

The following are minutes from the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting on Thursday, April 25, 2024, in Abita Springs Town Hall. The meeting convened at 6:00 P.M.

Commission Chairman Pierce called the meeting to order, and all stood for the Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioners in attendance included John Pierce, Chad Hall, Mike Lanaux, Claire Guidry, and Lex LeBlanc. Kristin Tortorich, Mark Fancey, Alex Carter, and Heather Hockman were also present.

CALL FOR AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

None.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

The Commission reviewed the draft minutes from the March 28, 2024, meeting. Commissioner Guidry motioned to accept the minutes of the March 28, 2024; meeting as presented. Commissioner Hall seconded the motion. Commissioners Pierce, Hall, Lanaux, and Guidry voted in favor. Commissioner LeBlanc was absent from the vote.

PLANNING:

Review Short Term Rental Application for 22155 Main Street

Kristin Tortorich explained the applicant had an approved permit last year, but missed the renewal deadline, so they were seeking approval from the Commission to get the current year Short-Term Rental Permit. Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to approve the application. Commissioner Guidry seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

ZONING:

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Proposed Commercial Use for Quality Plumbing at 22278 10th Street

Commission Chairman Pierce reminded the Commission that this was a discussion item on last month’s agenda and Kristin Tortorich recapped the application. Ms. Tortorich explained that Quality Plumbing is looking to purchase a property zoned Commercial that previously housed a construction company. Quality Plumbing is seeking Conditional Use approval due to plumbing companies not being on the list of approved uses. They are not proposing any changes to the property, using the office and parking trucks on the property.

Commissioner Guidry asked about the traffic impact the business would have on the neighborhood. The owner, Mike Cefolia, said most employees are dispatched remotely and would come to the office to replenish materials. They do not plan to have a storefront that would have customers present, only an office for employees, the occasional builder, and deliveries. Commissioner Guidry asked how many trucks are in the fleet and why the business is looking to relocate from Mandeville. The owner stated they currently have 24 trucks, and the space and functionality of the location on 10th Street would be better for his business, in addition to being closer to his wife’s family.

Commissioner Hall said that walking by the location, you wouldn’t know it is there. Commissioner Guidry said she likes the idea of adding commerce to Abita.

Public Comment

None.

Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to accept the application. Commissioner Lanaux seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

2. Recommend (1) repeal of the Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning district, (2) amendment of nonconforming use regulations to clarify treatment of existing PUDs, and (3) to provide for related matters.

Kristin Tortorich explained staff came to the Commission in January requesting a one-year extension on the moratorium for PUDs and was given six months thinking that was going to be enough. In order to not rush and have time for staff and legal to finish the conversations and research required, a request is being made for a six-month extension.

Commissioner LeBlanc asked the status of the legal guidance requested. Kristin Tortorich said that more time is being requested because their focus was on the Subdivision Regulations due to the four months they had to make those changes. Commission Chairman Pierce stated the vote would be to prohibit the establishment of any new PUD. Kristin Tortorich reminded the Commission the vote is to forward their recommendation on the moratorium, favorably or unfavorably, to the Board of Aldermen to make the ultimate decision.

Public Comment

None.

Commissioner Guidry motioned to extend the moratorium for another six months. Commissioner Hall seconded the motion. Commissioners Pierce, Hall, Lanaux, and Guidry voted for the extension. Commissioner LeBlanc voted against the extension.

DISCUSSION

Commission Chairman Pierce reminded the Commission that the discussion items are to let them know what is coming up for a future vote, and to hold their opinions on the discussion items, and just to ask clarifying questions.

Discuss potential new business 22155 Level Street, Abita Paws Grooming Salon

Kristin Tortorich explained the following in her staff report: The Southern Magnolia Montessori School has moved out of a building next to Town Hall, and a pet grooming salon would like to move in. The property is zoned Commercial with a Mid-Town Cultural District overlay. Pet grooming is not on the current list of allowable uses. Barber and beauty shops, gift shops, and feed stores are on the list as allowable. There is a parking requirement stating for every three hundred square feet, there needs to be one parking space. 8.5 spots are required, and 10 street parking spots are available. The business would have three bays for pets, limiting the need for parking.

Trisha Thibodeaux said her family is from the Northshore and recently relocated to Abita Springs and this business is a way she feels she could really be part of the community. The building in the back of the property would be where the animals would be kept and bathed. In the future, she would like to apply for a retail license to sell collars and other items. All grooms would come with personalized bandanas and bows. Employees would park in the lot across from the Town Hall. Clients could use street parking and would only be parked for ten to fifteen minutes during drop off and pick up.

Commission Chairman Pierce asking if there would be any boarding. Ms. Thibodeaux stated that there would not be any overnight stays. She also stated should there be an issue with a pickup, she would take the animal home with her and would make arrangements for them. Ms. Thibodeaux presented examples of previous grooms and explained the business would do competitive grooming, abstract art, fusion art, and dyes for events such as Mardi Gras and Saints' games.

Commission Chairman Pierce asked for clarification on the applicant's need for seeking future approval for the retail portion of the business. Mark Fancey recommended adding a statement to the code in commercial zones to allow for small, incidental retail items that could be sold in association with the

business. Mr. Fancey said you wouldn't define the business as a retail pet store but could allow a grooming salon that also sells pet related items.

Commission Chairman Pierce suggested holding public comments until after hearing all three discussion items.

Kristin Tortorich explained the moratorium for commercial building was extended for a year with the caveat that if you could meet certain requirements, then you could submit an application to seek approval from the Town Engineers, Planners, the Planning & Zoning Commission, the Historic Commission when applicable, and then would be allowed to apply for a building permit.

Mark Fancey clarified that the last two discussion items fall under an exception to the commercial building moratorium. Mr. Fancey said that in the ordinance that allows the exception, there is a requirement that any application for an exception must meet the goals and policies of the recently adopted Master Plan. While reviewing the Master Plan, staff found the Master Plan to have two policies that both relate to the location of parking or screening of parking which should be addressed in the presentations.

Discuss potential commercial development at Longbranch Recovery 21516 LA-36

Presenters for the Longbranch Recovery & Wellness Center project were Emily Meyers, Longbranch CEO and Therapist, and Matt DeCotiis and Dyani Robarge both with Cicada, the architecture firm hired to design the expansion. Mr. DeCotiis explained that when taking the history of the property into account, they felt keeping and extending the parking along the front and pushing the new building to the back would prevent overpowering the existing buildings on the campus and prevent taking away from the historic character. Mr. DeCotiis said they understood the desire to screen the parking, and said there is existing green screen of bamboo, pines, and brush along the property that could be maintained. Mr. DeCotiis said the two-story structure would house the residential rooms for patients, while offices and the main entry would be in the one-story part of the building parallel to Highway 36. He said there would be a two thousand square feet gym and yoga studio for the Longbranch residents.

Commissioner Lanaux stated the Master Plan promotes putting the parking behind the architecture, but he could see where that wouldn't work well with this site. Mr. DeCotiis said that the grade of the property is not well suited for the parking in the back due to the type of surface that would need to be used and the runoff issues associated with it.

Commissioner Lanaux asked if Cicada partners with a landscape architect. Matt DeCotiis said they didn't on this project, but they do take the landscaping into account on their projects. Dyani Robarge pointed out the courtyard planned in the middle of the building to create an adjacency to the existing campus. Ms. Robarge said having the parking on the northern side would allow for easier access to and from the other buildings. Commissioner Lanaux asked if the parking lot would be pervious gravel. Mr. DeCotiis said they are currently proposing the pervious gravel parking with the exception of the handicap spaces unless the Town Engineers come back with other requirements. Mr. DeCotiis then showed the current street view of the property to emphasize the greenery that is already in place at the property which would screen the parking from view from the highway.

Commissioner Hall asked about the setback requirements from the property line in the southeast corner of the lot and stated maintaining a two-story building so close to a property line on a slope is difficult. Kristin Tortorich said she would review the setback requirements and their plan. Mr. DeCotiis mentioned there also being an egress path there as well to be maintained.

Commissioner Hall asked about the occupancy. Mr. DeCotiis said it would be permitted as an institutional building by the Fire Marshal but will have 12 residential rooms plus group rooms and offices for the existing facilities.

Discuss potential commercial development on Hwy 36 next to the Abita River

Paul Mayronne presented on behalf of owner Buddy Coate. Mr. Mayronne stated that there is a building placement issue on the property along the river and they were grappling with the Master Plan parking requirements. Mr. Mayronne said they feel if the building is along the highway with parking in the rear, then the best part of the property is enjoyable from the parking lot. They would prefer to place the building along the river for the scenic value. Mr. Mayronne said Mr. Coate has a vision of a smaller version of The Chimes restaurant. The current drawings place parking in the front with a restaurant and/or coffee shop with deck along the river in the back. Mr. Mayronne said after seeing the Longbranch plan and driving by the property, he can appreciate the camouflaged parking with the greenery in place, however Mr. Coate's property does not have that currently in place. Mr. Mayronne said he thinks planting may be a way to make the front of the property a usable space while still meeting the requirements of the Master Plan.

Commission Chairman Pierce asked if thirteen parking spaces is correct. Mr. Mayronne said that is the current estimate but would be dependent on the size of the building. Commissioner LeBlanc then asked the approximate size of the building. Mr. Mayronne confirmed 2100 square feet per the current plans. Commissioner Lanaux asked for clarification on the proposed new property line. Mr. Mayronne said that Mr. Coate owns both properties and is entertaining the idea of moving the property line to accommodate the project.

Commissioner Hall asked if the clearing issue was ever resolved on the property. Kristin Tortorich said the Town Arborist revisited the site and the plantings were done to resolve the issue. Commissioners Hall and Lanaux noted that with the last storm and flooding, the trees were knocked over and should be addressed. Kristin Tortorich said that she'd notify Mr. Coate.

Mark Fancey said given the location of the property, there is a bigger issue regarding the site plan, as the proposed development requires a Scenic Rivers Permit from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF). Kristin Tortorich said LDWF confirmed building within one hundred feet of the river requires a permit and when she reached out to Mr. Coate, he said he had someone working on the permit application. Commissioner Hall said he thought Abita Springs' code had requirements for building within a certain number of feet from a waterway. Kristin Tortorich said she would confirm the details regarding waterways.

Commissioner Lanaux said it is a very visible property and it is important to get it right. Commissioners Lanaux and Guidry both recommended a focus on landscaping to break up the parking mass. Mr. Mayronne said they are aware of the importance of the location being near an entrance to town and the impact the appearance can have and want to deliver a project the town can be proud of.

OPEN COMMENTS

None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Kristin Tortorich announced the annual Fourth of July event is being planned and to watch for future announcements for details.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Hall motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Guidry seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted in favor. Meeting Adjourned at 6:48 P.M.

Kristin Tortorich, Planning & Zoning Director

Date