

MINUTES
COLUMBIA CITY PLAN COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MONDAY, JUNE 3, 2019
7:00 P.M.

WHITLEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS/COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING ROOM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Larry Weiss, President
Patrick Zickgraf, Vice President
Walt Crowder
Doug Graft
Chip Hill
Jon Kissinger
Don Langeloh
Dennis Warnick

STAFF

Nathan Bilger
Amanda Thompson

ATTORNEY

Dawn Boyd

MEMBERS ABSENT

Dan Weigold

VISITORS

One visitor was present at the June 3, 2019, Columbia City Plan Commission meeting. A guest list is included with the minutes of this meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Weiss called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

ROLL CALL

Ms. Thompson read the roll call with those members present and absent listed above.

CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION OF THE MAY 6, 2019, COLUMBIA CITY PLAN COMMISSION MINUTES

Mr. Weiss asked if there were any corrections or additions to the May 6, 2019, meeting minutes. Mr. Langeloh made a motion to approve the minutes as distributed. Mr. Zickgraf gave the second. The members voted unanimously to carry the motion.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE OATH TO WITNESSES

One visitor was sworn in by Ms. Boyd.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

NEW BUSINESS

1. 19-C-DEV-2

McDonald's Corporation requested a development plan review for a 5,282 square foot drive-thru restaurant and associated parking lot to be located at 1001 Spartan Drive, Columbia City. Mr. Bilger summarized the Staff Report and explained the petitioner's plans to construct a new building to replace their current establishment. He described that the existing restaurant would remain open for a majority of the construction before being demolished for parking area. There would be no change in the free standing signage, which is grandfathered. Mr. Bilger stated the engineer and McDonald's strove to design their project to comply with the Columbia City codes. Mr. Warnick thought there had been a Variance approval for McDonald's signage, approximately 20 years ago. Mr. Bilger said he would look for the petition information.

Mr. Bilger called attention to the site's access points, one, possibly two, of which are unnecessary. He stated the current code only allows one entrance/exit per frontage, being either one combined access point or a separate entrance and exit. He added that current truck parking is isolated and often seems to be being used for parking trucks for storage instead of for customers at the restaurant. Mr. Bilger noted McDonald's new design attempts to address this problem. He also explained that the length of the angled parking spaces needed the Commission's interpretation as the angle causes the depth of the space to be compliant but shortens the length. Mr. Bilger continued with his summary of the Staff Report and then described options for traffic flow on the site.

Mr. Bilger presented his on-site circulation sketch illustrating vehicle traffic flow. He also pointed out an area where a truck ("long vehicle") space and car spaces were overlapping, which is against the Code. He stated the petitioner would still meet the parking requirement if they chose to designate the area as truck space. Mr. Bilger said INDOT supplied a no comment letter with regard to the site, but they also provided informal information saying long vehicles could interfere with stacking at State Road 9. Mr. Bilger offered solutions to this problem by designating an access as entrance only. The Commission members discussed different options with regard to the site access points and traffic flow. Mr. Bilger moved on to the landscape plan. He said it was compliant but needed some contents defined because the Code does require more than just grass. Mr. Bilger concluded by outlining the six suggested conditions listed in the Staff Report.

Mr. Graft asked several questions comparing the existing building (and its components) to the proposed. William Terry of Weihe Engineers answered his questions. Mr. Weiss asked Mr. Bilger if parking spaces proposed on the southwest side of the site, near Hoosier Drive, would cause issues with ingress traffic. Mr. Bilger understood his concern but also said the plan was compliant. Mr. Terry added that the chances of someone parking there would be very slim because most customers park on the side of the building with the access doors, which are located on the opposite side as the drive-thru. With no further questions for Mr. Bilger, Mr. Weiss asked the petitioner to present.

Mr. Terry stated his name and address for the record and explained that the current site is in bad shape and needs redone. He said McDonald's' motto is "easy in, easy out," so the site design was based on that concept and will rely on signage to facilitate traffic flow. Mr. Terry discussed the problem with non-customer semi-truck parking and hoped decreasing the number of available truck spaces and relocating the truck area to a more visible location would deter non-customer parking. He said signage and bollards are ineffective at controlling unwanted parking, and enforcement of the lot usage would be the responsibility of the store's management. Mr. Weiss said Walmart and Kroger both have signage against overnight truck parking. Mr. Terry said he would discuss such signage with his client, but he felt the lack of enforcement is what has allowed the problem to grow. Mr. Kissinger believed the proposed design would solve the issue and encourage parking from customers with boats or RVs.

The Commission discussed the access points and traffic outside of the site. Mr. Langeloh noted it is a congested area. Mr. Kissinger supported the proposed design and felt it would help move traffic more effectively. He asked for the project timeline. Mr. Terry said construction is planned to begin at the end of June and be underway for approximately 90 days. McDonald's will be closed for just 30 days between the tear down of the old building and opening of the new building.

Mr. Graft asked Mr. Bilger why sidewalks were not required for this project. Mr. Bilger said there were none in the area currently, but the Plan Commission could require them as a condition of approval. Mr. Graft felt sidewalks were necessary, and he has seen many people walking on the street to get to this site as well as the surrounding businesses. Mr. Bilger offered that sidewalks on this site could be the beginning of a system for other properties to connect to. Mr. Crowder added that sidewalks could help safely direct people to green space when walking their dogs. Mr. Graft felt perimeter sidewalks and sidewalks to the proposed building would be most important. Mr. Terry stated the sidewalks would have to be located in the right-of-way because the only requirement for the site's landscape buffer is trees. Mr. Bilger said generally sidewalks are installed in the right-of-way unless there is a cause for putting them inside. Mr. Weiss asked for input from other Commission members. Mr. Zickgraf asked Mr. Graft to describe his vision for the area. Mr. Graft replied that he did not have a vision but was concerned about public safety. Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Terry pointed out there is a deep swale along Main Street. Mr.

Graft said sidewalks along Spartan Street were more important to him than along Main Street. Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Graft both commented about having seen people in wheelchairs traveling on the streets through this area. Mr. Terry said people in wheelchairs won't use sidewalks even if they are available. Mr. Warnick agreed. Mr. Terry added that he has had sites that required sidewalks and the public does not use them and prefers to walk in the streets. Mr. Graft appreciated Mr. Terry's opinion.

Mr. Weiss began considering the suggested conditions and asked the members for their thoughts on the depth of the angled parking. It was the consensus of the Commission to allow the length as it was proposed on the site plan. Mr. Weiss asked if the northern Hoosier Drive access point should be entrance only. Mr. Bilger suggested exit only. Mr. Graft said he didn't feel the northwest access on Spartan Drive was necessary. The members discussed the options and decided to accept the accesses as proposed on the site plan. Mr. Bilger noted that signage could always be added later to change the traffic flow if needed.

Mr. Weiss asked if anyone had any other items to discuss with regard to the project. Mr. Graft said he felt sidewalks were necessary. Mr. Warnick disagreed. Mr. Terry asked if sidewalks would be McDonald's' responsibility or the City's. Several members responded that the developer would be responsible. Mr. Kissinger clarified with Mr. Graft that he was most concerned about sidewalks for Spartan Drive and Hoosier Drive. The members debated whether or not sidewalks should be required, but no decision was made. Mr. Bilger requested discussion of the overlapping parking spaces. Mr. Weiss asked the members if they would like to eliminate the long-vehicle space or the two car spaces. Mr. Terry said he would remove the two car spaces, and the Commission was satisfied with that result.

Mr. Weiss called for a motion. Mr. Warnick made a motion to approve 19-C-DEV-2 with conditions as discussed. For the record, those conditions are:

1. Lighting must be directed and/or shielded to prevent glare onto public rights-of-way.
2. Acceptance of the on-site traffic circulation but with the addition of signage for no overnight truck parking.
3. Eliminate the two overlapping car-length parking spaces.
4. Acceptance of the dimensions of the angled parking spaces as proposed.

Mr. Kissinger gave the second. The members voted 7-1, with Mr. Graft in opposition.

OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business. Mr. Bilger announced that the City Engineer, Ken Hecceg, was in the process of reviewing the City's Subdivision Control Ordinance and identifying areas in need of updating. Mr. Bilger told the Commission a draft would likely be ready for their consideration within a couple months. He added that he had not forgotten about the need for a section restricting the number of lots allowable per access point.

Mr. Bilger also announced that the department's Planner I position had recently been vacant as Jennifer Shinabery accepted a position as the Commissioner's Assistant, but a new employee had recently been hired, Mark Cullnane. Mr. Bilger described that Mr. Cullnane would manage the County's planning petitions as Ms. Shinabery had. He added that Mr. Cullnane had a public policy degree which made him a suitable candidate for the entry level position, and it is likely he will assist in gathering research for the code updates.

Mr. Warnick commented to the members that he had attended the Board of Zoning Appeals training session last month and found it very beneficial.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Kissinger made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Langeloh gave the second, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:13 PM.

GUEST LIST

1. William Terry (Weihe Engineers) ----- 10505 N. College Avenue, Indianapolis, IN