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August 2, 2011

**MAGGIE BURLESON**

City of Asheville  
P.O. Box 7148  
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RE: Asheville Planning & Zoning Commission Application Questions

**MS. BURLESON**, thank you for forwarding to me the five questions that the Asheville City Council has posed to all the applicants for the Asheville Planning & Zoning Commission. The following are my responses:

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

In my thirty years as an Asheville resident, I have seen our city prosper and grow and I want it to continue to do so in thoughtful and sustainable ways. To that end, my vision has been to find opportunities to encourage development and growth, particularly mixed-use, in areas that are best suited for the types of change that can serve and enhance established neighborhoods as well as create new neighborhoods. I have long been a proponent of encouraging this type of development along our city's major transit corridors at scales that are appropriate to the land resources, existing infrastructure, and adjacent, typically, single-family residences. Many of these transit corridors, lined with older single-use strip developments and large, often underutilized, parking lots, hold prime land resources where new mixed-use developments can be encouraged that provide services, employment and resources to surrounding residents as well as homes for those who cannot afford to own or who desire a more urban lifestyle. Encouraging this type of growth, together with improvements in pedestrian and alternative transportation can further enhance the livability of our community. To this end, I have worked to encourage incentives for developers to provide both sustainable and affordable growth and I look forward to seeing these utilized to promote development that can enrich our community.

For more than twenty years, I have been involved both professionally and as a community volunteer in efforts to better fully utilize our riverfront for recreation, business and living. This has been a long community journey that is now beginning to come to fruition. Our riverfront contains a sizeable amount of land that can be utilized to enhance Asheville's livability as well as ultimately its overall economy and its tax base. This area probably best epitomizes Asheville's rich diversity and, as such, there is not a one-size fits all solution to how this area should grow and develop. It is already beginning to develop in "neighborhoods", each with unique characteristics but also sharing roots in sustainability and entrepreneurialism. As we look to the future development of the Wilma Dykeman Riverway and to possible incentives to encourage investment along our riverways, I see this being one of the main areas of growth for Asheville and one that can be a benchmark for environmentally sensitive as well as uniquely creative development.

Finally as someone who has seen and been involved in Asheville's downtown renaissance of the last twenty or so years, I do think we will continue to see more development within the central business district, particularly as the economy improves. For me the challenge will be to continue to preserve what

has uniquely defined us as a community and that has made Asheville, Asheville, while at the same time allowing for new development that can enhance and compliment what we already have and truly cherish.

In all planning for our city's future, we should look to find solutions and opportunities for development that are unique to our needs, our community resources, and our mountain environment and which continue to enrich Asheville for generations to come.

**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.**

In reflecting on this question, I would say that in general Asheville has taken a "positive" approach to growth over the last 5-6 years. We do really need to avoid using the labels of "pro" or "anti" as we discuss Asheville's future. I think that more and more as a community we are looking towards how to direct and encourage the type of growth that improves Asheville for all its sectors. To that end, I believe that in terms of the planning function, Asheville has taken some positive directions that are really more than just the "plan-on-the-shelf" approach, which was much too common in our city's past. Efforts such as the Wilma Dykeman and Downtown Master Plans have laid the foundations for future development, and the community visions these plans established are now being further developed into resources that can be realized and that can guide development as the economy improves. The city has also created development incentives to further Council's goals for more affordable housing and sustainably-built structures and the new Riverfront Commission no doubt will develop yet more incentives that can help direct the type and diversity of growth that the community needs and wants in this area of our city.

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

My approach has always been that the UDO is an accepted, written guide for development, prepared with extensive community input and ultimately approved by City Council and, as such, should be interpreted and applied as written. When this comes in conflict with community goals and desires, then consideration should be given to amending or rewriting appropriate sections of this document through the same process. Thankfully, it has proven to be a dynamic document that evolves over time as Asheville changes and grows, often providing new development tools and options, but it is through approval by City Council that it becomes the basis for guiding Asheville's future.

**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.**

One zoning decision that I agreed with that generated much debate was the Planning & Zoning Commission's approval of MHO's Larchmont Development on the site of the former armory off Merrimon Avenue. This development's adjacency to Merrimon Avenue and its proposed mix of affordable housing and sustainable design were, to me, appropriate to this transit corridor and met current City Council goals. This proposed development was thoughtfully designed, on a pre-developed site, to be reflective of North Asheville's residential aesthetic. It is a great example of adding housing alternatives in an area that bridges a conventional single-family residential neighborhood and a narrow commercial corridor and which is located where jobs, services and resources can easily be provided for those who live there.

Asheville Planning & Zoning Commission faced a real challenge with Frank Howerton's proposed 100-unit apartment development in Kenilworth. This was a case where current zoning did not adequately match the existing land resources and surrounding infrastructure but where the proposed development met the existing UDO requirements. It can be challenging for the Commission when it is faced with a proposal that meets the current rules but knowing full well that the development ultimately is not compatible or appropriate to the surrounding community. Touted as being in-fill housing along a transit corridor, this development was proposed on steep undeveloped land along small winding feeder streets. In this case, the Commission had to uphold the rights of a proposal that met the existing UDO requirements. It ultimately fell to City Council to either agree with the recommendation of the Commission, disagree, or look towards changing the rules currently guiding this type of development. In my previous tenure on the Commission, I always felt that it was my responsibility as a Commissioner to explain to those in attendance my rationale for a decision and what aspects of the UDO guided me to it and, if conflicted, to explain why. Again, the Commission's role is advisory and I always felt that speaking about my rationale not only informed the public but also explained in more detail to City Council the issues we as an advisory body had faced in review of a particularly controversial proposal.

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

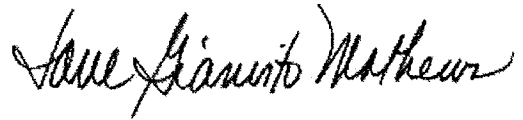
In general, Asheville's development standards and regulations have worked to both preserve the character of Asheville as well as allow for a variety of tools to plan for new growth. Over the years the addition of new tools such as Flexible Development standards, Conditional Use permits, and Alternative Compliance for landscaping have provided options for the development community that did not exist before and in return, the City of Asheville often gains support towards meeting other stated community goals. There has also been a much more coordinated effort by City Planning and other related departmental staff to coordinate with prospective developers and thoughtfully guide what can be seen by some as a complicated process.

Over the years, there has been much debate about allowing the general public to comment on proposed development plans. I do not see this as negatively as some as I believe that open and public debate is part of maintaining an involved and engaged community. Ultimately, the comments of the general public can help shape future land use policy and/or regulations and inform the staff, the Commission, and City Council as to what is working or not in terms of our regulations. However, as previously stated, the UDO in effect is what guides Planning & Zoning decisions at the time of review.

I think for the most part, current zoning regulations have been positive but things can always be improved. Sometimes after living with a change in the regulations, we learn that a specific zoning tool may not serve the intended goals as well as we had hoped. Our community's regulations should be regularly evaluated and, where necessary, changed or revised to better serve the community's needs. In addition, we should be open to, and thoughtfully evaluate, new tools, models, and regulations that help further the mission of the Planning & Zoning Department to "promote the orderly, harmonious use of land and improved quality of life for Asheville's diverse community and future generations".

Thank you Ms. Bureson and please convey my appreciation to the Asheville City Council for their consideration of my application to serve on the Planning & Zoning Commission.

SINCERELY,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Gianvito Mathews". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

JANE GIANVITO MATHEWS, AIA, LEED AP