

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING  
OF THE  
GREAT FALLS PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD/ZONING COMMISSION  
July 26, 2016**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The regular meeting of the Great Falls Planning Advisory Board/Zoning Commission was called to order by Chair Nate Weisenburger at 3:00 p.m. in the Commission Chambers of the Civic Center.

**ROLL CALL & ATTENDANCE**

Planning Board Members present:

Nate Weisenburger, Chair  
Scot Davis, Vice Chair  
Peter Fontana  
Anthony Houtz  
Keith Nelson  
Cheryl Patton  
Sophia Sparklin  
Mark Striepe

Planning Board Members absent:

Michael Wedekind

Planning Staff Members present:

Craig Raymond, Director P&CD  
Tom Micuda, Deputy Directory P&CD  
Gregory Gordos, Planner I  
Erin Borland, Planner I  
Connie Tryon, Sr. Administrative Assistant

Other Staff present:

Joseph Cik, Assistant City Attorney

Mr. Raymond affirmed a quorum of the Board was present.

**MINUTES**

*\*\*Action Minutes of the Planning Advisory Board/Zoning Commission. Please refer to the audio/video recording of this meeting for additional detail.\*\**

Chair Nate Weisenburger asked if there were any comments or corrections to the minutes of the regular meeting held on July 12, 2016. Seeing none, the minutes were approved as submitted.

## **BOARD ACTIONS REQUIRING PUBLIC HEARING**

### **Lithia Great Falls Subaru: Conditional Use Permit**

Mr. Gordos entered the staff report into the record for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) request by the applicant, Lithia Real Estate, Inc. The proposed land use would be for vehicle repair and vehicle sales, where the current existing use is only for vehicle sales.

Mr. Gordos presented photos of the current site conditions, and said the existing building is a Contributing building to the Central Business Historic District. The applicant is proposing demolition of this structure with construction of a new facility, asserting that the existing building cannot be preserved due to the significant amount of structural damage and costly repairs required. The new building would expand the current building footprint of the showroom with six vehicle repair bays proposed. Mr. Gordos said this project went to the Design Review Board (DRB) on July 11, 2016, and staff recommended denial of the proposal based on the aesthetics and materiality of the proposed building; however, it was approved by the DRB. Some conditions of the DRB approval include matching the Central Avenue streetscape with designs that are consistent with our downtown, adding an additional two trees, and replacing the curb, gutter, and sidewalks.

Fourteen additional parking spaces would be added, as well as one ADA accessible space. A curb-cut is proposed on Central Avenue, and a loading zone used exclusively for repair equipment is proposed on 8<sup>th</sup> Street South.

Mr. Gordos said the proposal is consistent with environmental and physical portions of the Growth Policy. The conditional use meets the seven criteria for a basis of decision as listed in the staff report. He said there are numerous Conditions of Approval that are listed in the staff report, and he highlighted the most unique to the proposal, the first being the aggregation of four City lots which can be done administratively and filed the Cascade County Clerk and Recorder. The developer shall be responsible for the installation and cost of new street curb and gutter abutting 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Central Avenue, as well as approval of the dimensions for the proposed loading zone and the curb-cut.

Staff recommends the Zoning Commission recommend the City Commission approve the CUP with the Conditions of Approval as listed in the staff report. Mr. Gordos offered to answer any questions.

## **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

Mr. Striepe asked if this vehicle repair facility will replace or be in addition to the one currently existing on the corner of 9<sup>th</sup> Street and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue South. Mr. Gordos said the vehicle repair that is on the same block but located on the southern portion, will remain.

Ms. Sparklin asked if the structural damage noted during the walkthrough and subsequent determination that the renovation of the building was likely infeasible was a change in the City's position as to what extent it was a Contributing building to the Historic District. Mr. Gordos explained the applicant's justification to demolish the structure was based on conditions and costs to rehabilitate the structure. Staff was able to determine there was foundational and water damage.

Ms. Sparklin said while the application is to approve a CUP for the vehicle repair facility, the demolition of the existing building needs to be taken into consideration. She inquired if there could be a compromise where parts of the historic structure be maintained. Mr. Gordos said there has been significant dialogue with the applicant since the beginning of the year on maintaining the aesthetic and elements of the building that would be demolished; however, since the DRB approved the design, the approval of the CUP is all the Board can consider.

Ms. Patton asked the proposed building would be a metal building. Mr. Gordos said it would be primarily stucco.

Mr. Weisenburger asked what type of zoning allows for a repair shop. Mr. Gordos said traditionally C-2 General commercial.

### **PETITIONER'S PRESENTATION**

Nick Oswood, Oswood Construction Company and construction manager of the proposed project, emphasized that Lithia chose to stay downtown and help revitalize the downtown as opposed to having their business on 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue South. He said while they appreciate the Planning Staff's concern in wanting to revitalize the existing building, it is not economically feasible for Lithia to attain, given the extent of the damage to the building. He said the current budget is already over six times the original budget for the project. Mr. Oswood also pointed out that there is already vehicle repair use on the same block, and the only thing before the Planning Advisory Board (PAB) is whether or not they will be allowed to continue that specific use on this portion of the site. He said the DRB previously approved the design, therefore, the design and aesthetics of the building was not what the Planning Board was here to consider. He added that he feels the proposed project will ultimately be a nice addition to the downtown.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

### **BOARD DISCUSSION AND ACTION**

Ms Sparklin said she disagreed with Mr. Oswood's statement that the PAB has no say regarding the design and aesthetics of the proposed project; this project is in a Historic District, and the PAB is invested in the direction and precedence set for downtown. Ms. Sparklin said she realizes there are different parties involved, but she would have loved to see some more effort put into revitalizing the building, as there seems to be significant amount of intact detail with the masonry on the building. She noted the District's historic buildings are becoming scarcer, and her concern in moving forward with the approval of the CUP is that it eliminates yet another historic building from our downtown that could possibly have been revitalized.

Mr. Patton asked if neighborhood comments had been received. Mr. Gordos said there has been no formal comment on the project.

Mr. Striepe expressed his support of the project.

Mr. Weisenburger asked if there was a way to gage how much true investigation was done to salvage the building, and whether or not due diligence was done by the applicant. Mr. Gordos said the conversation from the very beginning with the applicant was that upon Lithia's review, the building needed to be replaced.

Ms. Patton expressed her support of granting the CUP, but said she would have liked to see a much more distinctive building.

**MOTION:** That the Zoning Commission recommend the City Commission approve the Conditional Use Permit of the subject property located at Lots 1-4, Block 360, Great Falls Original Townsite, Section 12, T20N, R03 E, P.M. MT, Cascade County, MT, the Findings of Fact and Conditions of Approval located in the staff report.

Made by: Mr. Nelson  
Second: Mr. Fontana

**VOTE:** Ms. Sparklin voted against the motion, with all other seven votes in favor. The motion passed with a majority.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

### Next Meeting Agenda – Tuesday, August 9, 2016

- None

### Project Status:

- None

### Petitions & Applications Received:

- None

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Raymond noted Mr. Gordos was relocating and this would be his last Planning Board meeting. He commended Mr. Gordos for the excellent work he did for the City. Mr. Weisenburger extended the same sentiments on behalf of the Board.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Chair Nate Weisenburger adjourned the meeting at 3:41 p.m.

---

CHAIRMAN

---

SECRETARY