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Planning & Zoning Commission Questionnaire

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1. What is your vision for growth and development in Asheville?

I believe the economic downturn has actually presented us with an opportunity to refocus on our vision for the future of Asheville. I envision a city that is vibrant, diverse and sophisticated, a global leader among small cities in terms of sustainability and quality of life.

Asheville is clearly a unique place. What I believe makes it attractive to so many is the wonderful balance of urban, small town and natural amenities. Having been involved in sustainability for nearly 20 years now, I, like many others, brought my family to Asheville almost 9 years ago because I foresaw the nexus of smart, sustainable community evolving in this eclectic little city. What has developed over my time here (the emergence of a lively green building market, the establishment of many smart growth policies, emergence of the green economy, et al) has created the opportunity to present Asheville as a national model for smart growth and sustainable development if we are willing to commit ourselves, as individuals and as a community, to this goal.

Preserving the qualities that make Asheville so wonderful will take thoughtful consideration and judiciously balancing the many factors that affect our economy, growth and development. It involves many hard choices, but it is clear that the city is, in many ways, poised to move to the forefront of green economic development, electric vehicle infrastructure and sustainable development practice, and we must not squander this opportunity. We must preserve the "essence" of Asheville, but always with an eye towards the future. Luckily, Asheville's boasts an enviable pool of talented, creative and passionate individuals, perhaps its greatest asset, who are committed to working together to realize a vision for Asheville as a leader among modern small cities.

The city has made many positive strides towards developing a comprehensive smart growth strategy over the last decade, as evidenced by the Asheville 2025 plan, the Sustainability Management Plan, the Downtown Master Plan and others. Realizing the goals will require that we act wisely, implementing a series of critical sequential decisions deployed with careful consideration over time. I believe we need to continue to press forward in this direction, actively pursuing regional and national partners in our efforts to stay on the forward edge of strategy, policy, technology and economic development.

However, we must be careful to not further weaken the local real estate and construction economies, which are so critical to the city's economic health, and in fact continue to leverage our position as a trendsetter in the green economy through leadership and policy. I fully believe that it is possible to simultaneously achieve affordability, sustainability and economic vitality through well designed and implemented codes and regulations

I believe the best way to achieve many of the goals we share is to incentivize businesses, builders and developers to employ green practices and smart growth methods, and to nurture a regulatory and economic environment that will produce stability and controlled growth over time. I think many underappreciate the impact that developing our green economy can have, and how it will continue to benefit Asheville in many ways going forward.

Transportation is another critical issue in my mind. Understanding and properly managing the relationship between development, transportation and quality of life will be central to manifesting a future for Asheville that is sustainable, vibrant, modern and bountiful. is a complex issue, but we must continue to encourage the type of development that will increase the viability of more effective, less impactful and more efficient transportation systems, with the overarching goal of reducing the miles driven per resident as a measure of success on an annual basis

If the complex issues of development, transportation and economy are not carefully considered and implemented under one unifying strategy, the results will be haphazard and substandard. Only by addressing these areas consistently, with a sophisticated and integrated strategy, will we be able to grow, prosper and preserve what makes Asheville so unique and desirable.

2. Do you believe Asheville has taken an approach that is too "pro-growth" or "anti-growth" over the past 5-6 years? Please share your reasons.

I don't actually believe that either accurately represents the whole truth. The unfortunate result of the tug-of-war that has been going on between the pro-growth and no-growth camps has resulted in some haphazard real world results. I hope the decision makers and the public can realize that this type of polarizing approach and the resultant policies only serve to produce less than desirable results. A great example is the Cottage Development Code. This code was very well intended, and studied for many years prior to being proposed. It is a great example of using incentives to encourage smart growth, which will in turn have the multiple benefits of less energy consumptive homes, improved efficiency of our public transit system, lowered home costs and increased homeownership, preservation of green space, and many more.

However, prior to the code prior being passed, many compromises were made, and the code that was finally passed has rarely been implemented. It represents in theory a great step forward, but there are so many restrictions built into it that very few parcels in the city actually qualify, and among those even fewer are economically feasible to develop. This is a great example of trying to implement smart growth strategies that generate multiple benefits, yet the end result being a code that has only been implemented maybe once or twice in 5-6 years due to the results of the extreme positions of the pro- and anti-growth camps and an inability to moderate and implement effective policies to encourage the growth we desire when the inevitable growth comes. .

Our goal should always be forging effective policies that will allow us we can grow in a way that is strategic and beneficial to all. It is obvious that the area will continue to grow, and that we need some regulatory framework to accommodate and guide this growth, so the extreme fringes of both camps hold untenable positions by definition. We should all try, even in the current polarizing political environment, to broker agreements and policies that acknowledge to the long-term realities and that account for the common good.

3. How strictly should interpretation and application of the Unified Development Ordinance be applied?

I believe the UDO should be used as a guideline for decisions, but balanced with consideration for the subsequent developments in the code and the emerging vision for development and future growth. We should constantly be on the lookout for elements of the UDO that are outdated and no longer meet the city's strategic goals. As with all effective documents of this type, it needs to be an evolving framework that is able to be updated and improved to meet an ever changing context and environment.

4. Name one Planning & Zoning Commission decision in the last 18 months you've agreed with and one you've disagreed with or would have struggled with. Please explain your rationale for each.

I will actually use one decision in response to both questions. The Affordable and Sustainable Density Bonus was a very well intended proposal, thoughtfully crafted by staff and the committees. It represented a proactive, incentive-based program for two of the most important and debated issues in our community.

I am pleased the proposal was passed by the Commission. It again underlines the Commission's understanding of the importance of these two issues to local residents and the future of Asheville. It represents an incentive-based model, which I strongly believe is the most effective method that can be used to achieve the city's strategic goals. It was the result of the hard work of many dedicated individuals and organizations.

It also recognized some very important, and often overlooked, details in regards to the barriers that many face in the current system. The goal of many small developers or builders is to build affordable, green infill projects, and the proposal laid out a great menu of opportunities to incentivize the type of developments, centered around major transit corridors. By basing it on the traffic corridors, it offered that dual emphasis on development policy and transportation. Two of the major hurdles to this goal are land cost and a potentially cumbersome and expensive review process, and the original proposal effectively address these issues.

Although it is commonly held that these are two important goals, not only for the city but for most Asheville residents, there was substantial public outcry in response to the proposal. Increased density lowers land cost per unit, which in turn lowers price (there is a general 1:5 rule of thumb of improved lot cost to resale value of the construction), but this drew major fire. In response, not only was RS8 removed from the proposal but the corridor was reduced to 1/8 mile.

The staff review component, however, caused an even more adamant response. For developers of this scale, to incur the time and cost involved with a full public review, especially for a small scale project, the risk /reward is just not viable. The architects of the proposal, recognizing this, and attempting to engineer a way to incentivize the type of product and development that is almost universally called for, pushed for a staff review for this small group of projects.

The end result, much like with the Cottage Development code, was a compromise version of the proposal. Unfortunately, the compromises severely limited the use of the proposal and a great opportunity to encourage these small green pocket developments was largely missed.

So I feel the fact that this framework was put forward, and that this many aligned and engaged individuals and organizations are beginning to frame things in this manner, representing the very forward edge of

smart growth policy, our officials again made debilitating compromises that will continue to limit the effectiveness of these measures.

5. What are some of the positive or negative effects of Asheville's zoning regulations?

It is critical to the future of the city to create order, stability and a level playing field for both the citizens and the businesses in the city. I believe zoning is necessary for safety, economic viability and to insure beneficial development over time for the public good.

However, as with many cities across the nation, some of the codes are based on antiquated concepts that may be growing increasingly less applicable in the rapidly changing world. It is a difficult issue, and it is one that seems to draw a lot of public attention, both good and bad. However, we must be careful not to "over-regulate", creating unnecessary costs and complications, raising the cost of housing for all citizens and, in the most extreme scenarios, creating an economic environment that actually drives away growth and business.

I feel that clear, effective zoning regulations are critical to a bountiful and sustainable future for all of Asheville's current and future residents. If selected, I would devote my efforts on the Planning and Zoning Commission to intently study and consider all the varied elements of our zoning strategies and codes with the goal of working with my fellow Commissioners to insure that all the involved parties are treated fairly, and the public good and the future of Asheville are protected in all matters.

Thank you.

David Mosrie