Committee members present virtually: Mayor Tim Helms – Chair

Dr. Bill Seaman

Mari Gramling

Maggie Elliott

John Casper

Richard DuBose

Daniel Hewitt

Committee members absent: Dr. Paul Maurer

Town staff present virtually: Angie Murphy, Town Clerk

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

**Agenda Approval**

Mr. Richard DuBose moved to approve the agenda as presented. Ms. Mari Gramling seconded and the motion carried 6/0.

**Minute Approval**

Dr. Bill Seaman moved to approve the July 28, 2022 minutes as presented. Mr. Richard DuBose seconded and the motion carried 6/0.

**New Business**

**Presentation by Katie Sieb**

What Do We Know?: MS Consultant Katie Sieb stated that Montreat is growing faster than Buncombe County overall. The population is likely higher than the US Census estimates at most times of the year. The 2020 Census likely resulted in an undercount due to the pandemic. Montreat’s population is too small to reliably use the Census estimates for population characteristics. For many characteristics, the Census relies on a sampling method. In small communities this results in a high margin of error.

What Do We Really Know?: In absence of statistics on Montreat’s population, the consultants turn to other data sources and anecdotal evidence which tells them that both seasonal and full-time populations are likely increasing (based on college enrollment, building permits and renovation permits). Also, to afford today’s housing costs in Montreat (which sell for well into the $500k range, more for new-builds), new homeowners likely have high incomes or retirement savings, possibly wealthier than long-term residents. Many seasonal residents appear to move permanently upon retirement, and many retirees purchase new homes. In general, there are more “older” adults and “younger” adults (students), not as many “middle-aged” adults or young families. The popularity of Montreat and the region are increasing: more tourists, more hikers and more short-term/weekend visitors.

What Else Do We Know: Environmental Findings: The Flat Creek has high water quality – let’s keep it that way! Montreat and Buncombe County can expect more dry spells and an increase in the number and severity of storms. Montreat is in a high wildfire risk area with risk increasing. Montreat is in a high landslide risk area. Montreat’s many steep slopes and ridgelines are unsuitable for development and should not be disturbed.

What Else Do We Know: Impact of Growth: In some communities, change is sudden and looks like: major roadway projects or highway development, subdivisions from large developers and sudden demand for new services and schools. In Montreat, change may be slow, but it is happening: more homes will likely be built and renovated by new owners, who may not have a long history of visiting Montreat, institutions may continue to evolve and grow, there will be more competition for parking (especially at trailheads), land will continue to be developed, and more severe storms will continue to degrade trails, threaten water quality, create erosion problems and overwhelm stormwater systems.

What Did We Hear? Data Collection: The online survey was the most far-reaching, with 400 responses, but is not to be considered consensus on a topic alone. The survey showcased the range of opinions that different audiences have, such as part time residents, full time residents, students, those who work only in Montreat and visitors. The mini-meetings held in and around Town were fantastic tools for more detailed discussion on a variety of topics. There were roughly 50 participants. The Community Workshop was also a deep dive into topics and possible ideas for change. There were also roughly 50 participants as well.

What Did We Hear? Major Topics: The major topics heard by the Consultants were (1) Historic Preservation and Community Character; (2) Development and Housing; (3) Natural Preservation and Stormwater; and (4) Traffic and Transportation.

What Did We Hear? Historic Preservation & Community Character: The defining characteristics of Montreat were that around 75% of people agree that it feels like Montreat is changing. While many people are worried about the impact of future development all Montreaters want to protect the Town’s historic character.

What Did We Hear? Commercial Development: Full time residents have a stronger desire for commercial uses. Montreat College and the town center are considered the most appropriate locations for businesses. There was a desire for smaller buildings rather than large developments.

What Did We Hear? Housing Development: Most respondents agreed that new houses should look similar to existing houses. The area around Montreat College is considered the most appropriate location for apartments and townhomes. New homes should be compact to preserve as much tree canopy and undisturbed land as possible.

What Did We Hear? Conservation & Stormwater: People agree that new building footprints should not be built where they may disrupt and existing creek or stream. A majority of people believe Montreat should develop a Climate Action Plan. There is a general consensus that stormwater and forest management are key issues and most people are willing to support strong intervention.

What Did We Hear? Traffic & Transportation: Many people expressed concerns over trail parking and speeding. Full-time residents perceive more pedestrian danger than part-time residents of Montreat.

The Draft Comprehensive Plan is estimated to be around 50 pages with maps and graphics but could increase as the Consultants move forward. Katie SIeb reviewed the basic outline of the draft plan and stated that the appendix will include full community engagement results for reference. The Review Process involves:

1. Drafting Vision Statements (10/3 meeting)

2. Reviewing Draft Objectives and Future Land Use Maps (next meeting)

3. Steering Committee will rank possible objectives (November workbook)

4. MS Consultants will produce Draft Plan Version 1 for the Committee to review (Late Dec/Early Jan)

5. Steering Committee will provide their comments to MS Consultants on Draft Plan, resulting in Draft Plan Version 2 (mid January)

6. Draft Plan Version 2 will be posted on website, accepting public comments for roughly 30 days (mid February)

7. Steering Committee to review draft comments and agree to any changes (mid February)

8. MS Consultants will make the changes, plan is ready of adoption (late February)

Activity: What is a vision? Why is it important?: Tonight’s meeting is to draft vision statements. Creating a vision statement is an opportunity to be proactive and define what the future of Montreat should look like. Vision statements should reflect what has been heard from the public. It should acknowledge points of tension or disagreement in a healthy way. It should look towards the future and be simple and capture the essence rather than a highly specific set of goals. The Consultants provided a visioning example from the Town of Black Mountain and Hendersonville.

Richard DuBose gave a brief discussion of trends and what is to come for Mountain Retreat Association. The Steering Committee brainstormed on a vision statement surrounding Historic Preservation & Community Character. Ideas floated around involved:

-using the phrase “mountain architecture” to describe historic preservation

-is the word “historic” accurate?

-Montreat has a rich-unprotected history

-use “unique character” rather than “historic”

-Montreat is a place set apart

-Montreat values and protects our tree canopy, streams, land and natural beauty

-Montreat’s community will honor the rich historic character of its built environment and preserve the beauty of its mountain surroundings taking into account the need for resilience in the face of a changing climate

-Montreat will be a community that respects buildings with historic value and encourages new development to be polite to the surrounding architecture

-Montreat will be accessible for people as they age, safe for children and families, and traffic/parking will be calm

-Lots of discussion around the word “historic”

The Steering Committee gave the consultants permission to explore objectives to come up with a vision statement.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

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Tim Helms, Chair Angie Murphy, Town Clerk