

Cullowhee Planning Council
Minutes
June 18th, 2019
6:00 p.m.
Conference Room 101A, Cordelia Camp Building
Western Carolina University

Members	Present	Absent	Members	Present	Absent	Members	Present	Absent
Rick Bennett	X		Myrtle Schrader	X		Mike Byers		X
Scott Baker	X		Joel Setzer	X		Jim Lewis		X
Jack Debnam	X		David Claxton	X				

Staff Present

Michael Poston, Planning Director
 Caroline LaFrienier, Planner II
 Heather Baker, County Attorney
 Allison Kelley, Administrative Assistant
 Rich Price, Economic Development Director

Others Present

Harrison Conner, Student Representative for the Cullowhee Small Area Plan
 Steve Williams, NCDOT
 Jake Petrosky, Stewart Inc.

Call to Order

Chairman Scott Baker called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. and a quorum was present.

Additions to Agenda

Joel Setzer made a motion to approve the agenda as written. Jack Debnam seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

David Claxton made a motion to approve the minutes from the April 1st and April 23rd, 2019 meetings. Rick Bennett seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

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

There were no public comments.

New Business

a. DOT Update on Road Improvement Projects

Steve Williams stated there would be a public workshop on August 27th, 2019 with the location still to be determined regarding the portion of the road project NC 281 that goes to the Tuckasegee Dam. Mr. Williams informed the Council the current project (NC 107, R-4753) under construction on Highway 107 is eighteen months behind schedule due weather, and employee turnover. He stated they were currently pursuing several different avenues to get the project back on schedule. Mr. Williams stated the project originally was predicted to be completed by 2020, however due to the setback it would be completed by 2021/2022.

Mr. Williams informed the Council the Monteith Gap Road (SR 1336) project right-of-way plans had been released except for the utility plans. He stated the DOT does not have much control over the utility plans and are waiting on contact from Duke Energy. In addition, Mr. Williams stated he spoke with Mr. Poston and is aware of Jackson County's desire to keep the existing bridge on Monteith Gap Road to utilize as a future greenway. Mr. Williams presented the plans of the Monteith Gap Road project and informed the Council the roundabout would need additional work. He stated the DOT narrowed the entrance to reduce speed on Ledbetter Road, and they plan to request to narrow the entrance from South Painter Road. Mr. Williams stated the project right-of-way acquisition date is January 2019 and estimated construction would begin in January 2020 pending the utility plans.

Rick Bennett inquired about the NC 107 (R-4753) project of upgrading the existing roadway from SR 1002 to NC 281. Mr. Williams stated the road had to be resurfaced because the retaining wall created the pavement to re-shift.

Jake Petrosky inquired the pavement width at the crossroad section on Monteith Gap Road. Steve Williams stated there are 11 foot lanes, and 5 foot bike lanes and sidewalks. In addition, Mr. Petrosky asked if there would be space for a pedestrian crossing at the roundabout should there be a need in the future. Mr. Williams stated there would be space for a pedestrian crossing, and they would utilize the splinter island in the future design plans to create a crossway.

b. Cullowhee Small Area Plan

Jake Petrosky presented the highlights of the community survey results as follows:

- There was 272 responses with 14 questions
- 58% of respondents live Cullowhee
- 31% of respondents had lived in Cullowhee for more than 10 years
- 25% of respondents were between the age of 35-44
- “What do you value about Cullowhee” (open ended question responses)
 - Scenic beauty
 - University community, events, activities
 - Abundance of nature
 - Recreation opportunities (trails and greenway)
 - Small-town vibe
 - River and mountain views
 - Peace and quiet
 - Opportunites/optimism
- Most Important Items to Address (respondents were asked to choose up to four)
 - 50% selected “Revitalization of Old Cullowhee”
 - 48% selected “Restaurants, shopping and entertainment”
 - 44% selected “Open space, parks, recreation options, greenways”
 - 32% selected “Protecting the environment”
- Desired Housing Types (respondents were asked to select all that apply)
 - 62% selected homes with small yards within walking distance to a shared open space or park”
 - 45% selected low maintenance patio homes or townhomes
 - 43% selected homes with large yards, even if not near shopping, services or school
- Quality Residential Development (respondents were asked to rank most important)
 - 65% selected sidewalks
 - 61% selected access to trails, greenways, parks & green space
 - 60% selected shade trees
 - 40% selected buffers between development & existing homes
- Preservation of Open Space (respondents were asked to select up to three)
 - 56% selected streams, wetlands & areas important for water quality
 - 37% selected corridors for future greenways & trails
 - 36% selected additional access areas along the Tuck
 - 36% lands important for habitat & biodiversity
- “Road/Intersection Improvements” (open ended question responses)

- Old Cullowhee Road / Back Entrance to Western Carolina University (WCU)
- Speedwell Road
- Ledbetter Road
- Little Savannah Road
- Monteith Gap Road
- Wayhutta Road
- Improvements for bicyclists and pedestrians
- Active Transportation Facilities (respondents were asked to choose two)
 - 53% selected sidewalks
 - 52% selected multi-use paths and greenways
 - 34% selected bicycle facilities (bike lanes, bike parking, bike share)
 - 31% selected increased or expanded transit service
- “What I Would Change” (open ended question responses)
 - Businesses and Economic Development
 - Affordable Housing for full-time residents
 - Improve Old Cullowhee Road
 - Revitalized Town Center
 - Sidewalks and multi-modal transportation options
 - Improved relationship between university and residents (parking, communication, support for improvements)
 - Removal of blighted buildings
- “My Vision or Big Idea for Cullowhee” (open ended question responses)
 - Redevelopment of Old Cullowhee
 - Make Cullowhee its own “Town”
 - Create more parks, greenways, trails and river access
 - Cultural hub that includes amenities, services and activities for all people
 - A grocery store
 - Balanced, cohesive and connected community
 - Build a River park
 - Uphold community values

Mr. Petrosky asked the Council for feedback and any questions regarding the survey results. Chairman Baker stated the consultants had a good turn out from the public meetings and was not surprised to have a good turn out on the survey.

Mr. Petrosky presented and briefly discussed a more detailed economic analysis for the Cullowhee area that would be included in the Cullowhee Small Area Plan. The highlights are shown as follows:

- Population of the study area had increased 59% since 2000
- 35% of the total growth in Jackson County is within the Cullowhee area
- The population has been influenced by student expansion at Western Carolina University
- Students that live on campus are not counted within the census data but those that live off campus and live quarterly in Cullowhee are included
- The study area median age is 23 years compared to Jackson County median age of 38 years
- Employment within the area includes approximately 900 jobs with educational services being the highest followed by the leisure and hospitality sector
- Approximately 3,500 residential units permitted within Jackson County since 2006
- Approximately 3,000 residential units with an increase of 1,500 units since 2000 are within the Cullowhee study area (largest share being single-family detached units)
- Estimated 60% of the housing units in the study area are occupied
- The housing value within the Cullowhee area is higher than the entirety of Jackson County

- Rental housing, single-family, and apartments around \$500,00 and greater per bed targets the student population, however, apartment listings indicate limited availability
- Retail leakage of 49 million dollars are spent by residents in the Cullowhee area that are spent outside of the study area (food and beverage, general merchandise stores, etc.)

David Claxton inquired if the Council had the ability to address the Board of Governors in regards to the growth rate of campus. Mr. Petrosky stated that is more addressed with the county and their relationship with the university as the pace of growth would be in correspondence with the volume the valley can handle. Chairman Baker stated WCU's net growth over the last 10 years had been less than 100 beds, and they are counting on the growth in the housing market from the local economy. Rick Bennett stated he understood the Board of Governors allowing WCU to grow, however, it is the local economies responsibility to improve the infrastructure such as sidewalks, and street lighting.

Heather Baker stated she had spoken to a retired administrator of WCU and was informed the campus would not bring in students the valley could not handle. The campus ensures there are enough student housing before admitting new students, therefore there is a cap. In addition, for every new student, there are faculty/staff to represent the growth. Mr. Petrosky stated the term used is "carrying capacity," and it is important to consider the carrying capacity for the valley. In addition, within the Cullowhee Small Area Plan the consultants could include language of pace of growth at WCU.

Myrtle Schrader stated it is important from a planning aspect to consider the current need for student housing, however, it should not be in excess as it would not be suitable for faculty/staff. Ms. Schrader encouraged the Council to be careful with the need of student housing, but be aware of the implications it could have on the environment.

Rich Price stated the concern of the inability to afford living in the Cullowhee area is a concern shared throughout Jackson County (441 Corridor, Cashiers, etc.). Mr. Price believes if there were more housing opportunities designed towards faculty, staff and professionals the economic landscape progressively would change. He stated it is difficult to acquire a grocery store, or chain restaurant within the Cullowhee area as both businesses are driven by consistent volume. In addition, these type of businesses are clustered oriented as they want the driver of traffic volume issue to already be in place and not create the issue. Mr. Price stated the Old Cullowhee area appears to be appropriate for mixed use development that supports the community. He believes if this type of development is established, and the density continues to improve then additional opportunities for retail growth from both national and/or regional branches would be available.

Jack Debnam asked the Council to consider to address that the Cullowhee area is viewed as a vacation destination. Mr. Petrosky added that factor could be an opportunity to guide balance of the economy.

Mr. Price stated Jackson County is a small business economy, in both Dillsboro and Sylva small businesses have been appearing over the last couple of years. He stated if they can expand on this portfolio and target new businesses, while continuing to support small business owners, tourism and vacation destination, the county would continue to evolve.

Mr. Petroksy presented the draft map of the Future Land Use Map of Cullowhee area with the recommended character areas to the Council. In addition, he asked the Council to email any feedback and/or questions concerning the Future Land Use Map.

Joel Setzer inquired if the consultants had discussed better high-speed internet and cell-phone service in the Cullowhee area. He stated individuals with jobs in the area consider this factor if they are contemplating to relocate to the area. Mr. Petroksy stated the stakeholders discussed the partnership with WCU should continue to improve. In addition, Mr. Poston stated WCU partnered with Morris Broadband to expand access for high-speed internet for WCU and the community. He stated those that have WCU power/electric should expect the change to occur in 1 to 1.5 years. Mr. Poston stated it is more of a challenge to improve cell tower signal. There is the issue of signal dropping from Cullowhee to Walmart in Sylva, and no signal past East LaPorte. However, to his knowledge, Verizon is not considering to build new systems in the area.

Adjournment

With no further business, Joel Setzer made a motion to adjourn. Jack Debnam seconded the motion, and the meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,


Allison Kelley
Administrative Assistant- Planning


Scott Baker
Planning Council Chair