

CITY OF LA GRANDE

Planning Commission Meeting

Regular Session

August 8, 2023

6:00 p.m.

La Grande City Hall
1000 Adams Avenue

MINUTES

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Liberty Avila, Chair
Ann Morrison, Vice Chair
Matthew Gougherty
Roxie Ogilvie

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

Dave Felley

DISCUSSION/DISPOSITION

STAFF PRESENT:

Michael Boquist, City Planner
Kendra VanCleave, Planning Secretary

CITIZENS PRESENT:

Dan Beckner
Mike Becker
Dale Johnston
Blake Bars
Kirk Shake
Eileen Salsig
Wally Waller
Steve Fincher
Sallie Standley
Ernie Humphrey
Christy Robertson
Tammy Johnston
Tom (no last name)
Aaron Standley
John (no last name)
Wayne Griffith
Tee Gandy
Dave Comfort
Jesse Winteroud

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

AGENDA APPROVAL

CONSENT AGENDA

PUBLIC COMMENTS

AVILA, Chair, called this Regular Session of the Commission to order at 6:01 p.m. and conducted a Roll Call; a quorum was determined to be present.

The Agenda was approved as presented

The Minutes of the June 13th, 2023 Minutes were approved as presented.

OGILVIE introduced the following Motion.
GOUGHERTY abstained since he was absent and all in favor.

MSC: Unanimous
NONE

NEW BUSINESS

NONE

PUBLIC HEARING

- a. Zone Change Designation
File Number: 01-ZON-23
Dan Beckner

(PUBLIC HEARING OPENED 6:05 PM)

AVILA asked for the Rules of Order to be Read and asked for Commissioner declarations. There were none.

AVILA asked for the staff report.

STAFF REPORT

BOQUIST stated the applicant is asking for consideration and approval to rezone 307 Greenwood from Light Industrial to General Commercial. The Planning Commission's decision is a recommendation to the City Council where a final decision will be made.

BOQUIST continued the purpose of this rezone request is to accommodate a commercial tenant occupancy on the subject property, Underground Oasis, which provides an addiction recovery and support program. As discussed in the applicant's submittal, the proposed facility will include a commercial kitchen and offer public meeting space and educational meeting space. The application referred to future site improvements that may include a mini-storage facility. However, the applicant advised the Planning Commission during the public hearing on August 8, 2023, that this was a conceptual idea that they have since decided against. They would like this element removed from the application and not considered, as this is not part of their future plans.

BOQUIST continued there is a number of criteria that needs to be met and the following is a summary of staff assessment and concerns.

A. The zone change application does not adequately satisfy the required Land Development Code (LDC) Review Criteria for a Zone Change or Comprehensive Plan Map Change.

- Does not meet Goal 2-Policy 3 which requires that public need be established.
- Does not meet Goal 9 Economic Development policies related to revitalizing the downtown area – the proposal does not include business or activities that encourage customer involvement from one store to another. Also is not consistent or complimentary to the City's focus and efforts underway revitalizing the Jefferson Street corridor and downtown areas to include small scale manufacturing.
- Proposal is not supported by any specific studies or other factual information which documents public need for the zone change.

The surrounding property adjacent the subject property is a mixture of commercial and industrial. The City's light industrial zoned lands are very limited with few known vacant sites available for new industrial development. The subject property of this rezone request is one of the only developed industrial sites available for a new business or expansion. As a result, the City needs to retain all existing light industrially zoned lands and there needs to be discussion is if the City can afford to lose such land through rezoning without a justification. Recently the City hired a consultant to conduct an economic needs analysis to evaluate and determine what the City's needs are for commercial and industrial lands. Until this effort is complete, the City will not know what it's commercial or industrial zoned land needs are, what sectors need land, and where such zone should be located.

The applicant identified in their narrative there is a need for education and services for the drug abuse population in the City of La Grande. They have located in other commercial spaces, but because of compatibility issues in the past with other businesses. The location where they are housed currently and trying to rezone provides access for their patrons and eliminates intrusion to the downtown businesses and customers.

AVILA asked if there was any other process other than the zone change like a variance. BOQUIST responded that there isn't a variance process to allow a use that is not allowed in the zone. There has been flexibility in other applications of allowing a secondary or incidental uses to collocate in a primary use.

GOUGHERTY asked if the primary use could be medical. BOQUIST answered medical could possibly be related to commercial.

MORRISON asked if the meeting space could be secondary to an industrial use. BOQUIST responded yes, but to be valid there would need to be existing industrial use on property that had meeting space in association with the industrial use.

Applicant Testimony

AVILA asked for testimony from the applicant.

BECKNER commented the owner of the property Steve Colkitt offered the property to use for the ministry. The Underground Oasis is a Christian teaching, education and support group for people who are dependent on substances. After using the building, a while, it had advantages to the ministry. Historically, the ministry started in 2006 and was located right next to the theater, but because it was so close it had compatibility issues. The subject property proposed, isolates the ministry from the downtown and have had less complaints.

JOHNSTON commented along with a couple others wrote the Underground Oasis program in 2005. With the

conflicts of their other location by the theater, they needed a place not in the main stream, but accessible to patrons and the old Millers Store was a good option. The building is busy throughout the week. Saturday nights is their food program for anyone that needs to eat, the recovery program is Tuesday, Thursday and Friday nights. There is a study on Wednesday night. The building is being utilized and the future of the building depends on the zoning. There was some architectural work done to give an idea of what could be done. Additionally, the program tailors to 20-+30 people that show up every week. The owner of the building gave the building to the Underground Oasis for \$1. The purpose of the rezone is not to cause conflict, but to meet a need for the community struggling with addiction.

AVILA asked the applicant to outline future uses if the zone change is approved.

BECKNER responded the building is about 6,000 sq ft and there are some undeveloped portions. Currently using about 1,500 sq feet. Anticipate putting an ADA bathroom in, some commercial bathrooms, split the facility in 2 or 3 areas that will allow for heating and cooling efficiency based on the audience size. Life skills education would like to be included. There is an option for leasing or renting part of the building for community activities because of the space and commercial kitchen capability.

AVILA asked about adding the mini storage outlined in the application. BECKNER responded that was an earlier plan and have since pulled it to leave future options for development.

MORRISON asked about timelines on the long-range goals. BECKNER said the larger space is the meeting space of about 3,000 sq ft and would accommodate the growing group. Depending on audience interest, needs may change. Having a larger space and smaller space will allow holding multiple meetings.

MORRISON asked about the other commercial location opportunities Underground Oasis looked at and why it wouldn't work. BECKNER responded they looked at six commercial locations. The key items in that search were to not repeat the same mistake as last time because of compatibility issues. Affordability is an issue when the organization is a nonprofit. Lastly, the Millers location is valuable that it is central enough for people without transportation its easily acceptable.

AVILA asked for testimony in favor.

Public Testimony

BARS commented he has attended some meetings in the past which made an impact and has given him an opportunity to help others. Underground Oasis's program is different than other programs and uniquely brings a lot of resources that works.

SHAKE commented he is co-founder of the Underground Oasis and it is a safe haven for many people to find love and not judgement.

SALSIG commented as a mental health counselor and Oregon Youth Authority foster parent she became aware of the organization. Two youth boys that came under her care were connected to the program where they found love and care. Additionally, one of the boys got to assemble bicycles through the program. The location is easy to find, accessible and not in the midst of downtown.

WALLER commented he has lived in La Grande for about a year and works in mental health. This organization is doing amazing and powerful work allowing people to heal. There is a need for stabilization in drug abuse and mental health issues facing the community. There is a need for a place big enough to teach a job skill, or computer lab to restart lives.

FINCHER commented he is recovering addict. La Grande needs this ministry for the community. There are services provided for food, clothing, shoes etc. The location is the perfect spot.

Sallie STANDLEY commented the program gives hope to people and offsets a problem. Anyone can become an addict or be on the street.

HUMPHREY commented as a young person he suffered from addiction. The program gives a second chance to people and the Commission has an opportunity to help the welfare of the Community.

ROBERTSON commented before she went to Underground Oasis, she was in a nursing home learning to walk again after being in a coma. She ended up getting in trouble and going to the program. The program fulfills a sense of self and fits a specific need.

JOHNSTON commented she is on the Board of Directors of the Underground Oasis. About 90% of the people when the program first started are gainfully employed and staying off of the streets. The previous location on Adams was in process of being purchased and they went through a lot of turmoil of not being welcomed there. To go downtown again won't work, because people don't want us there. The current location is perfect.

TOM commented he attends the program and feels the positive energy that the program gives people.

Aaron STANDLEY commented the future plans do include a computer lab, a food bank to be expanded, commercial kitchen to do community feeds. The location is right off the highway and catches transients that people don't want to see. Additionally, there is a weekly occurrence that someone dies from overdose. This

program saves lives. Would like the Commission to consider a way to satisfy the zoning request.

GRIFFITH commented he is recovering addict and if it was not for the program he might not be here. The program is a networking agency to help people with finding resources.

GANDY commented that previous use was Millers Lumber and stayed in the location for many years as a commercial facility in the light industrial zone until it was moved.

AVILA asked for testimony neutral or opposition. There was none.

Commission Discussion

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

MORRISON asked about the earlier comment on the historic use of the property has been commercial.

BOQUIST responded Millers Lumber was mixed use with huge outdoor storage as industrial and the retail store frontage as commercial use and could argue either way it was industrial or commercial, but the proposal is different.

AVILA asked if the need for the rezone from the staff report is under GOAL 2 factual information for the need and does the need have to be adopted or documented. BOQUIST responded that it needs to be documented or a commonly known need. Goal 2 is referring to a zone and if there is a need for both industrial and commercial.

AVILA stated there is a need for public services in general and for the addiction crisis.

MORRISON asked about the discussion in staff report on how it met goals City and State. BOQUIST responded the State has a set of statewide goals. La Grande models the State goals.

MORRISON asked if a public need for a service is distinct from a public need for rezoning. BOQUIST responded public need for the rezoning is not a public need for an actual use. Use fits in variety of zones within the City.

AVILA commented there is need for public services which is a commercial use, however some commercial uses might need to be separated as to not impact other commercial uses and as such there may be a need for those zones.

The commission continued discussion on adding more commercial zoning to City creating more of deficit in industrial zoning if application is approved.

BOQUIST commented the zoning needs based on the study is 25 acres of commercial needed in the category of 5 acres. The subject property is 1 acre and is one of

2 sites identified as redevelopable for the industrial zone.

OGILVIE commented as part of being on the Planning Commission they serve the City of La Grande and if the citizens are not the City of La Grande, then who is.

There was consensus from the group that not every commercial property is in a location suitable for every commercial use or activity and is a needed for accommodating commercial uses that may generate higher neighborhood impacts.

(PUBLIC HEARING CLOSED 7:50 PM)

OGILVIE made the following Motion, with GOUGHERTY providing the Second.

MOTION

MOTION: I move that the Finding of Fact and Conclusions set forth in the Draft Decision Order be amended and that the Zone Designation Change be Recommended to the City Council for approval.

VOTE

USC: Unanimous

AVILA called for a 5-minute break

- b. Zone Designation Change
File Number: 02-ZON-23
Mike Becker

PUBLIC HEARING OPENED 7:55PM)

AVILA announced that the Rules of Order were read in their entirety at the first Public Hearing. There were no challenges or declarations.

AVILA asked for the staff report.

STAFF REPORT

BOQUIST stated the applicant is asking for consideration and approval to rezone from Medium Density Residential to General Commercial. The Planning Commission's decision is a recommendation to the City Council where a final decision will be made.

1. The purpose of this rezone request is to expand the existing commercial area along Walton Road, North of the Union Pacific Railroad, rezoning the subject property from Medium Density Residential (R-2) to General Commercial (GC) on the City of La Grande Zoning map, and from Medium Density Residential to Commercial on the City of La Grande Comprehensive Plan map.
2. To address the one of the required review criteria, which focuses on the feasibility of the property to support a commercial development if rezoned, the application included a conceptual development plan for a 100-space RV park. For

this rezone application, this plan is only conceptual, and this decision order does not grant any permissions, approvals for any actual development.

BOQUIST continued that comments were submitted from City Staff, ODOT and Island City. Both ODOT and Island study requested that a traffic study be done. Island City asked for the study as part of rezone and ODOT asked at a traffic study at a time a certain traffic volume was triggered. The City commented there were studies done previously and know generally what the impacts are and mitigations. To do multiple traffic studies now, would be based on a conceptual hypothetical assumption. Then when an actual project is proposed, another traffic study would be done and it might come up with something different. Rather than doing multiple traffic studies, the City recommends to defer the traffic study until an actual plan is submitted for development and is recommended as a condition of approval. ODOT has supported that recommendation and Island City submitted a letter for an additional Conditional approval and are here to speak on the application.

AVILA asked for testimony from applicant.

BECKER commented the property is not viable for residential development. It is too far from any street and needs to be part of a larger parcel to connect to Walton Road. Property is already joined by surrounding commercial ground. Additionally, there was a conceptual plan submitted for an RV park as part of the application, but not sure if that is what they want to do.

AVILA asked if it is changed to commercial use what changes the need for roads. BECKER responded it becomes part of a block of land for a larger project and if it was an RV park it needs to be gated, controlled and private.

BOQUIST commented in the draft economic needs analysis waiting to get adopted, there is a need for additional commercial of 25 acres in the 5-acre category. The RV park is one option. There are all kinds of development options, just depends on the market demand and when development occurs then infrastructure will be figured out.

AVILA asked for testimony in Favor. There was none.

AVILA asked for testimony Neutral.

COMFORT commented he is the mayor of Island City and is not opposed to the application, just want to be in coordination that at the point of development that ODOT, La Grande and Island City can work together. Additionally, would like to request a condition of approval that prior to approval of building permits for development that relies on access and infrastructure in Island City, the

Applicant Testimony

applicant shall be required to receive land use approval from Island City for proposed infrastructure improvements in Island City.

WINTEROUD commented he is the Planner for Island City and his view is consistent with the Mayor of Island City. Island City is not opposed of the zone change, just want to make sure the infrastructure continues to function. There have been several conversations over the years with ODOT regarding the intersection at the rail crossing, indicating it is a problem. Development can't fund improvement to that intersection and why increased development raises a concern. Grants have been applied for to seek out solutions for the issues. Would like to work together with ODOT, City of La Grande as development occurs.

BECKER rebutted that he is aware of the challenges with the future development and to save for another day. The application is for a zone change only.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

Commission Discussion

MORRISON commented she received the letter from Island City a short time before the meeting and wanted to review more closely at the information and asked to table the meeting.

AVILA, GOUGHERTY and OGILVIE wanted to push through to finish the decision.

The group went over the Island City letter that was submitted prior to the meeting and the condition of approval they propose. There was consensus from the group that the conditions are necessary.

(PUBLIC HEARING CLOSED 8:28 PM)

OGILVIE made the following Motion, with GOUGHERTY providing the Second.

MOTION

MOTION: I move that the Finding of Fact and Conclusions set forth in the Draft Decision Order be amended and the Proposed Zone Designation Change be recommended to City Council for approval.

Conditions of approval:

1. At the time of application for development, a traffic impact study (TIS) shall be prepared and submitted to the City of La Grande, Island City and the Oregon Department of Transportation, that meets the requirements and methodology as determined by such jurisdictions. The TIS shall evaluate the existing conditions of the surrounding street system and demonstrate the level of impact the proposed development will have on the surrounding street system. As part of the development, the applicant shall be required to mitigate all negative impacts attributable to the development as identified in the traffic impact study.

2. Prior to approval of any City of La Grande, land use, zoning and building permits for development that relies on access and infrastructure in Island City, the applicant shall be required to receive land use approval from Island City for proposed infrastructure improvements in Island City.

USC: 3 in Favor; 1 abstained

VOTE

None

CITY PLANNER COMMENTS:

None

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

None

There being no further business to come before this Regular Session of the Commission, adjourned the meeting at 8:34 pm. The Commission is scheduled to meet again in Regular Session, Tuesday, September 12, 2023 at 6:00 p.m., in the Council Chambers of City Hall, 1000 Adams Avenue, La Grande, Oregon.

APPROVED:

ATTEST:

Kendra VanCleave
CEDD Secretary
Date Approved:

Chairperson