MINUTES
COLUMBIA CITY BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS
REGULAR MEETING
JUNE 2, 2026
7:00 P.M.

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

MEMBERS PRESENT	MEMBERS ABSENT	STAFF
Cathy Gardner		Nathan Bilger
Patricia Hatcher		Amanda Thompson
Jon Kissinger		
Lyle Kuhmichel		ATTORNEY
Dennis Warnick		Greg Hockemeyer

(E)lectronic participant

AUDIENCE MEMBERS

Five visitors signed the Guest List, which is included with the minutes of this meeting.

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

Ms. Gardner made a motion to approve the March 3, 2026, meeting minutes, as distributed. Ms. Hatcher seconded the motion, and the motion carried with a 5-0 vote.

Mr. Kuhmichel moved to approve the April 7th meeting minutes, and Ms. Gardner gave the second; motion passed, 5-0.

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. **26-C-VAR-3**
   Eagle Landing CC, LLC, requested development standards variances for a multi-family development planned to be located on the east end of River Bluff Drive, east of Liberty Drive. Mr. Bilger explained that the proposed variances were regarding lot area per unit, parking number, and recreational area. He described that the subdivision request had been approved in May, along with a waiver for the right-of-way width, and development plan

review was expected for July. He displayed an aerial image with the site plan and summarized various details of the project and site. Mr. Bilger provided Units Per Acre counts for the three nearby developments to compare with the proposed. He summarized the Review Criteria in the Staff Report. Contours were displayed and discussed. There were no further questions for Mr. Bilger, and Mr. Kissinger requested to hear from the petitioner.

Roger Muselman introduced himself to the Board as the developer for the project. He explained that his family owned and managed market-rate apartments across Indiana. He mentioned that Gateway New Haven was a nearby project of his that would have similarities to the proposed project. Mr. Muselman explained how changes to the proposed lot area per unit, parking number, and recreational area would affect the project. He also detailed how the proposed counts were similar to those of the surrounding developments. Mr. Muselman said the proposed parking count, being 1.5 parking spaces per unit, was based on the usage he was familiar with at his other developments. He noted that the requested 6% recreational area only reflected the area designated on the plat as recreational area, and that there actually would be a significant amount of additional, unspecified, green space on the property. He listed that the development would include a playground area and potentially a covered pavilion with tables and a grilling station, a fire pit, and a dog park. In conclusion, he thanked the Board for considering of his requests.

Mr. Muselman confirmed for Mr. Warnick that a sidewalk was planned to connect to Denzil Drive. Cristhian De La Paz, with MLS Engineering, was present to answer questions about the design. He explained that the subdivision approval had specified a sidewalk connection to Blue Bird Drive, but upon reviewing the topography, he realized the elevation of the street and the drainage plan would make installing the sidewalk very difficult, and, it would be challenging for pedestrians to utilize as well. He commented that connecting to Denzil Drive would not only be more feasible, but it would allow a more direct route to Kroger and the City's trail.

Ms. Gardner asked if Mr. Muselman had considered requesting to purchase more of the available property, in order to avoid needing variance approvals. Mr. Muselman replied that when looking at the property, because of the amount of green space, it hadn't seemed like recreational area would be an issue; also, because he's used to working with 1.5 parking spaces per unit, he hadn't realized Columbia City's Code requirement was so much greater. He stated that with the extra green space, from the site plan, the density did not seem as high as it was.

Mr. Muselman described that development would begin on the south side of the property, starting with the connection to Denzil Drive and two or three of the first four buildings there. He explained that each building would have 18 units, and he anticipated they would all be two-bedroom apartments. He confirmed for Ms. Gardner there would be on-site management. Mr. Muselman told Ms. Gardner that the manager would handle parking issues so that there would not be a hardship for the police department. Ms. Hatcher wondered about guest parking. Mr. Muselman replied that in his other developments, most tenants were single individuals with one vehicle, so plenty of parking was always available. He stated that with 2-bedroom apartments, most tenants were not families with more than two vehicles.

Mr. De La Paz clarified for Ms. Gardner that "future recreational areas" on the plans referred to areas that would be recreational but may become a dog park or another more specific

recreational space. Mr. Muselman added that he committed to installing a small playground, and he was considering a pavilion, fire pit, etc.

Shawn Hoeppner introduced himself as a neighbor to the north of the property. He voiced concerns regarding increased traffic in the already busy area. Mr. Hoeppner also described trespassing and disturbance on his property from children and pets in the neighboring developments. He asked if the developer could add a barrier or fence along his property to protect its value and prevent trash from blowing through. Mr. Bilger confirmed for Mr. Hoeppner that the annexation of the subject property would not affect his property. Mr. Hoeppner also testified that the Simonson development was home to a lot of children even though it only offered 2-bedroom apartments. He confirmed for Ms. Gardner that his property is surrounded by a line of mature trees.

Mr. De La Paz spoke to address the traffic concern and voiced that the Indiana Department of Transportation reviewed the proposal and had no comments. He added that a berm, potentially 5-6 feet, was planned to be installed along the north boundary, and grading would additionally lower the existing area on the north side of the property.

There were no further comments, and Mr. Kissinger closed the public hearing and requested discussion from the Board. Answering a previous question, Mr. Bilger announced that he had calculated the parking counts for the surrounding developments; one of the three had 1.7 spaces per unit, and the other two were 2 spaces per unit or slightly greater.

Mr. Bilger confirmed for Ms. Gardner that a fence, such as Mr. Hoeppner requested, would typically be considered with the Development Plan review. He stated that the Board could also apply a condition if they felt the fence was needed as part of the Variance request.

Mr. Bilger estimated for Mr. Kissinger that there was around 45 acres of developable property east of the development, under the same ownership. Ms. Gardner asked about an area of property at the northwest corner of the development that had been excluded. Mr. Muselman replied that the property owner wanted to retain that area. Ms. Gardner voiced that she was concerned about the decreased parking and did not want the Police Department to be handling issues caused by a Variance approval. Mr. Kissinger considered that if the parking were an issue, it would become apparent with the development of the first phase. Mr. Muselman confirmed for Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Warnick that a staff member would live in the first building.

Considering that the parking request was the biggest concern, Mr. Warnick made a motion to approve the proposed lot area per unit (being 2,452± square feet), as requested. Mr. Kuhmichel gave the second. The motion carried with a vote of 5-0. Mr. Warnick then made a motion to approve the recreational area as proposed (which was 6±%). Ms. Hatcher seconded the motion, and the Board voted 5-0 in favor. The members then attempted to focus on the parking request.

Mr. Warnick commented that more parking would be better, but he did not see where it could be located. Mr. Bilger pointed out that although the other developments in the area had more compliant parking, they did not meet the Code for open space/recreational area, meaning that they had used their green space to create the required parking. The Board continued to discuss. Ms. Gardner said that with no on-street parking and no garages, there weren't any options, and she felt that most couples had two cars. After additional discussion,

Mr. Warnick made a motion to approve the request for 1.5 parking spaces per unit. Mr. Kuhmichel seconded the motion, and the members voted in favor 4-1, with Ms. Gardner voting against.

OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

REPORTS FROM STAFF AND MEMBERS

Mr. Bilger also spoke briefly about the upcoming June 29th training session and encouraged the Board's attendance.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Gardner made a motion to adjourn, Ms. Hatcher gave the second, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:07 P.M.

GUEST LIST

1. Hoeppner family ..... 920 Liberty Drive, Columbia City
2. Roger Muselman ..... 269 S. Jefferson Street, Berne
3. Naomi Muselman ..... 269 S. Jefferson Street, Berne
4. Cristhian De La Paz ..... 617 Alquin Court, Huntertown