

MINUTES
COLUMBIA CITY BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 4, 2025
7:00 P.M.

WHITLEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER
MEETING ROOM A/B, LOWER LEVEL

MEMBERS PRESENT

Patricia Hatcher
Jon Kissinger, Chairman
Anthony Romano, Vice Chair
Dennis Warnick

MEMBERS ABSENT

Cathy Gardner

STAFF

Nathan Bilger
Amanda Thompson

ATTORNEY

Greg Hockemeyer

(E)lectronic participant

AUDIENCE MEMBERS

Four visitors signed the Guest List; there were no attendees on the webcast. A Guest List is included below.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL/INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Kissinger called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M. Ms. Thompson read the roll with members present and absent listed above.

CONSIDERATION OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

The Board considered the minutes of the August 6, 2024, meeting. Mr. Warnick made a motion to approve as presented; Mr. Romano seconded. Motion passed, 3-0-1, with Ms. Hatcher abstaining since she was not present at that meeting.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH

Mr. Hockemeyer administered the Oath to visitors who planned to speak at the meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

NEW BUSINESS

1. 25-C-VAR-1

The Whitley County Museum, in conjunction with the Whitley County Historical Society as owner of the subject property, requested a development standards variance to allow for installation of an Electronic Message Center (EMC) as part of an identification sign. The subject property was part of Lot 8, Block 6 of the First Addition to the Town of Columbia, with an address of 301 North Main Street.

Mr. Bilger summarized the staff report. He stated that the proposal was to replace the existing museum sign on the northwest corner of Main and Jefferson Streets with one that included an EMC. The Board of Works already approved the reuse of the location in the right-of-way. He said that the sign code permitted EMCs in commercial districts and for community centers, parks, schools, and fire stations in any zoning district. However, museums were not part of that exemption, so a variance was needed. He said the EMC would be about 18 square feet per side, with the overall sign area being about 54 sq. ft. in total. He then displayed aerials, a photo of the existing sign, and the submitted sign plan. He discussed the review criteria and noted that there seemed to be a practical difficulty given the proximity of commercial zoning and the limitation of the list of exempted uses.

The Board had no questions for staff, so Mr. Kissinger asked the petitioner to speak.

Russell Gilliom, Historical Society, and Angie Fleeger, Fastsigns Fort Wayne, described their plan. Mr. Gilliom said that the current sign was deteriorating, and a new sign was needed. It would direct to the museum and needed to have information about coming events. He suggested that it may be used for some other businesses or organizations as well. Ms. Fleeger said that the sign could be on a timer, if desired, and would have an automatic dimmer. Mr. Kissinger asked if it dimmed based on the amount of sunlight; Ms. Fleeger said it did.

Having no further questions for the petitioner, Mr. Kissinger asked for public comment.

Having no comments from the audience, Mr. Kissinger closed the public hearing and asked for any further discussion or a motion. Mr. Warnick made a motion to approve 25-C-VAR-1. Mr. Kissinger asked if there were any suggested conditions of approval; Mr. Bilger replied that there were not since standards for EMCs were already in the code. Ms. Hatcher seconded the motion. Motion passed, 4-0.

Mr. Warnick asked when it would go in. Ms. Fleeger said it would be about two months.

Mr. Bilger and Mr. Hockemeyer reminded the petitioner that using the sign for other businesses could be problematic as that could be considered off-premises signage or a billboard.

2. 25-C-SE-1

Dalton McDonald, tenant of the subject property, requested a special exception approval to permit a dog grooming home occupation on the site as a traffic-generating home occupation. The property was zoned R-1 and located at 106 Cul De Sac Lane. The property consisted of Lots 32 of Rolling Hills Subdivision, platted in 1957. The site was improved with a single-family dwelling and shed.

Mr. Bilger summarized the staff report. The proposed use would be in the existing 8'x12' shed for dog grooming business. He described the proposed hours of operation, signage, number of customers per day, that there would be one gravel parking space, and other details. He showed aerial photos and the submitted site plan. He stated that the criteria for special exceptions should be met since the dogs would be primarily kept inside. He provided the following suggested conditions of approval, which were revised slightly from the written report:

1. The special exception is granted as presented.

2. The special exception is granted for the applicant and is non-transferable.
3. Operations will be by appointment-only, not to exceed 3pm to 6pm Thursdays and Fridays, and 10am to 5pm on Saturdays.
4. No more than two dogs will be on-site at one time, not including any owned by the petitioner.
5. Dogs will be kept inside or within the fenced-in yard.
6. Appropriate permits to be obtained for the structure/remodel and any signage.
7. Any dog excrement will be removed from the site regularly.
8. At least one additional parking space be added for use by customers. The Board should determine if the parking space and/or driveway need to be paved.

Mr. Bilger concluded by stating that Board member Gardner had requested to check the covenants of the subdivision. He said that the covenants prohibited businesses, but that home occupations, as home-based business, may not have been a concept at the time the subdivision was platted. He said that the Board did not enforce covenants, but it may be of interest.

Having no questions for staff, Mr. Kissinger asked the petitioner to speak.

Dalton McDonald, petitioner, said that the driveway would be chip and sealed in the summer. He said that the parking concerns should be alleviated by having only one dog on the property at a time. He said that he planned to have anti-barking sonic devices on the property if barking were to become excessive. Pet waste would be removed by a contractor regularly. He said this would be a side business for him in addition to his full time job.

Mr. Romano asked if he already started the business. Mr. McDonald replied that he had a grooming business in Ohio for 16 years before moving here and that this would be a new operation.

Mr. Kissinger asked if any of the other houses on the cul-de-sac had a stone driveway. Mr. McDonald said that his was the last one left as stone. He said that the property needed updated and the driveway was one of many things to be done. Mr. Kissinger asked what he meant by chip and seal. Mr. McDonald said that it would be similar to asphalt.

Mr. McDonald said he would keep the signage limited since he did not want too much business here. If the business were to grow too big, they would move the operation to a different location.

Ms. Hatcher asked if there was a homeowners association. Mr. Bilger said that the covenants did not have a provision for an association, so enforcement of the covenants would be up to individual owners.

Having no further questions for the petitioner, Mr. Kissinger asked for any public comment. Having no one in the audience left to speak, he closed the public hearing and asked for any more discussion or a motion.

Mr. Romano made a motion to approve 25-C-SE-1 with the staff conditions, with the last condition being modified that the driveway and parking be paved, which could include chip and seal, and be completed within one (1) year from the date of approval. Mr. Warnick seconded. Motion passed, 4-0.

OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

REPORTS FROM STAFF

Mr. Bilger reminded the Board of the upcoming Fifth Monday joint training session at 6pm on March 31. The topic was scheduled to be “Ask Me Anything, Part II”.

Mr. Bilger mentioned that a new Planning and Permitting Technician had started the day before. Travis Sheets had previously been employed by More Farm Store.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Warnick made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Romano. The motion passed 4-0, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:29 P.M.

GUEST LIST

1. Russell Gilliom8731 E. 600 North, Churubusco
2. Angie Fleeger.....6646 West Jefferson Blvd, Fort Wayne
3. Aaron Mathieu9250 E. 375 North, Churubusco
4. Dalton McDonald.....106 Cul De Sac Lane

GUEST LIST (WEBCAST)

5. No webcast attendees