

MINUTES
COLUMBIA CITY PLAN COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
OCTOBER 6, 2025
7:00 P.M.

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

MEMBERS PRESENT

Chip Hill
Jon Kissinger
Donald Langeloh
Jennifer Romano
Nicki Venable
Dennis Warnick
Dan Weigold
Larry Weiss, Vice President
Patrick Zickgraf, President

MEMBERS ABSENT

STAFF

Nathan Bilger
Amanda Thompson

ATTORNEY

Greg Hockemeyer

(E)lectronic participant

AUDIENCE MEMBERS

Fourteen visitors attended the meeting in person, and there were three attendees on the webcast. A Guest List is included with the minutes of this meeting.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Mr. Zickgraf 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

Mr. Warnick made a motion to approve the May 5, 2025, meeting minutes, seconded by Mr. Langeloh. The motion passed 9-0.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE OATH TO WITNESSES

Mr. Hockemeyer administered the Oath to visitors interested in speaking at the meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

NEW BUSINESS

1. 25-C-SUBD-2

Wal-Mart Real Estate Business Trust requested primary plat approval for Walmart Addition, 402 W. Plaza Drive. Mr. Bilger summarized the staff report, describing that Wal-Mart obtained Lot 1 of Towne & Country Plaza in 1990 and then purchased an adjacent 2.5 acre parcel in 1996. He explained that Wal-Mart had requested to combine the two parcels, thus causing the need for the subdivision review as a replat of Towne & Country Plaza; the

subdivision also proposed to relocate a platted easement to the location where utilities had been installed. Mr. Bilger also clarified that the subdivision request was not related to Wal-Mart's current remodel project, but that they had realized there were two parcels while preparing plans for the remodel. In conclusion, Mr. Bilger suggested three conditions of approval. There were no questions for Mr. Bilger, and Mr. Zickgraf requested to hear from the petitioner.

David Nardin of Carlson Consulting Engineers, Inc., was present on behalf of Wal-Mart. He agreed with Mr. Bilger's description of the proposal. There were no questions for Mr. Nardin. No other visitors wished to speak with regard to the case, and Mr. Zickgraf closed the public hearing. Mr. Warnick motioned to approve 25-C-SUBD-2 with the conditions suggested in the Staff Report. Ms. Venable gave the second to the motion, and the motion passed 9-0. The conditions are as follows:

1. Correct names in Board of Works signature block.
2. Address comments of reviewing agencies, if any.
3. Secondary plat approval be delegated to staff.

2. 25-C-SUBD-3

Swihart Properties, LLC, requested primary plat approval of a 137-lot subdivision proposed to be known as The Busche Project and located on the northwest corner of Plaza Drive and Line Street (State Road 109). Mr. Bilger summarized the Staff Report. He described that the proposed plan included a collector street between Armstrong Drive and State Road 109 that would also connect to an extension of Walton Drive, a section of 33 single-family detached lots, and a conceptual area of up to 104 single-family detached and attached units. He discussed that an approved primary plat would set the maximum lot count and the general concept while other details remained flexible until the secondary plat stage. Mr. Bilger noted that water and sewer were proposed to extend from existing mains, and drainage would be directed north to detention areas. He commented that because the adjacent western property was industrial and the topography to the north was impractical for development, no stub streets were proposed, but he recommended that at least one stub street be added to the plan, within the eastern 1000 feet. In conclusion, Mr. Bilger suggested nine conditions of approval.

Mr. Bilger clarified for Mr. Weiss that if the primary plat were approved for 137 lots, the developer could reduce, but not increase, that number. He confirmed for Mr. Zickgraf and Mr. Warnick that the private streets would be maintained by the developer but built to public street specifications. Several members expressed concern regarding other poorly maintained private streets being dedicated to the City to repair.

Mr. Weiss considered a recent project, Timbers Edge 2, and asked if a reduced right-of-way request was proposed for this development as well. Mr. Bilger said a waiver was approved with the primary plat for Timbers Edge 2, but consideration of a waiver was not advertised for the current meeting. Mr. Weigold expressed concern regarding the size of the lots and not having proposed building lines and easements to review. He stated that the City Council often heard concerns from residents who had issues with neighbors when the development consisted of smaller sized lots. Mr. Hill responded that larger lots would yield more expensive properties where the goal behind the subject development was for economic, starter homes in a neo-traditional layout. Mr. Weigold stated that two cars needed to fit in the driveway so that there would not be vehicles parked over the sidewalks, and the streets

needed to be wide enough for fire trucks to maneuver. Lot size and density comparisons were discussed, and Mr. Bilger confirmed for Ms. Venable that sidewalks would be required throughout the development. Mr. Hill clarified for Ms. Romano that a traffic study had been requested in order to determine if stoplights would be utilized at the intersections. There being no further questions for Mr. Bilger, Mr. Zickgraf requested to hear from the petitioner.

David Brown of D. A. Brown Engineering was present on behalf of Swihart Properties. He described that the subject property had been vacant since 1990, after Wal-Mart was constructed. Mr. Brown stated that affordable housing was needed in Columbia City, that younger generations were struggling to afford available homes. He explained the calculation for current market costs. Mr. Brown detailed a plan for development to start on the west side of the property, with the streets, sidewalks, and northern group of homes. He explained the right-of-way and a plan for a 25' front setback to account for vehicle parking. He confirmed that a Home Owners' Association would cover maintenance rules, and the streets would be constructed to the City's specifications. He stated that the Indiana Department of Transportation had communicated that the planned access was acceptable, but there had not been any update on what kind of access would be required. Mr. Brown confirmed for Mr. Langeloh that there would be storm sewer and that the detention basins would be large enough to handle any extra water. Mr. Bilger displayed images from a neo-traditional development in Longmont, CO, and discussed details of the development, including the lot width, garage placement, and the cost of the lots.

Jerry Busche of Swihart Properties was also present and explained to the Commission that he was a manufacturer, not a developer, and that his goal for the project was to create affordable housing to bring people to live in Columbia City who might then also work in the community. Mr. Hill reported that the Economic Development Corporation had applied for a grant and was planning a Tax Increment Finance district. He stated that the City was in support of the project.

Brooks Langeloh expressed concern regarding sidewalks being directly adjacent to the streets, as in Heritage Place, because plowed snow then blocks the sidewalks. He also described how driveways less than 20' wide, such as in Chesapeake Landing, resulted in parked vehicles blocking sidewalks. He pointed out that the Comprehensive Plan designated the subject property for commercial use and requested that the Commission consider locations for future commercial properties in the City. Mr. Langeloh expressed that he agreed that affordable housing was needed and that despite his concerns, he was in favor of the project.

No one else chose to speak, and Mr. Zickgraf closed the public hearing. Mr. Weiss asked if waivers, similar to those approved for Timbers Edge, would be appropriate for the southern portion of the proposed project. Mr. Bilger confirmed that could be a condition of approval. Mr. Weigold commented that his personal concerns were addressed, but it was important to eliminate and minimize problems for residents. Mr. Langeloh made a motion to continue 25-C-SUBD-3 to the November meeting, so that fine details could be added and questions answered. Mr. Warnick seconded the motion. Ms. Venable took a moment to express her appreciation for the plan to bring affordable housing to the community so that people would have the opportunity to work, live, and play all in the same location. She asked Mr. Busche not to be discouraged if the members voted to continue their discussion. Mr. Zickgraf asked if the questions some members had might be answered in a committee review. Mr. Bilger

confirmed there would be a Technical Review meeting to review the development plans prior to approval of the secondary plat. He added that an ad hoc committee could also be created to review the items the members were concerned with. Mr. Kissinger asked for the list of concerns. Driveway width/length, private streets, and lot size were listed. Mr. Weigold pointed out that the driveway width could be a condition of approval. Mr. Hill suggested that the concerns could be covered by other reviews. When there were no further comments regarding the motion, Mr. Zickgraf called for a vote. The motion failed with a vote of 2-7 (with Mr. Langeloh and Mr. Warnick voting in favor).

The members considered conditions of approval. Mr. Hill commented that the plat could move forward while any waiver request could be heard at the Plan Commission's next meeting. Mr. Weiss felt that having an area between the curb and sidewalk was important. Mr. Bilger clarified that the City's Street Specifications required such an area. Mr. Hill made a motion to forward a favorable recommendation on 25-C-SUBD-3 with the conditions suggested in the Staff Report and those stated by the members, being as follows:

1. Address comments and requirements of reviewing agencies.
2. The maximum unit count shall not exceed 137.
3. Sidewalks shall be a minimum 5' in width.
4. Street width and pavement section to comply with the subdivision code and/or street department specifications.
5. A stub street will be required to the north as part of future platting.
6. Adjust the deficient lot areas to comply with zoning code minimums and/or obtain additional approvals as may be necessary.
7. Property owners' association(s) will be mandated in covenants and restrictions, with funding mechanisms established for the maintenance of any common areas and improvements.
8. Covenants and restrictions will be reviewed by staff prior to recordation.
9. Secondary plat approval be delegated to staff, unless performance sureties are proposed, or there are issues that require Commission approval.
10. Driveway width shall be no less than 20', unless a waiver is secured.
11. Sidewalk location shall comply with street department specifications.

Ms. Venable gave the second. The motion passed 9-0.

3. 25-C-DEV-2

Valvoline Instant Oil Change requested development plan approval for a 2,673± square foot automobile service center proposed to be located at 309 W. Plaza Drive. Mr. Bilger summarized the Staff Report and described that the former Bob Evans restaurant and most of the hard scape would be removed to construct the new building and parking lot; the developer intended to retain most of the existing landscaping. Mr. Bilger commented that there seemed to be an excess of pavement planned. He added that the sign location needed to be clarified, and he suggested the sidewalk be extended, with a ramp at its end. He described that the intersection would likely be redone in 12-15 years, so it may not be prudent to add a sidewalk along the highway. He summarized the remaining Development Standards and the Review Criteria and suggested five conditions of approval.

The members considered the location of trees, a swale, and road signs and discussed whether or not a sidewalk could be placed along Line Street. Several members commented that people often walk in this area and cross US 30. There was a brief discussion regarding maintenance of the shared drive within Lot 5 of Towne & Country Plaza and no further questions for Mr. Bilger.

Mike Mihalik, project manager, was present on behalf of the project and indicated several other representatives were participating via the webcast. Robin Peck with Valvoline confirmed that extending the sidewalk to a professional end at Line Street was an acceptable modification to the proposal. Mr. Mihalik requested clarification on the location of a sidewalk along Line Street, if required. Mr. Bilger suggested that if such a condition were added that it be open ended with the location “to be determined.” Julie Gehling, also with Valvoline, noted that the sidewalk would need to be considered by INDOT. She requested guidance on where such a sidewalk would end, considering weeds along US 30, and also commented that this seemed like a dangerous place to encourage pedestrian traffic. Several members suggested ending the sidewalk at the guard rail. Mr. Mihalik said he could discuss this concept with INDOT, but he was unsure of what stipulations they might have, if they would even allow it. Mr. Warnick commented that INDOT might consider a sidewalk with the future US 30 improvements.

Mr. Mihalik addressed Mr. Bilger’s comment about excess pavement and explained the reason behind the dimensions that were planned. Ms. Gehling confirmed that Mr. Mihalik’s descriptions were correct. Mr. Mihalik suggested striping the area in front of the dumpster might help to designate its use. He clarified that the sign location was incorrect on the landscape plan but did show correctly on the other documents.

There were no further questions for Mr. Mihalik, and Mr. Zickgraf asked if anyone else would like to speak. Thor Hodges expressed to the Commission that he wasn’t in favor of the idea of putting in a sidewalk that didn’t go anywhere. He stated that he supported the concept of adding sidewalks in the City, but sometimes, as in the subject case, it would make sense to allow an exception. He agreed that having a sidewalk in this location could be dangerous and that INDOT could plan for one with their project. In conclusion, he expressed support for the Valvoline development.

No one else wished to speak, and Mr. Zickgraf closed the public hearing. Mr. Bilger suggested that having a sidewalk easement might resolve some concerns by documenting that a sidewalk was intended but not requiring it to be installed at this time. He added that INDOT might then incorporate the sidewalk into their design. Several members supported this concept. Mr. Kissinger made a motion to approve 25-C-DEV-2, with the suggested conditions, which were as follows:

1. Approved as presented, with any stated conditions.
2. Address any outstanding comments from reviewing agencies.
3. Exterior lighting must be directed and/or shielded to prevent glare onto public rights-of-way.
4. Consider reducing amount of pavement in center of site.
5. Complete existing sidewalk along Plaza Drive to the intersection, including ramp.

He confirmed that a sixth condition should be added, being:

6. Add a sidewalk easement parallel to Line Street.

Ms. Romano gave the second, and the motion passed 9-0.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Bilger displayed the dates for the 2026 meetings and training sessions. The schedule was approved by consensus.

REPORTS FROM STAFF

There were no reports.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Mr. Warnick made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Romano. By unanimous vote, the meeting was adjourned at 8:53 P.M.

GUEST LIST

1. David Hieber, Wal-Mart 3154 Old State Road 3, LaOtto
2. David Nardin, Carlson Engineering 7068 LedgeStone Commons, Bartlett, TN
3. Marsha Kelly 4 Barbara Drive, Columbia City
4. Michael Kelly 4 Barbara Drive, Columbia City
5. David Brown 5491 CR 427, Auburn
6. Jerry Busche, Swihart Properties 9730 S. 800 East, Roanoke
7. Shylla Busche, Swihart Properties 9730 S. 800 East, Roanoke
8. Michael Mihalik, CESO 3601 Rigby Road, Dayton, OH
9. Harry Stafford 730 Norfolk Cove, Columbia City
10. Amanda Stafford 730 Norfolk Cove, Columbia City
11. Brooks Langeloh 818 N. Newport Run, Columbia City
12. Kati Parker 550 W. Connexion Way, Columbia City
13. *Don Armstrong (did not sign in)*
14. *Thor Hodges (spoke but did not sign in)* 157 Lexington Drive, Columbia City

GUEST LIST (WEBCAST)

15. Robin Peck, Valvoline, LLC 100 Valvoline Way, Lexington, KY
16. Julie Gehling, VOIC 100 Valvoline Way, Lexington, KY
17. Jared Hutchison, Carlson Consulting 7068 LedgeStone Commons, Bartlett, TN