

Old Fort Mountain Heritage Alliance

August 19, 2009, 3:00

Members Present:

Dru Heldman, Chairperson, Debbie Smith, David Quinn – Handmade in America, Dean Kanipe, , Susie Painter, Terry Wilson, Scott Swickle, Carol Price, Terrell Finley, Nada Carroll, Linda Canterbury, Brigitte Walters, Karen Allison, Charlie Pyles, Tami Schultz,

Minutes:

The committee wishes to thank the Wild Moose Restaurant for hosting the meeting and providing light refreshments. It was a welcome change. Everyone introduced themselves with a brief synopsis of what is going on in Old Fort as it relates to their professional lives.

Debbie Smith and Dean Kanipe reported on their trip to a meeting at Valdese regarding Models of Community –Based Philanthropy. We heard about examples of ways people can contribute to local communities other than through donations made through wills. There are Rural Community Foundations in NC and across the country. Giving Circles are groups of people who organize and everyone contributes a set amount and then the group decides upon which charitable organizations they choose to support. Old Fort already has several community minded groups such as OFMH Alliance, Cooperative Extension Group (formerly Home Demonstration), Friends of the O.F. Branch of the Public Library, Mountain Glory Quilters' Guild, the Senior Center, Gateway Museum, plus various school and church groups. All of these groups already provide donations and services to our community.

Carol Price announced that NC Department of Commerce announced in the annual report that tourism increased 6.4% in 2008 over 2007. McDowell had the third largest increase in the entire state of NC. There was a 10% increase of visitors to the Tourism/Depot from June 08 and a 40% increase in July for this year. More information is being published about our area and it seems more people have been drawn into our area. Hopefully there will be more information through various types of communication (facebook, blogging, twitter, etc.) to continue to increase of tourism. Also the tourism authority will receive 3 bike racks to place at the Arrowhead, Bradley Park and the Gateway museum.

Scott Swickle announced that the Chamber of Commerce is hoping to increase the scope of the annual Oktoberfest to include Main Street and other areas instead of just the museum area. Scott also announced that an Outdoor Shop will be opening in the spring that will include bike rentals and various excursions, such as hiking and river trips.

Dru Heldman reported that Davidson's Fort has received grant money from the Rural Center. They are starting the "Block House" which will eventually be the main visitor's center of the Fort. A fund raiser will be held in September and there is a goal to have the walls up in time for a reenactment of a pioneer Thanksgiving to be held there.

Terry Wilson reported that the Elementary School budget has been drastically reduced this year. The enrollment seems to be continuing to grow and in spite of the hardships of meager budget, the students' progress continues to improve each year. Old Fort Elementary scores are above the county and state average.

Dean Kanipe announced that McDowell Tech is continuing to grow. The enrollment is continuing to increase and a new welding department is going to be added.

Standing Committee Reports

- Economic Development

Dean Kanipe met with his committee and they have created a survey to be given to residents and tourists regarding our community. One part of the survey comes directly from Hand Made In America. There are a number of ways the survey could be distributed: Placing it online, sending it out through City Utility Billing, obtaining mailing lists from the town utility database, circulating through residential communities, mailing to all 28762 zip code users, and having surveys located at business checkout counters. The projected date for the survey period is mid September. Also, a zip code survey will help identify whether clientele is made up of locals or out-of-towners. Merchants can ask for a patron's zip code to help determine the demographics. A retail survey will be done to see the potential for increasing businesses.

The surveys will help the town to identify problems and strengths so that changes can be prioritized and tackled in small steps. We are very lucky to have Dean and his professional expertise.

- **Heritage and Preservation**

Terrell Finley reports that the final music program for the Gateway museum will be held this coming Saturday (Aug. 22). The music programs have been successful this year and the last 2 programs drew in about 500 people each. Unfortunately there has not been much of a response to the demonstrations. Vendors that set up in town did not do well. It is difficult to determine why. Allocated grant money has been used for the Saturday programs. Ann Swann has done well with the storytelling project. It is now available on line.

- **Promotion**

There will be a membership drive for the O.F. Mountain Heritage Alliance held on Sunday, Sept. 20 from 2:00-4:30 on the grounds of the Gateway Museum. It will be advertised as a Sunday Ice Cream Sundae Social. Ice cream, popcorn and lemonade will be available at no charge. Informational flyers will be available as well as the posters from the NCSU team showing what has been accomplished by this group and what can be done to improve our community. There will also be music, local comedians, and announcements made throughout the afternoon. David Quinn suggested that we contact other communities also in the STEP program be invited to come help and share what their communities have done. Advertisement for the social will be made in newspapers, web sites, flyers passed out in schools and churches, and posters around town.

- **Design and Beautification**

A cement park bench has been ordered along with 18 more Olive Jar Planters for the town. The additional planters will be placed along Catawba Ave. All of the planters will be replanted with winter hearty foliage that will hopefully look good most of the winter. The new planters should be delivered by late September. The cost of the Olive Jars is \$33 each.

The committee that is working on the town sign has talked with 3 vendors and has worked up a Request For Proposal (RFP). The formal request will be sent out requiring that the proposals be returned to the committee by September 16. This should allow for the Mayor and Board of Aldermen time to approve the requests. The first sign to be done will be on West Main Street driving west. The existing wooden sign with brick pillars will be adapted or replaced. Each vendor said that the project could be finished in about 4-6 weeks once the contract is made. Two more signs are planned for placement on 70 East (near Curtis Creek) and on I 40 East at exit 73.

The DoT should be contacted to find out about the actual placement of the sign and about landscaping.

- **HandMade in America**

David Quinn reminded the committee that the funds for the Town Walk must be used before December '09. The committee should be meeting very soon. Tim Johnson (296-4500) is an excellent resource to assist in planning. A member of the McDowell Trails would also be an asset to the committee.

There will be a Rural Forum in Raleigh on Nov. 5-6 (Thursday-Friday). Expense for travel, food and overnight will be paid.

David agreed that more discussion should be done to come up with a much more appropriate motto than "Gateway to the Mountains".

There had been some misunderstandings regarding funding from the Rural Center. A huge thanks goes out to Art Jackson who worked out the problems and was able to cover the budget for Railroad Days and events at the Museum.

The town improvements are being noticed by the public, especially the flowers. Many have commented on how beautiful the flowers are. A huge thanks to Painters' Green house, Terry Wilson and the town maintenance workers for watering, fertilizing, pruning these beautiful plants.

Minutes taken by Debbie Smith

Debbie