Mr. DuBose suggested demarcating the Town from the Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction with a harder boundary line would be helpful for viewers.

Land Use & Zoning were considered to be correct with regards to content. Dr. Seaman suggested elaborating on why “three quarters of the land in Montreat is conserved and cannot be developed” would be helpful. Ms. DiCristina notated environmental facts as well as the conservation easement. Mr. DuBose noticed that the map delineating full time residents on page 10 of the draft document shows full time residents on properties that MRA owns that have not been developed. Ms. DiCristina stated she would work with the Consultants on correcting this map. There were no comments under Property Ownership.

Ms. DiCristina advised that the next two sections, Extraterritorial Jurisdiction and Conservation Easements, were pulled from noted sources and she felt like the content and language were acceptable. Dr. Seaman wondered if there was a need for additional language in the ETJ paragraph on page 12. Ms. DiCristina cautioned the group on adding additional language because it would be anecdotal rather than information the consultants actually collected. Ms. DiCristina suggested adding language addressing the composition of the ETJ.

The next page addressed was page 16, Fig 2-11, Land Ownership. Dr. Seaman suggested different colors to distinguish between Town of Montreat and Montreat ETJ. Dr. Paul Maurer noted that there were two “Town of Montreat” listings on the legend. Mr. DuBose suggested adding a map on greenspace ownership. Ms. DiCristina advised that there is a section that hasn’t been completed yet that will address that matter.

Dr. Seaman had supplemental verbiage to add under the Environment section on page 17. Dr. Seaman suggested taking a chart from the 2020 Community Survey where eight different attributes are listed with Flat Creek being number one and inserting into this section. Dr. Seaman also suggested some verbiage about invasive species such as Japanese Knotwood.

Ms. DiCristina advised that under Stormwater & Erosion on page 18 that any of the regulations listed are correct as far as zoning. Dr. Seaman advised that he had a good picture of silt running into Lake Susan that documents the soil-sediment contamination problem if the Consultants would like to utilize it in the document. Dr. Seaman also suggested mentioning the partnership with Land-of-Sky with regards to developing the Stormwater Ordinance. Ms. DiCristina did not think Land-of-Sky needed to be referenced but asked Dr. Seaman to send her the image he mentioned.

Ms. DiCristina advised that the information on Wildfires & Landslides was taken directly from the cited source. Mr. DuBose discussed the photo provided by Swain County Emergency Management and felt that it needed to be clarified more or find an example closer to Montreat. Dr. Paul Maurer suggested removing it because it appears very misleading.

The next section on pages 20 and 21 led Mari Gramling to ask for further clarification on the legend of the Land Stability Index. There were no comments on pages 22 and 23.

The next sections deal with the Online Survey Information. Mr. DuBose noticed that the pie chart on page 24 did not appear to include a category of less than one month. Ms. DiCristina advised that on page 25 reference was made to the 2020 Survey. Mr. Casper asked if anything had changed since the 2020 Survey with regards to Montreat’s Characteristics. Ms. DiCristina thought that was a great question and made note to discuss with the Consultants. The next section was Matrix Questions which Mayor/Chair Helms stated was the Consultants summarization of the public comment periods. Dr. Seaman questioned if the matrix table captured all of the responses because he didn’t see a mention of traffic. Dr. Maurer stated that in Figure 2.5 on page 27 the interpretation of Agree/Disagree is a little confusing. Mr. Casper agreed that the charts were confusing in his opinion. Ms. DiCristina is going to ask the Consultants for a copy of the 2020 survey to verify all the comments were represented. Mr. DuBose mentioned that the whole topic of business in Montreat is counter-productive because he doesn’t see it ever happening. Mr. DuBose stated that there were some businesses around in the summers and they went away for a reason. Dr. Maurer suggested building that topic around the idea that there aren’t enough population wise to support businesses in Montreat. Dr. Seaman questioned whether the graphics on pages 29-30 were really necessary or would they cause more angst. Mr. Casper wondered if the graphic information was correct because it was showing suggested café locations out in the woods. Ms. DiCristina suggested these maps might be better located in the appendix.

The next section was Engagement Events which was exactly what the Consultants received from the Community. Dr. Seaman suggested that there be an introductory sentence stating that it was received from the Community. Dr. Seaman also pointed out a visible error in which the number of meetings needed to be clarified.

Ms. DiCristina advised these were the first three sections of the plan and the last sections will be the objectives which the Steering Committee worked on and Implementation which Ms. DiCristina worked on along with Mayor Helms and Interim Town Manger Ben Blackburn. Ms. DiCristina will pass along today’s comments to the Consultants and get another draft to the Steering Committee. Ms. DiCristina questioned whether the Committee wants to see a rough draft of the last two sections or the full draft version of the plan. It was decided by the Committee to review the full draft version of the plan at the next meeting.

The next meeting will be held on Friday, April 21st at 10:00 a.m.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**Adjournment**

Dr. Paul Maurer moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Richard DuBose seconded and the motion carried 6/0. The meeting was adjourned at 3:32 p.m.

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Tim Helms, Chair Angie Murphy, Town Clerk