

Town of Blowing Rock

Planning Board

Minutes

January 18th, 2024

The Blowing Rock Planning and Zoning Board met on Thursday, January 18th, 2024 for their regularly scheduled meeting. Members present were Chairman Bill McCarter, Joe Papa, Gregg Bergstrom, Chris Squires, Brooks Mayson, Lindsay McClanahan Cook and Tom Barrett. Staff members present were Planning Director Brian Johnson, Interim Town Manager Kevin Rothrock and Support Specialist Taylor Miller.

Meeting called to order at 5:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Tom Barrett made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Joe Papa. All members in favor.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chris Squires made a motion to approve the October 19th, 2023 minutes, seconded by Lindsay McClanahan Cook. All members in favor.

1. Special Use Permit 2023 – 06 Arbor Village Subdivision

Interim Director Brian Johnson presented the staff report. The property is located across 321 from the new Rhoddie's bike shop. It also fronts on Main Street. It will be a 4-lot subdivision with a duplex on each lot. The property is limited to 5 units per acre. Based on the lot's acreage, they are allowed 7 units. They are requesting a waiver for one extra unit, meaning they want to put 8 units total on the property. There will be four bedrooms per unit. Each dwelling unit will require two parking spaces which equals a total of 16 parking spaces for the project and they have provided 16 total spaces in their plan.

The driveway will be right in, right out. Their storm water management will consist of an underground retention system. Water and sewer will be connected from Main Street down below. There will need to be some clearing of trees/brush to install utilities and run it to Main Street. The landscaping will consist of trying to keep vegetation that is already there, but they will supplement where it is necessary. The project has also presented a couple retaining walls/ There will be two 12-foot walls. They plan to put landscaping between the two 12-foot walls to break them up and provide a buffer.

These buildings are single family buildings, so they are not subject to our visual standards. There were some brick details initially, but they switched to rock and board and batten. If the project is approved, they will also need to provide a lighting plan and an erosion plan. There also may need to be some

discussion on preserving some of the bigger historic trees on the site but it is up to the council to approve or deny those details.

Member Chris Squires asked how it is considered multi-family and single family. Mr. Johnson said a duplex is considered single family but from a density standpoint, it applies to a multifamily project. Section 16-12.2.3. It is considered multi-family based on the density.

Jason Gaston, the engineer for the project stated that that this piece of property is not easy. There's a 50-foot elevation change. They decided to come in off 321 because there would be less cutting and damaging of what already exists. He stated that a residential project seems to fit the property better than a commercial project. This property is very walkable to downtown which makes it great for residential. From a conservation standpoint, they are minimizing disturbance on the back of the property which will buffer the project on Main Street's side. They wanted to try and maintain the visual impact the building would have.

Member Gregg Bergstrom asked how far from the front door to the right-of-way. Gaston approximated 30 feet. They don't have a buffer plan for the 321 side but are open to it. Gaston stated that if you're standing on the sidewalk on 321. You will be looking at the front doors.

Member Chris Squires asked if they have considered putting a screening wall on Main Street. Gaston stated that a fence or wall would need to be very tall to screen the visual of the building. He believes keeping as much vegetation as possible seemed more reasonable.

Member Lindsay McClanahan-Cook asked where the proposed sidewalks would be located. Gaston stated there would be sidewalks on 321 as well as Main Street that would be approximately 200 feet. He also stated that he didn't think the sidewalk on Main Street would add any significant value to the property. Member McClanahan-Cook stated the sidewalk adds to the infrastructure and maintenance.

Chairman McCarter asked about the lot lines and why each duplex is on its own individual lot. Gaston noted that the overall project must meet certain watershed requirements and it was easier to meet those requirements for individual lots. They also wanted to keep individual ownership for the deeds. He said that there will be an access easement for access to stormwater and retaining walls.

Member Brooks Mayson asked about the overlay district for short-term rentals and if these new units would be able to short-term rent. Mr. Johnson confirmed they would be able to. Member Mayson noted that to meet short-term rental requirements, they will need one parking space per bedroom. This means they would need four spots per unit and right now they only have two per unit. Mr. Gaston stated that the POA would have to heavily police the parking situation or it would become a problem. He said they would need to have very clear language in the POA requirements that could specify parking. Member Mayson noted that this plan seems tight for parking if any of the units were to short-term rent. Mr. Gaston said parking is tight, but the walkability of the site is what makes the property so unique. Member Mayson stated that they can provide more parking, but they would need to remove some units. Mr. Johnson stated that there are requirements and stipulations that can be put in the SUP. The board and council can waive the unit allotment, or they can waive the parking allotment. If the board and council provide stipulations for the SUP, those rules would be more enforceable by staff.

Member Mayson asked about the 12-foot requirement for the retaining wall and if they got around that by having 3 separate retaining walls at 12 feet. Gaston said yes.

Member McClanahan-Cook asked what kind of material the walls would be made of. Gaston said the gravity wall blocks are off the table, but they are open to other suggestions.

Member Mayson asked if the POA would handle the storm water retention center. Gaston said yes.

Josh Cash with Cash Custom Homes presented and said their main concern when looking at the property was the rock and rhododendron buffer on Main Street. That is what led them to make all the decisions that they did.

Member Bergstrom confirmed the units are 4 bedrooms and 4 bathrooms. Cash stated that the topography of the property guided the size of the units. There are three levels. Originally it was 3 bedrooms and 3 bath but the bottom level allowed for extra space that made an extra bathroom, extra bedroom, and den area. Member Bergstrom noted that it seemed like the units were built for rental use as opposed to personal family use.

Mr. Johnson noted that the board should weigh in on the allowance of an extra unit when they consider their suggestion of denial or approval to the Council.

Member Bergstrom asked if it was feasible to have half a unit. Mr. Gaston and Mr. Cash said it would be difficult from a building standpoint. Member Bergstrom noted that this is the highest use of the property, maybe not best, but highest. It would generate property tax for the town.

Member Joe Papa said he would like to see some sort of sight and sound barrier on the 321 side. He stated he was concerned if they put small little trees as a buffer, they will just die and not be effective as a barrier.

Member Mayson asked if this proposal is in the spirit of the Comprehensive Plan and the vision, they have for 321. Mr. Johnson advised the Comprehensive Plan is the guiding document but there are uses allowed there right now and this proposal obeys that. Member Tom Barrett states that he agrees, and he's concerned about the parking, the visual from Main Street and the visual from 321.

Member Chris Squires said he has thought about a commercial property at this location. It would be great but what could you really do there. You would have to remove far more vegetation than this project is proposing and require a lot more parking.

Member Lindsay McClanahan-Cook asked if they could choose to not do the sidewalk on Main Street. Mr. Johnson said he did not want to speak for the council, but it didn't seem in the town's best interest to turn away a sidewalk. Member McClanahan-Cook asked about added hours for maintenance for our town employees. Mr. Johnson said he wasn't sure how to answer that but that we would most likely accept a sidewalk with a project. There will be minimal disturbance to add the sidewalk on Main Street.

Chairman McCarter asked about the condition of a screening or a buffer on 321. Cash said he personally thinks the vegetation and the look of the building would be better than a solid wall.

Member Gregg asked Mr. Johnson if someone could run a general business or office out of that unit. Mr. Johnson said the allowed use there would prohibit that from happening.

Member Joe Papa said he makes a motion to approve it with the condition of vegetation and buffer on 321 and that 8 units would be okay.

Member Mayson asked about a conversation considering dropping to three units instead of four and having more space for parking. Chairman McCarter asked if the current 4 building configuration would prohibit short-term rental use. Mr. Johnson stated it would be based on two bedrooms per two parking spaces. He said he has had people convert to less bedrooms to accommodate parking for short-term rentals.

Member Joe Papa asked about the 7 units and how many parking spaces would be added. They approximated two or three spaces.

*Member Joe Papa said he makes a motion to approve it with the condition of additional vegetation and buffer on 321 and approves the waiver to allow one additional unit above the maximum of 7 units allowed. Member Chris Squires seconded the motion. **Members Tom Barrett and Brooks Mayson opposed this motion, all others in favor.***

2. Review of Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Vaughn Hinson presented the draft of the Comprehensive Plan. He discussed the purpose of the plan, project timeline, public engagement in the planning process and the plan summary. The vision statement that encompasses the essence of the plan was discussed as well.

The focus areas of the plan consist of downtown, connectivity, development, and municipal services.

Brooks Mayson asked about the studies for the parking development and the water and sewer facility plants and where he can get copies of the studies. Mr. Brian Johnson advised we could share those with the committee.

Mr. Kevin Rothrock asked if the board had any thoughts on a different name for the Comprehensive Plan to make it unique to Blowing Rock. The board agreed that we should keep the name the same until after it is adopted by the Town Council because we have been using the same name since April of 2023 and don't want to confuse anyone with a new term.

A citizen from the crowd asked if there were any timelines, priority or dollars associated with any of the objectives. Mr. Hinson said that there was some discussion on priority, but they did not rank any more important than the others. Mr. Squires stated that they created all these goals with the thought process that all of them would get attention and hopefully be completed.

*Mr. Squires made a motion to recommend the Comprehensive Plan to Town Council, seconded by Mr. Tom Barrett. **All in favor.***

Meeting adjourned at 7:09 p.m.

