

Gastonia Planning Commission February 8th, 2024 Meeting Minutes

The Gastonia Planning Commission meeting opened at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, February 8, 2024, in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 181 S. South Street of Gastonia, NC.

Present: Chair Kristie Ferguson and Commissioners Megan Chapman, Anthony Gallant, Chad Ghorley and Glen Silverman

Absent: Commissioners Jim Stewart, Carl Harris and Rodney Armstrong

Staff Members Present: Charles Graham, Quentin McPhatter, Jalen Nash, Jordan Tubbs, Keith Lineberger, and Amber Bridges

Item 1a: Role Call / Sound Check

Chair Kristie Ferguson noted the absence of Commissioners Stewart, Armstrong and Harris and declared a quorum for the meeting.

Item 1b: Calls/Contacts to Planning Commission Members

Chair Ferguson and Commissioner Ghorley received two contacts. None of the other Commissioners received any contacts.

Item 1d: Approval of January 4th, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Ghorley made a motion to adopt the January 4th minutes as presented and Commissioner Gallant seconded the motion. The motion unanimously passed (4-0).

Item 2: Public Hearing – Union Mill (File #202300408)

Subject hearing involves a request for annexation and assignment of zoning for approximately 219.178 acres from Gaston County R-1 (Single-family Limited Residential) to PD-RRDD (Planned Development – Revised Residential Development District). The subject property is located on Union New Hope Road, directly across Glover Road and is owned by Walton North Carolina, LLC.

Chair Ferguson announced that the Gastonia City Council will hold a Public Hearing for the annexation and assignment of zoning request at the February 20th, 2024 meeting.

Chair Ferguson recognized Jordan Tubbs, Senior Planner, for staff presentation. Mr. Tubbs stated that the request includes an annexation petition and that the applicant is present for a recommendation on the zoning. Mr. Tubbs discussed the existing conditions and surrounding zoning of the subject property. He stated the request is for a 526-unit single-family residential development. The site plan was displayed. Mr. Tubbs discussed the 50-foot perimeter setback along the entirety of the property and the 100-foot landscape setback along Union New Hope Road which the applicant has agreed to provide. He discussed the agreed upon conditions in the staff report and noted that a Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) is required for this development which is currently under review. Mr. Tubbs stated the request is consistent with the 2025 Future Land Use Map for residential uses and staff is recommending approval.

With no questions for staff, Chair Ferguson recognized Sara Shirley, 200 S. Tryon Street, Charlotte, NC. Ms. Shirley stated that she works with Kimley Horn and is representing the applicant, Meritage Homes. Ms. Shirley discussed the neighborhood meeting that was held and the site plan revisions requested from staff. She noted that construction will most likely be in four phases and that full buildout would be intended for 6-8 years. Ms. Shirley discussed specifics of the site plan, including stream buffers, wetlands, setbacks, open space, and tree save area. She shared the concerns from the neighborhood meeting which were traffic, neighborhood change, environmental protection and construction.

Chair Ferguson recognized Reid Owen, 13925 Ballantyne Corporate Place, Charlotte, NC. Mr. Owen shared that he is present on behalf of Meritage Homes. He provided background information on Meritage Homes and shared that they have also built in the neighboring Nolen Farms development. Mr. Owen also noted that Meritage will be the land developer, home builder and seller throughout the process.

Chair Ferguson recognized Holly Stowe, 630 Union New Hope Road, Gastonia, NC. Ms. Stowe shared that she is an adjoining property owner and long-time resident of Gastonia. She stated she has a small farm and that her main concerns with the proposed development were the quality of life. Ms. Stowe shared that Union New Hope road is a rural area, with several farms and large lots which would make this project not compatible. She shared concerns with density, small lot sizes, school capacity and traffic. Commissioner Silverman asked Ms. Stowe if the property that she owns adjacent to the site is currently being farmed. Ms. Stowe replied “Yes”, and shared that it is for hay for their cattle.

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Chair Ferguson recognized Daniel Cerdeiras, 247 Moore Drive, Gastonia, NC. Mr. Cerdeiras shared that he has a small farm and was attracted to the Union New Hope Road area due to its rural nature, low density development, and limited traffic. He shared that the proposed development would not improve the lives of the existing residents. He shared concerns for quality of life and density and stated that the proposed development did not fit in with the area.

Chair Ferguson recognized Eduardo Cerdeiras, 247 Moore Drive, Gastonia, NC. Mr. Cerdeiras shared that he has the same concerns as the previous speakers. He stated that the property should be developed with more of an ecological mindset to preserve nature and not be so dense. Mr. Cerdeiras also discussed the issues of road connections, traffic concerns, and school capacity. He noted that cookie cutter homes do not fit in this area and he expressed concerns with clear cutting the existing woods.

Chair Ferguson recognized David Arruzza, 243 Moore Drive, Gastonia, NC. Mr. Arruzza shared that the proposed project did not fit in with the existing County properties. He stated that the lots should be 2 acres and the unit count should be cut in half. Mr. Arruzza shared concerns with homes being too close to one another and the property being overbuilt. He also stated that traffic will get worse and that the infrastructure cannot withstand the new homes.

Commissioner Ghorley asked Ms. Shirley what the turn out of the neighborhood meeting was and if any suggestions from the residents were added to the site plan. Ms. Shirley responded that there were 20 to 25 people in attendance. She also noted that the 50-foot perimeter setback around the entire property was added due to feedback from residents. Commissioner Ghorley asked Mr. Owen if he had thought about less density since this is a more rural area. Mr. Owen replied that the current site plan is a significant decrease in unit count from the original site plan. He also shared that Meritage would not be able to make one acre to three quarters of an acre lots work. Commissioner Ghorley asked what amenities would be provided. Ms. Shirley shared that it is not yet finalized but that they are planning for a pool and clubhouse as well as several pocket parks throughout the site.

Commissioner Silverman asked for clarification on the proposed elevations. Mr. Owen stated that the elevations included in the packet are different varieties for ranch style and two-story homes. He discussed that the elevations are similar to the homes built in Nolen Farms. Mr. Owen also noted that they are anticipating more feedback on the elevations from staff throughout the process. Commissioner Chapman asked Ms. Shirley for clarification on price points. Ms. Shirley discussed that price points are based upon the current market at the time of sale but that they will be market rate.

Chair Ferguson asked Ms. Shirley if the perimeter setback and landscape setback were agreed upon conditions and beyond what the code required. Ms. Shirley replied "Yes". Ms. Shirley approached for a rebuttal to address concerns from the residents. She discussed compliance with all City and County ordinances, the need for additional housing in the area, the water and sewer extension planned for Union New Hope Road, and the future vision of the City.

Commissioner Gallant made a motion to close the public hearing and Commissioner Ghorley seconded the motion. The motion to close the public hearing was unanimously approved (5-0).

Commissioner Gallant and Chair Ferguson discussed the TIA. Assistant City Attorney, Charles Graham, noted that the TIA takes the provided density and unit count into account and will provide mitigations to the project site and other intersections that are studied. The Commissioners discussed the density, TIA, consistency and price points. Commissioner Ghorley stated he felt the request was consistent based upon similar projects in the area. Commissioner Chapman shared that she has concerns with the density. Chair Ferguson discussed affordability and how it is related to density.

With no further discussion, Commissioner Ghorley made a motion to recommend approval of the request as presented with the statement of consistency and reasonableness. Commissioner Gallant seconded the motion. With no discussion, the motion to recommend approval of the request as presented was unanimously passed (5-0).

Item 3: Public Hearing – Oakwood Townhomes (File #202300361)

Subject hearing involves a request to rezone approximately 3.152 acres from RS-12 (Single-family Residential, minimum 12,000 sq. ft. lots) to PD-RRDD (Planned Development – Revised Residential Development District). The subject property is located at 1106 N. Oakwood Street and is owned by KB Holdings, LLC.

Chair Ferguson recognized Jordan Tubbs, Senior Planner, for staff presentation. The zoning map was displayed. Mr. Tubbs stated the request was for a maximum of 35 rear loaded townhomes located on N. Oakwood Street. He explained the existing conditions of the property and the surrounding zoning. The site plan was displayed. Mr. Tubbs explained that site plan was designed in accordance with

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Section 8.1.17 following the Revised Residential Development Standards. He discussed the agreed upon conditions in the staff report. Additionally, he noted that the applicant has agreed to provide a two-story product although the elevations show a three-story. Mr. Tubbs stated that the request is consistent with the Future Land Use Map for residential uses and staff is recommending approval as presented.

With there being no questions for staff, Chair Ferguson recognized Kenneth Bell, 325 State Street, Charlotte, NC. Mr. Bell shared that he is the applicant on the request. He started by providing some background information on the previous ownership of the subject property. Mr. Bell discussed the existing conditions of N. Oakwood Street, particularly the narrow roads and lack of pedestrian infrastructure. Mr. Bell discussed highlights of the site plan including open space, sidewalk on Oakwood, and buffers.

Commissioner Gallant asked if the townhomes are for sale or for rent. Mr. Bell replied that they are intended for sale. Commissioner Gallant asked for details on the neighborhood meeting and if any suggestions from the residents were included on the site plan. Mr. Bell replied that there was a good turnout at the neighborhood meeting. He discussed that the main concerns were traffic, density, and overall change. In response to the concerns, Mr. Bell noted that they added additional buffers, wider driveways at the entrance and units that front on Oakwood for aesthetic purposes.

Chair Ferguson asked Mr. Bell about the re-located access to 1106 ½ N. Oakwood Street. Mr. Bell replied that he has been in contact with that property owner. He discussed that there is currently a dirt road to the rear property but that they have agreed to provide paved access through this development.

Chair Ferguson recognized Angie Castro, 7823 Elwood Drive, Charlotte, NC. Ms. Castro shared that she is a realtor. She discussed the lack of affordable housing and that she was in favor of the proposed project.

Chair Ferguson recognized Eric Eichinger, 424 E. 36th Street, Charlotte, NC. Mr. Eichinger shared that he was in favor of the project and believes it will provide needed affordable housing.

Chair Ferguson recognized Ashshaquor Sandiford, 5124 Rosemead Drive, Charlotte, NC. Mr. Sandiford shared that he is working on a similar project on Davidson Avenue. He discussed theft and drug use in the area and noted that he believes new housing will help. Mr. Sandiford stated that he was in favor of the project and its potential to increase home ownership.

Chair Ferguson recognized Tonda Nolen, 1204 N. Oakwood Street, Gastonia, NC. Ms. Nolen shared that she is speaking on behalf of the Oakwood and Hillwood neighborhoods. She stated that most homes in the neighborhood are ranch style with larger lots. She expressed concerns for the quality of life of the existing residents. She argued that higher density townhomes did not fit in the single-family detached neighborhood. Ms. Nolen stated that she would rather have single-family homes at this property. Lastly, she shared that Oakwood is a small neighborhood and a short road and that she believes this will congest the area.

Chair Ferguson recognized William Suggs, 1423 N. Oakwood Street, Gastonia, NC. Mr. Suggs shared that he had concerns for the existing flood way and creeks that are surrounding the property. He also mentioned that the townhomes were too close together.

Chair Ferguson recognized Amber Price, 1042 N. Oakwood Street, Gastonia, NC. Ms. Price shared that Oakwood is a narrow street in bad condition. She expressed concern for additional vehicles and traffic in the neighborhood. She also discussed existing creek and stormwater issues. Ms. Price shared she was in opposition of the proposed project.

Commissioner Gallant asked Mr. Bell for clarification on parking for the townhomes. Mr. Bell replied that all parking is proposed on-site and that there is no street parking. He also added that all townhomes are rear loaded with either garages or driveways. In response to public comments on stormwater issues, Mr. Bell stated that underground management will be provided. Commissioner Ghorley asked Mr. Bell if he had considered developing single-family detached instead. Mr. Bell replied that due to development costs and affordability, townhomes made more sense. Commissioner Silverman asked Mr. Bell what the price points would be and what makes these units affordable. Mr. Bell replied that they would be market rate but will fall in the price range for the local first time homebuyers program.

Commissioner Chapman asked staff where the stormwater pond would be located on site. Assistant City Engineer, Keith Lineberger, replied that the applicant is proposing an underground management system. He also noted that this will continuously reviewed throughout the construction document process.

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Commissioner Chapman made a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Ghorley seconded the motion. The motion to close the public hearing was unanimously passed (5-0).

Commissioner Ghorley and Commissioner Chapman discussed underground stormwater management, affordability and compatibility with the existing neighborhood. Commissioner Gallant made a motion to approve the request as presented with the statement of consistency and reasonableness. Commissioner Ghorley seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion to approve as presented was unanimously passed (5-0).

Item 4: Public Hearing – 1820 Hoffman Road (File #202300461)

Subject hearing involves a request to rezone approximately 3.75 acres from RS-12 (Single-family Residential, minimum 12,000 sq. ft. lots) to C-2 (Highway Business). The subject property is located at 1820 Hoffman Road and is owned by Gary McCaslin.

Chair Ferguson opened the public hearing and recognized Jordan Tubbs, Senior Planner, for the purpose of staff's presentation. The zoning map was presented. Mr. Tubbs discussed that the intent of the rezoning was for the petitioner to sell the property for commercial uses. He explained the surrounding zoning, noting that the Hoffman Road and Gaston Day School Road intersection is currently a commercial corridor. Mr. Tubbs stated that the general rezoning request would consider all C-2 uses which includes some less intense commercial and some residential uses. He explained that although the Future Land Use Map shows residential, staff feels a commercial use at this location would be in keeping with the existing commercial character of the area and that staff is recommending approval as presented.

Chair Ferguson recognized Gary McCaslin, 1820 Hoffman Road, Gastonia, NC. Mr. McCaslin said he was looking to relocate and sell his property for commercial uses. Chair Ferguson shared concerns that the request was for a general C-2 zoning rather than a conditional. Further, she asked staff if uses could be limited as part of the rezoning request. Assistant City Attorney, Charles Graham, clarified that conditions or limiting uses cannot be added to a general request.

Commissioner Chapman made a motion to approve the request as presented with the statement of consistency and reasonableness. Commissioner Ghorley seconded the motion. The motion to approve the request as presented was passed (4-1). Commissioners Gallant, Ghorley, Chapman, and Silverman voted in favor of the motion. Chair Ferguson voted in opposition of the motion.

Item 5: Public Hearing – 819 S. Oakland Street (File #202300502)

Subject hearing involves a request to rezone approximately 0.26 acres from C-2 (Highway Business) to C-1 (Neighborhood Business). The subject property is located at 819 S. Oakland Street and is owned by Bond Stone Holdings, LLC.

Chair Ferguson opened the public hearing and recognized Jordan Tubbs, Senior Planner, for the purpose of staff presentation. The zoning map was presented. Mr. Tubbs stated the request was for a general rezoning to C-1, neighborhood business which includes single-family residential uses. He discussed the surrounding zoning and land uses. Mr. Tubbs stated that the request is consistent with the Future Land Use Map for residential uses and that staff believes smaller scale uses in this area would be more compatible. Lastly, he stated staff is recommending approval as presented.

Chair Ferguson recognized Joseph Wilson, 3001 Smithfield Drive, Monroe, NC. Mr. Smithfield stated he was available for any questions. Commissioner Gallant made a motion to approve the request as presented with the statement of consistency and reasonableness. Commissioner Ghorley seconded the motion. The motion to approve the request as presented was unanimously passed (5-0).

Item 6: Public Hearing – 2558 W. Franklin (File #202400010)

Subject hearing involves a request to rezone approximately 2.62 acres from I-2 (General Industrial) to C-3 (General Business). The subject property is located at 2558 W. Franklin Boulevard and is owned by Rusty Nutz, LLC.

Chair Ferguson opened the public hearing and recognized Jordan Tubbs, Senior Planner, for the purpose of staff presentation. The zoning map was presented. Mr. Tubbs stated the request was for a general rezoning to C-3, general business. He discussed the surrounding zoning and land uses. Mr. Tubbs stated that the request is consistent with the 2025 Future Land Use Map for commercial uses and that staff is recommending approval as presented.

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Chair Ferguson recognized Kathy Spencer, 956 Oates Road, Bessemer City, NC. Ms. Spencer shared that the property is owned by her father. She stated he would like to use the property for commercial uses instead of industrial uses.

Commissioner Ghorley made a motion to approve the request as presented with the statement of consistency and reasonableness. Commissioner Silverman seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion to approve as presented was unanimously passed (5-0).

Item 7: Other Business

Assistant City Manager, Quentin McPhatter, shared that the Highland Townhome project has been withdrawn and that a Planning Commission representative will no longer be needed for the February 20th, 2024 City Council Meeting.

Chair Ferguson announced that Vice Chair Jim Stewart and Commissioner Rodney Armstrong have resigned from the Planning Commission. Mr. Graham shared that two new commissioners have been appointed by City Council and will need to be sworn in at the next Planning Commission meeting.

Chair Ferguson entertained nominations for Vice Chair. Commissioner Gallant nominated Commissioner Ghorley. Commissioner Silverman seconded the nomination. With no further discussion, the nomination for Chad Ghorley for Vice Chair was unanimously passed (5-0).

Item 8: Adjournment

Chair Ferguson entertained a motion to adjourn the February 8th Planning Commission meeting. Commissioner Ghorley made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Gallant seconded the motion. The motion to adjourn was unanimously passed (5-0). The meeting adjourned at 7:24 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jalen Nash, Planning Technician

Kristie Ferguson, Chairwoman