

Cullowhee Planning Council

Minutes

March 6, 2023

6:00 p.m.

Hospitality Room, Ramsey Center Building
Western Carolina University

Members	Present	Absent	Members	Present	Absent	Members	Present	Absent
David Claxton	X		Chris Stuckey	X		Rebecca Manring	X	
Carol Burton	X		Donna Huguelet		X	Damon Sink	X	
Mike Byers	X		Karen Kandl	X				

Staff Present

Michael Poston, Planning Director
Anna Harkins, Planner I
Allison Kelley, Administrative Assistant III

Call to Order

Chairman David Claxton called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m. and a quorum was present.

Oath of Office

Allison Kelley, clerk to the Council read the Oath of Office for new member Damon Sink, and reappointed member David Claxton. They affirmed to execute the duties of Cullowhee Community Planning Council Member according to the best of their skills and abilities.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Poston asked the Council to remove item b) Lot Size Discussion under "New Business". David Claxton made a motion to approve the agenda with the removal of item b) Lot Size Discussion, and it passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Karen Kandl made a motion to approve the minutes from September 12, 2022. Chris Stuckey seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

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

There were no public comments.

New Business

a) Introduction to River District

Ms. Harkins stated at the last Council meeting they discussed the Cullowhee Small Area Plan goals and objectives, and the number one most important item to address in the plan is to consider creating a River District in Old Cullowhee. Within the plan, it has a general study area mapped out of the considered district, which could be made larger to go over the Cullowhee bridge. The plan states that the suggested River District would be a pedestrianized mixed use that would be walkable similar to a main street kind of area, which would be completed through incremental redevelopment.

Ms. Harkins stated as new development comes in they would be required to follow these standards, which would ultimately lead to development that could potentially bike lanes,

crosswalks, and different types of parking which is not possible with the current zoning. The current zoning of this area is commercial, which is a lot more in line with more suburban commercial development where you see parking lots in the front or the side, and buildings are farther apart. In addition, there is landscaping requirements, and they are required to do sidewalks currently in the commercial district with coordination with DOT. In addition, as a part of the redevelopment the applicant would have to also comply with the Greenway Master Plan, and open space requirement of at least 10% that has to be maintained in a vegetative and natural state. Ms. Harkins stated the current zoning standards do not match with what the Cullowhee Small Area Plan is suggesting for the River District area. The plan suggests more flexible development standards that would encourage buildings to be closer to the road, and closer together for pedestrian walkability and more desirable for people to come to the area to park and walk even from the WCU campus area. In addition, the plan also suggests to allow shared parking, offsite parking and parking behind structures to move parking away from the front and sides of buildings. The Cullowhee Small Area Plan also suggests to increase the built allowable building height, currently it is 40 feet in height which is roughly a three-story building depending on how it is designed. In addition, the plan also suggests that outdoor open space could be patio dining, or plazas or other types of outdoor gathering spaces that is not necessarily natural and vegetative.

Mr. Poston stated if the River District were to be adopted, all of the existing uses would become legally non-conforming, but they would still allow for some of the same uses such as restaurants, retail, and residential, etc. In addition, he stated unless an investor comes in and acquires the totality of that area, the redevelopment with the new standards would most likely occur over time.

Ms. Harkins stated through zoning they could address setbacks, buffers, and landscaping to allow for buildings to be closer together and to the street. She stated they could consider having no setback requirements, and no landscaping but they could require street trees as part of some vegetation to make up for the lack of landscaping. In addition, they could also require pedestrian pathways that would help create more connectivity and make those buildings closer to create a more downtown feel. Ms. Harkins stated they could consider off-site parking to reduce having to walk through many parking lots in the area, and parking on the backside of the businesses to encourage pedestrian walkability. In other areas, shared parking an option and they could determine how much of an area is used for parking for shared uses. In addition, staff has also discussed the possibility of requiring bike-parking locations to allow more people to come to the area that live near in apartments or on campus.

Mr. Poston stated to create and implement the River District, they would have to rezone the entire area, and would require sending notice to those that live in the district about the zoning changes and the public hearing process.


Ms. Harkins stated in the proposed River District they could also look at building height and increasing the maximum building height, which would allow for more mixed uses and architectural flexibility. In addition, she stated our Senior Planner John Jeleniewski explained architectural flexibility that giving people an extra 10 feet would allow for better architectural quality. For example, sometimes they would still do a three-story building, but the architectural quality might be better because they could do a different type of roof, or the inside might feel a little bit larger because they could have taller ceilings. In addition, the increase in height would allow for more possibilities for living spaces above and then residential or other types of commercial uses below. Ms. Harkins stated she could come back to the Council with some examples of building heights in the area to determine an appropriate height for the proposed River District area.

Ms. Harkins stated the Cullowhee Small Area Plan suggests creating allowed different types of open space. The plan suggests more flexible open space options, such as outdoor dining, small plaza, and pocket parks that allow for mainly community gathering. The Council could discuss if they want to require some form of open space or how that would work with setbacks as this process moves forward. In addition, she stated staff could bring back more graphics and other examples from other municipalities that have a similar district. The Council directed staff to begin gathering additional information for the next meeting to begin discussion standards for the River District.

Adjournment

With no further business, Carol Burton made a motion to adjourn, the motion carried unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 7:17 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,


Allison Kelley

Administrative Assistant- Planning



David Claxton
Planning Council Chair

