

Meeting Minutes

Boulder Town Planning Commission

February 12, 2009, 7:00 p.m.

Commissioners present included Mike Nelson (acting chair), BJ Orozco, Bobbie Cleave, and Ray Gardner. Brian Dick was out of town. Substitute Recording Secretary was Judi Davis. Members of the public included Mark Nelson

Mike called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m. He welcomed Bobbie as the newest member of the Planning Commission. BJ made a motion to approve the January 8 minutes, Ray seconded the motion and all approved.

Discussion on High Density Residential Zoning

Mark had prepared proposed language for the high-density, residential section of the General Plan. He had received input from Randy Ripplinger and Donna Jean Wilson, which he incorporated into the draft, and presented. Among his objections to the original wording included an implied acceptance of a need for high density housing, which he questioned, along with his feeling that “high-density” residential zoning in the Village Center shouldn’t even be indicated if we want to preserve the charm of that area.

He reiterated that “exceptions” are bad in planning. The language “case-by-case basis” doesn’t include any parameters; definite guidelines are needed. He suggested, and the Commission seemed to agree, that it is better to be cautious than to be too open. We do need affordable housing and perhaps employee housing, but he questioned whether high density is the solution.

BJ liked this sentence: “Boulder Town does not wish to encourage or endorse higher density, urban-type landscapes, or the type of infrastructure that is necessary to support them.” He thinks that says it all and that the rest of the wording supports that.

Mike stated that he would wordsmith the proposal, get back with Mark, then bring it back to the Commission on March 12.

Ray asked if high density or clustering are being postponed altogether. If so, will that help preserve “a rural-agricultural community with large areas of unspoiled pastoral and scenic vistas,” or will that encourage large areas that will then be broken up and houses placed in the middle of each lot? He was hesitant to say what anyone can do with their property. If large lots are all that are available, only those who can afford them will buy.

Mark stated that it is hard to plan for the unknown. “If we’re going to have the kind of town we want, it can’t be all things to all people, nor should it be... Change will happen, but it should be planned. There’s a difference between accommodating growth and promoting growth. You can zone down, but it can’t be turned around and then zoned up, so we should be cautious.”

Mike had asked Curtis about legal issues, and Curtis stated that the town has the right to zone one area differently from another. Mark didn’t feel that that was accurate. There was speculation as to how the high-density residential section got into the General Plan, and Judi pointed out that it was in previous versions because there are two areas of pre-existing high-density use.

In response to Ray's concern, it was emphasized that clustering is currently allowed in our ordinances and could be the best way to address affordable and/or employee housing.

Ray then presented an example and a question. If a retired couple wants to come to Boulder but doesn't want to maintain a big acreage, what would they do? We'd rather see a pasture, but if that's all that's available and they put their house in the middle of the field, do we want that? BJ felt that clustering should answer that concern.

Judi suggested that the Planning Commission just think about the need for smaller lots for young people who can't afford large pieces and the real need for young families, as Boulder's population is aging and there is a definite scarcity of young people to help with farm work. Mark had earlier suggested that there are areas in town that are unsuitable for farming/ranching, and Judi wondered if they couldn't be identified and zoned as high-density.

Discussion on Gibbs Smith's Ranch Sign

As background: Gibbs' sign is too high, and his application for a permit was denied because it didn't fit the height restrictions. The height of the gate is not the issue. He has now submitted an application for a change in the sign section of the Zoning Ordinance. Mike thinks ordinances shouldn't be changed just because one person asks, but that there should be a real need for it. BJ holds with the original decision. Ray concurs and asked what qualifies Gibbs lot as a ranch. Peg will advertise a public hearing to be held at the March 12 meeting.

Ray reported on an assignment he received earlier. The tunnels in Red Canyon are 13'6", so he suggested that a maximum height for a gate sign, if allowed, be in the 13'6" - 14' range. Gibbs's sign still wouldn't be in compliance. Mark feels we need to find a way to let people know that they can't put the sign up and then ask for a permit (or hope no one notices.) He stressed that ordinances should not become a popularity contest (i.e., if Gibbs brings 30-40 signatures of people who like his sign, that shouldn't be the deciding factor—if we don't want tall signs for the overall effect they would have on the town, it shouldn't matter how many signatures he has.) BJ stated that the momentum is often based on "facts" that aren't true, and Mark agreed that facts too often take a back seat to public clamor. Mike then reminded the Commission that, if there is a real reason to change an ordinance, then it should be done. Mark reminded the PC that sometimes they have to be the bad guy to protect what is best for the whole community.

The March 12 agenda will include:

- a public hearing, followed by review, decision, and recommendation to the Town Council on wording for the high density section of the General Plan.
- a public hearing, followed by review, decision, and recommendation to the Town Council on Gibbs' application for a change in the sign section of the Zoning Ordinance.

BJ may not be in town for the March meeting.

Ray moved to dismiss, BJ seconded the motion, and Mike adjourned the meeting at 8:20 p.m.

[notes taken by Judi Davis, and presented here by Peg Smith, Planning Commission Clerk] Date

Approved: _____ Date: _____