

Planning Commission Minutes – November 1, 2023

PRESENT: Chairwoman Nancy Moore and Members: Joe Becker and David Volpe

ABSENT: Members: Ed Andrulonis and Diane Bernardo

STAFF: Code Enforcement/Zoning Officer, Zac Lawhead; City Solicitor, Toni Cherry; Councilman Pat Reasinger; and Administrative Secretary Korbi Slocum

The meeting was called to order at 4:20 p.m. by Planning Commission Chairwoman, Nancy Moore.

Approval of Minutes – September 6, 2023 & October 4, 2023

The motion was made by Volpe and seconded by Becker that the Planning Commission approve the minutes of September 6, 2023, and October 4, 2023, as presented.

VOTE

AYES: Commission Members: Becker, Volpe and Chairwoman Moore

ABSTAIN: None

NAYS: None

MOTION PASSED: 3-0

At this point, Miss Cherry joined the meeting.

New Business:

Gaven Wolfgang – 515 Liberty Blvd.

Lawhead introduced Gaven Wolfgang who is requesting to open a gaming café in the building formerly housing Fishel's Hobby Shop. The building was recently purchased by Chris Beck of Rockton. Lawhead explained that the zoning is Industrial and allows for commercial uses as a 'conditional use'. Mr. Wolfgang is interested in opening a business there. He did get Mr. Beck's permission (see page 6 of the application). He can explain his business plans.

Wolfgang described the gaming café as 'basically like an arcade almost'. He also will offer easy-to-make food, snacks and drinks. There will be computers, consoles like PlayStation and X-box, and board games. There will be a variety of games to choose from.

"As far as the building, Chris is handling the majority of the renovations. Nothing too structural. New floorboards, walls and ceiling tiles.

Some of the renovations I will be responsible for include some upgrades to the electrical because there will be lots of high draws with all the machines and what-not in there. I think we are adding a restroom as well. There is a little employee room with two tiny restrooms, but we want to add a public restroom for customers when they come in.

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I know Chris is also planning on doing some outside renovations. There is a pretty bad pothole in the parking lot. He also wants to add some better parking signage to make it easier to get in and out. And putting in some extra cooling, as well. With all the machines, again, drawing all that power is going to produce a lot of heat and I need to make sure it is comfortable as far as temperature goes. Adding in some A/C units is going to be part of it.

That mainly covers what I will be doing as far as renovations go.”

Chairwoman Moore asked if Chris is his partner. “Chris is just the owner of the building; I will be renting from him. We have been talking for a few months now and he likes the idea that I have. He is looking for someone to move in there and he and I seem to have the same vision as to where we want the building to go. I think we will do well together.”

Cherry asked, “This video game café is going to be on the first floor?” Wolfgang replied, “Yes, right where the old hobby shop used to be. It should be exactly the same space as the hobby shop.”

Cherry then asked, “But you’re not going upstairs? Those will still be apartments?” Wolfgang replied, “Right. Those will still be residential.”

Cherry noted that there will be plenty of parking. Wolfgang confirmed there is parking in both the front and back.

Cherry stated, “It’s clearly a commercial use permitted in a commercial district. The only issue is you will have to come to Council to have a Conditional Use hearing, but I don’t have any legal concerns. I assume you are here today to recommend to Council that they have a hearing and grant the conditional use.”

The motion was made by Becker and seconded by Volpe to recommend to Council to have a hearing and grant the conditional use.

VOTE

AYES: Commission Members: Becker, Volpe and Chairwoman Moore

ABSTAIN: None

NAYS: None

MOTIONED PASSED: 3-0

Cherry said, “I think it’s gonna be great! It’s nice to have something on that side.” Wolfgang replied, “I think it will be really good, too. Thank you.”

Becker commented, “Something a little different for people to do in town.” Cherry added, “I think it’s nice.”

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Moore asked, “Will there be regular computers in use?” Wolfgang replied, “There will be gaming computers. They will be all fancy looking and flashy but they are just a normal computer. You can go in and do whatever you wanted on it, really, but they’re meant for playing video games.”

Becker asked, “Will you have competitions and stuff, too?” Wolfgang replied, “I really want to work with... There has been a lot of eSports talk lately. I think the middle school started a club or an actual sport, but I want to work with the schools – like Penn State/DuBois, the high school and middle school – to get in some training time. Maybe do some sort of collaboration. That’s a pretty exciting thing that’s coming up in the future. It gets more and more popular every year, like professional gaming. It sounds kind of weird to think about but look at all the money that goes into these big tournaments that are world-wide. You’re talking millions. The industry is in the billions. It’s not slowing down any time soon. It’s pretty exciting stuff.”

Becker commented, “It’s pretty neat.”

Volpe handed Wolfgang some contact information. “I work at the high school. There’s the directors of our eSports program.” Wolfgang replied, “OK. Great! Thank you. I will definitely be in touch.”

Referring to the agenda, Moore said, “We have new business and old business on here, but I don’t think we have any.”

Old Business:

Cherry said, “I think we’ve already decided on the language of the ordinance, and I will be presenting that to Council. We had already discussed the renter issue, correct?” Lawhead responded, “Yes.”

Cherry continued, “OK. And, also, the junkyard amendment, so I think we’re set on that. We’ll present them. I think we’re good. That will be it.”

Visitor’s Comments

Councilman Pat Reasinger welcomed Gaven Wolfgang to the City.

Cherry asked Lawhead about the form Gaven completed. “This was a form I drew when we had both Zoning (variances) and when Council did ‘conditional uses’ and Zoning would have to grant special exceptions. We do it now through Council because it’s far more economical for the person applying. I want to raise that if you don’t mind.”

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Moore stated, “I think it’s time.”

Cherry agreed, “I think so, too. I don’t know that the new group coming in understands that Council has the power to grant conditional uses.”

Reasinger asked, “Like zoning variances and things?”

Cherry explained, “In lieu of a zoning variance, Council can use the modification provision, so they don’t have to have that variance. And, instead of the special exception which can only be done by a Zoning hearing, Council does conditional uses. If you look at our Ordinance, we have really changed all things that were ‘special exceptions’ to ‘conditional uses’. So, I’m thinking...”

Lawhead agreed saying, “We need to update the form. Make it a little simpler. There’s so much that deals with the other stuff that we don’t use and there’s a lot of blank.”

Cherry replied, “I think so.”

Moore said, “It should be completely separate.”

Cherry continued, “I saw here granting a variance. But Council goes right to modification now. When that happens, Council has the power to not enforce any provision or not be bound by it and we already have that taken care of. I think all this stuff about variance should come off. I want to make sure you’re OK with it before I get this done before the end of the year.”

Lawhead responded, “That would be fine. If you’ll give me a rough draft then we can go over it. I think that would help because sometimes it (the form) is intimidating. Nine pages and we’re only using two of them, maybe three.” Wolfgang commented, “It was slightly intimidating, I can attest to that.”

Cherry asked if the Planning Commission wanted to direct her to update the form.

The motion was made by Becker and seconded by Volpe to direct Cherry to update the form.

VOTE

AYES: Becker, Volpe and Chairwoman Moore

ABSTAIN: None

NAYS: None

MOTION PASSED: 3-0

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Cherry stated, “The modification form is good.”

Moore agreed, “The modification is wonderful.” Speaking to Councilman Reasinger, Moore continued. “You’ll get to realize that. When things come from the Planning Commission to Council they should be wrapped up by staff and it should make review much easier. The other thing I want to tell you is you can’t have another entity that you’ve appointed taking you to court which has happened in the past.”

Cherry added, “That’s been the awkwardness between zoning and council. This way, Planning gets to look at it.”

Reasinger clarified, “Everything goes through Council and Planning.” Cherry said, “I think that makes you directly responsive to the people who elected you. You know your City. You have that power and I think that’s good.”

Cherry requested a blank form from Lawhead so she can begin updating the form.

Adjourn

There being no further business to transact, the motion was made by Volpe and seconded by Becker that the Planning Commission adjourn at 4:35 p.m.

VOTE

AYES: Commission Members: Becker, Volpe and Chairwoman Moore

ABSTAIN: None

NAYS: None

MOTION PASSED: 3-0