

MINUTES
COLUMBIA CITY BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 2, 2021
7:00 P.M.

WHITLEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER
MEETING ROOM A/B, LOWER LEVEL

MEMBERS PRESENT

Cathy Gardner
Jon Kissinger, Chairman
Dwayne Knott
Anthony Romano, Vice Chair
Dennis Warnick

MEMBERS ABSENT

STAFF

Nathan Bilger
Amanda Thompson

ATTORNEY

Dawn Boyd (absent)

AUDIENCE MEMBERS

There were three visitors present at the meeting and no attendees on the webcast. A Guest List is included with the minutes of this meeting.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

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

Mr. Bilger read the roll call with members present and absent listed above.

CONSIDERATION OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

Mr. Warnick made a motion to approve both the January 5, and February 2, 2021, meeting minutes as presented. Ms. Gardner gave the second. Motion passed, 5-0.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE OATH TO WITNESSES

Mr. Bilger administered the Oath to one visitor.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

NEW BUSINESS

1. 21-C-VAR-2

Morsches Lumber, Inc., requested a Variance of the Parking Code in order to allow for a gravel driving/parking area for the overall business located at 516 E. Van Buren Street, Columbia City. Mr. Bilger summarized the Staff Report and described the property's existing site as primarily having gravel driving areas along with a paved entrance and customer parking lot. He explained that the petitioner applied for a building permit for a T-shed type of storage building and had requested to surround the building with an extension of the gravel driving/parking area. Mr. Bilger stated the Zoning Ordinance describes that such areas be asphalt or concrete; however, in the past, the Board has exempted low-traffic areas from paving. He also pointed out that the Code describes a

10' landscape buffer is needed, but the Code also allows for approval of alternative designs. Mr. Bilger displayed aerial images of the site, referencing current paved and gravel areas, the proposed gravel area, the new building's proposed location, and the existing fence, street right-of-way, and overhead power lines. Moving on to the Review Criteria, Mr. Bilger expressed concern over the potential affect on surrounding property values, and he requested that the Board consider what uniqueness or hardship might justify approval of the Variance.

Mr. Kissinger invited the petitioner to speak. Jeremy Hammel, operations manager, was present and explained that the proposed T-shed rack would be accessible from both sides and would hold material as large as 48' long and 55' wide, causing the need for a large area around the building for maneuvering semitrucks and trailers loading and unloading the product. He said a gravel surface area is far easier to maintain as fork-lift traffic is very damaging to asphalt; also, the high cost of concrete would make it a less than ideal surface material, considering the size of the proposed driving/parking area. Mr. Hammel mentioned to the Board that the Electric Department had instructed him to keep his building 10' from the farthest arm of the electric pole, and he intends for the building to be approximately 30' away. He said the City had no concerns about the gravel or about forklifts and trucks being driven under the power lines or in the area.

Mr. Warnick asked if the existing site had dust problems. Mr. Hammel replied that sometimes in the dry part of the summer, there is some dust from the main driving area. He clarified that the proposed area would receive much less traffic and was not expected to cause to a dust issue. Mr. Kissinger asked if the City required protection of the middle power pole. Mr. Hammel said they had not mentioned it, but it would be easy to reinforce. Mr. Knott asked for clarification regarding the traffic patterns around the new building. In his reply, Mr. Hammel described that much of the items stored on the existing gravel will be relocated inside the new structure, allowing room to maneuver semis on the south side of the building. He stated that some overstock items will continue to be stored outside, on the southeastern section of the proposed gravel area. Mr. Kissinger inquired about landscaping. Mr. Hammel said none was planned. Ms. Gardner asked about the drainage plan, and Mr. Hammel confirmed that a new drain would be installed and connect to the existing drains; the new building will have a drain at both ends. The Board then discussed the Code's landscaping requirements with Mr. Bilger and considered what might be suitable for the site. Mr. Hammel voiced that trees could cause a hardship for the business as material may need to be transported over the area in question.

There being no further questions for the petitioner, Mr. Kissinger asked if anyone else was present who wished to speak. Hearing none, he closed the public portion of the meeting. Mr. Knott made a motion to approve 21-C-VAR-2 as presented, with the condition that landscaping would not be required. Mr. Warnick gave the second. The motion carried 5-0. *(Note: In accordance with the Code, Mr. Bilger later discussed the case with the Community Development Director, and they approved the Board's landscaping condition as an alternate landscape plan for this site.)*

OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Romano made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Gardner gave the second, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:01 P.M.

GUEST LIST

1. Jeremy Hammel, Morsches Lumber, Inc..... 516 E. Van Buren Street, Columbia City
2. Chris Peters, Morsches Lumber, Inc. 516 E. Van Buren Street, Columbia City
3. David Gardner (did not sign in)

GUEST LIST (WEBCAST)

4. No attendees