

Cullowhee Planning Council
Minutes
September 14th, 2020
6:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting

Members	Present	Absent	Members	Present	Absent	Members	Present	Absent
Rick Bennett	X		Jim Lewis	X		Vacant		
Joel Setzer	X		Mike Byers		X	Vacant		
David Claxton	X		Vacant					

Staff Present

Michael Poston, Planning Director
 Caroline LaFrienier, Planner II
 Allison Kelley, Administrative Assistant

Call to Order

Michael Poston called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. and a quorum was present.

Additions to Agenda

Mr. Poston requested to move letter “B” “Chair and Vice Chair Nominations” under “New Business” ahead of the approval of the agenda. Joel Setzer made a motion to approve the agenda with the reordering of letter “B”. Rick Bennett seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Chair and Vice Chair Nominations

Rick Bennett made a motion to nominate David Claxton as Cullowhee Planning Council Chair. Joel Setzer seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously. In addition, the Council made the decision to postpone nominating a vice chair at a later meeting once the vacant Council seats have been filled.

Approval of Minutes

Jim Lewis made a motion to approve the minutes from August 3rd, 2020. Joel Setzer seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Public Comment- Sign-up sheet- 3 minutes per speaker

There were no public comments.

New Business

a) Cullowhee Small Area Plan – Action Plan Discussion

Caroline LaFrienier presented the action plan to guide policies and decision making in order to advance the vision and goals for the Cullowhee area. She stated the goals were identified in the Cullowhee area, and asked the Council for guidance moving forward which of the goals they considered a high priority.

Mike Poston informed the Council that some of the concepts are located in the Cullowhee Small Area Plan but there are also versions of them in other countywide plans. The Jackson County Recreation Department has been actively working to expand the Tuckasegee Greenway and has been communicating with property owners for involvement, but it is a slow process. In addition, the county has been discussing and working with the NCDOT on a pedestrian project that is a multi-use path off Highway 107 between Cullowhee Mountain Road and North Country Club Drive. Mr. Poston informed the Council those interested in pathways and connections can review the Jackson County Walks Pedestrian Plan StoryMap on the Jackson County Planning Website. The plan is still in the public engagement process to move pedestrian mobility in the

county to target the areas that need improvement in Cullowhee, Cashiers, 441 Corridor, and connection points into Sylva, Webster, Dillsboro, and Forest Hills.

Rick Bennett inquired when they revise regulations would they be requiring greenspace for developments. Mr. Poston stated the Council can require greenspace for developments, and believes there was discussion in the plan that speaks to that. Mr. Bennett stated it appeared that one of the goals they would be considering is a stronger density development, and he is concerned about the available greenspace and does not want to lose the rural feel for the community. Mr. Poston stated they can balance that discussion, and the plan is directed and speaks to where density is planned to be in specific areas. In addition, the plan speaks of parks and greenway on South Painter Road, and the opportunities working with CuRvE to make those parks a reality. Mr. Poston stated as the Council begins to discuss the action items, they would also discuss ways to encourage or require greenspace. Mr. Bennett stated at one of the community meetings for the Small Area Plan consultant Jake Petrosky mentioned the Cullowhee area was designed after Banner Elk, Boone, and Carry North Carolina. In addition, he stated he did not want to be designed after those areas, and did not want the strip of Old Cullowhee to look like the Noble Hall strip that goes through WCU campus. Mr. Bennett stated he was concerned that is the direction they are potentially moving towards for Old Cullowhee. Mr. Poston stated the plan does speak about the River Corridor, the overall vision with a mixed-use density type of projects but the plan does not dictate the outcome. These questions and concerns will be part of the discussion of how to approach and address implementation of that section of the ordinance with the concepts of the Small Area Plan. Mr. Poston stated the public input has helped shaped this document, and the consensus was to have more density on Old Cullowhee Road but the space is limited in that area which the Council would discuss the best method development should occur in that area. Mr. Bennett stated the goal of increasing the height of buildings is vague, as he does not know the current maximum height, and what would be appropriate for increasing the height. He stated it would need to be economically feasible for development in Old Cullowhee, and the building should have character and not be a stamped out building like at Biltmore Park or Nobel Hall.

David Claxton stated while Nobel Hall picture is not the vision he has for Old Cullowhee he believes it outweighs what currently exists. He believes this is a high priority and they should push this goal forward to begin this discussion, along with the CuRvE River Park. Mr. Bennett stated the Jackson County Recreation Department represents CuRvE and they are not involved in the Master Plan update, and asked staff where they were on this process. Mr. Poston stated the Planning Department acts as a support role for planning documents and work to support to facilitate those efforts to updating the Greenway Master Plan. In addition, since this goal is a part of the Cullowhee Small Area Plan, staff can reach out to Rusty Ellis the Director of Parks & Recreation, who participated during this process at community meetings and as a stakeholder. Staff can inform the Recreation Department that the Council is supportive of the CuRvE's endeavor to have a River Park and ask how they can support that effort. Mr. Bennett stated the last master plan the River Park was the number one requested item, and now the indoor pool has been bumped up to the number one item and the River Park has not been mentioned again. Mr. Bennett stated he would like to see some local support for the River Park and to be considered a high item on the master plan as the county would most likely not be able to provide funding, but CuRvE can explore other opportunities for funding if the River Park is considered a high priority.

Jim Lewis stated the Council should discuss issues of shrinking the minimum width requirement, as he is concerned of potential trailers going on smaller lots, which would be a disaster. Mr. Poston stated in the residential districts they allow up to five units per acre and reduce to 2 tenths of an acre smaller would help with affordable housing or workforce housing. Having a smaller lot would allow not only for trailers but for smaller homes of approximately 1,500 square foot for residents that work in and around the Cullowhee area. In addition, more land is connected to a higher home price but having a minimum of 50 feet width smaller lot does not always match up with current ordinance standards. Allowing more density per acre is not always easy if you have a 50 feet minimum lot width as it makes it difficult to make smaller lot size for housing projects. Mr. Poston stated the Council did not need to concern themselves with manufactured homes in this conversation as they allow these types of homes in a specific district and manufactured home parks that meet specific standards. This discussion focuses on single-

family housing in the district with a smaller lot size that would allow people to have an option at a lower price point. Mr. Lewis stated his driveway is approximately 30 feet and if you put a minimum lot size of 50 feet there would not be enough greenspace around the houses. Mr. Poston stated the subdivision ordinance requires greenspace and they could give more greenspace to the common areas and less around the house, depending on the type of subdivision. This would allow for more options to individuals that are elderly, needs less yard maintenance, and do not have to relocate because there is not a product that fits their needs in the area. In addition, by changing these standards they are trying to match the density levels, and the Council would discuss and determine the appropriate minimum lot width number. Mr. Lewis was also on board with the River Park endeavor.

Joel Setzer stated he believes extending the Tuckasegee Greenway would drive support, success, and connectivity for the Painter Road/Monteith Gap Pocket Park and the River Park. He stated he believes the Tuckasegee Greenway would have countywide support and understands that it is a priority for the Jackson County Recreation Department and it should be on the Councils list of priorities for the Cullowhee area. In addition, Action Plan Items 1A & 1B are important issues to discuss on how to attract more traditional family housing in the area, as many individuals work in the area but choose to live in another area and commute. Mr. Setzer stated he believes the trend when his parents located here in the 60s appears to be that type of housing and it will come back. We need to consider this as the Cullowhee area continues to grow and evolve. He believes it is an important balance for the community to be able to promote some single-family homes along with opportunities in the area. In addition, Mr. Setzer stated Action Plan Item 1B goes along with this discussion as the transitional areas about the areas chosen for high density and they need being creating the transition and the blend compatibility of these areas.

The Council determined to focus on the Cullowhee Small Area Plan - Action Plan goals as follows:

1. Jackson County Unified Development Ordinance Updates

- a. Revise regulations to allow for single-family homes with smaller lot width and setbacks in Low and Medium Multi-Family Residential zoning districts with increased design requirements including internal access.
 - *Currently new single-family lots must have a minimum width of 50ft except for those in a Planned Development. Allowing narrower lots in certain locations may help encourage more housing that appeals to*
- b. Improve design standards that could help increase the compatibility of new medium-to high-density residential, especially in Transitional areas.
 - *Improve landscaping and buffer requirements that encourage tree preservation, native trees, wider buffers, and layered planting schemes.*
 - *Increase minimum standards and prioritize features for open space and amenities. Require usable open space and protection of natural features.*
 - *Minimize visual impact of parking lots through design standards and/or incentives.*

2. Greenways and Pedestrian Connections

- a. Extend the Tuckasegee Greenway
 - *See page 50 for detailed segments and phasing recommendations.*

4. Parks and Open Space

- a. Continue working with the Cullowhee Revitalization Endeavor (CuRvE) on the Tuckasegee Family River Park
 - *Include River Park improvements in the County next update of the Jackson County Park and Recreation Master Plan.*
 - *Pursue funding through the county's Capital Project Fund.*
 - *Pursue grant and state funding.*

Informal Discussion

David Claxton inquired about the process for potential new members to the Council as there is still three vacant seats. Mr. Poston stated the Planning Department has received applications and has sent those to the clerk's office for distribution to the Board of Commissioners for consideration and appointment. Staff is not involved after they send to the clerk's office unless there is questions about specific applications.

In addition, staff has not had many discussions with developers with potential new projects in the area, and does not foresee new requests that would come before the Council by the end of the year. Over the next couple of months, both staff and the Council will be working on these action items.

Adjournment

With no further business, Joel Setzer made a motion to adjourn. Jim Lewis seconded the motion, and the meeting adjourned at 6:46 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Allison Kelley
Administrative Assistant- Planning

David B Claxton

David Claxton
Planning Council Chair