

**CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS  
PLANNING BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
HELD MARCH 15<sup>TH</sup>, 2022**

**REGULAR MEETING – 6:30PM.**

**CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL:** Vukonich called Meeting to order at 6:30 PM

**PRESENT**

Vukonich  
Smith  
Byrd-Rinck  
Lundgren  
Shepard  
Duffy  
Kavanagh

**ABSENT**

Nelson  
Singer

Also present: Contract Planner Eric Mulcahy, City Manager/Zoning Administrator Susan Nicosia, and City Attorney Justin Breck (Via ZOOM)

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Approval of February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022 Regular Meeting Minutes

Motion made by Kavanagh to approve the February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022 minutes as presented, Seconded by Lundgren. Motion carried with all those present voting in favor: Vukonich, Smith, Byrd-Rinck, Lundgren, Shepard, Duffy, Kavanagh.

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

No comments.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS AND ACTION:**

The applicant, Clark W Griz LLC is requesting Preliminary Plat approval to construct a 10 space RV Park for property at 201 Highway 2 East, Columbia Falls. The property is zoned CB-2 (General Business) which allow RV Parks as a permitted use. The proposed RV Park is adjacent to the Columbia Falls RV Park. The property is described as Lot 3 of the D & G Subdivision in Section 8, Township 30 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., Flathead County.

Planner Eric Mulcahy presented the preliminary plat staff report, CPP-22-01 stating that this RV park would not function like a normal RV park. It would be more like a hotel with customers renting RVs owned by the applicant that are permanently placed on the property. It is zoned CB-2 with some Light Industrial uses close by such as a cabinet shop and Perfect Cuts butcher shop adjacent to this property. The proposal put forward meets all conditions except parking where they are asking for a variance to the required 2 parking spaces per unit. The applicants want to have 1.5 parking spaces per unit since customers would not be pulling in an RV. Eric states that the 1.5 spaces per unit seems adequate because hotels require 1 space per unit so this would most likely provide more parking than a typical hotel. Public Works and the Fire Chief have gone through a site review of this property and they are satisfied with their design. Board Member

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Kavanagh had a question that if the applicant decided to not use trailers and instead used small homes would they have to go back through the application process. Planner Eric Mulcahy answered yes that would trigger another review. This change to small dwellings would not necessarily require that they go through a full subdivision review and would instead probably be an administrative review performed by the city. Shepard was wondering if there was any public comment. City Manager Susan Nicosia stated that there was no comment.

Chairman Vukonich opened the public hearing at 6:39 pm.

Kelly Whitman, 1138 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave, stated that he owns a manufacturing business on the east side of the applicant's property. He has no problem with this project, his concern is about residential uses close to his manufacturing business increasing. He says the expectations can be different than reality and what they believe to be a peaceful Montana experience could turn out to be noisy. Some of the new trailers are very close to his dust collection system. He works a lot of hours and his business produces a good amount of dust and noise. He says that the applicants should come by during business hours and hear the amount of noise and see the dust generated. In the past he has done a lot to mitigate these problems with the owner of Columbia Falls RV Park such as building a fence and planting trees. He wants to work together with the applicants to help with his concern.

Tanya Bingham, 623 Woodland Place, Whitefish, stated that she is one of the owners of this property and an applicant for this proposal. Ms. Bingham is aware of the fact there is an industrial sawmill close by as well as the noise and dust generation of said business. She intended to talk with Kelly about mitigating the noise and dust by building a higher fence and planting trees. They want to create a large green space that is a good experience for tourists where they are separated from other people and have the option to rent a retro bike to head into town to go eat dinner at one of the local restaurants. The applicants are already builders in the valley and were hoping this would be a good side business that they could eventually be primarily managing. They want to be good neighbors and they want to work through these concerns they just have not had a chance to speak with their neighbors yet. Inside of the trailer that is closest to this industrial saw mill they cannot hear any significant noise. For the most part this RV park is a place people would be hanging out in the evenings not in the middle of the day since they will be at the river, the park or enjoying other activities. Chairman Vukonich noted that staff did not mention anything about fencing. Susan Nicosia stated that fencing is a permitted use and is addressed in zoning. The applicants were thinking that an 8-foot fence would be more suitable for dust and noise mitigation. They are planning to add lots of landscaping and trees. They will be removing the existing trees since they are not suitable for landscape and will eat up everything underground. The trees they plant will be native and just as large as the trees they will be removing. Board Member Kavanagh had a question about whether this facility would be seasonal or year-round. Tanya was not sure yet if they would only be seasonal or year-round, the trailers will be insulated and skirted but water is hard to keep from freezing in RVs. She then addressed the reason for 1.5 parking spots. Tanya stated the reasoning for that decision was limiting the amount of gravel and asphalt in the RV park to provide a larger area for landscaping.

Planner Eric Mulcahy clarified the earlier fencing question by stating that the fencing section of the zoning code allows a fence up to 8 feet tall for security reasons or in this case to mitigate industrial use. No regulations will have to be changed for it. Chairman Vukonich asked if they planned on putting trees in-front of the fence. Ms. Bingham stated that yes, they would be planting trees in-front of the fence but they don't want an 8-foot fence all along the entire side. They would want to stagger it and have it at its tallest in the spot where there is the most dust.

Board Member Smith made a motion to adopt Staff Report CPP-22-01 as findings of fact and it was seconded by Board Member Shepard. Discussion of the proposal was then opened. Shepard stated that the area seems to have become an RV Mecca. Traffic would not be negatively influenced by this proposal since people who do not know how to drive RVs would not be taking them to this property. Board Member Duffy was wondering if there was any chance of them building a secondary entrance. Planner Eric Mulcahy stated that the property does not abut 3<sup>rd</sup> St. E so they would have to buy property to create a second entrance. Kavanagh stated that the site plan is difficult to see in the packet and he could not determine the depth of the parking bays. He further stated that the standard 20ft depth could easily encroach

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on the 16ft road width to accommodate a fire truck. Planner Eric Mulcahy stated that that is the standard width for the parking space and the road. Kavanagh is concerned with the single 16-foot-wide entrance and the parking of large vehicles with bike racks. Chairman Vukonich was wondering where snow would be plowed to on this property. Eric stated that they had not reviewed this aspect but some would be stored on-site and they would most likely have to haul some away, if they were operating in the winter. Mulcahy stated again that the Fire Department did look at this property and they found it satisfactory. Chairman Vukonich wondered if there was time for a meeting with the applicant to clarify this parking and fire problem before this proposal is presented to the City Council. Eric stated that there would be time but he believes the parking spaces are an adequate depth. Ms. Bingham stated that the concern is a valid point about the depth of the parking and they have plenty of space to address this point and she can look into that with Eric Mulcahy and possibly stagger them to create a deeper parking space. Mulcahy will amend language in staff report for Council. Kavanagh was curious about the fire pit location and if there was a fire suppression plan and equipment near the site. Eric Mulcahy stated that the Public Works review will address these concerns and will discuss a location of a future fire hydrant.

A roll call vote was performed to approve Staff Report CPP-22-01 as Findings of Fact:

Voting Yea: Vukonich, Smith, Byrd-Rinck, Lundgren, Shepard, Duffy, Kavanagh

Voting Nay: None

A motion to Recommend Approval of Preliminary Plat to City Council was presented by Byrd-Rinck and was seconded by Lundgren, a roll call vote followed:

Voting Yea: Vukonich, Smith, Byrd-Rinck, Lundgren, Shepard, Duffy, Kavanagh

Voting Nay: None

**ADJOURNMENT** – A motion to adjourn was presented by Shepard and seconded by Smith, all present voted in favor of adjournment, **Meeting duly adjourned at 7:13 PM**

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Chairman

Attest:

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Public Works Clerk