

Cullowhee Planning Council

Minutes

September 11, 2023

6:00 p.m.

WCU Ramsey Center, Hospitality Room

Sylva, NC

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 6:02 p.m. and a quorum was present.

Approval of Agenda

Carol Burton made a motion to approve the agenda as written. Karen Kandl seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Carol Burton made a motion to approve the minutes from August 7, 2023. Rebecca Manring seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

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

There were no public comments.

New Business

a) Economic Development Discussion – Tiffany Henry

Tiffany Henry, Economic Development Director for Jackson County was asked by the Council to attend a regular scheduled meeting to be able to answer questions for projects in the Cullowhee area. Mr. Claxton inquired if those that are interested in starting a business in the County typically begin with speaking to Ms. Henry. Ms. Henry stated Jackson County is very complicated, and is restrictive with the Mountain and Hillside Development Ordinance, water and floodplain. In addition, she stated the County is watching the main corridor that has continued to grow and the road-widening project. Ms. Henry stated when business are looking to locate in Jackson County, they first look at the traffic count and generally want to locate where there is high traffic count. In our area, the Asheville Highway corridor towards Highway 107 to Western Carolina University is the higher traffic count. On Old Cullowhee Road, there is interest to develop, recently the Rogers Brothers Restaurant project has taken longer because they could not meet all the requirements for the parking on the piece of property they were going to redevelop and had to reevaluate their plans. Ms. Henry stated it is important for local government to provide the requirements upfront of what is expected to start a business in the County. For connectivity and walkability, sidewalks are important but can be a big expense for businesses that could potentially make or break the project.

Mr. Claxton inquired if Ms. Henry has had any other people reach out to her for the Cullowhee area. Ms. Henry stated she has had a few people that are kicking tires around about some commercial activity. In addition, she stated the backside of Cullowhee is the Tuckasegee River where you have to consider how to develop with those natural assets in a responsible way. Mr. Stuckey inquired if the County helps with the expense of sidewalk for new businesses. Ms. Henry stated the ordinance is what is used for when developers and property owners start new development within the Cullowhee area. In addition, she stated when looking on the backside of Cullowhee developers consider the viability of the site if there is utilities, water and sewer, etc. Ms. Henry stated she has received feedback that parking spaces for housing has been a barrier, and if they use a bicycle could you count that towards parking.

Mr. Claxton inquired if she had any more information regarding the Cullowhee River Park. Ms. Henry stated there is one piece of property that a structure is still standing, and today, that property owner has not been willing to discuss selling. Ms. Henry stated with every community, every challenge is an opportunity. One of the key assets in Jackson County is our higher education that brings in workforce development and student housing that is supported by Western Carolina University and Southwestern Community College. In addition, the County works with the workforce development boards on other ways that we can sort of triage specific things that they need. The Tuckasegee Water and Sewer Authority (TWSA) can be a barrier, because of the way it is operated in the County versus the rest of North Carolina. However, Ms. Henry sees that as an opportunity, because in most cases there are ways to seek funding to support a project as a municipality that they cannot go after as an authority. Most of the funding incentives for new businesses are through the governor's office or North Carolina's Department of Commerce. Jackson County does have a revolving loan fund for businesses, and a portion of that called All In Jackson Fund is being managed by Mountain BizWorks. The fund was started during COVID as a bridge loan until businesses could access their EIDL and PPP loans, because they were a little slow rollout from the SBA that was to support businesses. The All In Jackson Fund was restructured a year ago, for people to access not as a bridge loan but as a standalone loan with lower interest for people that might have barriers with financing at traditional banks.

b) WCU Update – Mike Byers


Mr. Byers gave an update that the Water Rock, Shining Rock and Black Rock residence halls, which were the three buildings to replace Scott and Walker residence halls, the new parking garage, Apodaca Science Building, and the Steam Plant were all big investments by the taxpayers and students, faculty and staff pay for parking garage and dorms. The Apodaca Science Building project is not done, the building is completed but natural science building it replaced is gone. One reason that the project is unfinished state is they have went through a year of negotiation and litigation with the contractor over how much we owe. Mr. Byers stated they do not have as much money to do what the architects drew for the building, but they will replace the stairs that come down from up top at Hunter Library into that courtyard, and a new entrance to the library on the second floor. In addition, he stated he is hopeful that over time, they can rearrange the library so that you would enter down on the first floor near the new courtyard. He stated they are also working on the Cullowhee dam project that will require repairs; there is the abutments that is where the dam touches the sides of the river that need to be repaired as well. Mr. Byers stated they have applied for a federal grant worth around seven figures that would aid in the repair work and might make a notch possible in the dam that would facilitate a river park. In addition, he stated CuRvE made a plan that showed how we could have a river park with or without the dam, which would allow us to start pursuing the with the dam option for the in river portion of the park. In addition, he stated they received appropriations for renovation to the Moore Building and they have started to design and they are billions of dollars over budget in the design and will have to press the pause button until we can seek additional funding. The Moore Building renovation would be for office space or classroom and two of the major departments would be Criminal Justice and English. Mr. Byers stated they are asking for funding from the current legislative session for a new engineering building, it is currently located in Belk building, which was not designed for an engineering program. In addition, he stated they are planning some athletic facility replacement, and would hire a designer to design those renovations


that they are estimating around \$30 million of borrowed money on the backs of students and fees, and \$30 million, at least worth of donated monies or \$60 million worth of renovations and portable facility replacements. Mr. Byers stated these replaces would be on the west side, and the press box is not ADA accessible and would replace the Fieldhouse so that is it larger and ADA compliant. In addition, he stated when they demolished Scott and Walker they saved \$4 million by not sending debris to a landfill and they crushed up the parts that were allowable and put it in the field dirt area in front of Norton and The Village. In addition, they also created two more levels of new parking lots up at HHS. Mr. Byers stated they have also started to look into a project that would create recreation fields.

Adjournment

With no further business, Carol Burton made a motion to adjourn. Donna Huguélet seconded the motion and it carried unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,


Allison Kelley
Administrative Assistant- Planning


David Claxton
Planning Council Chair

