

**BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN DISCUSSION
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2022, 9:00 AM
1500 BLOWING ROCK ROAD**

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Tim Futrelle, Mayor Pro Tem Edie Tugman, Todd Carter, Dalton George, Becca Nenow, and Virginia Roseman

PLANNING STAFF PRESENT: Jane Shook-Director of Planning and Inspections, Mike James-Senior Planner, Jessica Mitchell-Long Range/Special Projects Planner, Christy Turner-Senior Planner, Brandon Wise-Environmental Planner, and Brenda Henson-Administrative Support

OTHER TOWN STAFF AND REPRESENTATIVES PRESENT: Amy Davis-Town Manager, Mark Freed-Director of Cultural Resources, Andy LeBeau-Chief of Police, Rick Miller-Public Works Director, Dale Presnell-Human Resources Director, Josh Eller-Public Works Deputy Director, Todd Moody-Public Works Deputy Director, George Santucci-Sustainability/Special Projects, and Allison Meade-Town Attorney

Call to Order

Mayor Futrelle called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m., welcomed everyone, and introductions were made.

Comprehensive Plan Presentation

Ms. Shook presented the Comprehensive Plan presentation contained in the meeting packet. She stated that the Comprehensive Plan should reflect the vision for the Town for the next 20 years. Ms. Shook suggested three top goals the Comprehensive Plan should address included equity, affordable housing, and sustainability.

Ms. Shook outlined other adopted plans of the Town, including the High Country Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan, the Wellness District Small Area Plan, West Downtown Alive, the b. well Section Plan of the Middle Fork Greenway, Section 6 of the Middle Fork Greenway Master Plan, the Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan, the Watauga County Comprehensive Transportation Plan, and the Urban Forestry Master Management Plan. Ms. Shook questioned whether or not Council would want to have the small plans incorporated into a larger plan or remain standalone plans.

Ms. Shook stated that the Boone 2030 Land Use Plan was repealed by the previous Town Council. However, she felt there were relevant items that could be taken from the 2030 Plan and incorporated into the updated Comprehensive Plan. Council Member Roseman relayed that she had spoken with some people who felt there were parts of the 2030 Plan that had detrimental side effects on the community. Ms. Shook replied that many community members participated in discussions to help shape the 2030 Plan. However, she felt there were things included in the Plan that the community did not fully support, such as development height and appearance. Council Member Carter asked why the 2030 Plan was created when a Comprehensive Plan was already in place. Ms. Shook replied that the 2030 Plan was a more modern document designed to be a blueprint for the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Meade stated that the repeal of the 2030 Plan by Town Council was narrowly, yet strongly opposed. She urged the present Council to review the 2030 Plan, keeping an open mind not to think the community thoroughly rejected the Plan because it did not. Ms. Meade noted that the Plan was repealed by a very thin and close call by Council. She encouraged Council members to review the current Comprehensive Plan as well.

Ms. Shook stated that the next step for the Comprehensive Plan was to select a consultant and work up a contract. She explained that the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) was written in a way that would let the consultant know that the Town wanted a plan where the consultant worked jointly with staff. Ms. Shook felt that the consultant should be able to brand this Comprehensive Plan and add all graphics that would make the Comprehensive Plan interesting and something people could feel a connection to. She stated that the next part would be public engagement with authentic community participation. Ms. Shook added that there would need to be discussion regarding how boards such as Planning Commission, Community Appearance Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, and Cultural Resources would be included in this process. After the approval process, Ms. Shook stated there would need to be active implementation with timeframes that were clear to everyone.

Mayor Pro Tem Tugman noted that there had only been one response to the RFQ. She asked if the RFQ should be reopened. Ms. Shook stated the firm that responded, Destination by Design, was local, and there could be benefit to using someone local. Council Member George suggested that an outside perspective might be helpful. There was discussion regarding reopening the RFQ. The majority of Council members wished to reopen the RFQ for two more weeks.

Ms. Shook asked Council members about their individual expectations for this comprehensive planning process that staff would need to consider.

Council Member Roseman felt the outline provided in the meeting packet was well thought out. She asked that the Town obtain input from the most voices to get the best product.

Council Member George echoed Council Member Roseman's thoughts. He suggested neighborhood meetings, not necessarily specific to neighborhoods but maybe specific to areas of Town, would bring interesting and unique perspectives. Council Member George felt it would be more focused and beneficial to go to where these people were and maybe even knock on doors to encourage participation.

Council Member Carter stated that he agreed that going into different neighborhoods was a good idea. He felt that it was the Council's job to get as much public participation as possible. Council Member Carter asked if he could get a copy of the 2030 Plan to review.

Council Member Nenow stated that they should try to devise more creative ways to encourage public involvement in addition to the normal avenues. She suggested posting notices on town bulletin boards and public spaces. Council Member Nenow stated she was unsure how this process would work in the budget. She asked, in terms of communication with Town Council, that whenever there was discussion about the Town's priorities, there be some clear communication of how the process would be taken forward in the budget process.

Mayor Pro Tem Tugman felt strongly that all voices should be heard. She suggested bringing the downtown businesses, the retail businesses, and the professional businesses together in a way that they felt they were being heard without being attacked. Mayor Pro Tem Tugman also suggested that student housing might have an opportunity to be heard without the neighborhoods confronting them. She stated she did not know if there was a way to have these meetings be focused explicitly on each type of group instead of being a general public meeting.

Ms. Shook replied that she understood the desire to be very intentional about how participation should be managed. She felt it was important to provide people with an environment where they could speak without fear of retribution. Ms. Shook stated that they would have to create a process and guidelines for these meetings so that everyone could engage and listen. She added that staff would also try to be very direct with Council when reporting to them so that they understood how their priorities were being incorporated.

Mayor Futrelle asked that all staff members be candid and upfront with Council members on what they think because Council relied on them to help make their decisions. He asked Ms. Shook to speak about the implementation process for the Comprehensive Plan so that they all had a better understanding of how things would move forward.

Ms. Shook explained that the process would depend on Council's implementation action steps that would come from the actual plan. She stated that some of these would be through code, the consideration of zoning map amendments, or the consideration of investments and public infrastructure. Ms. Shook noted that currently there was guidance on water and sewer in the Town Code and the Comprehensive Plan regarding expansion of services and areas. She added that long-term investments and public infrastructure would be based on the Comprehensive Plan, which could include things like culture and art, utilities, and hazard mitigation. Mayor Futrelle noted that the process very much involved the budget. He stated that some of them may never see some of these changes come to fruition. Ms. Shook agreed that the full impacts of code changes were not often realized for 15-20 years.

Council Member Carter expressed a desire to be purposeful and look carefully at each thing they would like to adapt to achieve the new objectives.

Ms. Shook asked that Council be aware of staff time dedicated to this and other ongoing projects. She stated some big items were on the staff's plate, such as participating with the Housing Council, signs, transportation, and lighting.

Council Member Carter stated he was flabbergasted at the list of priorities given to Planning staff over the past few years and did not want to have that kind of situation because it was just not reasonable. Ms. Shook replied that, in her head, that list still existed and was still a required list with some things on it that needed to be reprioritized. She stated that if there were things that Council wanted to remove from the list, a discussion about that might need to take place. Council Member Carter replied that the list was a 10-year list and not achievable. Mayor Futrelle added that he was all for efficient and effective government.

Ms. Meade stated that Council might need to give further direction about who and how this process should be led. From reading the 2006 Comprehensive Plan, she felt that that effort was led by the Planning Commission and public input from the beginning. She urged Council to consider first relying on staff and then themselves to do the initial heavy lifting to get a framework and starting place for priorities and action items. Ms. Meade suggested then bringing in the public and other boards for their consideration. She felt that would be the most effective way to get a document that would be actionable for staff. Ms. Meade suggested intense work sessions, maybe half a day weekly, between herself and staff and then bring in Town Council for some follow-up work sessions. She stated that while staff needed to carry the laboring end, the priorities needed to be set by Council.

Ms. Shook referred to the framework on page 11 of the meeting packet and stated she would like to start there. However, depending on the consultant that would be chosen, they may propose something different. Ms. Shook felt that topics such as community, environmental health, and facilities and services could be addressed by staff.

Council members agreed that a monthly, half-day work session to discuss the Comprehensive Plan would be a good idea. This work session should be separate from their other meetings and work sessions. Two work sessions were scheduled; one for October 26, 2022 from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m., the other for November 30, 2022 from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m.

Mayor Futrelle stated, in summary, there would be two more weeks of the RFQ, a work session on October 26 at 11 a.m., and a work session on November 30 at 9 a.m.

Ms. Meade added that she and staff would get together and begin work. She suggested they could email Council with some homework to prepare them for their work session. Ms. Meade urged Council members to look at the 2006 Comprehensive Plan policy sections, which were the sections that were intended to be binding, as opposed to all the narrative. She stated that some of the policies had very actionable items, some were vague and had no actionable items, and some were in between. Ms. Meade felt there were two key components for Council to weigh in on: action items and prioritizing among them, and the vision of what they wanted the Town to look like.

Mayor Futrelle thought it was a good idea to take notes of things people liked or disliked around Town for Council to discuss at their work session. He asked if it would be important to look at climate change and how that might affect the Town's planning. Ms. Shook replied that climate change could affect all categories of discussion. She stated that Mr. Santucci's work would definitely need to be incorporated into the Plan. Mayor Futrelle added that this would be the first Comprehensive Plan for the Town that would implement climate change.

Adjournment

With nothing further, Mayor Futrelle adjourned the meeting at 11:25 a.m.

Tim Futrelle, Mayor

Brenda Henson, Administrative Support