

Town of Blowing Rock

Planning Board

Minutes

February 20th, 2025

The Blowing Rock Planning and Zoning Board met on Thursday, February 20th, 2025 for their regularly scheduled meeting. Members present were Chairman Bill McCarter, Chris Squires, Steven Cohen, GK Naquin, Brooks Mayson and Lindsay McClanahan-Cook. Staff members present were Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Zoning Officer Brian Johnson and Support Specialist Taylor Miller.

Meeting called to order at 5:31 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

*A motion was made by Tom Barrett to approve the agenda, seconded by Steven Cohen. **All members in favor.***

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

*A motion was made by Chris Squires to approve January 16th, 2025 minutes, seconded by Steven Cohen. **All members in favor.***

1. 2024 – 05 Conditional Rezoning – Shoppes on the Parkway

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock presented the staff report. The applicant is requesting to rezone from General Business to Condition-Zoning General Business. Shoppes on the Parkway, LLC is the applicant. The applicant is requesting to redevelop the property from a single level retail center to a mixed-use development with retail, restaurants and residential units. They are seeking approval of Phase 1 only at this time. It will be an additional of 34 dwelling units in a 3-4 story building on the south end of the property along the Middle Fork New River. The applicant has shared the entire master plan with the community to indicate their long-term plans but anything beyond phase 1 will require additional approval and need to go through this process again.

The applicant purchased the property in 2022 and has determined it is underutilized. They have proposed a community with residential units, retail shops, restaurants, adequate parking, outdoor lawn and dining areas all tied together within a walkable development with pedestrian sidewalk connections to the future Middle Fork Greenway.

The proposed buildings on the site of the project build-out will exceed 35-feet in height including Phase 1. An increased 40-foot street setback and a 16-foot side and rear setback will be required for the buildings. This project meets required setbacks. The majority of the proposed building has a ridge of 37-feet. There are 5 mezzanines across the face of the building that have a maximum height

of 53-feet. The applicant is requesting a condition of approval for the three additional feet that exceed the 50-foot maximum for the building. There will be a combination of vertical wood siding, heavy timber beams and accents. There is a substantial amount of stucco and efface plan for the exterior walls. Staff has asked for a reduction in the stucco siding and replaced with wood lap siding. Feather edge wood siding was discussed as an option between staff and designer. The architect did change the amount of stucco on the building to the plans presented today. The roof will be charcoal gray standing seam metal.

Staff has asked the applicant if the future phases of the project do not happen, the applicant will be required to make some exterior upgrades to the existing retail shops that will blend with and compliment the proposed building of Phase 1.

The current parking lot will be adjusted to accommodate the proposed residential building once a portion of the current retail building has been removed. Parking for the residential building will be somewhat separated from the rest of the parking lot with some trees and buffering.

The applicant has requested approval of another condition that allows one parking space for every one-bedroom unit, two parking spaces for every two or three plus bedroom unit, plus one space for every four units in the residential building. The one space for every four units is part of our code and is required. The applicant asked that instead of a half space for one bedroom and another half space for a two or over three-bedroom unit that they just have two parking spaces for every unit that is two or more bedrooms.

The proposed parking requires 74 spaces, and the applicant is providing 77 spaces.

Through Phase 1 and through the total build-out of the project, both will reduce the amount of impervious areas than what is there now.

The applicant is proposing rain gardens and bioswales that will treat the storm water and provide water quality benefits that do not exist of the site currently.

Public water and sewer currently supply the property, but the applicant will need to relocate some of the lines to accommodate this proposed building location.

There will be new dumpster areas on site that will be screened within the redesigned parking lot between the proposed building and the existing retail building.

The south end units of the current building will be removed and the parking lot in front of that area will be reorganized.

There is a gap on the southern edge between this property and Chetola. There will need to be a buffer in that area with more screening.

The stream side of the building will have a vegetative buffer that will help screen the proposed building from Highway 321.

The two proposed conditions from the applicant were the parking request and the height request.

The applicant held a neighborhood meeting last week where they shared their immediate plans and their future plan for the project.

Mr. Rothrock stated that staff has proposed two conditions for the applicant. The first states that if within two years of the issuance of the final CO for the condominiums in Phase 1 the applicant decides not to proceed with the future phases of the development then exterior modifications shall be completed on the remaining shopping center buildings. The modifications shall include painting, roofing, siding, rock treatments, timber beams and other aspects that will help blend the existing building with the new condominiums. The work should be completed within 36 months of the final CO issuance for Phase 1.

The second condition from staff states that a sidewalk shall be constructed along the access road to connect the proposed phase 1 condominiums to the intersection of Hwy 321 and the future Middle Fork Greenway Trailhead area. This was a part of their plan for later in development, but the Town wants it done with this first phase.

Chairman McCarter asked about what happens to the connection to Chetola from that property. Mr. Rothrock said he wasn't sure. Chairman McCarter stated he thought the town had an easement through there. Mr. Rothrock said there was a utility easement.

Member Lindsay Cook asked about town infrastructure plans for town water and sewer to accommodate the additional usage. Mr. Rothrock stated that there will be some relocation of some existing lines on the property but beyond that, nothing will need to be done. The town utilities can handle the increase.

Member Steve Cohen asked about the maximum height of the existing building that is there. Mr. Rothrock estimated 37 feet.

Member Brooks Mayson asked about limited resources in terms of the reservoir, clean water availability and our waste management system and whether those systems can accommodate this project. He asked if we have any numbers that could help us understand if this will impact those things. Mr. Rothrock said the town runs at about 40% for the sewer plant and we have more than adequate water.

Member Steve Cohen stated he recognized the property is underutilized. He was under the impression they would be approving a master plan not just phase 1. He asked if our code requires an applicant to have a master plan with the project. Mr. Rothrock stated that they are not required provide a master plan because they may not do it. If phase 1 is successful, they have future plans for the property. Planning Board is only recommending approval for 34 units, not the whole master plan.

Member GK Naquin clarified that we would have the security of still having retail shops on the property even if the applicant does not move forward with the rest of the project because of the town suggested condition of updating the buildings that currently exist there.

Mr. Rothrock stated anything different from Phase 1 will have to come before the board again for approval. Mr. Rothrock also stated that the proposed conditions for this phase will remain in place and other conditions can be proposed when other phases are brought before the board for approval.

Mr. Cohen asked if we could put a condition on this phase that guaranteed there would always be an amount of retail on the property. Mr. Rothrock said that you could, but the applicant would have to agree to it.

Chairman McCarter asked to hear from the applicant.

Jay Herrald spoke on behalf of the applicant. The applicant was unable to be there due to some health concerns. He stated his company has been hired by Oak Hill Management to handle development, construction, sales and property management.

The applicant chose this section of the project because it has the least impact of the current shopping center. Significant demo would need to be carried out in other areas if they started anywhere else.

Jay Herrald mentioned that the 34 units proposed have a variation of floor plans and number of bedrooms for each unit. They want to try and find out what the market is for each kind of unit with this first phase.

Mr. Cohen asked about price points. Mr. Herrald said that they are looking at prices starting in the mid \$500,000's and some of the bigger top units would be around \$1,000,000.

Mr. Squires asked about the drafts of the two staff conditions and if they were okay with them. Mr. Herrald said yes.

Mr. Squires was concerned about parking and asked about the applicant proposed condition of reduction in parking requirements. Mr. Squires asked if the applicant would be okay with keeping the condition as it is but adding to the end that provided if any future phases of development, we will need to address the parking supply and demand of the entire development including Phase 1.

Mr. Herald said it seems very fair and the applicant would most likely be okay with that.

Mr. Cohen asked if there was a condition that could be placed on the property that would restrict short-term rentals. Mr. Herald said that he would be open to hearing information on that, however the property is allowed to have short-term rentals and not having short-term rental units can cause a loss of sales in units. He said they would be open to hearing suggestions, but it is above his pay grade to make that final decision.

Mr. Tom Barrett asked about any group studies or market studies that have been done to assess the demand for this area. Mr. Herald said not in this specific area but said their company has developed 150 condos this year and said that is why they were chosen to help with this project, because they have experience in it. They provided a wide range of unit options in this first phase to gauge what they will need in the other phases.

Mr. Herald noted that the only units with 3 bedrooms are the ones on the top with the mezzanines. The rest of them are all one and two bedrooms.

Mr. Barrett asked if the building has an elevator. Mr. Herald said yes.

Mr. Barrett asked about parking downtown and how it's a challenge for everyone. He mentioned if you live at Shoppes and want to go downtown, it's going to go through your mind "where am I going

to park?” He asked if any form of shuttle or transportation has been considered. Mr. Herald said some folks have brought that up. They have looked into golf cart stuff and could possibly access through Chetola.

Member Linsday Cook asked where HVAC units would go. Mr. Herald said they will go on the roof.

Member Squires asked about the reduction in the amount of stucco on the exterior design of the stucco. He asked if the renderings they are seeing now reflect that reduction. Mr. Bill Dixon said yes. They will also be darkening the color of the stucco.

Mr. Bill Dixon with Appalachian Architecture noted that all the materials they have chosen are approved materials for that zoning district. They will be using real stone and real timber frames.

Mike Trew with Municipal Engineering said he was here to answer any questions.

Mrs. Cook asked what the ground make-up was like. Mr. Trew said the fill isn't too bad and they didn't hit any bedrock.

Mr. Naquin asked how far the first level of the building is to the river below. Mr. Trew said about 35-40 feet.

Chairman McCarter asked if there is a reduction in impervious surface. Mr. Trew said there is a reduction.

The floor was opened to public comment.

John Calbert, lives on Henkel Street, said he has been in the building and development field his whole life. He has done a lot of land development plans and presentations. He questioned where the principal of the LLC was. It was answered that he was unable to be there due to a medical issue. Mr. Calbert said they are asking for approval from the board but there is no one present who can answer any of the board's questions. He said the site plan has a lot of buildings on it and 200,000 square feet of residential and retail use on that property. He said there could be up to 140-150 units, and we don't know what they are going to be. He told the board to remember that the developers need us more than we need them.

Jamie Dixie, lives on Norwood Circle, stated she came tonight to relay the voices of the community. She said there is no need to differentiate between full time and part time residents. She gave the board a sample of Facebook comments on the Blowing Rock Community page. She said the developers are here for profit. She said 65% of the comments were in opposition to the project. About 18% of them were supportive and the rest were neutral. She stated there are 3,600+ members and they are speaking loudly. She requesting that the board listen to our community and help Blowing Rock grow wisely.

Sarah Murphy, lives on Heritage Lane and a member of the Board of Adjustment. She asked if the developers would do this project if they couldn't do short-term rentals. She speculated that their answer would be no. She stated that many cities have a requirement or a tax advantage for developers to provide affordable housing for teachers, police officers, etc. She asked if Blowing Rock has anything like that. Mr. Rothrock stated we do not have anything like that right now.

Warren Cathcart, the owner of Chetola Resort spoke. He stated that they share a very large property line with this project. As a result of that, they have spent a lot of time trying to grasp what these developers are going to do. He said they represent over 2,000 owners in the resort. He said he spent a lot of time meeting with the owner, looking at other projects the developer has done, they have done reference checks on the owners and builders and have spent money internally to do so. He said he had meetings with the 3 Poa's within Chetola. The meetings lasted 13 hours and a lot of it was about this project. He said some of the things they realized were a little bit of a surprise to him. They looked at height, site plan, parking, Phase 1, aesthetic landscaping, utilities and access.

In terms of the height, they are in favor of it. They are not opposed to either heights proposed.

In terms of parking, they are in favor of the reduction in parking. He said there are a lot of required parking spaces that sit open in Chetola that they would prefer to be green space instead of required parking.

In terms of aesthetic, a lot of people who saw it said they were pleased with the look. He also said they were pleased to hear there would be some screening. They have collaborated with the owners quite a bit and have talked about a joint golf cart path from the Shoppes property to Chetola. He said the POA's were intrigued by the idea. He said the security staff were enthused with the idea as well.

In terms of short-term rental, the POA's have been in support of short-term rentals. He said that was a shock to him because it would technically be direct competition for the short-term rental units in Chetola. He stated that they know the buildings would be dark without short-term rentals and the members of Chetola value vibrancy.

He mentioned that they have a shuttle van that they do not use and there could possibly be a collaboration with that shuttle van.

He said that he found out that the previous owner, Mr. Tanger, specifically chose the new owners and it was very particular in who was selected.

Mr. Cathcart stated they are very much in favor of this project.

Chairman McCarter asked if the board had a consensus on the two applicant conditions and the two staff conditions for the project with modifications to the parking that Mr. Squires suggested.

Mr. Cohen stated that he mentioned a condition regarding short-term rentals and then asked if there could be a condition requiring a certain amount of retail on the property.

Mr. Rothrock stated that specific condition might be more appropriate to suggest during the next phase of the project.

Mr. Cohen asked the rest of the board if they would entertain a condition that restricted the use of short-term rentals on the property.

Mr. Squires said that the property is commercially zoned, and his view would be that this is an appropriate place for this area. Usually, a conflict with short-term rentals comes into play when the renting is occurring in an area where other rentals are not occurring, and this property has neighbors that also short-term rent.

The other board members did not support the idea of restricting short-term rentals in this zone due to it already being allowed in that district.

*Chris Squires made a motion to recommend approval of the project with the two conditions proposed to staff 1) the applicant will provide a sidewalk from the Phase 1 project to 321 where it will connect to the trail head for the Middle Fork Greenway and 2) if the applicant decides not to move forward with any other phases of the project, they will upgrade the existing shopping center to compliment the phase 1 building. As well as approval of the two applicant proposed conditions 1) the maximum building height of the five mezzanines be no more than 53 feet measured from the primary entrance and 2) the reduction in parking that states one space for one bedroom, two spaces for two bedrooms and two spaces for anything 3 bedrooms or more with the suggestion that provided any future phases of redevelopment will need to address the parking supply and demand of the entire development including Phase 1. Seconded by GK Naquin. **Five members in favor of the motion. One member opposed.***

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Chairman, Bill McCarter

Support Specialist, Taylor Miller