



PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, December 10, 2024 at 6:00 PM

DRAFT MINUTES

- Members Present:** Chair Dan Cary
Vice Chair Jennifer Shoemaker
Commissioner David Rosengard
Commissioner Scott Jacobson
Commissioner Charles Castner
Commissioner Brooke Sisco
- Members Absent:** None
- Staff Present:** City Planner Jacob Graichen
Associate Planner Jenny Dimsho
Community Development Admin Assistant Christina Sullivan
City Councilor Mark Gunderson
- Others:** Brady Preheim
Suzie Dahl (ZOOM only)
Jane & Pat Ferry
Ken & Jennifer Bowen
Rein Herman
Sabrina Moore
Todd Jacobson
Matthew Remsberg
Al Petersen
Dan Hatfield
Shauna Harrison
Rick Scholl

6:00 P.M. CALL TO ORDER & FLAG SALUTE

Chair Cary called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Preheim, Brady. Preheim said vacancies on the Planning Commission should be open to new applicants, opposed Diana Weiner's selection to the Commission, and said that the City and Planning Commission should coordinate with contractors to open the completed intersection at 1st Street.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Planning Commission Minutes Dated November 12, 2024

Motion: Upon Commissioner Jacobson's motion and Commissioner Shoemaker's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Draft Minutes dated November 12, 2024, with a change to the

last page regarding Commissioner Cohen. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, NAYS: None]

PUBLIC HEARING AGENDA (times are earliest start time)

- B. 6:00 p.m. Conditional Use Permit at 58646 McNulty Way at the intersection of McNulty Way and Gable Road - Columbia Community Mental Health

Chair Cary opened the Public Hearing at 6:05 pm and confirmed no Commissioners had any ex-parte contacts, conflicts of interest, or bias.

City Planner Graichen presented the staff report, reviewing the components of the requested Conditional Use Permit application, noting a sanitary sewer impact fee would be imposed. He read into the record a letter received from Columbia River Fire & Rescue (CRF&R) after the Staff report was published expressing concerns about the center media proposed on Gable Road which would obstruct visibility and access for emergency vehicles. Staff recommended a simple, two-way, non-barrier turn lane for Gable Road and requested an updated Tree Plan to better identify impacts and approval from the fire marshal on the building identification numbers.

Graichen addressed clarifying questions about improvements related to the two-way, non-barrier turn lane, the date of the wetland delineation, and "sensitive lands" referring to the creek at the south side of the site. He confirmed the proposed development was outside the riparian area and the floodplain, so there were no issues.

Petersen, Al. Applicant. Petersen is the architect representing the applicant. He shared that the creek and wetland were being addressed with the civil engineer and wetland specialist to manage any potential impacts. The wetland was approved by the Department of State Lands (DSL) in early spring. He highlighted the Tree Plan and presented an updated tree survey and requested that "registered landscape architect" be added to the condition requiring a certified arborist to allow them more flexibility.

He noted that CCMH was already connected to city services with an oversized meter and had met the sewer and water requirements for the proposed project and therefore should not be subject to the new sewer connection surcharge. The Applicant agreed to the parking re-striping and requested approval of the site design review and conditional use permit, with the exception of the two items raised. CCMH hoped to start construction next spring.

Jacobson, Todd. Applicant. Jacobson is the executive director of CCMH. He said that contractually, CCMH is required to complete the project by December 31, 2026.

In Favor

No one spoke in favor of the application.

Neutral

No one spoke as neutral testimony.

Opposition

Moore, Sabrina. Moore raised concerns about the limited utility improvements for the community due to the sewer line's inaccessibility from Gable Road, and supported the two-way turn lane to aid emergency responses. She questioned the facility's suitability as a conditional use, the focus on out-of-county clients, and the facility's impact on already strained local services like emergency response and social services, adding that Columbia County's limited job opportunities raised doubts about the effectiveness of client reintegration.

Harrison, Shauna. Harrison cited safety concerns due to the lack of law enforcement, strained local resources, and the community not having a hospital. She noted challenges with wetland mitigation and accessing a viable sewer system and questioned how trees and shade would be preserved. She also raised concerns about Gable Road being overcapacity, safety at McCormick Park, and the community's inability to support vulnerable populations due to limited jobs, medical services, and transportation.

Preheim, Brady. Preheim stated that while the proposed facility meets approval criteria, the community does not want it. The existing Broadleaf Arbor facility is already overwhelming local schools, police, and services. He criticized the facility's focus on serving people from other counties and questioned the adequacy of the sewer system, which was insufficient citywide. He called for denying the conditional use permit until the sewer system is improved and the community has the necessary resources, including staffing and policing, to support additional residents.

Dahl, Suzie. Dahl said sewer capacity was a big issue and that the center median should not have concrete. She expressed concerns about people coming from other counties, noting that many individuals who do not complete detox are often released back into the community, which lacks the necessary services to support them.

City Planner Graichen responded, explaining that the sewer issue is related to citywide infrastructure capacity, not the CCMH site's system or meter. The existing system is above capacity, potentially leading to surcharges, which could result in public health risks. The Code states that development permits may be restricted if sewer deficiencies pose a threat to public safety or violate regulations. Although improvements are anticipated by 2027, the City is evaluating each proposal's impact on the system. He also discussed possible options for extending the sewer line, but noted complications such as crossing a creek, floodplain concerns, and the shallow depth of the current line on Gable Road.

Rebuttal

Petersen, Al. Applicant. Petersen noted he had referenced the wrong maps in his presentation. He explained that top priority improvements in the Wastewater Master Plan regard operations and safety, not capacity. The system that has been serving CCMH since 2005 is adequately sized and has sufficient capacity to support CCMH's expansion, disputing claims that the development would overwhelm the entire sewer system. He also questioned the legality of surcharge fees.

Jacobson, Todd. Applicant. He said that the crisis stabilization and detox center plans were developed collaboratively with law enforcement from Scappoose, St. Helens, the Sheriff's office, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), CRFR, and community justice, all of whom supported the initiatives. The previous detox center closed in 2021 due to staffing losses during the COVID-19 pandemic, and plans are underway to reinstate it at pre-pandemic capacity. Detox is the top request from community partners and services will primarily support Columbia County residents, with some availability for Clatsop and Tillamook counties under the Columbia Pacific Coordinated Care Organization.

Petersen, Al. Applicant. Petersen noted that many homeless individuals in the area are local residents. The proposed CCMH facility aims to help people transition out of homelessness and will also serve as a detox facility. The existing crisis center is an addition to the facility, and its future use remains undecided as it is not part of the current application. Ignoring issues such as homelessness and substance abuse, and claiming they only originate from outside sources, is incorrect.

City Planner Graichen addressed clarifying questions from the Commission about the sewer surcharge fee and feedback regarding the letter from the County Sanitarian Environmental Service Specialist.

End of Oral Testimony

Close of Public Hearing & Record

Deliberations

The Commission decided they would prefer having a certified arborist verses a registered landscape architect. The Commission discussed how it is their role to ensure compliance with ordinances and building codes, while City Council addresses larger social policy issues. They also discussed the sewer surcharge and timing of the Basin 5 improvements, updating ADA parking in the proposal to current standards, and the added benefits of the installing the two-way, non-barrier turn lane.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Rosengard's motion and Commissioner Sisco's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Conditional Use Permit as recommended by staff, replacing the proposed cement barrier/median with a two-way, non-barrier turn lane, and requiring an update to the ADA parking and access to City standards. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, NAYS: None]

Motion: Upon Commissioner Shoemaker's motion and Commissioner Rosengard's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Chair to sign the Findings when prepared. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, NAYS: None]

C. 6:30 p.m. Conditional Use Permit and Variance (x4) at 480 Wyeth Street - Hatfield

Chair Cary opened the Public Hearing at 7:47 p.m. and confirmed no Commissioners had any ex-parte contacts, conflicts of interest, or bias.

Graichen presented the Staff report for the Conditional Use Permit, which would allow the Applicant to rebuild the triplex destroyed in a 2021 fire. He reviewed the history of the site and summarized the applicable criteria and requested variances for parking, exterior elements, lot size, and setbacks. The Planning Commission was asked to focus on building size and parking variances, specifically considering the Fire District's need to access the property from all sides. The site plan in the packet indicated the wrong sidewalk location. The sidewalk was not adjacent to the property line and should be shown closer to the center line of the right-of-way and a few feet away from the property line.

Hatfield, Dan. Applicant. He said his main concern was that the on-street parking be allowed to continue. He explained the reason for the variance was so that the center unit would have a backyard. He stated an on-site parking lot would not work due to storm water issues. In addition, he purchased the property because it had been a triplex in the past and understood the site could be redeveloped with a triplex. On-street parking was prevalent in nearby streets and allowing on-street parking would leave enough room in the right-of-way as demonstrated by the nearby Lutheran Church.

City Planner Graichen confirmed a density variance would allow a triplex onsite since the right-of-way was wider than needed. The area was available but not necessarily within the boundary of the property lines.

In Favor

No one spoke in favor of the application.

Neutral

Ferry, Pat. Ferry lives next door to the subject property on Wyeth Street and was grateful the property was demoed and that the site was being developed. She wanted safety and traffic to be considered during development.

Ferry, Jane. Ferry expressed concerns about parking and confirmed neighborhood residents did park on the gravel. She understood the applicant wished to pave the parking and asked if the oak tree would be removed.

Opposition

Bowen, Ken. He was concerned about the size of the structure being built and the associated traffic and parking. He would like off-street parking provided to avoid residents parking on sidewalks, adding the size of the structure did not feel right for the neighborhood.

Bowen, Jennifer. She was asked to move her RV/trailer after parking it on the street for only a couple days, while other residents left boats and other vehicles parked on the sidewalk for years.

Preheim, Brady. Preheim did not believe it was right to continue to grant variances to the City's ordinances, adding that the applicant should build to the City's existing Code. A triplex would not fit in the neighborhood so the applicant should build a duplex.

Rebuttal

Hatfield, Dan. He clarified the oak tree would not be removed. He replied that residents would not be permitted to park boats or trailers on the street and that would not change if on-street parking was approved for his application. He confirmed that if on-site parking was required, it was possible to provide some parking on the northwest corner of the property on 5th Street.

End of Oral Testimony

Close of Public Hearing & Record

Deliberations

The Commission discussed concerns about parking and the requested parking variance noting a recently denied project with a similar request. They had concerns about the proposed building's size on the small lot and consideration of the other requested variances. The Commission agreed to not approve the reduced yard variance as suggested by Staff until revised plans were presented.

Vice Chair Shoemaker said she was opposed to the parking variance. Commissioner Rosengard agreed that the off-street parking was necessary. Commissioner Jacobson pointed out that he could build a duplex outright. Vice Chair Shoemaker said these were all self-imposed issues and that would not allow for approval.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Rosengard's motion and Commissioner Shoemaker's second, the Planning Commission unanimously denied all applications. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, NAYS: None]

Motion: Upon Commissioner Sisco's motion and Commissioner Shoemaker's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Chair to sign the Findings when prepared. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, NAYS: None]

D. 8:30 p.m. Variance (x2) at S. 6th Street - Scholl

Chair Cary opened the Public Hearing at 8:35 p.m. Commissioner Sisco declared she owned property on S 6th Street down the road from the subject property, but it would not bias her decision.

Associate Planner Dimsho presented the staff report, providing background on the property's zoning and history, summarizing the requested front setback and side setback variances. The flag-lot property was very steep in some areas, with slopes greater than 25 percent according to a topography survey provided by the applicant. The topography challenges were the main reason for the requested variances. Approval of the requested variances would also enable the applicant to provide parking and mitigate the impact to trees along the steep slope. Staff recommended that off-street parking requirements be met as well as the other conditions of approval if the Commission approved the application.

She addressed questions, noting flag lots were treated differently in the Code and had larger setback requirements. She confirmed the lot had double frontage on S. 5th and S. 6th streets and access to the lot would be from 6th Street. She said that the requested 10-foot setback was unlikely to cause any hardship since the property to the north was undeveloped.

Scholl, Rick. Applicant. He described creating the flag lot which made development easier and noted he had selected affordable, 1,387 square foot, three-bedroom, two-bath houses for the lots. He added the City right-of-way was about 32 feet from the street with the 18-foot setback requirement for one house. He confirmed there were no other developed lots adjacent to the property on the S. 5th Street side.

Associate Planner Dimsho confirmed the Fire Department would have been notified of the flag lot during the lot line adjustment process and had the opportunity to provide feedback at that time. If the driveway was longer than 150 feet, then a turnaround or sprinklers were needed, but the lane was 100 feet.

In Favor

No one spoke in favor of the application.

Neutral

No one provided neutral testimony.

Opposition

No one spoke in opposition of the application.

End of Oral Testimony

Close of Public Hearing & Record

Deliberations

Commissioners discussed the request and agreed it was reasonable.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Jacobson’s motion and Commissioner Rosengard’s second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the two Variance requests as recommended by staff. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, NAYS: None]

Motion: Upon Commissioner Shoemaker’s motion and Commissioner Sisco’s second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Chair to sign the Findings when prepared. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, NAYS: None]

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- E. Planning Commission Vacancy Interviews

- 7:30 p.m. Reid Herman

- 7:50 p.m. Diana Weiner

Commissioner Shoemaker explained why the interview process was being done publicly.

Mr. Graichen noted vacancies needed to be filled for Chair Cary, whose term was expiring and for Commissioner Carlson who resigned on Friday. He updated the Commission of the status of the applications received, noting that two recently received would be considered along with any others received during the next advertising period for Commissioner Carlson’s position.

Commissioner Jacobson recused himself from the proceedings, citing his position as Chair of the Parks Commission on which the applicant, Reid Herman, served.

Reid Herman introduced himself and provided some professional and personal information. He wanted to be sure the Commission did not feel his work commitments would conflict with the position and noted that if appointed to the Planning Commission, he would retire from the Parks Commission.

City Planner Graichen said there were examples of one person serving on multiple committees.

Mr. Herman responded to questions from Commissioners as follows:

- The waterfront in St. Helens had potential to thrive and he wanted to be a part of helping to guide positive change in the community. He hoped to realize those changes while keeping the area's slower pace. St. Helens should not become Portland.
- There were spaces in the city where new businesses could open while the St. Helens maintained its small-town feel. He supported historic preservation where possible.
- While he had some experience with commercial property from working with Les Schwab, he was not familiar with the rules and terms regarding property and land use.
- He hoped to make a lasting mark or contribution to the community as his legacy. He would like his son to be able to point to something that he was part of helping to develop.
- Being left-handed in a right-handed world helped Mr. Herman to make unique contributions and solve problems in a different way. He tried to find solutions to all challenges and look at the bigger picture, while listening to different viewpoints. He hoped to listen to opposing viewpoints in the community and would invite people in the community to come to the Planning Commission.
- He indicated he would like to learn the ropes and acclimate to the Planning Commission before taking on a leadership role like the Chair position.
- He acknowledged that while his current work schedule was temporarily demanding, this was not typical. He understood the Planning Commission role would require more than a monthly hour commitment and expressed his willingness to dedicate the necessary time to review meeting materials thoroughly.

Commissioners reviewed next steps with Staff and agreed the vacancy did not need to be readvertised to open the applicant pool again for Dan Cary's soon-to-be vacant position.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Castner's motion and Commissioner Rosengard's second, the Planning Commission recommended that the Council approve the appointment of Reid Herman to the Planning Commission. [AYES: Commissioner Sisco, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, NAYS: Vice Chair Shoemaker] Motion carries.

F. Update to Historic Resource Review at 240 Strand Street - Columbia County Clocktower

Associate Planner Dimsho provided background on the clocktower, reminding that a year ago the Commissioners approved flexibility on materials for restoration work with the condition that the color, texture, and design matched. Under the proposed design, the County would purchase a prefabricated, high-density polyurethane baluster. Pacific Stainless would then fabricate a top and bottom railing to fit the prefabricated baluster.

County Commissioner Garrett explained the metal option for the handrail would last longer than a wood replacement. All items would be powder-coated white finish to match the original and installed in a way that softened the shadow lines. He expressed confidence in the new material choice and asked for the Planning Commission's approval so the design could be presented to County Commissioners.

After discussion, Commissioners agreed to approve the metal option.

G. Planning Department Semi-Annual Report

The Commission agreed to review the Planning Department Semi-Annual Report given to City Council during their November 20 meeting.

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

- H. Temporary Sign Permit at 2100 Block of Columbia Blvd - Merchants Toy N Joy
- I. Site Development Review (Scenic Resource) at 405 Riverside Drive - Matt Olson
- J. Conditional Use Permit (Minor) at 1601 Railroad Avenue - Michael Russell
- K. Extension of Time for SUB.1.22 at the current northern termini of N 8th, 9th, and 10th Streets lying north of Deer Island Road; also Tract A and Lot 1 of the Elks Subdivision located along Madrona Court; Tax Assessor Map No. 5N1W-33-00700 and 5N1W-33AD-1900 & 1901 - North 8th Street, LLC
- L. Sign Permit (x2) at 58791 S Columbia River Hwy - ProntoSigns, LLC
- M. Temporary Use Permit at 305 S Columbia River Hwy - Breslin Properties

Chair Cary asked about the Director’s decision on 1645 Railroad Avenue. City Planner Graichen explained the City had accepted the floodplain permit due to new floodplain rules that considered the Endangered Species Act and no net loss of fish habitat findings, and the City acted to approve the permit before the new rules. The Applicant will still need to complete wetland delineations and comply with all City wetland rules.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT ACTIVITY REPORT

- N. Planning Department Activity Report - November

PROACTIVE ITEMS

- O. Architectural Standards
- P. Vacant Storefronts
- Q. The Plaza Square

There was no discussion of the proactive items.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION ITEMS

Vice Chair Shoemaker wished Christina Sullivan good luck and farewell.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Planning Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 10:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Jennifer Dimsho
Associate Planner*