

Town of Blowing Rock

Planning Board

Minutes

Thursday, January 16th, 2024

The Blowing Rock Planning and Zoning Board met on Thursday, January 16th, 2025 for their regularly scheduled meeting. Members present were Chairman Bill McCarter, Tom Barrett, Chris Squires, Gasper "GK" Naquin and Woody Hubbard. Staff members present were Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Zoning Officer Brian Johnson and Support Specialist Taylor Miller.

Meeting called to order at 5:34 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Tom Barrett to approve the agenda, seconded by GK Naquin. All members in favor.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Chris Squires, seconded by GK Naquin. All members in favor.

1. Conditional Zoning Permit 2024 – 03 Green Park Inn – John Winkler

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock presented the staff report to the board. Mr. John Winkler is requesting a Conditional Re-zoning for the Green Park Inn property. It is currently zoned R-6M and is requesting to be Conditional Zoning - General Business. The applicant is requesting to partially demolish the existing hotel and salvage and restore parts of the hotel. They plan to retain 40 of the 88 existing rooms. The applicant also proposes to construct 12 condominiums and 8 duplex units on the property.

Mr. Rothrock noted some of the history of the property. The hotel has been operating for almost 135 years. The development around it has been mainly residential. In the 1980's, the property and those surrounding were zoned multi-family residential. The hotel was deemed a non-conforming use, and any property changes were limited to renovations and maintenance. In 2008, the Town Council adopted a Historic Properties Ordinance which allowed up to 50% expansion of non-conforming historic properties. Later, owners of the properties were given two choices for seeking town approval for projects and the applicant for this project has chosen to pursue a Conditional Rezoning request.

The intent of the applicant's plan is to maintain and restore the main lobby area of the existing Green Park Inn. The hotel section will be demolished carefully to salvage materials from the existing building for the new building.

Some of the buildings will exceed 35-feet in height so there will be an increase in required setbacks for the new building and the proposed project meets all setback requirements. The proposed part of the hotel being rebuilt should not exceed 50 feet in height.

The hotel will be remodeled and renovated to a smaller footprint than what currently exists.

There are currently multiple access points for the property and the new project will have one access point on 321 and one access point on Green Hill Rd and additional access for the condos on to Goforth Rd.

The plans show adequate parking for the hotel and restaurant as well as the duplexes. Parking for the condominiums will be underneath the condo building with access from the West side.

Part of the property is in the watershed. There is a reduction in impervious surface by about 400 sq feet for the portion located in the watershed.

The property currently does not have any water control. There are a few culverts that move water around. The proposed project will have a detention system for part of the property – that will connect to DOTs existing structure. The other side is collected on the back side of the hotel and flows out next to the golf course, which is no real change from what is there currently.

The applicant proposes an upgrade along the road with curb and guttering to help pick the water up and move it and help improve the current water situation.

Electrical services that are above ground will be put underground. There will be three dumpsters on the property with screening.

The intention is to preserve as many trees as possible. The proposed landscaping is very extensive. Staff have noted some good things about the current landscaping plan but think we can work with the applicant to make some improvements if we need to.

The applicant has asked for two conditions. One condition is to waive the requirement for a sidewalk along Green Hill Road and the second condition is to allow for a density of up to six dwelling units per acre so they can construct 20 units – the current allowance is five units per acre which would only allow them 17 units.

Mr. Rothrock presented some older photos of the Green Park Inn – one from almost 100 years ago, one is estimated to be from around 1915 or after, one from 2012 and one from present day.

Mr. Rothrock presented renderings for the proposed project – this included the hotel, the condos and the cottages.

It was recommended to take the non-functional shutters off the proposed building.

Chelsea Garrett, with Deal & Moseley Law Firm, spoke on behalf of the applicant. She mentioned the letter that was sent from Mr. Wayne Greene.

She introduced the applicant team. John Winkler, Bill Warden, Will Miller, Brent Davis their architect and Jason Gaston their engineer. There is a structural engineer from Taylor & Vyola, James Tate, he was unable to be at the neighborhood meeting and this meeting due to some medical issues.

She stated the project started out early summer last year. The plan has always been to revive “the Grand Old Lady”. The intention is to restore it to whatever extent possible and update it to make it a little more relevant to needs of guests today.

The foundation has a lot of age on it. Mr. Tate, the structural engineer, has already stated a true renovation and restoration would be tough. The plan is to revive it and do a reimagining of it to preserve the history and the look of it. There has not been a lot of life there for a long time and they want to bring life back.

Jason Gaston, the civil engineer with Valor Engineering, spoke on the process of ending up where they are now with the site plan. After the survey, the first rendition of the project was to keep the entire building of the Green Park Inn except for one of the wings (the wing closest to the golf course) and some condos with additional parking. There were a lot of reiterations of the plan. They ended up shaving off many parts of the building, most of it being the additions that had been added overtime. They decided to save what seemed like the original portion of the Green Park Inn.

Around October and November, the structural engineer started looking closer at the building and realizing some of the concerns with what is there right now. That is how they ended up with the plan they have currently. It was a progression of changes and re-thinking of the plan to end up where they did.

Mr. Gaston stated they are trying to marry historical preservation with progress and that's hard to do. They want to maintain the spirit of the “Old Lady” while also kind of creating a “New Lady”.

Mr. Winkler stated that Mr. Tate, the structural engineer, got involved in late August. He took a closer look at a lot of the building and stated it was a tough situation.

They want a restaurant and event venue on the main floor and get some events and people there. They think the thing to do is build new rooms and bathrooms and try to preserve the feel and the atmosphere of the Green Park Inn.

They intend for the lobby to be the same size and feel of what is there now. They want to carefully disassemble the building to use a lot of the material of what is there now. They want original materials to be used throughout the rooms and other areas of the building.

They had a curator come through and look at anything that would be of historic value, fixtures, furniture, art, etc. They have done the evaluation and continue to be invited throughout the process. They also wanted anyone who had anything taken out when the auction occurred or know of the location of any of those items to help them find them and maybe bring them back. They want to keep or protect any historical artifacts that wouldn't be used in the renovation.

There are 130 pages of the structural engineer report that have pictures of the old locust posts that are used below the foundation. From Wayne Greene's letter, he references the crawlspace and states that you can stick your hand into the old locust posts and pull-out chunks of them.

Woody Hubbard stated he was very interested in the structural aspect of this and wanted to know if they would replace what is there with steel or something else. Brent stated the first floor would be on concrete slabs and they would add structural steel columns.

Chelsea Garrett stated that the plan from the beginning has been to restore the lobby area, which is seen as the heart of the building, if they are able to. With that being said, no one can commit to a price for what it would cost to do that. They want this project to be economically viable and if they realize the cost to do the restoration of the lobby is too much, they will have to reevaluate. They don't want to run out of money a year into the project due to the unknowns of the inside of the building.

Mr. Winkler says there are a lot of fireplaces in the building, and they want to try and save five of the fireplaces to add to the ambiance of the new Green Park Inn. A Lot of the fireplaces are covered up right now. They want to rebuild the look of the fireplaces with the materials of the ones they uncover.

Mr. Naquin asked about the shell they would build around the existing structure to preserve what is there through construction. Mr. Winkler said that is something they are still looking into. They want to do it if they can afford it. There is a risk with the shell around the building. The roof structure that would need to be built would not be a load bearing roof and if there is anything with weather where rain or water or debris gets in, you risk the lobby getting rained on or damaged.

Chelsea Garrett referenced Mr. Greene's letter again and stated that the building was never built with the intention of being open in the winter and that's pretty telling for the current state of the building. She stated she wanted to be very transparent in the fact that the new building may be more in spirit of the Green Park Inn rather than the actual structure. They want to make it as historically accurate as possible.

Brent has talked about trying to get everything with the details accurate and indicative of the historic era with molding and fixtures, etc. There are all kinds of internal finishing features to get the grand feel of the Green Park Inn that they will keep or rebuild.

Ms. Garrett stated a lot of time, effort, and cost has gone into trying to save The Green Park Inn exactly as it is but structurally, it does not seem feasible. They don't want to pretend they aren't trying to be practical. They still want to try with the lobby but still do not know for sure. They want the finished product to honor the Green Park Inn. It was wonderful for its era because it was a gathering place. A lot has changed, and it has not been well maintained for many years. The current owner has done a lot and tried but it went unmaintained for a long time before that.

Ms. Garrett mentioned there was a place called the Bellevue Inn in Florida that was a reimagined version of the old hotel that was there before. It is possible to clearly depict an era, and they want to do the same thing.

Mr. Squires asked about the drainage on the site. He asked if moving water from the Mississippi basin over to the Yadkin would be a permitting issue. Mr. Gaston stated that it would not, they do it rather often. Considering the size of the watershed, it's customary to do that.

Mr. Squires asked about different books that talk about this site and the headwaters for the Yadkin River and if that will work for this project because the cottages are going to be placed on top of this.

Mr. Gaston said there is an existing pipe that runs through the site. He said there is no historic value to that pipe. They are rerouting the existing pipe. He said they don't really have a lot of information on the drainage that exists right now and it is the same for the headwaters.

Mr. Squires asked about the curbing plans for the project and how that will affect the trees that are there. He questioned how they would save the trees if they are cutting into the roots of the trees for the new curb and gutter. Jason Gaston stated that there is always going to be a risk with tree root systems. They don't know how much will be cut out and how much will be left to be maintained. They don't know if they should see what happens and leave the trees and end up having to cut them down in five years or so or go ahead and cut them down. He said the intent is to save them and they don't think they are disturbing over half the root system.

Mr. Rothrock stated they did not request curb and gutter. The idea is to pick up some of the drainage on that part of road before it gets down to Oval James house where it was causing some problems. Our staff thinks the new curb and guttering could pick it up better. If the curb line moves too much, it will be hard to save the trees but from staff's perspective, we want to save as many trees as possible. That's why staff said the landscaping plan is preliminary right now. Some of the trees are in pretty bad shape but we want to save as many as we can.

Mr. Squires asked if from the staff's perspective, is there an opinion of whether or not that section of the road should have curb and gutter? Mr. Rothrock said no and asked Mr. Doug Chapman to weigh in. Mr. Chapman said diverting the water around the site is ideal. Mr. Squires said he understood the purpose of the curb and guttering but wondered if it was worth it if all the trees that are there could be gone in a year. Mr. Rothrock said either outcome could potentially be good.

Mr. Hubbard asked how tall the current building is. They believe it is 50 feet. The condos and the cottages will be close to that.

Mr. Naquin asked what kind of external façade they will use. Mr. Winkler said they would use wood siding and wood for the scalloped features. Mr. Naquin also asked about the cottages and said they look pretty flat and plain. He wondered if there is an option to do more architectural design on the outside. Mr. Winkler stated he is not fully happy with the way the buildings look right now either. They are limited to space but what to try to add some interest to the cottages.

Mr. Hubbard asked about the new foundation. He wanted to clarify that the skin and framing will all have to come down. Mr. Winkler said yes.

Mr. McCarter opened the floor to public comment. Comments and inquiries can only be directed to the board.

Mrs. Jamie Dixie, who lives on Norwood Circle, asked about giving The Green Park Inn another 135 years. She asked how much life is really left in the building as it is currently if nothing is done. Chelsea Garrett referenced the information Wayne Greene sent in. He stated there are so many problems with the building as it is and that trying to save a small part of the building seems like the best thing that can be done. Mrs. Dixie asked about the ownership of the building after Mr. Winkler's work is done. He stated that he will own the hotel and the cottages. The condos will be managed by the group that will be managing the hotel. They've already talked about a restaurant coming in. They

want to maintain ownership. Mrs. Dixie stated that the headwaters are a great marketing tool and asked him to try to save them.

Mr. Tom Barrett asked about short-term rentals in the condos. Mr. Winkler said the plan is to sell the condos to individual owners. The POA will control everything and protect what is there for the property owners.

Mr. Winkler addressed the board and wanted them to know he is very passionate about this project, and he wants it to be a legacy for him, his children and his grandchildren.

Mike Page, from the audience, stated that without this project, the Green Park Inn would end up being a tear down. He stated that we have an opportunity for an iconic property to be created by someone who has done it before.

Mr. Winkler stated that with this project, they want to try and preserve as much as they can and if they can't do that, they want to try to recreate what was there before.

GK Naquin made a motion to suggest approval of the project with the two conditions of not having to provide a sidewalk along Green Hill Road and to allow for 6 units per acre instead of 5 units per acre, seconded by Woody Hubbard. All members in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Chairman Bill McCarter

Planning & Zoning Specialist, Taylor Miller