



PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, March 21, 2023, at 6:00 PM

DRAFT MINUTES

Members Present: Chair Steve Toschi
Commissioner Pugsley
Commissioner Russ Hubbard
Commissioner Charles Castner
Commissioner Ginny Carlson
Commissioner Russ Low

Members Absent: Vice Chair Dan Cary

Staff Present: City Planner Jacob Graichen
Associate Planner Jenny Dimsho
Community Development Admin Assistant Christina Sullivan
Councilor Mark Gundersen

Others: Brady Preheim
Robyn Toschi
Casey McGuirl
Dan Hatfield
Curt Deslatte
Paul Meeuwsen
Keith Meeuwsen

CALL TO ORDER & FLAG SALUTE

TOPICS FROM THE FLOOR (Not on Public Hearing Agenda): Limited to five minutes per topic

Preheim, Brady. Preheim was called to speak. He said he did not think the Joint Planning Commission and City Council went well. He said the Planning Commission did not make a good choice in their Chair selection. He said based on how the City Council responded to the meeting, it was clear to him how the Council felt about this commission and its ability to make thorough decisions. He also said that Chair Toschi should resign.

CONSENT AGENDA

A. Planning Commission Minutes Dated February 16, 2023

Motion: Upon Commissioner Low's motion and Commissioner Carlson's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Draft Minutes dated February 16, 2023. Commissioner Pugsley abstained due to her absence from this meeting. [AYES: Commissioner Carlson, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Hubbard, Commissioner Low; NAYS: None]

B. Planning Commission/City Council Joint Meeting Minutes Dated March 8, 2023

Motion: Upon Commissioner Pugsley's motion and Commissioner Carlson's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Draft Joint Planning Commission & City Council Minutes dated March 8, 2023. Commissioner Castner abstained due to his absence from that meeting. [AYES: Commissioner Carlson, Commissioner Pugsley, Commissioner Hubbard, Commissioner Low; NAYS: None]

PUBLIC HEARING AGENDA (times are earliest start time)

C. 6:05 p.m. Conditional Use Permit & Sensitive Lands Permit at 1810 Old Portland Road – City of St. Helens (Started at 6:05 p.m.)

City Planner presented the staff report dated March 13, 2023. He shared this building was known for a long time as the FARA Building for Boise Cascade. He said in 1973 it was built as a warehouse and sales office. In the 1980s, the building was converted to a recreational facility. In 2015, the City purchased the mill site, including the building. In 2018, the City established the Recreation Facility. It became the secondary recreation center, when the City established the Community Center on Gable Road in 2021 and now it is evolving in to yet another use for the City with this application.

He shared the City would like to add Police Department offices for non-rank and file police staff. . He said the use of Public Safety Facility is a Conditional Use Permit in a Light Industrial zone. He said their current site was crowded and this space would allow them to spread out and buy some time until their new facility was built.

He said they needed to consider two things when looking at approving this use given its location within a 100-year flood area. One would be if this was a substantial improvement. If more than 50 percent of its value is being done on the building, then the Commission would have to apply floodproofing standards. After reviewing the previous recreation improvements and the proposed police improvements,, the total value was easily under the 50-percent threshold. He also said they needed to decide if it was a critical facility. He said because they would not have normal police functions or command and control at this facility (such function would continue at the current police station on S. 13th Street), the use of these offices would not constitute a critical facility.

Graichen said they would need a trash enclosure and an additional ADA space as conditions of approval.

He said because the property is zoned Light Industrial, offices are not allowed unless they were related or incidental to an allowable principal use such as manufacturing facilities. He said offices related to a public entity are fine, but to help protect the zoning's intent in the future, a condition should be added that the proposed office space could be used only by a public entity.

Graichen said he recommended approval with the conditions listed in the staff report.

Commissioner Ginny Carlson asked if this building would be in addition to the other buildings and portables the police already use. Graichen said yes.

In Favor

No one spoke in favor.

Neutral

No one spoke in neutral.

In Opposition

Preheim, Brady. Preheim was called to speak. He said he did not agree with this plan since they were already building a new police station. He said that they can't afford the new building and they should

take this money to remodel their current station and this space for more storage. He was concerned that they would take over this current building and keep it when the new building is built.

Rebuttal

Graichen said they would not be able to use this building in the future as a police station as it undoubtedly sits within the flood plain which is not feasible for a critical facility.

End of Oral Testimony

There were no requests to continue the hearing or leave the record open.

Close of Public Hearing & Record

Deliberations

Commissioner Pugsley asked if the space was minimized to the space proposed so that it meets the criteria. Graichen said the proposed plans would meet the criteria needed. The space proposed was not influenced by any standards.

Commissioner Carlson asked about the intersection and driveway approach spacing and if it currently meets safety standards. Graichen said there are two accesses off Old Portland road and the one closest to Kaster Road does not meet the spacing standards.

There was a discussion about the parking lot and the accesses and how to make them safer for vehicles entering and leaving the space. The Commission agreed there should be a condition of approval added to block off the entrance closest to Kaster Road to improve safety.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Low's motion and Commissioner Pugsley's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Conditional Use Permit as recommended by staff with the additional condition that the access closest to Kaster Road be eliminated. [AYES: Commissioner Pugsley, Commissioner Hubbard, Commissioner Carlson, Commissioner Low, Commissioner Castner; NAYS: None]

Motion: Upon Commissioner Carlson's motion and Commissioner Castner's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Chair to sign the Findings when prepared. [AYES: Commissioner Pugsley, Commissioner Hubbard, Commissioner Carlson, Commissioner Low, Commissioner Castner; NAYS: None]

D. 6:30 p.m. Conditional Use Permit and Variances (x3) at NW Corner of 6th Street and Columbia Blvd – LaGrand Townhomes, LLC (Started at 6:39 p.m.)

City Planner Jacob Graichen presented the staff report dated March 13, 2023. He shared where the property was located. He said the proposal was for a mixed-use building with up to three commercial units and nine residential units and related site improvements.

Graichen mentioned in 2020 the Planning Commission approved a six-lot subdivision for this site, but the applicant did not pursue that and has come back with something different.

Graichen said this property consists of three lots and the building was on one of them and the parking lot was on two of them, more-or-less. He said half of the parking lot was in an R5 zoning area. He also shared that across from the proposed property was the Methodist Church built in 1924 which is one of the City's designated landmarks, an official historic building in town. He did mention it was a tall building as well. He said the site was located at one of only a few non-highway locations where two arterial streets intersect. It is a highly trafficked and visible intersection which serves as a gateway between uptown and downtown.

He discussed the zoning district and the definition of shopping plaza and shopping center. He shared the Mixed Use zoning does not technically allow for the smaller version of the shopping center. He said the Commission had the right to condition that they only have one commercial space to meet the code. But they could also consider the purpose statement of the Mixed Use zoning district allowing the market to decide and whether it mattered that there was one or three units, as proposed. This would be establishing a use precedent.

He said one of the variances was for building height. He said because it was a multifamily building at the maximum allowed height by zoning is 35-feet. If there was no multifamily units in the building, then 45-feet would be allowed in this zoning district. He said the applicant is proposing just under 45-feet.

He said the second Variance was to allow a one-foot setback instead of the required 20-foot setback along Columbia Boulevard. He said if there was no multifamily component, they would be allowed to have a zero-foot setback. He said the prominence of this intersection and bringing the building to the street optimizes the sanctity of the residents who would like their privacy and outdoor space further away from Columbia Boulevard. Moving it forward would allow for that. He said moving the building forward puts the windows closer to the street and sidewalks, so the last variance was for the lower dwelling unit to be one-foot from the walkway instead of the required seven-feet for living room windows.

He discussed the parking required based on the basic standards. He said there would be at least 26 parking spaces required. He said 18 of those would be for the dwelling units and 8 spaces for the remaining commercial spaces. He said 21 parking spaces were currently proposed for off-street parking and that leaves 3 spaces off site for non-residential spaces. He did mention there was on-street parking available off both main streets, which could make up the difference (the extra 5 spaces needed) if the Commission considered and allowed shared parking provisions possible in commercial districts.

Graichen also mentioned there is an outdoor recreational requirement and the landscaping plan did show all the area that was needed. He said if the Commission felt there should be shared outdoor space, the requirement would be at least 1,800 square feet of. He said they could also consider the proximity of public parks one-quarter mile which allows them to exempt this requirement.

Commissioner Castner asked about Vision clearance at the corner of Columbia Blvd. Graichen mentioned the plans show there is a vision clearance triangle built into the design to avoid any visibility issues.

There was a small discussion about the staff report and items proposed by the applicant.

McGuirl, James Casey. Applicant. McGuirl was called to speak. McGuirl is the architect who represents the owner of the property and oversees the design of the project. He thought that the presentation by staff gave a great representation of how the applicant wishes to move forward. He said there were several iterations done to get to this point and there are some financial constraints.. He thought there could be some changes in architecture if they were reasonable requests.

Commissioner Carlson asked if they were doing things to make the design fit into the neighborhood. McGuirl said they did consider different ways of the façade to make it look nice and attractive to future tenants.

Commissioner Hubbard asked about adding more green and landscaping to the Columbia Boulevard side of the proposal. McGuirl said if they push the building back, it would cut into the landscaping for the tenants away from the busy street, but he said it is doable.

There was a small discussion about the type on-street parking.

There was a small discussion about the building height. McGuirl said the height of the building was to give the residential units more of an open feeling and the commercial units to have more space.

Hatfield, Dan. Applicant. Hatfield was called to speak. He said he did not want to do residential-only because there was more opportunity to achieve the maximum density with the Mixed-Use building. He said he had worked with the City multiple times to make this work out. He said he wanted it to be nice for the neighborhood and be a building the city is proud of.

In Favor

No one spoke in favor.

Neutral

Meeuwsen, Paul. Meeuwsen was called to speak. He owns the property adjacent to the proposed application. He asked about the application for variances and if it would affect his property line. Graichen said as property owner to the west, no setback reduction is proposed. Meeuwsen said the building height proposal seemed very high for the neighborhood and wanted to be sure it fit into the area and was aesthetically pleasing when you are driving down Columbia Boulevard.

Meeuwsen, Keith. Meeuwsen was called to speak. He expressed concern about the height and wanted to know if the neighboring property would be allowed to build this tall of a building if the current proposal was allowed. Graichen said it would depend on the zoning and what the other property owner proposed.

In Opposition

Deslatte, Curt. Deslatte lives at 135 N. 6th Street (the property to the north). Deslatte was called to speak. He expressed concern about the ground the building was being placed on. He said it was infilled with questionable things like old cars and he did not think the building would stay standing if the foundation collapsed. He also expressed concern about the number of lanes on the road and the traffic increase. He felt it would be a lot for a residential neighborhood. He was also concerned about the people who could possibly rent these properties.

Rebuttal

Hatfield, Dan. Applicant. He said there would be a soils study done to be sure that the ground they are building on is appropriate to hold the building they plan to construct. He said they also planned to install a storm drain to make sure there was no water runoff that would bother the neighbors. He said he planned to consider design elements to the building to make it look nice and fit into the neighborhood and that it meets all the appropriate zoning requirements.

End of Oral Testimony

There were no requests to continue the hearing or leave the record open.

Close of Public Hearing & Record

Deliberations

There was a small discussion about the environmental soils reports previously done to this property and the neighboring property.

Commissioner Pugsley expressed that the building height proposed was too high and she felt the design was very motel-like for the residential neighborhood. She said she might be able to consider a taller building if the setback was further back off the street.

Commissioner Carlson also agreed the proposed building height was too high for the neighborhood. She said she proposed meeting in the middle with the applicant and offering to agree to a 40-foot maximum height, instead of 45-feet.

Commissioner Hubbard said there was other architecture designs that could be considered in making the building a lower height.

There was a small discussion on the setbacks and the impact on the neighborhood. There was also a small discussion on the parking spots available to tenants and future customers.

There was a discussion about the landscaping and recreational area for the residential units.

Commissioner Pugsley said she agreed that this was the gateway into the Historic Downtown and she wanted to be sure what was placed here was not blight or have the potential of becoming blight..

Motion: Upon Commissioner Carlson's motion and Commissioner Hubbard's second, the Planning Commission approved the Variances (x3) as recommended by staff with the condition that the building height would not exceed 40-feet. [AYES: Commissioner Hubbard, Commissioner Carlson, Commissioner Low, Commissioner Castner; NAYS: Commissioner Pugsley; Motion Passes.]

There was a discussion about requiring some architectural design and historic design standards to the building being proposed so that it would better fit in to the neighborhood.

The Commission discussed having the applicant come back with his final design before applying for a building permit so they could look over it and see if it fits into the neighborhood. Commissioner Pugsley expressed concern that the building would look like the townhomes already being placed around the City by the same applicant. Chair Toschi asked if they are able to review the final plans. Graichen said they could impose a condition that states they would like to see the final design and offer a recommendation to open up the dialogue about building a structure that fits into the neighborhood.

There was another small discussion on the type of building being proposed for this property.

Chair Toschi suggested adding in a condition to require an architectural review of the plans before a building permit was submitted. Commissioner Low and Commissioner Hubbard agreed.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Carlson's motion and Commissioner Castner's second, the Planning Commission approved the Conditional Use Permit as recommended by staff with an added condition that the design be brought back before the Commission for recommendation to ensure it fits into the neighborhood. [AYES: Commissioner Hubbard, Commissioner Carlson, Commissioner Low, Commissioner Castner; NAYS: Commissioner Pugsley. Motion Passes]

Motion: Upon Commissioner Low's motion and Commissioner Hubbard's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Chair to sign the Findings when prepared. [AYES: Commissioner Pugsley, Commissioner Hubbard, Commissioner Carlson, Commissioner Low, Commissioner Castner; NAYS: None]

DISCUSSION ITEMS

E. Renaming of "Mill Street" in the Riverfront District

Graichen talked about the street located in a mid-block segment in the Riverfront District that will connect Strand Street to S. 1st Street. He said it had to be renamed because the street names have to coordinate with 911 and not be similar or have the same name as other streets in the City. Since there is already another Mill Street off N. Vernonia Road, they would need to rename it. He said the appropriate type of street would be "Way". Because of the infrastructure project, the street signs needed to be ordered.

Graichen shared some suggestions to help get the discussion started.

Les Watters shared a presentation on some of the different options that were suggested and the history behind each of those names.

Commissioner Pugsley wanted to share that there were not many streets in St. Helens that were named after women and she hoped to see that change.

The Commission discussed the different names that were suggested and narrowed it down to four names to recommend to Council. The names the Commission recommended in a tie for first places was "Nellie Way" and "Wapama Way". Then "Kaleva Way" and "Keel Way" were close second and third.

PLANNING DIRECTOR DECISIONS (previously e-mailed to the Commission)

- F. Temporary Use Permit at 555 S Columbia River Hwy - Delgato**
- G. Site Design Review Modification at 343 S 1st Street – Lauridsen**

There was no discussion on the Planning Director Decisions.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT ACTIVITY REPORT

H. Planning Department Activity Report – February

Graichen shared some highlights from the report. He said Broadleaf Arbor apartments were starting to finish up and should be a completed project by the end of the year. He also discussed the requirement of a Right-of-Way dedication from the High School for Firlok Park Street. He said it had been in the works for a while but was finally shown on mapping (taxlot) data. He also said the Historical Museum found the plans for the Warrior Rock Lighthouse which would help them in fixing and upgrading the replica of it by the courthouse. He also mentioned that Dairy Queen had finally submitted applications.

Associate Planner Jennifer Dimsho also brought up that there would be a new rendering of the stage in the Columbia View Park. She said the architect took into consideration different comments and feedback from the Planning and Parks Commission. She will email the new rendering out to the Commission when she has it.

PROACTIVE ITEMS

- I. HB 3115**
- J. Architectural Standards**
- K. New Proactive Item Proposals**

The Commission agreed to move these items to the Planning Commission retreat and the next Planning Commission meeting.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION ITEMS

Community Development Admin Assistant Christina Sullivan reminded the Commission about the Annual Boards and Commission Appreciation dinner coming up in April. She reminded them to send in their reservations.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Planning Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 9:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Christina Sullivan
Community Development Administrative Assistant*