

Planning and Zoning Board

Minutes

Thursday, September 20, 2007

7:00 p.m.

The Blowing Rock Planning and Zoning Board met on Thursday, September 20, 2007 for their regular scheduled meeting. Chairman West called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Members present were Ron Mace, Ada Webster, Nelda Miller, Albert Yount, Sue Sweeting, Web Alexander and Jim Steele. Staff members present were Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Town Engineer Doug Chapman, Intern Adam Spillman and Administrative Assistant Sherrie Pitts.

*Ms. Sweeting made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, seconded by Mr. Mace. **All members were in favor of the motion.***

Items of Business

Mr. Yount spoke about the issue of conflict with all board members receiving electric service and having membership with BREMCO. He said that he had talked with the Town attorney and with the County attorney they advised it did not create a conflict.

A vote was taken all members stated that they could remain impartial to the request before the Planning Board.

Mr. Alexander advised that in February he would be taking a seat on the membership committee for BREMCO and felt that he needed to remove himself from this conditional use permit request.

Mr. Steele motioned to allow Mr. Alexander to recuse himself from this conditional use permit request. Ms. Miller seconded the motion. **All members were in favor of the motion.**

CUP # 2007-09 Blue Ridge Electric Substation

Mr. Rothrock gave the staff report to the board in reference to conditional use permit #2007-09. Blue Ridge Electric Membership Corporation (BREMCO) is requesting a conditional use permit to construct a new electrical substation on the former Best Cellar property behind Food Lion. The new substation is a multi-phase project with the electrical equipment being operational in 2010. The substation will replace the existing substation off Possum Hollow Road and will serve the future energy needs of the Blowing Rock area. The subject property is zoned GB, General Business and is located at 278 Little Springs Road. Over the past 53 years, the electrical power for the Town of Blowing Rock and surrounding areas has been provided from the substation located off Possum Hollow Road. According to Blue Ridge Electric these substations are designed for 30 to 40 years. Based on an electrical engineering consultant review, there is a need to construct a new electric substation to serve the future energy needs for the Blowing Rock area. If approved, BREMCO plans to begin screening plantings this fall to encourage growth prior to substation construction in 2010. The proposed substation site is a 1.73-acre lot. The remaining restaurant office will be demolished and the modular home will be removed from the site prior to substation construction. A level gravel pad of approximately 10,000 square feet will be graded to accommodate all of the electrical equipment. An entrance driveway will be graded along the existing driveway that serves the property. The upper half of the property, north and east, will remain undisturbed and vegetated with mature trees. New evergreen and deciduous trees will be planted along the perimeter of the equipment area. The west side of the equipment area, facing Food Lion, will be surrounded by a 12' high wall to help shield the view of the electrical equipment. The wall materials will be of a color to blend into the surroundings of the adjacent hillside with rock columns. Utility lines to the new substation will be placed underground, and the service lines leaving the substation to the intersection with Hwy 321 bypass will be underground. The existing substation off Possum Hollow Road will be vacated and removed.

The substation is planned to be enclosed by an 8-foot high chain link fence with three strands of barbed wire. Section 16-171G of the Land Use Code prohibits the use of chain link fencing with or without slat weave in the General Business zoning district. The applicant is requesting a waiver to install the chain link fence for safety and to meet the National Electric Safety Code. The 12-foot wall on the west side and landscaping on the remaining sides would hide the chain link fence.

Mr. Yount asked what the zoning was for the site. Mr. Rothrock stated that it was GB, General Business.

Chairman West wanted to have clarification between a variance and a waiver. A variance would go before the Board of Adjustment and required findings of fact. A waiver if granted under a conditional use permit would be allowed. Mr. Rothrock affirmed the clarification.

With no other questions of staff the floor was opened to the applicant.

Mr. Mike High, director of engineering services for BREMCO, explained the plans for the electrical service setup system for the Possum Hollow station. He explained the load capacity and how in years past some power shifting to the Aho substation and the Hound Ears substation had relieved the load, but by 2010 the Blowing Rock substation would be at maximum capacity.

BREMCO is requesting a phased development of this proposed site. Phase I would be grading, walls and landscaping. Phase II would be substation construction in 2010. Phase III would be demolition and removal of the old substation and sale of property.

Mr. Dwight Hollifield, President of Facilities Siting, handed out a plan booklet to board members. He explained he has been involved in electric substations planning and site development. Mr. Hollifield discussed the grading and plans for the wall. He also explained the line of vision to the substation and how it would not be noticeable. The landscape and extra tree plantings were discussed and how it would help provide significant screening to the surroundings. Mr. Hollifield commented that sound pollution from transformers at peak level should be at a max of 30-35 decibels. This noise range is comparable to a refrigerator in a kitchen. Taking the ambient background noises into consideration the noise from the substation would be nearly unnoticeable.

Ms. Sweeting asked when the second transformer is in and working how much the sound would increase. Mr. Hollifield explained that the sound would not increase.

Ms. Sweeting asked about the area lighting. Mr. Hollifield stated the lighting would be on a switch and would be on when employees would be there working or in an emergency. He also stated it would be "cut-off" or down lighting.

Mr. Yount questioned what the vision from the homes in Peacock Ridge would be.

Mr. Hollifield mentioned that the retaining wall would be 12 feet high and that would lower the height of the substation and with the plantings it would help move the line of vision.

Chairman West was interested in what happens with the old substation removal and clean up.

Mr. Hollifield mentioned the possibility of putting some riparian trees along the creek edge and possibly sowing grass in the foreground.

With no other questions of the applicant the floor was opened to the public and closed with no questions or comments.

Mr. Yount made a motion to approve as presented. Ms. Webster seconded the motion. Mr. Steele stated that he accepted the motion with adding discussed cleanup of the old site to be added in the CUP and the waiver of the fencing to be accepted. All members voted in favor of the motion.

8:11 pm Chairman West called for a 5-minute break.

8:15 pm meeting returned to order. Mr. Alexander returned to his seat.

Chairman West requested to switch the order of the meeting and move Hartley's Interior CUP to next item.

CUP # 2007-11 Hartley's Interiors

Mr. Rothrock gave the staff report to the board in reference to conditional use permit #2007-11. Gwyn and Clara Hartley of Hartley's Interiors are requesting a conditional use permit to make significant exterior modifications to the front of the building located at 916 Main Street. The property is zoned CB, Central Business. The following exterior changes are proposed. New lap cedar siding to the sides, and cedar shakes to the front of the building facing Main Street. New windows are proposed across the front of the building, a cultured stone veneer wainscoting on the front of the building, stone base to existing 8x8 columns and new 8x8 column supports and heavy timber beams to existing awning. The existing carport on the north side of the building will be removed.

With no questions of staff the floor was opened to the applicant.

Mr. Gwyn Hartley, applicant, advised the board members that the roof was not changing. The eaves are T1-11 and will not be changed to shingles. The carport will be replaced.

Ms. Clara Hartley, applicant, asked if they could keep the option to either rebuild the carport or leave it off.

With no other questions of the applicant the floor was opened to the public and closed with no questions or comments.

Ms. Sweeting made a motion to approve the plans as submitted. Mr. Mace seconded the motion. All members were in favor of the motion.

CUP #2007-10 Town Parking Facility

Mr. Rothrock gave the staff report to the board in reference to conditional use permit #2007-10. The Town of Blowing Rock is requesting a conditional use permit to expand the existing public parking at the American Legion building by construction a parking facility. The proposed parking facility would add a second level of parking above the existing lower surface lot on the south side of the American Legion building. The new parking facility will add 39 spaces to the American Legion property plus approximately 10 to 12 additional spaces by lot reconfiguration. The property is located off Wallingford Street behind Memorial Park. Ingress and Egress access to the upper level will be from the existing driveway that serves the parking area in front of the Legion building. The lower level of the facility will be accessed from Wallingford Street; therefore no ramps will be necessary for vehicular movement. The traffic pattern through the American Legion lot will change slightly as it will be one way from Park Avenue to the upper level of the parking facility. The directional change may also yield additional parking spaces in the existing lot. A new sidewalk for pedestrians will be added along the west side of the American Legion lot. Most of the large trees between Wallingford Street and the proposed parking facility will be saved. All of the trees along the western side of the proposed parking facility above Mayview Lake will be retained as well. Additional landscaping will be added to help screen the parking deck from Mayview Lake and from Memorial Park. The impervious surfaces will be reduced by approximately 3300 square feet; therefore storm water detention will not be required. New drainage pipes will be installed to collect and convey storm water across the site. After construction, the new parking facility will yield 55 new spaces. The upper level will have 39 parking spaces and the lower level will have 54 spaces. The parking facility will be low profile to minimize the visual impact from surrounding properties and streets. The facility walls will be covered in cultured stone of a shape and color found in the Blowing Rock area. An aluminum guardrail with pickets will be added to the top of the retaining walls surrounding the upper level of the facility. Coach lights will be added to provide security to the upper level. Two covered stairways are planned for access to the upper level and improvements will be made to the existing steps beside the American Legion building.

Chairman West wanted to know what would happen to the recycling station. Mr. Rothrock advised the Town was looking at several new locations.

Mr. Alexander inquired if in the future another level could be added to the facility.

Ms. Webster asked what would happen to Art in the Park. Mr. Hildebran, Town Manager, stated that it would be in the upper level with parking allowed below, or if it was raining vendors could be under with parking on top.

Doug Chapman, Town engineer, commented on the location. He explained the grade and how it was a good location and cost effective because interior ramps will not be required. Adding another level probably would not be cost effective because of requiring ramps. Visually it would probably be seen above the tree line.

Richard Fort, of PBC & L architects, explained the plans including the wall heights and the stairwells on either end of the parking facility.

With no other questions of the applicant the floor was opened to the public.

Ms. Sarah Gilley, resident, commended the Planning Board on the work they do. Ms. Gilley asked about upkeep and repair work that would be required and wanted to know who would be paying for it. She also was interested in the landscape that has not been addressed.

Mr. Hildebran explained, how maintenance funds would be generated. He said the Town has a minimum parking fund available for businesses that cannot provide parking and the Tourism Development Authority Board has been contributing to the fund. BRAAC has applied for a grant and propose to re-landscape the entire bank below the parking area in 2008.

Mr. Ron Oberle, Commander of the American Legion, had good comments on the parking facility and that it would be good for that location.

Ms. Gilley had questions about the traffic flow and landscape. Doug Chapman described the traffic flow using the site plan. He explained the riprap drainage currently present and advised that it would be removed and piped underground and the entire area would be landscaped.

With no other questions or comments the floor was closed.

Mr. Steele made a motion to approve as presented. Mr. Alexander seconded the motion.

Mr. Yount asked about a time frame for construction. Mr. Chapman told the board that the Town plans to start before the end of 2007 and complete construction in the spring of 2008.

All members voted in favor of the motion.

Tractor Trailer use on Ransom Street

Mr. Rothrock gave the staff report to the board in reference to continued complaints about tractor-trailers traveling and making deliveries on Ransom Street. Some deliveries occur at the rear entrance to Blowing Rock Self storage, which restricts traffic flow and property access on lower Ransom Street. One solution is to restrict tractor-trailers from Ransom Street and requiring transfer to smaller delivery trucks at a separate location. At the September meeting, Council asked staff to forward the information to Planning Board for review and a recommendation.

Staff recommends a change to Chapter 6 of the Town Code to prohibit tractor-trailers (Three Axles or more) on Ransom Street from Main Street to Hwy 321 Bypass.

There was some discussion on restricting trucks and changing the Town Code. The Planning Board decided to send the issue of tractor-trailers to subcommittee for discussion and ideas to return to the Planning Board.

Other Business

Ms. Sweeting made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Mace seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

Adjourn

With no further business the Planning Board adjourned at 9:40 PM.

Jim West, Chairman

Sherrie Pitts, Administrative Assistant