

Old Fort Mountain Heritage Alliance

January 13, 2010, 3:00

Attending: Brigette Walters, Dean Kanipe, Karen Allison, Judi Jetson, Elizabeth Russell, Jenny Moore, Wilma Allison, Susie Painter, Terry Wilson, Dru Heldman, Scott Swickle, Terrell Finley, Jennifer Brown.

Standing Committee Reports:

- **County Tourism**

Carol Price- Carol explained that the Hwy 70 Cruisers (another non-profit group) are planning an annual event titled “Mountain Thunder Car Show” in Old Fort. The date for the show is the same Saturday as Pioneer Day, April 24, 2010. The show will last from 9-5. This group hopes to have over 70 vintage automobiles on display. Hopefully these events will have a large attendance. The Alliance will help promote and support these events.

OFMHA and other local community groups also need to begin working and communicating with each other. The Alliance is not an exclusive entity. All groups need to work together to preserve and improve our town. We need to support and help promote other groups, such as Mountain Music. We need to invite their directors or chairmen to our meetings.

Rail Road Day will occur on the first Saturday in May, which is May 1st. A committee will be established and will begin meeting in early February.

The Foothills Farmers will meet in Feb 9th. There will be a Seminar from 9-12. Davidson Fort is planning a possible opening date of April 24.

- **Design and Beautification**

Bradley Park:

Jennifer Brown from Greenmeadow Landscaping, Inc. was asked to look at Bradley Park in town to make some suggestions on improvements that could be made to beautify the park. She presented an architectural diagram of her proposed suggestions. The suggestions included moving the current benches, sidewalk paving bricks and railroad tie flower beds. A brick walking area would be rebuilt on both ends of the park. All areas will be handicapped accessible. Planters enclosed with rock walls that could also serve as seating area would be placed on the end of the park closest to the traffic intersection and another on the diagonally opposite side near the gazebo. New sod would be used and a watering system would also be installed. A variety of trees, plants and shrubs would be planted around the park.

Jennifer estimates that the cost of the entire project to be \$40,000. The work could begin as early as mid March and be completed in about 4 weeks or by Mid April. DOT must be contacted to see if their planned street construction would hinder the project or delay the start of the renovations.

Jennifer is willing to provide one year’s maintenance at no further cost to the town. Greenmeadow Landscaping, Inc. will provide all materials and finish the work for

ONLY the administrative costs which is \$5,000. (That's right, \$5,000, this is not a typo!!!)

A motion was made, seconded, and all members unanimously approved this project. The Alliance will present this to the Town Aldermen.

The Alliance appreciates Jennifer's work, professionalism, and contribution that she and her firm are providing to help make the Town of Old Fort a truly beautiful place to live and visit.

Town Signage: The RFP's we initially submitted for a new sign on West Main Street, contained rock work to support the sign. The rock work was approximately 60% of the estimated costs. The committee has reevaluated what type of support we would like the sign to have. If we were to go with wooden supports, it is possible that we can order all three town signs for what the first sign was estimated. The committee will meet next week to review our initial RFP. The committee agreed that we need to rework the RFP's and submit them to all three vendors again instead of just choosing the least expensive based upon the original RFP.

- **Economic Development**

Dean presented the committee a summary of the report and it will be a challenge to get this info out to the public. The information can be placed on our web site.

Retail information: Within a 5 mile radius of downtown, Old Fort lost \$25.8 million of retail sales to other surrounding communities. Full service restaurants, grocery stores, department stores and gas stations make up a majority of that amount. The Zip Code Survey showed that consumers from 21 states made visits during the two week period surveyed in October.

Consumer Survey: 64% of respondents came downtown at least twice per week. More than half of the respondents came downtown for groceries, banking and post office. Respondents requested antique store, art and craft supply store, bakery, book store, clothing, department store, dry cleaner, restaurants, large grocery store, Outfitters and Wal-Mart. Attractiveness of the area, personal safety and quality of goods were some of the areas respondents thought the town was doing a good job. The variety of goods was rated poor. Qualities respondents thought were very important to them are cleanliness and maintenance; customer service/before and after; focus on needs of local customers; historic character; more local jobs; public improvements, streets, sidewalks, landscaping; regular/convenient business hours and support for local businesses. Almost all were full-time residents and over 56% had one or two members in the household and 60% were employed.

Recommendations: The Economic Restructuring Committee should help market the Town's Maintenance Building and the Old Exxon stations. The town may want to start a small façade grant program to help businesses pay for exterior improvements to their businesses. It may provide an incentive for them to make more extensive improvements and improve the appearance of their buildings. Some of the homes downtown may be able to qualify as historic and can qualify for the NC Historic Tax Credit of 30%. This should also be promoted to owners of commercial property downtown. They may be able to benefit from the 20% Federal and 20% NC Historic Tax Credit.

The winners of the Old Fort “Bucks” are Amy Anderson, Linda Canterbury, Teresa Burnette, Annette Mathews, and Hazel Stine. As soon as the updated “Bucks” are finished, \$50 worth will be sent to each winner. Handmade in America has sent the \$250 in cash for the vendors to redeem at the Town Hall.

- **Heritage and Preservation**

We need to pursue the application process for Historical District status, deadline for submission, June 5, 2010. (We missed the Jan. 5 deadline).

David Quinn forwarded the names of Rebecca Johnson, Sybil Argitar, and Glen Lucasio as people who will be able to assist. These people will be invited to our next meeting so we can find out exactly what is needed, what we already have and what we need to do next.

- **Promotion**

Community sign: There is a need in our community for a better way to advertise upcoming local events. Many locals do not refer to the newspapers or listen to the radio for local activities. Debbie Smith suggested that a large, LED billboard type of sign could be placed in front of the Town Hall parallel to the train tracks which would also be visible from Main Street would assist in keeping the Community informed regarding activities that are going on in the town. Stuart Signs is a company in Florida that makes such signs that are tasteful and attractive. The rough cost would be approximately \$33,000. This sign would have up to 4 lines of text on both sides and graphics and videos can be projected. The program can be set up for recurring events for a year with minimal changes. If advertising space were charged, the sign could generate funds to help pay for the sign. The general consensus of the group was that this community does need to have some type of visual advertising. A committee will be formed to research this topic further.

Approve Articles of Incorporation, Approve By-Laws:

Both the Articles and By-Laws were given to all members present. They were approved unanimously. All directors present signed original documents to submit for Incorporating and for the IRS to apply for 501 (c)(3) Non-Profit status.

Establish board of Directors and elect officers:

The list of volunteers to serve as establishing directors was presented to the group. The following people were elected to be the Old Fort Mountain Heritage Alliance Board of Directors:

Andy Bunch, Terrell Finley, Dru Heldman, Dean Kanipe, Susie Painter, Debbie Smith, Scott Swickle, Terry Wilson and Ashley Wooten.

Carol Price and Brigitte Walters will serve as *ex-officio*, advisors or non-voting directors.

Officers elected: Dru Heldman, Chairman; Susie Painter, Vice-Chairman; Debbie Smith, Secretary; Andy Bunch, Treasurer; Terry Wilson, Assistant Treasurer.

Scott Swickle announced that his Outfitters business called "All Ab-Outdoors" will be opening in March. He will have many types of equipment for rent such as bikes, fishing, camping, and hiking gear. Also he will sponsor guided tours and mapping assistance.

Adjourned 5:15

Minutes taken by Debbie Smith

Secretary, OFMHA