



130 6TH STREET WEST
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AGENDA

REGULAR MEETING COLUMBIA FALLS CITY-COUNTY PLANNING BOARD AND ZONING COMMISSION

TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2019 - BEGINNING AT 6:30 PM

COUNCIL CHAMBERS CITY HALL

A. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

B. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Minutes of the February 12, 2019 Planning Board

C. VISITOR OR PUBLIC COMMENT: (An opportunity for the Public to comment on any items not on tonight's agenda)

D. PUBLIC HEARINGS AND ACTION: None

E. OLD BUSINESS:

1. Growth Policy Update Continued

The Columbia Falls Planning Board will hold its fourth workshop on the update of the Columbia Falls Growth Policy of which the Public is invited. The Columbia Falls Growth Policy requires a review of the document at least once every five years to determine if the goals and policies are still relevant or require updating. The Columbia Falls Growth Policy was last updated in 2013. This fourth workshop will focus on Chapters 6 and 7, Land Use – Agriculture/Timber/rural Preserves and Urban Design/Historic and Cultural Facilities, respectively and will provide the Public the opportunity to speak on these Growth Policy chapters. The Columbia Falls Growth Policy provides guidance, goals and policies to direct and manage the City's growth over the next five to fifteen years.

F. ADJOURNMENT

Next Meeting – May 14, 2019 (NO APRIL MEETING)



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Minutes

REGULAR MEETING COLUMBIA FALLS CITY-COUNTY PLANNING BOARD AND ZONING COMMISSION

Tuesday, February 12, 2019 - Beginning at 6:30 PM

CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS

A. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Vukonich called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL: PRESENT: Vukonich, Shepard, Hughes, Kavanagh, Singer, Stene, and Nelson.
ABSENT: Duffy

Also present were City Planner Eric Mulcahy and Public Works Clerk Alex Vissotzky

Chairman Vukonich led the Board, staff and public in the pledge of allegiance.

B. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Motion by Shepard to approve the minutes of the January 15, 2019, second by Singer and the motion carried with all present voting in favor of the motion.

C. VISITOR OR PUBLIC COMMENT: (An opportunity for the Public to comment on any items not on tonight's agenda)

Charles Lapp, 3230 Columbia Falls Stage Rd. Lapp commented on the Growth Policy review in general. He stated the properties along Meadowlake Blvd are ripe for development and that the biggest hurdle is the lack of city services. He also stated that in his opinion the light industrial zoning is a large barrier and it could be addressed parcel by parcel. The CRA-1 assisted living home is a prime example of that concept. He knows the growth policy is the 1st step in the process and emphasized that there are possible projects along Meadowlake Blvd. Lastly, he said the recession in 2008 set the town back many years in every aspect.

D. OLD BUSINESS:

Elections – Chairman and Vice-Chairman: Hughes motioned to re-elect Chairman Vukonich and to elect Shepard as Vice Chairman, Nelson seconded the motion. All present voted in favor and the motioned carried.

Growth Policy Chapters 3,4 and 5 Review

Planner Mulcahy started with a review of the January 15th recommendations and a reminder of how the Growth Policy is used and what it entails. He briefed the Board on the Growth Policy Chapter 3 (Residential Housing). Discussion followed on the definition of affordable housing, how future housing developments will have to be on the fringes of town and how expansion will occur. The largest hurdle for more housing is expansion of services. Chapter 4 (Commercial Development) Mulcahy briefed on past commerce trends in the area and how to update them for future predictions.

This led to a short discussion on area businesses, using technology and social media, and how to utilize the outdoor economy to its full extent. Parking in the downtown area was also discussed, which led to rewriting issue number seven. An updated issue number seven would state that there is a perceived parking issue downtown. The discussion and briefing on Chapter 5 (Industrial Development) included updating the list of the businesses in the city and the surrounding area. Mulcahy said he is updating the statistics for the growth policy as the review process moves along.

E. ADJOURNMENT – Adjourned at 8:35 PM, motion by Stene with a second by Singer.

Chairman

Attest: Public Works Clerk

6. LAND USE – AGRICULTURE/TIMBER/RURAL PRESERVES

Agricultural and timber lands preservation and maintaining the rural character of some of the urban/rural fringe areas of the community have become increasingly difficult issues because of the decline in commodity prices and increased development pressures. Suburban areas immediately surrounding Columbia Falls have become important for future urban development.

Issues:

1. As the planning jurisdiction only extends one mile outside of the Columbia Falls City limites there are not many acres of lands still in agricultural production within the land use influence of Columbia Falls..
2. Although not a significant issue in the Columbia Falls Planning Jurisdiction, agriculture in the urban/rural fringes of Flathead County is diminishing due to the conversion of agricultural land to residential subdivisions that can create conflicts between agriculture and expanding urban and suburban uses.
3. Rural lands close to the city are an important part of the city's future urban expansion area and can be vulnerable to untimely low density development that is not supported by urban services and facilities.
4. Conservation easements and similar voluntary mechanisms have become successful methods of conserving agricultural and timber land, but no local government programs currently exist to purchase development rights.
5. High land values are a major impediment to supporting and expanding the farming economy.
6. A significant amount of undeveloped timber land owned by the Columbia Falls Aluminum Plant lies immediately north of Aluminum City. In addition, the aluminum plant owns significant agricultural lands immediately east of the Flathead River north of US 2. These lands served as a protective preserve to buffer the aluminum plant operations. The City should identify which of these lands is suitable for urban residential, industrial development, and those lands too sensitive or steep to develop.
7. There is a growing concern that agriculture and timber landowners should have options for a return on their property.

Goals:

1. Encourage voluntary conservation of agricultural and timber lands.
2. Maintain lands designated for urban development in agriculture or timber production until urban services and urban demands occur.
3. Support the efforts to identify new land use opportunities on the CFAC property such as urban residential adjacent to Aluminum City, light industrial use for the old factory sites, and agricultural/open space areas where there is floodplain and steep slopes.

Policies:

1. Development of outlying parcels of land in the planning jurisdiction which are not readily serviced by municipal water and sewer should either be:
 - a. Discouraged until urban services are available or;
 - b. Developed using cluster concepts.
2. Cluster developments on urban designated lands should incorporate urban scale design standards or be built to incorporate the future extension of urban scale services.
3. Open space areas associated with cluster developments that are located in close proximity to the city limits should be considered as an urban reserve area so that it can be redeveloped when public services and utilities become available.
4. Discourage the premature or speculative rezoning of agricultural and timber lands from low density agricultural to intermediate density uses.
5. Conservation easements could be used to protect some of the more sensitive areas of the CFAC lands from future development.

Recommendations:

1. Cooperation between the city and county governmental bodies should be fostered so that redevelopment of the rural areas close to urban services can be easily accomplished.
2. The city and the Columbia Falls Aluminum Plant should work closely to determine the most feasible strategy and best use of lands should it choose to divest itself of some or all of these lands for conservation or development. This may involve an amendment process to the Growth Policy map for those lands north of the railroad tracks.

7. URBAN DESIGN/HISTORIC AND CULTURAL FACILITIES

Every community is different. Every community has its own story, its own origins and its own form shaped by its history. The built environment says much about the vitality and future of a community. Communities that respect their past and promote the present build a better future.

Issues:

1. Over the last ten years Columbia Falls and its citizens and business owners have worked hard to revitalize the traditional town center, Nucleus Avenue. Entrepreneurs have constructed a several new buildings and remodeled others. There are still a number of buildings that are underutilized and lacking in maintenance but land owners and business owners are putting some big investments in the downtown. There is now a Thursday night farmers market, new mix use building, a new hotel, new businesses catering to the visitor and local alike..
2. New commercial development continues to develop along 9th Street (US 2). The City has implemented new design standards in 2007 for large and small buildings in the Commercial and Industrial Zones. In 2008 the City implemented the “Industrial Buffer” provisions that require landscaping to buffer these intensive uses from residential uses. The City has also reviewed and updated the sign regulations several times over the last fifteen years to provide for more appropriate scale signage within the City. However, as Columbia Falls is the entrance way to Glacier National Park these provisions will be looked at regularly to ensure they continue to make a positive representation of the City
3. The Montana Veterans’ Home has several historical buildings dating over 100 years old. Support for the Veterans’ Home has allowed substantial improvements and restorations to the historic service building (old chapel), Old Main, and the supervisors quarters which will help preserve these building into the future. Improvements include asbestos removal, exterior siding, new copula on Old Main, new heating and bathrooms in the old chapel, walking paths and trees in the cemetery. All of these projects have been done to preserve the utilization of the structures.

Goal:

To have a vibrant urban core that caters to both the local resident and visitor.

Policies:

1. Encourage thoughtful upgrades and rehabilitation of historically or culturally significant structures and sites.
2. Support the efforts of private owners and conservation groups to identify, protect, rehabilitate and reuse historic and cultural resources.
3. Continue to encourage the design of new commercial and multi-family development to incorporate pedestrian access, well designed and landscaped off-street parking, integrated signage and the screening of storage areas and refuse collection areas.
4. Continue to encourage mixed commercial and second floor office and residential use in

the downtown core.

5. Continue to encourage the use of parking lot and building lighting that shields and directs the light downward and avoids the spilling of light onto other private property.

Recommendations:

1. Identify blighted buildings and areas throughout the community.
 2. Continue to develop a program including incentives, regulations or community awareness to encourage rehabilitation of or removal of underutilized buildings.
 3. Review and revise the sign codes, particularly in the area of free standing and portable signs to improve design and community image.
 4. Promote paving of the North Fork Road with bicycle facilities to Camas Creek, giving Glacier National Park an improved westerly entrance and further establishing Columbia Falls and Nucleus Avenue as the gateway to Glacier National Park.
 5. Review landscaping standards to ensure that commercial uses (and where appropriate industrial uses) have parking lots and storage areas fenced and screened.
 6. Develop outdoor or exterior lighting standards (dark skies ordinance) for the community that ensure that all outdoor lighting is directed down and shielded to inhibit light trespassing or impacting neighboring properties, reduce unwanted glare and protect the night skies.
8. Continue to encourage mixed use development in downtown area.