

**MINUTES
COLUMBUS PLAN COMMISSION MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2024 AT 4:00 P.M.
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL
123 WASHINGTON STREET
COLUMBUS, INDIANA**

Members in Person: Amber Porter, Andrew Beckort, Dennis Baute, Evan Kleinhenz, Chris Bartels, Keerthi Alapati, Michael Kinder, Zack Ellison, and Tom Finke (Bartholomew County Plan Commission Liaison)

Members via WebEx: None

Members Absent: Barry Kastner, Dave Bush, and Laura Garrett

Staff in Person: Jeff Bergman, Andres Nieto, Kyra Behrman, Jessie Boshell, Noah Pappas, and Austin Whitted (Deputy City Attorney)

Staff via WebEx: Janie Meek

Mr. Kinder opened the meeting with a brief explanation of the commission and its responsibilities as well as participation directions for the public in person and on WebEx.

CONSENT AGENDA

Minutes of the February 14, 2023 meeting were not available.

Mr. Kinder appointed Ms. Porter as Interim Secretary.

OLD BUSINESS REQUIRING COMMISSION ACTION

None

NEW BUSINESS REQUIRING COMMISSION ACTION

DP-2024-001: Lillian Schmitt Elementary – A request by the Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation for site development plan approval for a building addition and visitor parking and bus circulation changes. The property is located at 2675 California Street, in the City of Columbus.

Mr. Nieto presented for the Planning Department.

Jonathan Pasyk, Civil Engineer with Civil & Environmental Consultants, Inc., and Brett Boezeman with Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation (BCSC), represented the applicant. Mr. Pasyk stated they have updated their plans to address the deficiencies noted in the staff report. Mr. Boezeman stated the parking lot for visitors and staff is currently located behind the bus line, requiring them to walk through the buses to get to and from the school building. He stated the new configuration will separate those areas as well as having the bus flow in one direction - in off 27th Street and out on Home Avenue, and the Home Avenue exit will be right turn only.

Ms. Alapati wanted to clarify that the noted area was only for buses. Mr. Boezeman replied that is correct, except for the occasional event when visitors could park in that area also. He added that the bus area would be gated and for bus use only during regular school hours.

Mr. Kinder opened the meeting to public comment.

No one attending in person requested to speak.

Ms. Meek indicated that no members of the public attending via WebEx wished to speak.

Mr. Kinder read a letter sent by Morris Souders, 1140 27th Street, who stated he was in full support of the proposal. He stated it is not easy to back out of his driveway when the school children are being picked up or dropped off and having the buses exit on to Home Avenue will be a great improvement to the traffic flow.

Mr. Kinder closed the meeting to public comment.

Mr. Bergman stated there would need to be 3 votes on this request - 1 for each waiver request individually then 1 for the project as a whole.

Mr. Bergman stated the first waiver request is for drive separation on 27th Street and for the proposed new driveway to be 95 feet from the nearest driveway, 105 feet less than the required 200 feet. Mr. Bergman stated staff supports approval of this waiver request and that all criteria have been met as outlined in the staff report.

Motion: Mr. Ellison made a motion to approve waiver request 1 for drive separation on 27th Street, accepting the findings provided in the staff report. Mr. Baute seconded the motion. The motion passed with a voice vote of 8 in favor and 0 opposed.

Mr. Bergman stated that waiver request 2 is for drive separation on Home Avenue and for the proposed new driveway to be 54 feet from the nearest driveway, 146 feet less than the required 200 feet. Mr. Bergman stated staff supports approval of waiver request 2 and that all criteria are met as outlined in the staff report.

Motion: Mr. Ellison made a motion to approve waiver request 2 for drive separation on Home Avenue, accepting the findings provided in the staff report. Ms. Alapati seconded the motion. The motion passed with a voice vote of 8 in favor and 0 opposed.

Mr. Bergman stated the next step is the approval of the overall site development plan. He indicated that the staff supports approval with the previously approved waiver requests and the following 8 conditions:

1. All drawing sheets shall be revised to show complete Thoroughfare Plan street classifications. For example, Home Avenue is a Collector, Residential, Urban street.
2. All four handicap-accessible parking spaces shall be located so as to be the nearest parking spaces to the building's accessible entrance.
3. All driveway separation dimensions on all drawing sheets shall be shown as between driveway and street intersection centerlines.
4. An additional 2 trees and 5 shrubs, meeting the specifications of the Zoning Ordinance (for a total of 9 trees and 54 shrubs) shall be included in the parking lot interior landscaped area.
5. Two additional trees, meeting the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance, shall be provided along the 27th Street parking lot street frontage, maintaining the legal-nonconforming total of 17 trees in that area.
6. Either replace the 5 trees to be removed in the Home Avenue Parking Lot Street Frontage landscaping area, or provide an additional 10 shrubs in this landscape area, meeting the specifications of the Zoning Ordinance.
7. Two parking spaces in the visitor parking lot, as specified by the Fire Inspector, shall be designated for "compact cars only" in order to preserve the ability for a fire apparatus to make the turn radius in that area in the event of an emergency.
8. Proposed new light poles in parking lot islands shall be relocated outside of required landscape areas where they conflict with required landscaping.

Motion: Mr. Baute made a motion to approve CDP-2024-001 noting the 2 previously approved waiver requests and subject to the 8 conditions recommended by staff. Mr. Ellison seconded the motion. The motion passed with a voice vote of 8 in favor and 0 opposed.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Discussion of Rubicon Investment's potential development at 1008-1020 Washington Street and 921 Jackson Street.

Matt Nolley and Matt Ellenwood represented Rubicon Investments. Mr. Nolley discussed the preliminary layout of the site. Mr. Nolley added that, although the proposed restaurant on the adjacent site is shown,

it is for location reference only and not part of this discussion. He noted the proposed project's commercial space on Washington Street as well as the leasing office and amenities. He stated there are 120 units planned with varying bedroom numbers over 4 floors, and 130 parking spaces planned inside the street level garage with an additional 10 spaces on the exterior of the building along the south alley for a total of 140 parking spaces on site.

Mr. Ellenwood noted that this area is a gateway to Columbus' downtown and their goal is to promote pedestrian interaction and socialization with this project as well as blend the new building appearance with those that are existing.

Mr. Nolley also described an aspirational re-design of the intersection of Washington and 11th Streets that would provide a more pedestrian friendly intersection.

Ms. Alapati asked for clarification regarding the on-street parking spaces that were marked on the site plan. Mr. Bergman indicated those were staff notes showing that there were a total of 140 on-site parking spaces and that the on-street parking spaces were increasing to 9 from 8, but the on-street parking spaces do not directly count for total parking for the site.

Mr. Bergman stated that this site is in the CD (Downtown Commercial) zoning district, which is the only district where there is not a minimum parking requirement. He stated the Plan Commission would have discretion over the amount of parking provided during any future site development plan hearing for this site. He added that this was an appropriate time to discuss any parking concerns the Commission may have.

Ms. Porter asked if there would be sufficient parking for the commercial business that would be renting in the building. Mr. Nolley stated that those businesses would be small, like an insurance office, which does not require a lot of parking.

Mr. Ellison asked about bicycle parking space. Mr. Nolley stated that there is a designated area of the garage adjacent to the Washington Street entrance for secured bicycle parking. He added that there are some areas around the garage, too small for vehicle parking, where they will be adding bike racks.

Mr. Ellison asked if there were any thoughts on allowing someone to have the historic homes on the property, if that someone wanted to move them. Mr. Nolley stated that he did not want to speak for the current property owners, but based on conversations, he believed that if someone wanted to pay to move those homes the owners would be supportive. Mr. Bartels stated that, at a City Council meeting, the property owners stated they would support others moving the homes and, if that does not occur, would try to salvage their contents and may hold an auction for items from inside the homes.

Mr. Bartels stated that he likes the idea of this site being a downtown gateway and wondered if the Jackson Street side of the building could mirror the Washington Street side with commercial space. Mr. Nolley stated that he would consider that if it were possible to add additional commercial space without removing too many parking spaces inside the garage. Mr. Nolley and Mr. Bartels discussed parking for the St. Bart's Apartments (a previous Rubicon project in Columbus) and what is proposed for this development. Mr. Bartels added that he appreciates the design of the building, especially the community area that faces the south with a view of the city's skyline.

Mr. Kinder asked if there has been a parking space usage study at the St. Bart's Apartments. Mr. Nolley stated that they use permits for on-site parking and they have issued fewer permits than the number of parking spaces on the site.

Mr. Kleinhenz asked if the residents would be assigned a parking space, or would they have to search for an available space. Mr. Nolley stated that, in the proposed building, the residents would be assigned spaces according to their unit number.

Mr. Bartels commented that he lives near the St. Bart's Apartments and they have been good neighbors, they built a good structure, and tenant parking does not extend out into the neighborhood. He added that he has yet to see that parking lot full.

Ms. Porter stated that she is also interested in what could be added to increase the pedestrian traffic since Jackson Street is already pedestrian friendly.

Ms. Porter asked if Plan Commission had discretion over color schemes. Mr. Bergman reviewed the site development plan criteria from the Zoning Ordinance. He stated that the building height, massing, and parking are relevant especially when discussing the Comprehensive Plan and neighboring properties, but that exact colors may be beyond the Commission's purview.

Mr. Bartels asked about storm water drainage. Mr. Nolley stated they would have stormwater storage under the garage that would capture and then distribute the stormwater at a rate the city's drainage system can handle.

Mr. Baute wanted to know the depth of the 2nd floor roof space. Mr. Ellenwood stated that it does vary in some areas, but it would be 6 to 10 feet.

Mr. Baute asked if there would be any terrace on the proposed restaurant at the corner of 11th and Washington Streets. Mr. Nolley stated there is a conceptual patio/exterior dining area that fronts on 11th Street.

Mr. Baute wanted to know the height of the adjacent Jackson Place Condominiums. Mr. Bergman stated it is 50 feet in height.

Mr. Kleinhenz stated that the color breaks on the building were well thought out. He asked if the 6 to 10 foot 2nd floor roof area could be a running track or something similar. Mr. Nolley stated that there would be second floor balconies but not access to the entire garage roof.

Mr. Bartels asked if there would be a cross walk on Jackson Street. He noted that currently there is no crosswalk connection to the existing sidewalk on the west side of Jackson Street. Mr. Nolley stated he is supportive of that connection from this site, but would need to coordinate with City Engineering. Mr. Bartels stated that, especially if someone has a pet, they would want to head west to the parks and connect with the People Trail.

Mr. Bergman stated that the Planning and Engineering Departments have discussed pedestrian connections and intersection improvements in this area and there will need to be discussion at the site development plan review as to what portion of any envisioned improvements will be the developer's responsibility. Mr. Beckort stated that the 11th and Washington Street intersection is to be reviewed by the City Engineers Office. He stated it is a complicated intersection and noted the presence of the fire station. He added that the Engineering Department has discussed stormwater on the site with Banning, the applicant's engineer, and they will comply with all of the city's stormwater manuals and ordinances.

Mr. Ellison noted that letters from the public have been received for this meeting and asked if they would be read into the record at this meeting or will they be saved until the actual public hearing for the development. Mr. Bergman stated that would be the president's choice.

Mr. Baute asked about energy efficiency for the building. Mr. Nolley indicated they do what they can to make the all-electric building as efficient as possible by using energy efficient appliances, through the design of the units, and by installing electric car charging stations for the residents. Mr. Baute asked if each unit would have its own separate heating and air conditioning controls. Mr. Nolley indicated that they would.

Mr. Bartels asked if there would be any trash or recycling receptacles exposed on the alley. Mr. Nolley stated the idea is for the sanitation trucks to pull into the alley off Jackson Street and pull out the dumpsters for emptying. He stated, when the dumpsters are pushed back into their location, they would not be visible from either street. Mr. Beckort asked if the dumpster area would have a door. Mr. Nolley stated that it would have a door. Mr. Nolley added that the parking garage entrances would also have doors.

Mr. Kinder queried the Plan Commission members if they would like to allow public input for this discussion. Consensus was to allow public input. Mr. Kinder added that the comments should be addressed to the Commission and not the applicants. He also encouraged speakers to avoid repetitive statements.

Mr. Kinder opened the meeting to public comment.

Mark Dollase, with Indiana Landmarks, 1201 North Central Avenue Indianapolis, participating in-person, stated he was concerned with the preservation of the existing historic homes on the properties and noted that Columbus does not have a historic preservation ordinance.

Rick Agnew, with Agnew Investments LLC and 1033 Jackson Street owner, participating in-person, stated he was concerned with the anticipated location of the restaurant not having enough parking. He was also concerned with balconies extending past the property line and the location of the garbage receptacles.

Dale Nowlin, 821 Franklin Street, participating in-person, stated he was concerned with the historic homes being removed and that the proposed apartment building was too tall.

Mike Mullett, 723 Lafayette Avenue, participating in-person, stated he was concerned with the ground water contamination on the site especially if they would be putting the garage underground, and that the apartments would be high-end rentals and not affordable housing units.

Kerri Sinibaldi, 524 10th Street, participating in-person, stated she was concerned with lack of parking spaces especially during events by other, nearby property owners. She was also concerned with the loss of the historic homes.

Mike Cartwright, 1040 Franklin Street, participating in-person, stated he was concerned that the height of the apartment building would shade his solar panels and render them useless.

Mr. Kinder closed the meeting to public comment.

Mr. Nolley stated that the garage would be street level not underground, so the 61-foot total height includes the garage. He added that balconies and patios will not go past the property lines.

Mr. Ellenwood confirmed that none of the balconies would extend past any property line. He added the trash and recycle receptacles will be on the southwest side of the building in an enclosed area. He stated the northwest side of the building is designated for mechanical and storage areas. He added that there is also an approximately 14 foot wide green space area planned for the north side of the building.

Mr. Bartels asked if a condition of sale is to have the current owners provide a current environmental study on the property. Mr. Nolley indicated that the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) issued a no further action letter that restricts the use of ground water on this site. He stated they will also be getting their own assessment prior to actual property acquisition.

Mr. Kleinhenz asked if there are any plans for the use of solar panels on this building. Mr. Nolley stated there is not.

Mr. Kleinhenz asked if the 61.5-foot height included the parapet wall. Mr. Nolley noted that the elevated corners of the building would be approximately 62 feet in height. He added that the only place where this height will be exceeded is a stair tower the goes slightly above the roof.

Mr. Kleinhenz asked if the stair tower would provide roof access for the public. Mr. Nolley replied that the stair tower is strictly for maintenance and the roof will not have public access.

Ms. Porter asked if Columbus has a designated historic district. Mr. Bergman stated there is no local historic preservation ordinance or entity in Columbus. He added that there are historic districts that are federally recognized, including the Columbus Historic District a block away from this location. Mr. Bergman added that these recognitions do not carry any regulations with them.

Ms. Alapati stated that she understands this property has 2 of the last 4 Charles F. Sparrell-designed homes in Bartholomew County on them, and asked if it is true the property owner still has the freedom to do what they would like with those homes. She asked if there is any legal obligation for an owner to preserve those homes. Mr. Bergman stated that the current owners or any future owners have no obligation to preserve those homes.

Mr. Kleinhenz stated that, in his understanding, if someone approached the owners and said they would like to move the homes and restore them, with no expense to the current or future owners, they would be welcome to do so.

Mr. Kinder again opened the meeting to public comment.

Mr. Agnew stated that he has moved 9 houses. He stated that moving one of these big, 2 story houses is almost cost prohibitive. He added that unless someone has a location within a couple blocks to move them to, due to costs, moving the homes is not feasible.

Mr. Kinder closed the meeting to public comment.

Mr. Baute stated that he is for the project in general but does not feel comfortable with the 5th floor or putting another restaurant on the corner; he would have to see a more detailed site plan before making a decision on the restaurant.

Ms. Alapati asked about the maximum building height for this zoning district. Mr. Bergman replied that it is 125 feet.

Mr. Kinder stated he would like to see a well-thought-out parking plan if a restaurant is to go on the corner lot. He stated part of the issue as to why the property has not been redeveloped is because there is not enough parking to support a business.

Mr. Kinder suggested that when the applicant comes back for a site development plan hearing on the project that they bring renderings showing the building in its context from as many angles as possible.

Mr. Finke left the meeting.

Discussion regarding the Columbus Front Door Overlay Zoning District

Mr. Boshell presented for the Planning Department. He discussed the regulations applicable in the Columbus Crossing PUD versus the other commercially zoned properties in the I-65 / State Road 46 area. He stated the goal of this project is to eliminate confusion and inequity in regards to how all of these properties are regulated.

Mr. Boshell stated that the intent of the proposed Columbus Front Door Overlay District is to provide basic architectural standards that each development within the overlay district would be required to meet. It would also provide oversight to the Plan Commission for new developments located within the overlay district, regardless of underlying zoning, with hopes of creating cohesive development throughout the area that acts as the front door to the City of Columbus.

Ms. Porter asked if the previously approved White River Dental solar car port / electric charging station request adhered to this proposed overlay. Mr. Boshell stated that the proposed text discusses accessory structures, but not a solar car port / charging station specifically. It was agreed by consensus that such structures should be specifically addressed.

Several Commission members expressed concern about making the requirements too restrictive and therefore making development in a larger area cost-prohibitive. Mr. Bartels noted that these additional requirements may exclude startup businesses from this area.

The Commission members discussed the size and location of the possible overlay area. After discussion and by consensus, it was determined that the area initially proposed by Mr. Boshell should not be changed.

The Commission members discussed how the overlay should apply to building additions and if a threshold should be established for an entire existing structure to comply with the new standards. By consensus, the Commission determined that any new standards should just apply to new buildings, or new additions, etc. without any requirement for pre-existing structures to be brought into compliance.

Ms. Porter announced that this was her last Plan Commission meeting and she has accepted the position of Assistant City Engineer.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

None

ADJOURNMENT: 7:00 p.m.

Motion: Mr. Ellison made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Alapati seconded the motion. The motion passed with a voice vote of 7 in favor and 0 opposed.

These minutes approved at the Plan Commission meeting on April 10, 2024.

Michael Kinder, President

Laura Garrett, Secretary