

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL:

Smith called Meeting to order at 6:32 PM

PRESENT

Smith, Nelson, Byrd-Rinck, Lundgren, Shepard (via Zoom), Singer (via Zoom)

ABSENT

Vukonich, Duffy, Kavanagh

Also present: City Manager Susan Nicosia, Contract Planner Eric Mulcahy, City Attorney Justin Breck, Public Works Clerk/GIS Technician Caleb Sobczak

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Approval of August 9th, 2022 Regular Meeting Minutes

Motion made by Nelson to approve the August 9th, 2022 minutes as presented, Seconded by Lundgren. Motion carried with all present voting Aye: Smith, Nelson, Byrd-Rinck, Lundgren, Shepard, Singer

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

No public comment.

PUBLIC HEARINGS AND ACTION:

Acting Chairman Smith read the Planned Unit Development hearing notice: Mick Ruis is requesting a Planned Unit Development 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 Tract 1 of COS No. 3040 and Certificate of Survey No. 3778 all in Section 17, Township 30 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., Flathead County. The applicant is proposing to construct a four story 65-unit hotel and is requesting the PUD in order to exceed the 45-foot height limit by five feet and reduce the landscape provisions of the large building and PUD standards.

Contract Planner Eric Mulcahy presented Staff Report # CPUD-22-03 to the Board reviewing each of the Findings of Fact. Mulcahy noted that the applicant was requesting two deviations: 45' Height to 50' to allow for roof articulation and Perimeter landscape buffering reduction from 10' to 3'. The Staff report recommended approval of the height deviation but not the landscaping deviation. Staff recommended approval of the PUD with 11 Conditions.

Acting Chairman Smith asked the Board if they had any questions for staff. Shepard had a question for staff wondering how long Columbia Falls has had a height restriction. Staff answered that the first regulations are referenced in 1955 but the current regulations have been in place since 1989. Mulcahy noted that height limits have since increased in Whitefish and Kalispell with the addition of equipment such as ladder trucks, fire sprinkling and modern building materials.

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Smith asked how many parking spaces are provided. Mulcahy noted that the applicant is proposing 68 parking spaces which comply with the parking requirements for the hotel. Smith also wondered if these will be long term rentals. Eric Mulcahy answered that it is a hotel so they will be short term rentals.

Byrd-Rinck asked if this could be considered a VRBO. Mulcahy answered no, it is a hotel it is intended to operate like other hotels.

Lundgren asked how many parking spaces we normally require. Mulcahy answered 1 space per unit and 1 space per 2 employees on shift.

Singer, how large are the units? Mulcahy, mostly 1-bedroom but there are 2-bedroom units. The applicant can answer that question better.

Acting Chairman Smith asked if the applicant wished to report to the Board at 6:49 PM. Shane Jackola with Jackola Engineering stated he was present to represent the applicant. He stated that they are in agreement with staff's recommendations.

Acting Chairman Smith asked if the Board had any questions for the applicant. Singer asked her original questions on what size are the units. Mr. Jackola stated that they are mostly studios with a few 1-bedroom units and a handful of 2-bedroom units. All units are extended stay units and have a kitchenette in the room. Singer asked if there will be an office on site like a hotel lobby check-in. Yes, there will be a drop-off, a lobby, a check-in, a fitness room and laundry just like a regular hotel. Singer, remembers reading that there will be a continental style breakfast. To Mr. Jackola's knowledge the applicant is not committed to serving breakfast, the intent is for people to go out to eat or use the kitchenettes. Singer asked if there are elevators. Jackola indicated that there is one elevator in the building. Singer wondered if the elevator is the reason, they are asking for the extra 5 feet of height. Mr. Jackola said yes, with an elevator you need to have an area of refuge on the top for anyone working on the elevator, this is part of the reason. The other part of the height increase is it allows them to articulate the roof line instead of just a flat roof.

No other questions were asked of the applicant's technical representative.

Acting Chairman Smith opened the Public Hearing at 6:53 PM.

Jana Iverson, 412 2nd Avenue W, Columbia Falls. She stated that she was under the assumption that this was an apartment building not a hotel due to the newspaper article. Mulcahy said that he does not know what was in the newspaper but the application that was submitted said hotel as well as the staff report.

Hannah Hill, 1013 E 7th Street, Whitefish, representing the owner, stated that the applicant is proposing a hotel. Daily Interlake noted that Ruis would be offering extended work-force housing if needed, for traveling nurses or teachers for example, and that is why they wanted to put kitchenettes in; it will be built and operated as a hotel. Lundgren noted that the original hotel is going to be used for employee housing and the new project has always been and will be a hotel. Mulcahy said that the applicant verified that they are using it for their workers but it is still a hotel and will operate it as one.

Lori Gaye, 674 12th Avenue WN, Columbia Falls. Question regarding traveling nurses and teachers staying there, it is not a hotel it is long-term housing needs, conflicting with the hotel. Mulcahy answered that in any hotel there are no regulations that specify length of stay or that customers can't stay for longer periods. Mulcahy noted that there are hotels all over the Flathead that rent out for longer periods but it is still a hotel and operates as one.

Vicki Brown 385 Badrock Drive, Columbia Falls. Stated that she feels deceived by this application as she was at the July meeting where the zoning change was requested and this 65-unit hotel is more than she contemplated. Understands the need for a hotel and understands that the zoning allows for a hotel but it seems like there is always a request for variances. Zoning parameters are there for a reason and planning should look

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at the planned structures so that they fit. This planned structure does not, stop approving variances. Approve this building only when it conforms to zoning parameters.

Will Hammerquist, 57 Cedar Pointe Loop, Columbia Falls. Everything is coming in with a variance. Spends a lot of time at the adjacent park and does not want people throwing rooftop parties when he is there with his kids. The parking does not add up when some rooms are double rooms, employee parking was not included. Pedestrian issue, needs overpass for pedestrians to get across Highway 2. Sees this as a degradation to Marantette Park, everyone will just use the park. T

Debbie Evans, 1206 2nd Avenue W, Columbia Falls. Opposes the asking of variances. Lives by Cedar Creek Lodge and they get a lot of human traffic enjoying the river. A lot of these people are under the influence and they could go into the park where the kids are and she does not like that. Wondering if this will turn into a permanent residence later on.

Lori Gaye, 674 12th Avenue WN, Columbia Falls. Curious in the last 5 years have the number of variance requests increased? City Attorney Justin Breck answered no they have not increased. Ms. Gaye also wondered why have the standards and rules if they are never going to enforce them? Breck answered that this is what the due process is for; variances are allowed if approved by the board. Ms. Gaye stated that it seems that the plans are approved with little variances and as they proceed more variances come in. Variances seem to be getting bigger with every build. Understands there has to be growth but we are losing the small-town spirit.

Rick Burrell, 117 Larch Hill Drive, Columbia Falls. The proposed hotel does not fit in to the surroundings. There will be more than 1 vehicle per unit especially if they are long-term. Wants to see the current Ruis project finished before another is started. Opposed to the current plan, it needs to be scaled down. It will start out as one thing and will change to something else.

Clarence Taber, 24 Taber Lane, Columbia Falls. Does this building front Highway 2? Mulcahy answered yes. Taber, is it within city limits? Mulcahy, yes. Taber, does it have a basement of any kind? Mulcahy, not on the plans. Taber, the old restaurant had a basement. Taber, does the back of the building face the west? Breck requested that Mr. Taber address his comments to the Board as we are in the middle of a public hearing. Nelson answered that the west side of the building is the back. Taber stated that he would like to see it front the highway so you do not block the view of the mountains.

Judy Del Perry, 1425 Grove Street, Columbia Falls. It will be almost impossible to get out of Highway 2 especially in tourist season. With the county growing and more tourists traffic is getting worse. With variances the parking lot will be 3 feet from her neighbor's house.

Jana Iverson, 412 2nd Avenue W, Columbia Falls. Columbia Falls being called little Whitefish or Helena. This should show the council something of what the people feel. A 4-story building there is a waste and he will flip it. Reconsider this proposal.

Judy Del Perry, 1425 Grove Street, Columbia Falls. Staff is not agreeing with landscape variance then there would not be enough parking area.

Clarence Taber, 24 Taber Lane, Columbia Falls. Could favor this if the building could front the highway, stay within required heights and could put a basement in so it is not as tall.

Acting Chairman Smith closed the Public Hearing at 7:19 PM

Nelson question for City Manager Susan Nicosia with the resort taxes every property owner in Columbia Falls would be getting a tax refund? Nicosia answered in the affirmative.

Chris Peterson, 80 13th St E, Columbia Falls. Not opposed to hotel but is making a proposal that the landscaping have a buffer of trees so when you are at the Veterans' Wall you are not looking into the windows of a hotel.

His suggestion is that you require some sort of a buffer between the hotel and Highway 2 so we can extend those trees out.

Lundgren made a motion for an amendment that they require 10 more parking spaces for employees. Mulcahy answered that the Board does not have the ability to do that as the applicant is meeting the hotel parking standards and the Board cannot require them to have more parking than required in the regulations.

Shepard proposed a motion to amend the Conditions to require a buffer of trees on the west side of the building to the north of the existing ponderosas that extends the entire length of the back of the building. Mulcahy stated that this can be done by the Board. You can add additional buffering or landscaping. If you follow the recommendation to require the 15% of landscaping, the owner will have to shrink the building to accommodate the additional 7.5%. Motion seconded by Nelson. Motion carried with voice vote, all voting aye.

Motion made by Byrd-Rinck to adopt Staff Report # CPUD-22-03 as Findings of Fact with amendment. Seconded by Shepard. A roll call vote was performed. Ayes: Nelson, Lundgren, Shepard, Singer. Nays: Smith, Byrd-Rinck. Absent: Vukonich, Duffy, Kavanagh. Motion passes with a 4 to 2 vote.

Motion made to recommend approval of PUD with 12 conditions to City Council by Nelson. Seconded by Lundgren. A roll call vote was performed Ayes: Nelson, Lundgren, Shepard, Singer. Nays: Smith, Byrd-Rinck. Absent: Vukonich, Duffy, Kavanagh. Motion passes with a 4 to 2 vote.

ADJOURNMENT – Meeting duly adjourned at 7:30 PM

Chairman

Attest:

Public Works Clerk