TOWN OF BOONE PLANNING RETREAT
Tuesday, January 31, 2023

Town Council members in attendance: Tim Futrelle-Mayor, Edie Tugman-Mayor Pro Tem, Todd Carter, Dalton George, Becca Nenow, and Virginia Roseman (arrived at 10:05 a.m.)

Planning & Inspections Staff in attendance: Jane Shook-Director of Planning & Inspections, Stacey Miller-Deputy Director/Chief Building Inspector, Jessica Mitchell-Long Range/Special Projects Planner, Brandon Wise-Environmental Planner, Christy Turner-Senior Planner, Michael James-Senior Planner, and Brenda Henson-Administrative Support/Permit Tech

Other Town Staff in attendance: Amy Davis-Town Manager and Rick Miller-Public Works Director

Legal Counsel in attendance: Allison Meade-Town Attorney

Call to Order

Mayor Futrelle called the meeting, held in Town Council Chambers at 1500 Blowing Rock Road, to order at 9:00 a.m.

Moment of Silence

A moment of silence was observed.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Mayor Pro Tem Tugman made a motion to approve the following meeting minutes:

- April 20, 2021, Downtown Planning Projects Meeting
- May 11, 2021, Downtown Planning Projects Meeting
- May 19, 2021, Downtown Planning Projects Meeting
- May 27, 2021, Downtown Planning Projects Meeting
- June 9, 2021, Downtown Planning Projects Meeting
- October 26, 2022, Comprehensive Plan Meeting
- November 30, 2022, Comprehensive Plan Meeting

Council Member George seconded the motion.

VOTE: Aye – All
Nay – None

The motion passed.

Planning & Inspections Year in Review

Ms. Jane Shook, Director of Planning & Inspections, stated that the organizational structure of the Planning & Inspections Department had not changed from last year. She noted that the packet contained board information, permit number comparisons, and code enforcement numbers that Council members could read. Ms. Shook stated that there were a lot of factors that influenced development. She added that it would be difficult to tell any kind of trends other than a slowdown of big projects coming in for permitting.

Mr. Stacey Miller, Deputy Director and Chief Building Inspector, stated the Town had recently ordered two Chevrolet Bolt all electric cars; one for Planning & Inspections and one for Town Hall. He noted that the vehicles were ordered in November

2022 and would take 6-8 months to arrive. Ms. Shook added that an electric vehicle charging station would be installed in the back parking lot at Planning & Inspections before the vehicles arrived.

Ms. Shook explained that the Department would be changing permitting software to allow for digital permitting through an online portal. The department underwent some space reorganization to accommodate this change and purchased an i-Plan table. Ms. Shook encouraged Council members to stop by Planning & Inspections for a tour of the department.

Ms. Shook then discussed the Planning & Inspections fee schedule. She stated that operating costs and salaries had increased, necessitating fee increases. Ms. Shook noted that the fee schedule operated on a cost-recovery basis. Currently, the department was struggling to see a 40-50% recovery rate. Ms. Shook explained that the Department would never see a 100% recovery rate due to all the planning work, board work, and council projects that were not associated with any fee. However, she explained that the former town manager had a goal of 80% cost recovery for Planning & Inspections. Ms. Shook added that state statutes nor the UDO required advertisement in the newspaper of quasi-judicial hearings so this practice would be discontinued.

Mayor Futrelle stated he would never regret the decision to increase salaries.

Council Member Carter suggested a yearly assessment of rates with increases, decreases, or flat lines, as necessary. He also felt that personnel, morale, and retention issues should not fall into the specific budget for each Department. Mayor Futrelle agreed that salaries should not be a factor in cost recovery.

Ms. Amy Davis, Town Manager, stated she had been doing the budget for over 20 years. She did not think there had ever been any budgetary expectations or pressure that Planning and Inspections (P&I) would ever come anywhere close to cost recovery. Ms. Davis guessed that, in total, P&I might be around 25% cost recovery. She stated she did not know why the former town manager would have expected 80% cost recovery because that was unrealistic. Ms. Davis noted that the Town was a governmental service, and development services was a part that. She felt that the Town needed to keep the fee schedule current and relevant, but she did not think there should be any aim for cost recovery.

Ms. Shook stated she would review the fee schedule, update fees accordingly, and bring it back to Council for consideration.

Ms. Shook then noted that process worksheets would be created for different permit types to assist staff with all aspects of permit application flow.

Mr. Brandon Wise, Environmental Planner, provided an update on the tree canopy assessment. He stated there had been an increase in tree canopy since 2009 from 34.77% to 37.55% in 2022. Mr. Wise added that the goal should be 40% canopy coverage. Mayor Futrelle stated he would like to have more trees downtown.

Ms. Shook stated that the tree canopy information would be included in the Comprehensive Plan. She noted that currently the Town had a separate Urban Forestry Master Tree Management Plan. Ms. Shook explained that some of the individual plans should be merged into the Comprehensive Plan.

Planning & Inspections Annual Work Plan

Ms. Shook then addressed the P&I Work Plan. She noted that the erosion and sedimentation control regulations and the watershed regulations needed to be updated this year to meet model ordinances. Mr. Wise added that the text should be updated by June 2023.

Council Member Roseman arrived at the meeting at 10:05 a.m.

Mayor Futrelle stated that the P&I Work Plan reflected a vision of a previous Council's, and he did not want that to get in the way of this Council's vision.

Ms. Meade stated that so much emphasis needed to be put on the Comprehensive Plan, and she felt it should be the top priority. She noted that the updated Comprehensive Plan might address a lot of the items on the Work Plan. Ms. Meade stated that the Work Plan was helpful as a list of things to look at, but she felt it should be thrown out in terms of taking it as direction or priority.

Council Member George felt there were some good ideas in the Work Plan. Mayor Futrelle agreed that some good things should be retained and worked on at some point. However, he felt that this Council had a clear set of priorities that should be addressed first.

Ms. Meade suggested that she and Ms. Shook go through the Work Plan and prioritize any items that match up with this Council's priorities. She felt they could retain some of the good ideas on the list and possibly add a few other things that Staff would like to have Council consider.

Ms. Shook noted some items on the Work Plan were currently underway, and Staff would continue to work on those items so they could be completed. She stated she would keep the list of Work Plan items and reorganize the list based on today's discussion and Staff's knowledge of Council's priorities.

Mayor Futrelle called for a break in the meeting from 10:30 a.m. until 10:45 a.m.

Boards/Commissions Review

Ms. Shook stated there was no work plan for the Board of Adjustment or Planning Commission. She emphasized a need for Board of Adjustment members, noting that a social media campaign to recruit members would begin soon.

Ms. Shook stated that the Historic Preservation Commission and the Community Appearance Commission have a work plan. She asked that a discussion of the Community Appearance Commission be deferred to the wrap-up session at the end of this meeting. Ms. Shook explained that the Historic Preservation Commission had two meetings a month; one an advisory meeting, the other a quasi-judicial hearing. She noted that Ms. Jessica Mitchell, Long-Range/Special Projects Planner and staff liaison to the HPC, put together a work plan for HPC; this plan was in the meeting packet beginning on page 96. Ms. Shook asked that Council consider some of the bigger items they were asking Staff to do this year, such as the Comprehensive Plan, and that she would need Ms. Mitchell to be more available to assist with those items.

Ms. Mitchell reviewed the HPC Work Plan. The first item was the revision of Appendix D to improve the historic district Certificate of Appropriateness process. Ms. Mitchell felt the existing standards could be improved and clarified regarding the COA process. Some other items on the Work Plan included the Boone Cemetery Interpretative Panels, the Boone Cemetery Survey, the Councill's Store and Hayes-Bryan-Greene Cemetery Marker Installations, and the Local Historic Landmark Reports and Designation of the R.L. Clay (Rivers) House and the Jones House. Ms. Mitchell stated that the HPC was also interested in writing standards for each Landmark property.

Ms. Meade stated that the Secretary of Interior's Standards were currently in place for Landmark properties. She added that they were generic and, while they expressed values, they did not express anything about any particular type of architecture. Ms. Meade stated that, as she understood it, the HPC wanted to write landmark specific standards for each of the buildings that had been designated, which she did not feel was required but might be preferred.

Mayor Futrelle asked what the benefit of taking this on at this time would be. Ms. Shook explained that to obtain the Certified Local Government (CLG) status, the Town needed to designate some Historic Landmarks. Therefore, the Linney House and the Post Office were designated with the idea that the HPC would go back and write standards for those properties. Ms. Shook noted that specific standards would address the time frame of a particular Landmark. For instance, the Blue Ridge Tourist Court standards would look different than the standards for the Post Office.

Ms. Mitchell stated that being a CLG had benefits such as grant funding. However, grants could not be applied for until the Town had maintained its CLG status for one year. She explained that there were some requirements associated with the CLG status, such as training. Ms. Mitchell stated she could work to find low-cost or free training to get the training requirements this year. Council Member Carter stated he knew what it was like to scrap and try to find free training, which ultimately slowed down the process.

Ms. Mitchell noted that the HPC wanted to have signs posted or banners attached to the light poles on King Street to mark the Historic District. She stated they also wanted to work on reports for the street history for the downtown area, as well as look at other historic districts for possible designation. Ms. Mitchell stated that Staff felt things could be done with the current Historic District to make it more successful for everyone, and that Staff would like to figure out ways to do that before adding other Historic Districts. Council Member Carter agreed and stated he was not in favor of designating other Historic Districts until the current one was completed. Mayor Futrelle added that the Town already had a Historic District they were working with and needed to be all they could be for that Historic District.

Ms. Mitchell stated she had also worked with Ms. Paige Henderson with the Downtown Boone Development Association to look at their facade grant applications. She felt the façade grant applications could be a tool to help provide clarity and education about Historic District standards.

Council Member Carter asked if having standards for Landmark properties would help secure grant funding. Ms. Meade noted there were already standards in place, just not specific standards for each Landmark property. Ms. Mitchell did not think specific standards would make a difference for grant funding.

Ms. Mitchell stated there were costs associated with administering the Historic District and maintaining the Town's Landmark property, which was the Post Office. She added that there was typically money set aside for Digital Watauga. Ms. Mitchell stated that the HPC wanted her to ensure that it was mentioned that specific funding for the HPC was allocated to them each year. She noted that the HPC would like to keep a paid intern on hand to help with things like Landmark reports.

Ms. Shook felt the HPC Work Plan was overwhelming and overly ambitious, based on the Planning & Inspections Department's needs. She stated that credit needed to be given to the Historic Preservation Commission because they were very active, did a lot of work, and put a lot of time and effort into the Commission. However, Ms. Shook stated that there needed to be a balance between what was going on with Historic Preservation, the Town's needs, and the Department's needs. She noted that she was not supportive of starting anything with new Historic Districts because she felt there needed to be some communication with the neighbors of the areas. Ms. Shook stated that kind of thing would take Staff time and planning. She felt it was important to communicate with the public and get people involved in the process early. Ms. Shook added that additional Landmark designations should not be made until specific standards were adopted for that property. She stated that everything the HPC wanted to complete was doable over time.

Mayor Futrelle asked what the benefits were of being a CLG. Ms. Mitchell explained that the training was a benefit because it kept the members up to date on the latest in historic preservation. Also, having the status added to the fact that this was a community that was looking to preserve what they had. Ms. Mitchell stated that the CLG status also came with a responsibility that if a property was nominated for the National Register of Historic Places, the Historic Preservation Commission and the Mayor would have to review that property and say they were good with the nomination. There would then be coordination with the State Historic Preservation Office within a certain time frame as required.

Ms. Shook stated that every Council had just said yes to the work plan that HPC suggested, and, at the end of the day, their work plan was directed by Council. She felt that Council needed to help Staff by slowing things down. Ms. Shook stated that if this year's purpose and main goal for the Department was the Comprehensive Plan, then the boards would either have to make that their purpose or some of the extras they would like to do would have to be cut back.

Mr. Rick Miller, Public Works Director, stated that Council needed to know that whatever charge they gave to HPC or any committee might affect Staff time and budgets of other Departments. He added that they would do whatever Council wanted but noted that every time someone from Public Works was working on the tasks from committees, they were not mowing the Greenway Trail or installing sidewalks. Mayor Futrelle agreed that Council needed to ensure a balance of alignment when considering priorities.

Ms. Shook stated that the Historic Preservation Commission was given money in the past. They now had Ms. Mitchell as what they might consider a dedicated Staff person to the HPC, but she was not. She noted that while interns were great, they still took management and time. Ms. Shook stated that she appreciated where the HPC was coming from, but felt that everyone needed to put their eggs in the Comprehensive Plan basket for the remainder of this year and the next fiscal year.

Council Member George suggested having the HPC Chair attend a Town Council meeting to discuss the importance of the Comprehensive Plan and priority goals. Mayor Futrelle suggested that Council convey their thoughts and the decisions they were making to the HPC. If they had concerns, they could request to come and make an appearance at a Town Council meeting.

There was a discussion regarding which items should remain on the HPC Work Plan this year. The following was suggested from the document presented:

- Keep 1. Completion of remaining work plan items from Fiscal Year 2022-2023 (further referenced as FY 2023) as follows:
  - **a.** **Revisions and supplementary documents to Appendix D** as a method to improve the historic district Certificate of Appropriateness process for applicants, HPC members, and Staff.
  - **b.** Finalizing **Boone Cemetery Interpretative Panel** text, budget for purchasing the panels is for FY 2024
  - **c.** **Boone Cemetery Survey** to be re-visited and completed by June 30, 2023. The HPC had started this project prior to the historic district and expressed interest in finishing this project. This project had involved surveying the cemetery and formulating a method to share the material on the web, possibly using Esri web map applications.
  - **d.** **Councill's Store and Hayes-Bryan-Greene Cemetery Marker Installations**; these markers were approved by Town Council during FY 2023. Planning Staff has ordered the markers and is awaiting shipment of the Cemetery marker. Councill's Store Marker is set to have installation ceremony on February 3, 2023. There are no other expended funds to the unveiling ceremony outside of Staff time, as the event coordinates with other Boone 150/Boone 151 events. P&I Staff intend to advertise the event by public notices and posting an invitation on the Town website; these are no-cost options P&I staff has decided to use. Future events can use the same means of advertising. Hayes-Bryan-Greene Cemetery Marker would have an unveiling ceremony after delivery and following Town Council approval on date.
- Keep 3. Boone Cemetery Interpretative Panels – purchasing and installation (to be completed by P&I staff and Public Works staff, respectively). Requesting funding for FY 2024: Cost estimate of panel(s) approximately $5,000 using force labor for installation (Public Works).
- Keep 5. Completion of at least three Board Training opportunities in FY 2023-24 to meet ongoing CLG requirements. Training must be completed within the Federal Year (October 1, 2022-September 30, 2023). All HPC members must participate in at least one training opportunity.

Mayor Futrelle felt that the Rivers House should be removed from the list of potential Landmark properties. Ms. Mitchell replied that the intern had already written and been paid for the Landmark report for the Rivers House. Mayor Futrelle stated that previous town managers and Councils might have been inclined to designate the Rivers House, but the current Council and Manager might want to use the property in a way that would not align with a Landmark designation.

Mayor Futrelle stated he did not want to be disrespectful, but he had concerns. He explained that he did not want HPC to take up too much of Staff's time. Mayor Futrelle stated that he did not want to pay for another HPC intern but would like to pay for continuing education. He added that he wanted to discontinue the idea that direction could be given to other Departments from a committee that stood under the purview of the Council. Finally, Mayor Futrelle stated he did not want a Landmark designation for the Rivers House.

Ms. Shook felt there was consensus that the budget items should be taken out of the HPC Work Plan, other than training, the interpretive panels, and Digital Watauga funding.

After some discussion, it was determined that Staff would see if HPC members could attend the Town Council Work Session at noon on the first meeting in February or the first meeting in March to discuss Council priorities for the HPC Work Plan.

Mayor Futrelle called for a break in the meeting from 12:12 p.m. until 12:45 p.m.

Multi-Family and Multi-Family in Mixed-Use Discussion

Ms. Shook directed everyone to packet page 99, containing the Town of Boone Residential Primer. She stated that the primer was designed to be published for the public to help educate them on the residential types of uses within the Town of Boone. Ms. Shook explained that people did not quite grasp how the Town of Boone handled or managed housing.

Ms. Shook stated that in 2008-2009 multi-family was allowed in the business districts. There was concern that multi-family development would take over the business districts, calling into question where the businesses would go. Ms. Shook stated that this precipitated a moratorium on multi-family development, and Staff was requested to draft multiple mixed-use standards in a very short amount of time. She noted that development under those standards was not realized for a few more years.

Ms. Shook explained that the Affordable Housing Task Force drafted standards for multi-family development that were intended to create more family-oriented type development. The unintended consequences of the multi-family standards included that if you built after 2013, there could not be more than two unrelated people in a multi-family unit. Ms. Shook stated that this caused developers to develop one- and two-bedroom units.

Ms. Meade stated that when she came to the town in January 2015, she heard complaints from engineers and architects about the multi-family standards. She felt the standards were very micromanaging because they required certain design elements. Ms. Meade stated that the standards, combined with the lack of available R3 property, drove developers to build mixed- use as big as possible. The developers just had to meet the other requirements and livability limits on how intensely the land could be used. She added that developers were building commercial space that was never well adapted as commercial space because they needed to get under the height requirements to get the stories in for all of the residential units where they were actually going to make their money.

Council Member George stated he thought this was about having a vision for Boone. He noted that Mayor Pro Tem Tugman did not like the new car wash building. Council Member George stated he would like to have less car-oriented design along Blowing Rock Road. Ms. Shook asked where car-oriented businesses would be allowed if they were not allowed along the commercial corridor. She stated that could ultimately force traffic onto substandard streets not meant to carry that kind of traffic.

Council Member George felt that every bit of new development in the Town was extremely plastic and looked like something in Charlotte. He stated that it was not cutting standards but totally reorienting them that would foster a desired change.

Council Member Nenow stated she would also like to move away from car-oriented businesses, make the Town more walkable, and incorporate affordable housing. She mentioned a model called the 15-minute city where the concept was that, from where you live, you could get to anything you needed on a daily basis within a 10–15-minute walk or bike ride. Council Member Nenow stated that this was her vision for Boone. She added that walkability, affordable housing, local businesses, and local food all played into that model.

Ms. Shook asked how Council wanted to proceed with the Comprehensive Plan process. She felt that the small business stakeholder meeting was productive and asked if Council would like to do something similar to that with other types of uses. Ms. Shook mentioned a neighborhood option that took the input session to certain parts of town, having virtual meetings, or using social media to involve the public. She added that some sessions would have to cover multiple topics, or they would be having public input sessions for a year.

Ms. Meade felt that visioning was crucial in the Comprehensive Plan process. She stated that having small area plans for neighborhoods could necessitate additional zoning districts.

Ms. Shook asked if a consultant should be hired to work on the Comprehensive Plan. She suggested that Staff could work on the process and then bring in a consultant for graphics and presentation. There was consensus from Council for Staff to work on the process for the Comprehensive Plan update before bringing in a consultant.

Mayor Pro Tem Tugman stated that she liked the idea of taking specific areas and helping to determine how they could be developed in the future with buffer zones between residential areas and business areas.

Council Member George felt that people were happier in the city and wanted to come to the city to live when they could safely walk to get a cup of coffee. He stated that the current design along Blowing Rock Road was unfortunate because it made it a corridor that no one would ever enjoy. Council Member George added that he would like to see Blowing Rock Road with no drive-thrus. Ms. Shook noted that during the pandemic, drive-thrus allowed people to operate their restaurants and businesses still. Council Member George felt that Boone was the fast-food drive-thru capital of America.

Ms. Shook stated that, when looking at the Comprehensive Plan, they needed to consider what resiliency would look like for the Town of Boone as far as the economy and the jobs that the Town and county wanted to attract. She added that they would also need to look at the driving market forces, the availability of space within the area where the Town needed to grow, and revenue needs.

Mayor Futrelle suggested setting aside an hour of each Town Council Work Session to discuss Comprehensive Plan update topics.

Ms. Shook asked if there were any questions about the Residential Primer or the Multi-Family Analysis. Mayor Pro Tem Tugman replied that she needed more time to review the Residential Primer.

Council Member George suggested not having such a rigid occupancy limit in multi-family districts. Ms. Shook stated that any multi-family, outside of multi-family in an R3, built before the current standards had an occupancy limit of 3-4 unrelated per unit. However, newer builds had an occupancy limit of no more than two unrelated per unit. Ms. Shook explained that Staff had to ask customers when their building was built in order to determine their occupancy limits. Council Member George felt this type of situation could cause repercussions for affordability.

Planned Developments were discussed. Ms. Shook noted that Planned Developments were repealed. Mayor Futrelle suggested that they be brought back with some revised standards.

Ms. Shook stated that she needed some direction regarding the Community Appearance Commission. She noted that Staff went over a Planning and Inspections Primer with the CAC members, which was previously shared with Council. She felt this was important to help introduce them to planning and zoning because almost all of the members were students. Ms. Shook stated she was hesitant to have the Commission begin work on architectural standards, noting that the tree canopy assessment had not been completed. She asked Council to consider moving Community Appearance Commission meetings to quarterly, as needed, until more work on the Comprehensive Plan had been completed in order to give them better direction. Ms. Shook added that the CAC would be considering things that would have long-lasting impacts on the community and would be set by the Town's vision, which currently had not been defined. She felt that being able to put into code what the Town liked would need to come after the vision had been determined in order to positively change the standards. Council Member George agreed that quarterly CAC meetings were a good idea.

Adjournment

With nothing further, Council Member George made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:54 p.m. Council Member Nenow seconded the motion.

VOTE: Aye – All
Nay – None

The motion passed.

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Tim Futrelle, Mayor

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Brenda Henson, Admin. Support/Permit Tech