

**CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
HELD MAY 8, 2025**

REGULAR MEETING – 6:00 PM.

Fisher called Meeting to order at 6 PM

PRESENT: President Fisher, Commissioner Kavanagh, Commissioner Berube

ABSENT: Vice President Ping, Commissioner Johnson

Also present: City Manager Hanks, City Planner Mulcahy, City Attorney Breck, Public Works Clerk Sobczak

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Approval of April 10, 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes

Motion made by Kavanagh to approve the April 10, 2025 minutes as presented, Seconded by Berube. 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)

No public comment received.

PUBLIC HEARINGS AND ACTION:

Columbia Falls Growth Policy Amendment from Park/Open Space to Urban Residential (Two to Eight Units per Acre):

The City of Columbia Falls in cooperation with Habitat for Humanity of Flathead Valley are requesting a Growth Policy Amendment from the current Park/Open Space designation to Urban Residential, a primarily single-family designation allowing 2 to 8 dwellings per acre. The site is currently used for a little league baseball field. Habitat for Humanity intends to construct six single family homes on the property. The property is addressed as 394 Railroad Street and is described as Tract 3D of COS 2090 (Accessors Tracts 3D); Section 8, Township 30 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., Flathead County.

A zone change from the existing CB-2 (General Commercial) designations to CR-5 (Two Family Residential):

The City of Columbia Falls in cooperation with Habitat for Humanity of Flathead Valley are requesting a zone change from the present CB-2 commercial zoning designation to a CR-5 zoning designation which will allow for the residential subdivision. The property is addressed as 394 Railroad Street and is described as Tract 3D of COS 2090 (Accessors Tracts 3D); Section 8, Township 30 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., Flathead County.

A subdivision creating 6 residential lots and a park/open space in the Columbia Falls Planning Jurisdiction:

The applicant Habitat for Humanity of Flathead Valley is requesting a preliminary plat approval for a six-lot subdivision. The single-family lots will range from 6000 square feet up to 8,705 square feet along with a 15,566 square foot park. Access to the lots will be from existing City streets, 4th Ave WN on the east side of the property and C Street EN on the south side of the property. The property is addressed as 394 Railroad Street and is described as Tract 3D of COS 2090 (Accessors Tracts 3D); Section 8, Township 30 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., Flathead County.

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES HELD ON MAY 8, 2025

City Planner Mulcahy presented the Growth policy Amendment Staff Report GP-25-01 on the Growth Policy Amendment. City Staff reviewed the four criteria for the growth policy amendment, including conformity with the overall growth policy, appropriateness of land use, and ensuring the amendment does not benefit a few at the expense of others. The property is utilized as a little league baseball field and previously owned by the Montana Department of Transportation, but was gifted to the City as a public park. Staff explained that the proposed amendments and changes are in response to extraordinary changes in circumstances since the 2019 growth policy, including a significant increase in median home prices (from \$310,000 in 2019 to \$574,000 in 2024) and increased housing demand following the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposal aims to ensure that the housing supply keeps pace with local economic trends while addressing infrastructure, design, and neighborhood compatibility.

City Planner Mulcahy presented the combined Staff Report CZC-25-01 and CPP-25-01. The CR-5 zone was selected over the CR-3 zone that is present to the south because recent State legislation has removed single-family-only zoning in cities with a population over 5000. This CR-5 zone is more appropriate for residential development than the current commercial zoning and matches the surrounding residential zoning. The project proposes a 1.3-acre subdivision with six single-family lots ranging from 6,000 to 8,700 square feet. The project was reviewed by the city's site review committee (Public Works, Fire, Planning, Building), which found the infrastructure and fire protection adequate, with some conditions such as sidewalk installation. The property is fronted by two city streets (4th Avenue East-North and C Street East-North), with existing sewer and water services, and will require a small extension for utilities. The site is flat, with no environmental hazards, and is surrounded primarily by residential uses, with some commercial and light industrial nearby. The development will require the creation of a homeowner's association (HOA) responsible for maintenance and replacement of the open space and park, with costs shared among the six lots. The proposal includes approximately 15,000 square feet (about one-third of the site) dedicated as a local park within the development, as required by subdivision regulations.

President Fisher opened the public comment period at 6:22 PM.

Donna McCann, 872 Frontage Road. Against this development due to the removal of an existing ballpark.

Ty Nagel, 385 3rd Ave EN Columbia Falls. Against this development. Does not want to see a public park removed that contains a little league baseball field. He does not want to be forced to join the new HOA and pay the dues. This subdivision will also increase his property taxes. He understands that more housing is needed but believes this is the wrong place for it.

Discussion commenced amongst the Commission regarding the Staff Reports and the future of baseball field and associated park amenities. It was noted that there is no definitive agreement yet on a replacement for the lost ball field, though the City, Baseball Association, and School District are expected to work together to address this. It was clarified that existing neighborhood residents cannot be forced to join the new HOA. Commission members expressed empathy for the loss of open space and the importance of balancing community recreation needs with the city's housing priorities. The Commissions direction is to pursue single-family style development to match the neighborhood, rather than higher-density townhomes.

Following the discussion a series of motions were put forward and voted on:

- Motion to adopt staff report GP-25-01 (Growth Policy Amendment) as findings of fact made by Kavanagh, seconded by Berube. Motion passed unanimously.
- Motion to recommend approval of the Growth Policy Amendment to the City Council made by Kavanagh, seconded by Berube. Motion passed unanimously.
- Motion to adopt staff report CZC-25-01 (Zone Change) as findings of fact made by Kavanagh, seconded by Berube. Motion passed unanimously.

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES HELD ON MAY 8, 2025

- Motion to recommend the Zone Change for City Council approval made by Kavanagh, seconded by Berube. Motion passed unanimously.
- Motion to adopt staff report CPP-25-01 (Preliminary Plat Application) as findings of fact made by Kavanagh, seconded by Berube. Motion passed unanimously.
- Motion to recommend approval of the Preliminary Plat for City Council consideration made by Kavanagh, seconded by Berube. Motion passed unanimously.

It was noted by Staff that the final decision on the proposed development will be taken up by the City Council at their public hearing on May 19, 2025 at 7 PM. Members of the public were encouraged to attend and provide input, as the City Council is the final decision-maker.

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Berube and seconded by Commissioner Kavanagh. Motion passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT – Meeting duly adjourned at 6:38 PM



President

Attest:



Public Works Clerk