MINUTES
COLUMBIA CITY PLAN COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 6, 2026
7:00 P.M.

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

MEMBERS PRESENT	MEMBERS ABSENT	STAFF
Chip Hill		Nathan Bilger
Jon Kissinger		Amanda Thompson
Brooks Langeloh		**ATTORNEY**
Leslee Robinson		Greg Hockemeyer
Nicki Venable, Vice President		
Dennis Warnick		(E)lectronic participant
Dan Weigold		
Larry Weiss		
Patrick Zickgraf, President		

AUDIENCE MEMBERS

Sixteen visitors attended the meeting. 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

Ms. Thompson confirmed that the November and January minutes were not ready for review.

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. **26-C-REZ-3**
   Elmer Shrock requested to rezone 304 N. Main Street from the R-1, Single-Family Residential District, to the R-2, Two-Family Residential District, in order to allow for the structure to contain two apartments.

   Mr. Bilger summarized the staff report. He stated that the residence on the property pre-dated 1900 and was converted to 3 or 4 apartments prior to the current zoning code. The immediate prior owner did not use the apartments separately, although they were not remodeled to be removed either, and the BZA made the determination in 2019 that the legal nonconforming status was lost due to the usage despite the structure. The current request for R-2 would permit the use of the two main apartments as a two-family dwelling. He discussed the surrounding zoning and land uses, and the Comprehensive Plan's recommendations.

He said that the designations of the Plan were somewhat vague as they were “low-density” and “medium-density” and presented a table showing residential zoning districts standards, and potential density calculations. The pending Plan update would provide more definition.

He then presented a map with the densities of the surrounding blocks for reference and stated that the existing densities of the area already exceeded the maximum permissible under the R-1 zoning district, more falling into the R-2 or R-3 range of around 5 units per acre.

Mr. Bilger concluded with a discussion of the review criteria. He noted that there were some multi-family structures in the area, although it was prevalently single-family. He suggested that the desired character of Main Street could be an important consideration of the most desirable land use. He stated that due to a newly passed law, decisions should not involve whether the property would be a rental or not.

There being no questions from the Commission, Mr. Zickgraf asked the petitioner to speak.

Elmer Shrock, 0765 W. 50 North, LaGrange, came to the podium. He requested the ability to rebut any potentially false claims made during the public hearing; Mr. Zickgraf affirmed there would be an opportunity. Mr. Shrock stated that the home had been built as a single-family with a butler apartment, so it was originally two-family. He continued with a history of his ownership of the property and his intention to use the apartment units based on staff’s interpretation, which was subsequently appealed and overturned by the BZA. He provided information about the current status of the home, which he had remodeled extensively with an investment of at least $100,000. He had revised the electric services to two units. He desired to rezone the property to allow the sale of the home as two dwelling units, as he had no success in selling it as a single-family dwelling for nearly a year and wanted to move on.

Mr. Zickgraf asked for any questions from the Commission. Mr. Langeloh asked to confirm the intention to use it for two units, not three or four. Mr. Shrock said that it would be two units and that he had removed the third electric meter.

Ms. Robinson asked if the units had separate entrances. Mr. Shrock replied that there were actually several entrances.

Mr. Zickgraf asked about the third kitchen mentioned as having been left from the third apartment. Mr. Shrock replied that the third kitchen would be left as is since had already invested enough. The new owner could further remodel or use it as a second kitchen in the unit. He continued with more information on the remodeling that had been done.

Having no more questions from the Commission, Mr. Zickgraf opened the public hearing.

Kim Slucher, 181 N. Lexington Drive, the petitioner’s realtor, discussed the sales history of the house, its historic nature, and the renovations that were done to resolve many structural problems and other improvements. She said that she felt it could be sellable as a two-family dwelling, but it was impossible as a single-family dwelling for various reasons.

Gary Kessie, 107 E. Jefferson Street, said he is a next door neighbor. He described that the nearness of the petitioner’s house to his house, and how there were problems with kids running in the alley and traffic going too fast over the years. He was worried about a fire in one house taking out all of the houses, and how that they were too close. He said that they would prefer a single-family dwelling, even if it was a large family. He concluded with concern about the amount of traffic generated.

Having no further public comment, Mr. Zickgraf closed the public hearing and asked if the petitioner desired to rebut any of the statements.

Mr. Shrock took the opportunity to explain his research into making the property fully historically accurate. He said he was also concerned about a fire spreading. He repeated the history of his ownership and the BZA appeal.

Mr. Zickgraf asked for Commission discussion. Mr. Weigold said that he thought the property was a mess years ago, both the number of units, the proximity of the houses, and the numbers of kids. He said that he felt the remodeling and maintenance were good, but it was impossible to predict what might happen.

Ms. Venable asked how the property would be designated in the pending Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Bilger replied that it would be in a historic area designation.

Mr. Langeloh asked to confirm that the zoning had never been changed, and the house was legal nonconforming. Mr. Bilger confirmed that. Mr. Langeloh asked if another unit could be added if it were rezoned to R-2. Mr. Bilger replied that the only way to add another unit, beyond the two in the house, would be with a variance due to the minimum lot area and possibly other deficient standards.

Mr. Weiss asked if they could make a motion for R-2, with a condition that there would be no more than two units except for permissible special exceptions. Mr. Bilger replied that it could be a recorded zoning commitment, but it would duplicate the zoning code so it might not be necessary. The Commission discussed the idea.

Mr. Bilger gave a summary of the BZA appeal decision that had been brought up before. He stated that the proposed rezoning was working with the BZA's decision to bring the zoning in line with the use of the property, not going against them.

The Commission further discussed the proposed condition. Mr. Weiss made a motion to forward a favorable recommendation of 26-C-REZ-3, with a condition that there two be only two dwelling units, with no exceptions. Mr. Warnick seconded. Motion passed, 9-0.

2. 26-C-SUBD-1

Michael & Marybeth Johnson requested primary plat approval of Johnson Meadows, a 2-lot subdivision proposed at 508 & 510 E. Van Buren Street.

Mr. Bilger summarized the staff report. He stated that the proposal was to replat Lots 2 and 3 of Block 13 of the First Addition to reconfigure the shape of the lots and incorporate adjacent vacated alleys so that the pole building on the property could be sold separately from the dwelling. He presented aerials and the proposed plat. He recommended an ingress/egress easement on Lot 1 to ensure access for Lot 2.

He suggested the following conditions of approval:

1. Address any comments of reviewing agencies.

2. Consider covenants and restrictions or easements to address potential conflicts between future lot owners.

3. Secondary plat approval be delegated to staff.

Mr. Warnick asked if the pole building on Lot 2 were to become a business, where the customer parking would be. Mr. Bilger said that parking could come off of Van Buren.

Mr. Weiss asked about the alley access; Mr. Bilger clarified the access.

Mr. Zickgraf asked the petitioner to speak. Michael and Mary Johnson, 1837 E. Keiser Road, came to the podium and explained that they had recently bought the property and their son wanted to have the house, while the pole building would be used for storage and possible future business. He said that there was room for up to 12 parking spaces.

Mr. Zickgraf asked about the access to the pole building if it were a business. Mr. Johnson said there may be access for box trucks, but nothing larger.

Having no futher questions, Mr. Zickgraf asked for public comment. Having none, he closed the public hearing.

Mr. Warnick made a motion to approve 26-C-SUBD-1 with the staff conditions. Mr. Kissinger seconded. Mr. Langeloh asked what staff condition #2 meant. Mr. Bilger replied that the recommendation was to have an easement to ensure access to Lot 2. Motion passed, 9-0.

3. 26-C-SUBD-2

Brave Investments, LLC, requested primary plat approval of Sunset Meadows, a 3-lot subdivision, proposed on the east side of 200 East, approximately 1/3 mile south of Widman Road.

Mr. Bilger summarized the staff report. Proposed were three lots in the jurisdictional area on well and septic. He noted that there were covenants and restrictions proposed, and that they included provisions for keeping some livestock, which was important since the property was zoned A-1. Lots would be 80,001 sq. ft. He presented aerials and the proposed plat. He discussed that there were some concerns received about the drainage in the area.

He suggested the following conditions of approval:

1. Two septic sites per lot are to be determined and approved by the Health Department prior to issuance of a building permit for a primary structure.
2. Work with the County Highway Department to ensure adequate drainage.
3. Commission should discuss the installation of a 5’ sidewalk along the street frontage.
4. Secondary plat approval be delegated to staff.

Mr. Langeloh asked if there would be a perimeter drain required for septic; Mr. Bilger replied that the Health Department would make that determination. Mr. Langeloh said that he thought in the County, the soil tests were required prior to platting. Mr. Bilger replied that after the Health Department’s ordinance to require soil tests was annulled by the state, the standard condition was modified to allow for some flexibility.

Having no further questions for staff, Mr. Zickgraf asked the petitioner to speak. Dave Pine, 5520 Abbeyhill Road, Fort Wayne, and Brad Minear, 863 Emancipation Court, said that their intention was to have three lots that match the existing parcels on the west side of the road. Mr. Pine said that the soil tests had been done. Mr. Minear requested that the sidewalks be waived for the subdivision.

Mr. Weiss asked if the 40’ platted building line would be appropriate. Mr. Pine said that the houses would be farther back.

Mr. Langeloh said that the 80,000 sq. ft. lots would be too small for keeping two horses. Mr. Minear said that they wanted to have some reasonable restrictions for keeping livestock. Mr. Bilger relayed the application of the County’s animal unit calculations for reference. Mr. Weigold said that he was appreciative of having chickens outside of the city limits.

Mr. Zickgraf opened the public hearing.

Taren McCullough, 714 N. 200 East, said that she lives south of the plat. She said that the sidewalk would be stupid. She stated that a bald eagle could be nesting in the wetland area and if it was taken into consideration. She had concerns about the drainage conditions and the amount of additional runoff. She showed the Commission the drainage issues on the aerial. She continued with concerns about possible impacts on wildlife and the wetland, but that she wasn’t opposed to the development.

Having no more public comment, Mr. Zickgraf closed the public hearing and asked the petitioner for any rebuttal. Mr. Pine agreed that protecting the environment was also important to them.

Mr. Langeloh asked about the lack of the establishment of an association although it was mentioned elsewhere in the covenants. Mr. Weiss said that he felt there should be covenants, no sidewalk, but was not sure about the association requirement. Mr. Warnick said that he thought there should be an association and no sidewalk. Mr. Pine said that their intention was to have an association and would revise the covenants.

Ms. McCullough asked if the city limits would be changed; Mr. Weigold replied that was not planned. There was a discussion on the timing of the drainage issues.

Mr. Hill made a motion to approve 26-C-SUBD-2, with staff's conditions, without the requirement of the sidewalk, and with amending the proposed covenants to include an association. Ms. Venable seconded. Motion passed, 9-0.

4. 26-C-SUBD-3

Randolph Plew requested primary plat approval of E. E. Addition, a 1-lot subdivision proposed to be located at 1150 W. 150 North.

Mr. Bilger summarized the staff report, saying the proposal was to split the I-1 zoned existing buildings from the tillable acreage. He presented aerials and the proposed plat. Mr. Langeloh asked if it was common to have a zoning district not follow a parcel line. Mr. Bilger replied that it was common in both City and County and explained the district interpretation rules.

Mr. Bilger concluded with the suggested following conditions of approval:

1. Prior to the construction of any new structure needing sewer service, an upgraded septic system is to be approved by the Health Department.

2. If the property is used for residential, two septic sites per lot are to be determined and approved by the Health Department prior to issuance of a building permit for a primary structure, or be connected to public sewer.

3. Commission should discuss the installation of a 5' sidewalk along the street frontage.

4. Secondary plat approval be delegated to staff.

Having no further questions for staff, Mr. Zickgraf asked the petitioner to speak. Ryan Peppler, Walker & Associates, surveyor for the petitioner, explained that the intent was to split the buildings from the field.

Mr. Warnick asked if the petitioner also did not want sidewalks since this was similar to the previous case; Mr. Peppler confirmed such.

Mr. Zickgraf opened the public hearing. Having no comment, he closed the hearing and asked for discussion or a motion. Mr. Hill made a motion to approve 26-C-SUBD-3 with the conditions of staff except for the sidewalk; Ms. Robinson seconded. Motion passed, 9-0.

OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

REPORTS FROM STAFF

Mr. Bilger reminded the Commission of the meeting the next month to approve the pending Comprehensive Plan. He described a few changes and the process for approval.

He discussed the June and August training sessions. The August session would be an all-jurisdiction hearing to discuss housing factors mandated by the recently passed HEA 1001.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Mr. Warnick made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Hill gave the second. All voted aye, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:46 P.M.

GUEST LIST

1. Mike Johnson ..... 1837 E. Keiser Road, Columbia City
2. Marybeth Johnson ..... 1837 E. Keiser Road, Columbia City
3. Elmer Shrock ..... 0765 W. 50 North, LaGrange
4. Emma Shrock ..... 0765 W. 50 North, LaGrange
5. Taren McCullough ..... 714 N. 200 East, Columbia City
6. Clay McCullough ..... 714 N. 200 East, Columbia City
7. Barbara McCullough ..... 700 N. 200 East, Columbia City
8. Gary Kessie ..... 107 E. Jefferson Street, Columbia City
9. Dave Pine ..... 5520 Abbeyhill Road, Fort Wayne
10. Susan Duff ..... 302 N. Main Street, Columbia City
11. Ryan Peppler ..... 112 W. Van Buren Street, Columbia City
12. Kimberly Slucher ..... 181 N. Lexington Drive, Columbia City
13. Josh Knowlton ..... 557 N. 200 East, Columbia City
14. Christina Knowlton ..... 557 N. 200 East, Columbia City
15. Brad Minear ..... 863 Emancipation Court, Columbia City
16. *Not Listed.*