

**CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS
PLANNING BOARD REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
HELD JULY 12TH, 2022**

REGULAR MEETING – 6:30 PM.

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL:

Chairman Vukonich called Meeting to order at 6:31 PM

PRESENT: Vukonich, Nelson, Smith, Byrd-Rinck, Lundgren, Shepard, Duffy, Kavanagh, Singer

ABSENT: None

Also present: City Manager Susan Nicosia, Contract Planner Eric Mulcahy, Fire Chief Karl Weeks, Sergeant Sean Murphy and Public Works/GIS Technician Caleb Sobczak, City Attorney Justin Breck (ZOOM).

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Duffy noted a correction to the second paragraph of the CUP Permit hearing on page 1; Duffy was referenced as the Chairman. Nicosia said the correction is noted.

Motion made by Shepard to approve the May 10th, 2022 minutes as corrected, seconded by Duffy and the motion carried with all present voting Aye.

VISITOR OR PUBLIC COMMENT: (An opportunity for the Public to comment on any items not on tonight's agenda)

Chris Hartzell, PO Box 2354, Kalispell MT 59903, said the following comments are not specific to tonight's agenda items. He said would be affected by any development. Mr. Hartzell believes approving as much development as possible leads to problems in budgeting and a reduction in the quality of life of residents. He said he has seen this in Whitefish where they had to implement water rationing and Kalispell is in a similar situation. Planning should include water usage, healthcare employee numbers, internet bandwidth, school space, a capable electric grid, a capable distribution system, and road quality to handle every possible resident if every property was developed under the current planned development. Approving development beyond capacity looks to cost 3-5 dollars for every 1 dollar collected. Hartzell said it is his opinion that the City of Columbia Falls approved the Resort Tax based on call volume and with zoning changes will take the city backwards.

Cathy Arvidson, 7123 Highway 2 E Columbia Falls, referred to the 2009 Planning Board Handbook page 36 item number 4, questioning the validity or legality of this meeting referencing "The public hearing should be carefully planned by the board and staff. Rooms should be reserved in an appropriate building that provides handicap accessibility, adequate seating, and audio/visual equipment." A recording should be viewable by the Board and the audience and she is sure the people in the hallway cannot hear the meeting.

Mary Flowers representing Citizens for a Better Flathead via Zoom, agreed with Ms. Arvidson regarding the Planning Handbook. Ms. Flowers recommends postponing the meeting to a future date. Flowers suggested considering the guidelines and keep the hearing open for an additional meeting and comments.

Dave Renfrow, 1150 Nucleus Ave., said this is the public process; the Growth Policy has been there for over 20 years. He wants to keep the meeting civil; this is a kind town and you will be heard. He stated that there are a couple things he is disappointed in and a couple things he is happy with. He said a community has to use clever planning to create

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affordable homes. Mr. Renfrow said affordable homes seem to be the common theme among the social media posts. He loathes the social media posts that say that the local government is corrupt and is taking money from the developers.

Chairman Vukonich asked staff about the comments received about postponing the meeting. Contract Planner Eric Mulcahy responded saying that the Board can postpone the meeting until the next Planning Board meeting to republish the Public Hearing and find a larger venue. He also reminded the Board that there is another agenda item that is not controversial and is scheduled before the River Highlands Hearing. Chairman Vukonich called a brief recess to establish order.

Chairman Vukonich called the meeting back to order. He entertained a motion from the Board to postpone the River Highlands project to the next Planning Board meeting to accommodate the unanticipated attendance.

Motion was made by Shepard and seconded by Kavanagh and the motion carried with all present voting in favor of the motion. Chairman Vukonich noted that the River Highlands Public Hearings will be postponed until August 9th, 2022, location to be determined.

Chairman Vukonich called for another short recess to give the public time to clear the room before proceeding.

PUBLIC HEARINGS AND ACTION:

Chairman Vukonich read the notice:

Request for a Zoning Map Amendment in the Columbia Falls Planning Jurisdiction:

Mick Ruis is requesting a zoning map amendment on behalf of HC 246 LLC in the Columbia Falls Zoning Jurisdiction. The property is located at 230 Highway 2 East in Columbia Falls and is described as Assessor's Tracts 2E, 2EC, 4EA, 4EAA and 4E Section 17, Township 30 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., Flathead County. The property is currently zoned CB-1 (Neighborhood Business) and the applicant is proposing CB-2 (General Business).

Contract Planner Eric Mulcahy presented Staff Report CZC-22-02. The property is currently zoned CB-1 which does not allow for hotels or motels. The site has been a hotel and restaurant since the 1970's. The applicant is looking to construct a new hotel on the site. The proposed change from a Neighborhood Business zone to a General Business zone complies with all the 12 statutory criteria. There should be no negative impact associated with the change and Staff recommends approval for the Zone Change.

Lundgren notified the Board that he will be abstaining from voting on this agenda item.

Shepard asked if the previous use as a hotel was illegal the whole time. Mulcahy stated that it was a grandfathered use. Kavanagh wanted clarification on the rezoning and what is the right of way of the avenue. City Manager Susan Nicosia replied it is 70 feet (Correction: right of way is 60 feet to the south of Highway 2 E and 70 feet to the north of Highway 2 E). Duffy stated that he has no idea of the scope of this hotel project and would like to know more before he makes a decision on the zone change. Mulcahy answered there is a PUD application submitted that will be considered by the Board in the future but reminded the Board that they are deciding tonight if this area is appropriate for CB-2 (General Business).

Chairman Vukonich asked the applicants or representatives to speak to the Board at 7:02 PM.

Bob Erikson, 2250 Highway 93 S, with Jackola Engineering reported he does not have a presentation and stated that staff did a good job with their report but he is available to answer any questions the Board may have. Singer asked if the hotel is going out and housing going in. Bob answered that the existing hotel would be used as housing.

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Mick Ruis, 1500 North Fork Road, stated that they bought the existing motel to use as housing for workers and is hoping to build a new hotel closer to Highway 2. The new hotel will not be used as housing.

No further questions were presented to the applicant.

Chairman Vukonich opened the Public Hearing for this agenda item at 7:06 PM

Andrea Getts, 336 2nd St E. Airbnb's have become an issue in Columbia Falls because there are no hotels. She does not see an issue with adding another hotel. It is something that we need to consider to discourage Airbnb's.

Laurie Gay, 65 1st St., Columbia Falls. Said she is concerned about the height and other design of the hotel. Ms. Gay believes the community is unhappy with the tall buildings that are currently going up. She is not necessarily opposed to the hotel but believes community input needs to be taken in to consideration. She is also concerned about what will happen to the temporary housing when the new building is finished.

Tony Corpron, 89 Great Bear Ln. said he has seen a lot of sprawl recently. He wants to see building within city limits and does not want to see farmland taken away. He does not have a problem with the hotel going in along highway 2, nor does he have a problem with the apartments being built in town.

Chairman Vukonich closed the Public Hearing at 7:12 PM, noting that the Board had received 3 written comments in the packet on this item.

Motion made by Duffy to Adopt Staff Report CZC-22-02 as Findings of Fact. Seconded by Shepard.

Duffy commented that repurposing of the old hotel and gaining a new hotel doesn't seem to have any interference with Highway 2 or any other problems with amenities. He does not see a negative side of it. Shepard agrees with Duffy, we have to maximize what we do within the City.

Roll call vote to Adopt Staff Report CZC-22-02 as Findings of Fact:

AYES: Vukonich, Nelson, Smith, Byrd-Rinck, Shepard, Duffy, Kavanagh, Singer. NOES: None. ABSENT: None. ABSTAINED: Lundgren.

Motion made by Shepard to recommend approval the Zone Change to City Council, seconded by Singer.

Roll call vote on the motion to recommend approval:

AYES: Vukonich, Nelson, Smith, Byrd-Rinck, Shepard, Duffy, Kavanagh, Singer. NOES: None. ABSENT: None. ABSTAINED: Lundgren.

ADJOURNMENT – Meeting duly adjourned at 7:18 PM

Chairman

Attest:

Public Works/GIS Technician