

Cullowhee Planning Council

Minutes

September 12, 2022

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		Vacant		
Carol Burton	X		Donna Huguelet		X	Vacant		
Mike Byers	X		Karen Kandl	X				

Staff Present

Michael Poston, Planning Director
Allison Kelley, Administrative Assistant III

Others Present

Rick Bennett, Cullowhee Revitalization Endeavor member
Gail Lazaras, American Rivers
Jay Spiro, Cullowhee Revitalization Endeavor member
Roger Turk, Cullowhee Revitalization Endeavor member
Maurice Phipps, Cullowhee Revitalization Endeavor member

Call to Order

Chairman David Claxton called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and a quorum was present.

Approval of Agenda

David Claxton made a motion to approve the agenda as written, and the motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Carol Burton made a motion to approve the minutes from July 11, 2022. Karen Kandl 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 Revitalization CuRev Presentation

Michael Poston stated Cullowhee Revitalization was one of the predecessors of the Cullowhee Planning Council. He stated they were doing work in the Cullowhee community that led to decision made by members of the community that they wanted something more than unbridled development and wanted to discuss how to plan and manage growth in a more orderly fashion. He stated they created a steering committee at the county level that started to bring forward some of those concepts that turned into the Cullowhee Zoning Ordinance and established the Cullowhee Planning Council. In addition, he stated both were created due to the amount of community organization and feedback to the county that a change was needed in how that area was operating.

Rick Bennett stated these discussions began on main street near the Cullowhee Café someone brought in a trailer overnight. The community quickly began to realize they have no rules or

regulations because they were not incorporated, which led to public meetings to go to the Board of Commissioners for approval to form the Planning Council.

Mike Byers stated since 2007, Cullowhee Revitalization (CuRev) has been working to create a vibrant and healthy community in Cullowhee that is environmentally and economically sustainable and centered on the natural resources of the Tuckasegee River and the Cullowhee Valley. CuRev's mission is to promote the revitalization of the historic center of Cullowhee through recreation, beautification, and community events designed to improve the quality of life for Cullowhee residents and foster economic development by supporting locally owned businesses. Mr. Byers stated CuRev is working towards the development of a family river park along the river between the Cullowhee dam and the new bridge over the Tuckasegee River.

Mr. Byers stated CuRev envisioned how to create the River Park, and the dam is a big component to this project. He stated Ms. Lazaras is with American Rivers and they have been working for several years to figure out how they can accomplish this goal. During this process, they have learned that Jackson County and Western Carolina University (WCU) have become dependent on the dam not for hydroelectric power anymore, but rather for water. He stated the pool created behind the dam has two water intakes one for Tuckasegee Water and Sewer Authority (TWSA) and the water plant up the hill, and they both pull water from that pool to we treat the water to provide the university's potable water. Mr. Byers stated they spent a lot of time and money with studies to try to ensure, and assure ourselves that removing the dam would not diminish the capacity in our water resource. He stated they determined that they could not predict with certainty that they would not diminish their water capacity by removing the dam. In addition, he stated the only other solution would be if they were prepared to replace the water plants. However, WCU was concerned if they change the intakes of the water would cause the old water treatment facility to come under new regulations which would require a lot of changes that they could not determine a way to get assurance that would not happen. Therefore, they all agreed to postpone the removal of the dam until the time comes for renovation or replacement of the water plant, and they would reenter the discussion over removal of the dam at that time.

Mr. Byers stated in 2014 CuRev commissioned an economic impact study to determine the impact of the river park development. The study showed the river park development would add \$1.2 million of new spending in Jackson County annually, support 16 new local jobs annually, generate \$145 thousand in annual tax revenues, and long-term estimates have the potential to be much greater. Mr. Byers stated he believes the river park would spark in additional redevelopment in Cullowhee and become much more attractive to investors.

Gail Lazaras stated, they proposed to the Jackson County Board of Commissioners in the beginning of 2020 to transfer property from Department of Transportation around the bridge for the River Park. She stated the commissioners approved the request and land transfer is still in process and happening. In 2021, Jackson County purchased the parcel at 74 Wayehutta Road that is adjacent to the DOT land that is in the transfer process. In addition, she stated as of June 2022, the parcel at 76 Wayehutta Road remains in private ownership, therefore they created two conceptual plans with two options, one with and one without this parcel.

Ms. Lazaras stated the intent of these conceptual plans is to provide Jackson County and CuRev a vision and foundation for riverside component of a future Cullowhee River Park. The conceptual plans were planned and designed between August 2021 and June 2022, and were designed by MountainTrue's Asheville Design Center volunteer landscape architect and was coordinated by American Rivers. During the planning and design process they coordinated with and incorporated input from the CuRev Board, Jackson County Planning Department, Parks and Recreation, and Permitting and Code Enforcement.

Ms. Lazaras showed renderings for the Cullowhee Riverside Park (Concept A) which utilizes a restricted area (one parcel) consisting of the property currently owned by, or in transfer to, Jackson County. Parking is along Old Cullowhee Road to improve the connection with Cullowhee for pedestrian access and drive-by visibility. The following are the highlights included in Concept A:

- The existing drive to the inholding parcel is maintained. However, this access is reduced to one-way to accommodate a separated pedestrian walkway while utilizing the same existing footprint of the drive. The pedestrian walkway can either be physically separated or utilize striping.
- Ingress for the park is to be one way, with egress utilizing the existing

drive location.

- Locating the park exit further from Old Cullowhee Rd. and Weyehutta Rd. intersection will provide a safer exit from the park
- Small open/event spaces.
- Event lawn is oriented south to north from stage.

Ms. Lazaras showed renderings for the Cullowhee Riverside Park (Concept B) which utilizes the entire area (two parcels), assuming that Jackson County will purchase 76 Wayehutta Road in addition to the property currently owned by, or in transfer to, Jackson County. The following are the highlights included in Concept B:

- Concept is geared to accommodate small festivals and events.
- Parking is located along the northwest boundary to maximize use of the space.
- Access to Old Cullowhee Rd. from parking is provided to encourage higher park use by providing access to food/shopping services at WCU campus.
- The existing drive is utilized for bike/ped, with approximately 8' of the southern portion of the road to be removed and re-graded to a gentler slope (reducing the current erosion on the downhill side of the existing drive) and planted with medium height plants (~6-8'). This will also reduce the demand for safety railing.
- Picnic pavilions are clustered and separated from main use area by a stylized dry creek bed.
- Pathways around the event lawn and to view/picnic pads are anticipated to be A.D.A. compliant decomposed granite (or similar material).
- Lawn games (such as horseshoes or root ball) located between event lawn and river to maintain views towards the river.
- Event lawn is oriented east to west from stage.

In addition, she stated Concept A works with the landform and the idea is to have it as simple but with as many amenities as possible that would work with the existing sewer lines and the landforms that exist to minimize land movement, and to make sure that there would be no issues with permitting for work within the floodway. Ms. Lazaras stated both plans have river access, and the landscape architect had a great idea to add a welcome sign that would attract those passing by in vehicles as well as pedestrian traffic. In addition, they also plan to have wayside signs; one will be designed to be installed overlooking the Tuckasegee River, the other two will be determined in the construction plans.

Karen Kandl inquired if there had been any archaeology studies in this area. Ms. Lazaras stated the plans were deliberately made for minimal ground disturbance, which might help. In addition, she is unsure if they would have to get Army Corps of Engineer permitting, but it would depend on whether you have federal funds. Mr. Poston stated to his knowledge there has not been any previous archaeology study done on this site. In addition, he stated unless you are going to use federal funds or something triggers this type of study such as finding something while digging the law requires you to stop digging and seek experts. Mr. Poston stated he would check with the DOT to see if they were required to do any studies by the state when they built the new road.

Ms. Kandl also inquired about the riparian zones around the river. She stated a good part is fairly demolished in that area and inquired what are their plans to prevent these riparian zones from being further demolished. Ms. Lazaras stated there is little to no disturbance between that existing road, backline and the floodway. The met with Permitting and Code Enforcement director Tony Elders to discuss if there he thought if there would be any repercussions and how to avoid making any impact to the floodway zone. In addition, she stated Mr. Elders felt like both of the conceptual plans would be fine and did not pose any red or even yellow flags.

Ms. Lazaras stated American Rivers received funds from the TDA to help with this Riverside Park concept. American Rivers also helped fund along with the Jackson County grant, for Wayside markers, and with the remaining funds would be for riparian restoration right along the waterway.

Mr. Bennett stated when DOT reconfigured Wayehutta Road that's when this land became available. He stated they have made good working partnerships with the state and WCU through


Mike Byers. The county has already purchased the property with the little brick house, which would become a part of this project that does have water and sewer ports that may be able to be financed. Mr. Bennett stated the project would be fairly low cost as there would not be a lot of digging, mostly landscaping and moving things around. In addition, he stated CuRev has been working on this plan for a couple of years, and we are bringing this to the Cullowhee Planning Council since it is within the area, and they have talked with a few of the county commissioners which were very supportive.


Ms. Kandl inquired if they envision this project connecting to the Greenway and other public networks. Mr. Bennett stated they have worked in a number of ways other than this project. He stated the Greenway is supposed to end at the community garden, and the next plan was for the Greenway to come further up. In addition, he stated they were involved with DOT when the new bridge was being built, and they were able to have DOT raise the bridge to allow pedestrian traffic to walk under the bridge as opposed to crossing over the highway. The Lena Davis Park, which is the canoe access park above the dam, they envision the Greenway also come to that area.

Adjournment

With no further business, Carol Burton made a motion to adjourn, the motion carried unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 6:48 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,


Allison Kelley
Administrative Assistant- Planning


David Claxton
Planning Council Chair