

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

CITY OF BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON

Thursday
June 3, 2021
Video Recorded

7:00 PM
City Council Chambers
www.cob.org

Call to Order / Roll Call

Present: Mike Estes (Chair), Ali Taysi, Barbara Plaskett, Jed Ballew, Scott Jones and Victor Crosetti (joined at 7:20pm)

Absent: Rose Lathrop

Approval of Minutes

Public Comment Period

Opportunity for citizens to speak informally to the Planning Commissioners on any subject not listed on the agenda. Speakers are allowed a MAXIMUM of three (3) minutes to address the Commission. Speakers will not be required to disclose their address.

WORK SESSION

CityView Proposal - a new residential multi-family project consisting of 106 units on a vacant 11-acre parcel generally north of Consolidation Avenue between Puget and Nevada Streets.

Staff provided a brief overview of the site's history and the application being reviewed, and explained the land-use review process followed to date. Staff noted the changes that have occurred to the project in response to public comment and the City's requests for information. Staff requested that the Commission identify any additional issues, on top of what was outlined in the staff report, that the City should consider during the SEPA review process.

Morgan Bartlett, applicant expressed his appreciation to both the Commission and the involvement of the neighborhood and the comments that have been submitted. He reviewed the issues that he has heard or read about and explained how he intends to address them.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Julie LaVergne questioned how the public could be assured that all of the comment submitted to date are reviewed by all the appropriate parties. She questioned why development is being considered in this area, as it seems to go against the City's development policies that are published on the website with regard to bus stops and convenience to shopping.

George Sanders expressed concern related to loss of on-street parking along Nevada due to the fact that Consolidation Avenue is too steep and narrow for tandem trucks or WTA busses to transit safely along. He mentioned that, after research, he could not find where the City of Bellingham ever specifically approved such high-density development for this parcel. He commented on the lack of proper geo testing done and expressed concern about the size of the

project being built at such a steep location. He spoke to the reduction in vegetation that will be realized.

Rob Flack stated that this is wrong development in the wrong place and will only positively benefit one person, while negatively impacting an entire neighborhood. He pointed out that there will be traffic congestion and unsafe streets, flooding from stormwater runoff, noise pollution, increased trash, loss of existing home values. He noted the access to the site is quite limited.

Lani Gabriel stated that there is a need for more single-family homes, not apartments. She noted that the three bedrooms and three bathrooms in one unit is completely wasted space. She commented on the lack of home-ownership options and expressed her frustration on the inability to get people out of apartments and into single-family homes. She expressed concern about trash, especially large furniture pieces, being left outside of the dumpsters and questioned how the developer will stop deter this from occurring. She expressed her concern about the traffic congestion and narrow streets.

Kevin Jenkins, Puget Neighborhood Association President shared comments from the neighborhood. He questioned what the impact of the development would be on the neighborhood with regard to water pressure, sewage capacity and water runoff from the weather. He stated that neighbors would like to know how the City or developer will be addressing the traffic challenges that will occur from 700 new individuals coming to the area. He also noted that the neighbors would like to know who they call if the issues they foresee occurring actually do occur. He listed the different ways that the project does not fit into the neighborhood and wanted to know if the neighborhood plans are meaningful or just an exercise that does not have any weight.

Nabil Kamel commented on the complete disregard for the concerns related to design, form and compatibility that does not address the character or needs of the neighborhood. He stated that he submitted the ways in which the project conflicts with the requirements found in the Multi-family Residential Design Handbook. He noted the revised SEPA analysis continues to be inadequate and incomplete, and shared some of the missing data. He also pointed out that a five-story building is not compatible with the neighborhood. He suggested that the developer work with an architect that could make the project work in a way that is more compatible and less dangerous given the steep slopes.

Todd Lagestee stated that this project is not the type of development or in the right location to assist in combating climate change. He pointed out the different ways that building this dense housing away from arterial streets and transit options is not the best choice. He expressed concern about this specific project being built on a steep slope, given the natural disaster that is anticipated to occur in our area at some point in the future. He commented on the fact that there are no parks in the vicinity. He explained that without an arterial road into this dense area, the safety of the residents will be greatly impacted in the case of a medical emergency.

Dick Conoboy stated that the totality of this project is overwhelming compared to the surrounding area and completely out of neighborhood character. He pointed out that it is being built to attract college students, regardless of what the developer says. He commented on the noise nuisances that will need to be endured by the neighbors and noted that the enforcement of such issues are ineffective. He listed some of the additional animals that can be found in this area that were not listed on the SEPA checklist submitted to the City. He spoke to the trail connector path to 46th Street which, in his opinion, will only increase the already present parking issues.

Jeffrey Eastman spoke to the water issues that the neighborhood currently experiences during the rainy weather. He questioned how emergency vehicles would be able to transit along the 12'-wide, steep (15% grade) emergency access road. He also wanted to know if the gates would be locked on either end with access limited to only emergency vehicles, given the fact that personal vehicles would not be able to pass each other with retaining walls on either side.

Steve Abell shared why he felt some of the claims and assumptions made in the application are inaccurate and should be revised. He also noted that some of the land-use codes cited were not the most appropriate ones to use for the project. He suggested that LU-225 Off-Campus Student Apartments be used when making predictions related to future traffic. He spoke to parking for CityView and compared it to two other similar projects in the City, concluding that CityView does not provide enough parking onsite especially given the distance from campus, shopping and public transit options. He pointed out that the lack of parking onsite will place undue burden on the neighborhood streets and residents.

Linda Diebert spoke to the issues of affordability and the primary target for residency being students. She noted the decline in students attending Western Washington University (WWU) and stated this is a nation-wide trend. She shared some statistics, provided by WWU, related to the reservations for beds they have received being far less than they have available, or currently under construction. She also spoke to the other different student housing projects in the city and the number of beds that they have available for students. She expressed concern that the design and monthly rents were not meant for low- or middle-income families.

Christopher Jensen pointed out that this is not multi-family development, and in fact it is a college dormitory. He stated that the response to the RFI showed disdain for the neighbors. He noted that the neighborhood character and the quality of life should be a consideration.

Brian McNitt stated that this is a large-scale commercial student dorm masquerading as multifamily housing. He questioned why this proposal was coming forward as no large buildings, of any design, would not be consistent with the existing neighborhood character. He noted that privacy will be an issue given that during the winter months, the foliage is gone and you see straight through the property and nothing can be done to mitigate for this issue.

Alison Costanza suggested that a new traffic study be done so that counts can occur during a more typical college week, instead of during finals.

Jacque Barnett expressed concern about how this development will impact her family's safety. She commented on the severity of traffic issues at the corner of Consolidation and Nevada and suggested that this will need to be addressed if the project were to be approved. She stated that the stability of the trees around her home are already a concern, and she is fearful what may occur if the land is disturbed. She spoke to the movement that is already occurring on the slope.

Kathleen Taylor spoke to the scale of the project and stated that it will ruin the character of the neighborhood. She questioned the vacancy rate that the developer quoted and wanted to know who to call in case of issues with the tenants, as there is no on-site management proposed. She expressed support for a new traffic study being done. She stated that the trees being proposed to mitigate noise and provide separation will not be enough.

Thomas Dohman spoke to the negative impacts from the proposed size and location of the project. He suggested that this project not be approved.

Donald Diebert commented on the impacts of privacy to the adjacent neighbors of the project. He commented on the size of the building being out of scale for the neighborhood. He noted the lack of on-site parking. He spoke to the work done by the Puget Neighborhood Workgroup related to this site and the report that was submitted to the City.

Chuck Beringer spoke to the traffic issues along Consolidation Avenue. He stated that the size and scope of the project should be reconsidered. He noted that, in his opinion, people will not be walking up (or down) Consolidation for public transportation access.

COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION

The Commission discussed each of the topics identified by staff and a summary of their recommendations are as follows:

- Drainage and Stormwater Runoff – 1) Ensure that cumulative impacts are considered; 2) ensure the adequacy of the scope of review; and 3) ensure the adequacy of any technical responses to the proposed design of the system meets or exceeds all adopted standards.
- Critical Areas and Geological Hazards - Consider both slope stability and seismic activity and implement appropriate measurements to address them.
- Traffic and Pedestrian Safety – 1) Assess consistency with the City's climate goals and policies as it relates to transportation; 2) assess the demands and limits of multi-modal accessibility to the site and the plausibility of multi-modal use; 3) ensure adequacy of street infrastructure; 4) clarify why one traffic standard is chosen over another; 5) ensure that fair-share contributions are provided; and 6) consider parking demand based on anticipated demographics.

<BREAK>

Victor Crosetti was unable to re-join the meeting.

- Project Scale – Consider the concerns raised related to: 1) the adequacy of the transition and separation between the proposed project and the adjacent uses; 2) the adequacy and applicability of the multifamily design guidelines when applied to this circumstance – specific to the intent to provide a better transition between uses when they are dissimilar; and 3) acknowledging the contextual use patterns – can the scale and transitional impacts in the neighborhood be adequately mitigated to an acceptable level.
- Parking – 1) Assess the adequacy of the provided off-street parking to accommodate likely demand and use and consider appropriate ways mitigation measures; and 2) consider requiring the project to enhance and encourage multi-modal use through incentives or other appropriate methods.
- Comprehensive Plan Consistency – 1) Assess the comprehensive plan consistency with attention specifically directed to the friction between needing to separate because of dissimilar scale and the desire to build integral neighborhoods that are connected.
- Social Behaviors (noise, garbage, parking) – 1) Assess the adequacy of solid waste and recycling facilities; 2) assess the rules related to discouraging or prohibiting disposal off-site; 3) consider strategies that can be implemented on-site to minimize some of the adverse effects; and 4) evaluate use terms for the open-space so that it minimizes off-site disruption.
- Housing Affordability – Encourage alternative floor plans to accommodate a range of current and future uses.

Old/New Business

Mike Estes reminded the Commission that there will be meetings held on June 10 and June 17, 2021.

Adjournment

Minutes prepared by:

Heather Aven

Heather Aven, Recording Secretary

Minutes edited by Planning Commission members and various Planning Staff.