

**TOWN OF LA CONNER
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
FEBRUARY 2, 2016**

The Planning Commission meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Present were Commissioners Mike Carlisle, Mary Wohleb, Bob Skeelee and Administrator John Doyle.

OPENING COMMENTS:

There were no opening comments.

MINUTES:

Commissioner Wohleb moved to approve the minutes of November 17, 2015. Seconded by Commissioner Skeelee. Motion carried 3-0.

NEW BUSINESS:

- *Underwood & Associates presentation of proposed plans for the Palmer's property, 512 S. First Street*

Mr. Doyle introduced Mike Underwood with the architectural firm Underwood & Associates. He and property owner, Mike Girdner, are seeking feedback from the planning commission on the preliminary design for a major renovation of the Palmer's property. Mr. Underwood gave an overview of the project and presented conceptual plans, stating they anticipate the project will be developed in four phases.

Phase 1: Repair and remodel the existing structure to create retail spaces.

Phase 2: Add on to the south side of the building extending it to the property line next to the Benton Street end; enclose the area where the barbecue pit used to be; remove the roof; install sprinklers; add a platform in the main building with 4 apartments and office space above. The parking lot on the north side will be used for construction staging purposes.

Phase 3: Construct a new foundation and structural elements in the north parking area in preparation for the next phase.

Phase 4: Add 3 additional apartments, offices and a deck above the new addition.

Mr. Underwood explained the parking arrangement, stating with the proposed usage 26 parking spaces are required and an additional 13 can be purchased through payment of en-lieu-of fees. A discussion followed about the Benton Street end access which will need to be reconfigured. Commissioner Wohleb expressed concern about this parking arrangement and Mr. Underwood noted they plan to review other options.

Commissioner Wohleb asked if they have a business plan. Mr. Underwood responded that the residential use will comprise about 30%, retail 50-60%, and offices 10-15%. A restaurant is not planned although they may include smaller food outlets.

Mr. Doyle reviewed the permit process. The permits will be consolidated to the hearing examiner for final decision, however the planning commission will have ample opportunity to review the project and forward their recommendation.

Mr. Girdner spoke about his project which will be called The Galleria. He stated an engineer performed an extensive analysis and the building was found to be very structurally sound. In designing the buildings they tried to vary the exterior colors, height, and siding materials to be cohesive with the surrounding historic district. The possibility of requesting a height variance to allow for steeper roof pitches was also discussed. Without a variance they would have to remove the transom in order to accommodate a steeper pitch. They feel removing the transom would affect the character of the building and the integration with neighboring properties. Mr. Doyle cautioned that a height variance would increase the mass and scale of the project, which would alter the streetscape and present issues with fire protection. There was further discussion about the design, which will incorporate rain gardens between the buildings, an eventual pedestrian access through the main building to the boardwalk, and signage allowances.

Mr. Doyle mentioned the County's valuation of the repair/maintenance activities currently underway was found to trigger the town's sprinkler ordinance. Although the project will be considered as a whole, each phase needs to be compliant on its own. A meeting will be held to discuss the fire safety issues before finalizing the application.

- *Review request from Joan Cross to install water collection tanks at the Crossroads Building, 125 Washington Street*

Joan Cross reviewed her yearly water usage and found she needs 2,000 gallons for the garden area alone. She would like to capture the rainwater by installing two dark green 500 gallon tanks, 4' in diameter and 6' tall. Commissioner Skeele asked if the tanks could be screened by boxing them in, but this would be too expensive. There was discussion about the visual impact and ways to encourage conservation while establishing some general specifications through an approval process for future requests. The commission would like to give this further consideration and will continue discussion at the next meeting.

- *Review proposed Conditional Use for Ruth Sutton, 112 Morris Street, for recommendation to the Hearing Examiner. The applicant would like to convert an existing commercial building to mixed use.*

This project would convert the former liquor store into a two-story residential unit. The suite fronting Morris Street will remain commercial use. The commission feels there is a need for additional residential space in town and is supportive.

A motion was made by Commissioner Wohleb, seconded by Commissioner Skeele, to recommend the Hearing Examiner approve the Conditional Use request.

With no further business Commissioner Skeele moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 p.m.

Chair Linda Talman

Date