



HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY PLAN

Steering Committee #1

October 21, 2020, 6-7:30 PM

Highlands Community Building

Highlands, NC

I. Attendance

Brad Armstrong

Hank Ross

Harry Bears

Jim Ward

John Lipoli

Darren Whatley

Terry Potts

Hilary Wilkes

Bill Reeves

II. Summary

The meeting began with Michael Mathis welcoming the Committee members and giving a brief explanation of the project.

Jake Petrosky from Stewart then gave a presentation to the Committee. He gave an overview of the project purpose, schedule, and team before reviewing existing conditions in the town.

Discussion about the project, logistics, and priorities then followed:

- The Steering Committee members would like long notice prior to future meetings. 6 PM on Wednesday are generally good for the group.
- Project team will provide a concrete definition of short-term rentals and see if there is any data available on average length of stay for visitors to the town.
- Project Promotion
 - Kay from the Chamber of Commerce may be a good partner for project promotion.
 - Survey should be translated to Spanish to capture workforce viewpoint
 - May be able to promote at country clubs and the school PTA
 - Water bills and radio may also be outlets
- The project team should look at other upscale tourist towns and their plans
 - Peers that were mentioned include:
 - The Hamptons: Highlands is Atlanta's Hamptons. Do not want to be East Hampton though.
 - Telluride: Has a historic Main Street, thoughtful density in town. Have preserved a ring of greenspace around the city of mountains, meadows and pasture.



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- Rockport, MA/ME
- Camden, ME
- Character
 - During the discussion on precedents, members mentioned what is special about Highlands.
 - We need to preserve what is unique about Highlands, the quaintness, a sophisticated rural mountain village.
 - Charm and appeal of the outdoors and the culture of town is important.
- Concerns
 - There is potential for constant commercial sprawl along corridors (i.e. to Cashiers)
 - Removal of ETJ is a concern
 - Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust is a good partner and could help with land protection along corridors. Will also need to work with the county.
 - Housing prices are pricing out families, so population is primarily an older set and hospitality workers.
 - Employers are concerned, if employees can't live here they have to be paid more
 - Pedestrian connectivity
 - Walking has been on the rise during covid
 - Pedestrians should be a top priority
 - Sidewalk connectivity to downtown is desirable and could help alleviate parking issues
 - Extension of sidewalks needed
 - Town has sidewalk masterplan, may need to be revisited and prioritized
 - Should try to connect greenway to Downtown and other destinations more
 - Parking
 - Expansion needed
 - What about parking for golf carts?
 - State highways are a concern for golf carts.
- Recreation Park
 - Rec park is jewel. Huge beautiful property. Park is under-developed and utilized. Could be more of a feature.
 - There is a park on every corner in some towns.
- Tree protection/Natural resources: Need to have a champion or heritage tree designation
- Streetscape downtown: Has not been a priority lately, but streetscape improvements could be expanded to additional areas and could help with wayfinding and building on downtown.



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- Electric service: Reliability of service. Has a perception of not being reliable.
- Short term rental discussion
 - 400 out of 1400 housing units are seasonal uses
 - STRs are driving up housing costs
 - Historical discussion
 - Highlands was built on long-term visitors
 - Visitors used to rent homes for a season.
 - 1 month + is a different tenant compared to 8 people in a 4 bed room home for a few days
 - Short term rentals bring a rowdier crowd, particularly when they are associated with weddings
 - Do we want to be a party city?
 - Balance needed: Rental may be basis for purchase of home. There is a positive economic impact of rentals.
 - How can Highlands limit rentals to preserve community character? Look at other precedent laws in Asheville and Raleigh