

# **BLAND COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION**

## **Meeting Minutes for February 6, 2017**

### **Members Present:**

Meagan Bradshaw, Guy Boone, Elmer Chewning, John Dodson, Wade Hall, Steve Hermansen, Jerry Mercer, Randy Johnson

### **Members Absent:**

Jim Baker

### **Others Present:**

Eric Workman, County Administrator  
Joel K. Cagle, Planning Commission Secretary  
Paul Cassell, County Attorney

## **CALL TO ORDER**

At 6:00 PM, Chairman Mercer called the meeting of the Bland County Planning Commission to order at the Bland County Courthouse; Bland, Virginia. The Invocation was given and allegiance was pledged to the flag of our country by everyone present.

## **ROLL CALL**

Planning Commission Secretary Cagle took the roll call and announced that a quorum was present.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Chairman Mercer called for motion to approve the minutes of January 9<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup>. Commissioner Bradshaw made a motion to approve the minutes of January 9<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Commissioner Chewning provided the second and the motion passed unanimously.

## **PUBLIC HEARING**

-Application from the East River Baptist Association, to obtain a CUP to operate warehouse storage on Tax Map No. 77A2-A-21, which is zoned Agricultural. Secretary Cagle summarized the application and read Section 62-132, stating the General Guidelines to be considered in determining the propriety of granting a conditional use permit.

Dee Dee Hoosier, representing the East River Baptist Association, spoke on behalf of the application, stating the reason for the change is that they have outgrown the current location of their clothing donation site. The Commission asked about the time frame for the start of construction, Ms. Hoosier stated that it would be approx. 8 weeks.

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Chairman Mercer opened the public hearing, and there being no registered speakers, it was closed. After a brief discussion, Commissioner Hall made a motion to recommend the Board of Supervisors approve the application, Commissioner Bradshaw made the second and the motion passed unanimously.

- Application from The Urantia Garden Foundation, Inc., to obtain a CUP to operate a Recreational Facility on Tax Map Numbers: 12-A-96, 12-A-107, 13-A-28, 12-A-95A, which is zoned Agricultural. Secretary Cagle summarized the application and read Section 62-132, stating the General Guidelines to be considered in determining the propriety of granting a conditional use permit.

Stephanie Shaefer, representing The Urantia Garden Foundation, Inc., spoke on behalf of the application. She started off by stating that the Foundation has applied for a name change. The name will be changed to The Garden Project Community Foundation. She stated it was their purpose to protect the land, she also stated that the Foundation, after locating this site, have reviewed the County's Comprehensive Plan and think that their plans seem to fit. She also informed the Commission that they plan to have a site developer to review the site on Saturday, February 11<sup>th</sup>. It was the Foundations intent to build a beautiful garden, to include a conference retreat (with counseling; Family, marriage, etc.); sustainable organic garden, and a museum of art/religion. Ms. Shaefer also provided a detailed narrative of the Board and their backgrounds. She stated that the plan was for 15 to 20 retreatants at a time. With a plan to build an undetermined number of cabins on site. She stated that underground service for lighting would be used as well as shielding if needed.

Chairman Mercer opened the public hearing.

Paul Looney: Stated that the job of the Commission is to protect the land of Bland, cautioned the Commission to watch the building of cabins and all items needed to support (sewer, etc.) Commented that the entrance needs improvement, concerned about run off, Number of bedrooms needed for this retreat. If CUP is allowed is this going to protect the adjoining landowners? Request it be denied.

Dreama Hatcher: Provided the Commission with a petition with 372 signatures stating they are against the approval of this application for the following reasons, "*Increased traffic flow especially whenever there is a traffic situation on I-77; the effects of the taxes on surrounding properties in being decreased; Mountain erosion and excessive water shed on the neighboring properties and roadways; Transient population that will not be contributing to the tax base but rather be a drain on community resources with potential to negatively impact the wells and springs used by existing neighboring property owners; Obstruction of the natural scenic beauty of the area; The possibility of disenfranchisement of Bland County's own integrated community as local citizens may be looked upon as "an inferior race"; The residents of Rocky Gap and Bland County*

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*would not benefit from the building of the retreat as a whole.*" The list was giving to the Secretary and the count of 372 signatures was counted.

Joe Davidson: Stated that the Foundation is already listed as tax exempt and could be shielded from paying land taxes. With a limited tax base, this could be a heavy blow to the county. Already 25% of the county is not taxed now. The tax on the four parcels now are \$4,108 per year now.

David Hounshell: Stated he is an adjoining land owner, this would mess up local hunting, the amphitheater would be noisy, and the purposed use could mess up wells and springs for the community.

Roger Lee: Stated same concerns as other speakers.

Gerry Schepers: Large portion of Bland County is national forest. His concern is the loss of taxes paid to an already low tax base.

Carol Pence: Lived in VA for 27 years. Spoke in favor, stating these are good people.

John Pence: Spoke in favor, stating good people, project will benefit the community. Facility will find other uses for community. Spoke on the technology of new septic products to lower impact to land.

Jason Lambert: Deferred his time to others.

Charles Akers, Jr.: Lives under it, stating the entire mountain is nothing but boulders and any development could be damaging to community. Site cannot and should not be developed with heavy equipment.

Harlan Cox: Concerned about the tax base and the definition of Recreation Facility. The changing of the Foundation's name in mid-stream concerns him. He would like a definition of cabin, house, etc. Concerned about the amount of people per housing.

Vicki Slaughter: Prayers for the Commission in their decision, concerned for her grandchildren being around this environment. Also stated if they wanted to take care of people, there were people needing care in New Jersey.

Matthew French: Deferred his time to others.

Arlene Bridges: Asked when the name change was applied for, and why was old name on application instead of new name. Asked if any other Garden sites were around.

Ray Hotaling: Questioned the zoning change of residential to recreational facility.

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Larry Conley: Lives at the entrance; hazard as it sets. He is flooded due to grading activities.

Sally Lambert: Would hate to see site change.

Brad Eastridge: Asked what economic impact this would have on Bland. Questioned other uses not mentioned on application (via website) "when not used as recreation"

There being no more registered speakers, the public hearing was closed.

The Commission began its discussion. Commissioner Dodson made a statement that this is an opportunity for restrictions to be imposed. A question was asked about the tax exemption, with the County Attorney stating that was not one of the general guidelines to use in determining the approval or denial of a CUP. Chairman Mercer spoke on the application addressing if it would be prejudicial to the character of the neighborhood as well as being detrimental to the use or development of adjacent properties. A question was raised about the website offering 99 year leases. Question was asked about having a multi-family community and how many cabins and how many families.

Ms. Shaefer stated that the new garden was to enhance existing beauty by protecting the land, animals and plants.

The Commission raised concerns about the information gap, stating it seems the Foundation is moving too fast on this land. Commissioner Boone asked what the purposed water source is, and is the developer qualified. Ms. Shaefer stated that the developer would be looking at the site with them on Saturday. Commissioner Chewning stated that the project is not set in concrete, and it appeared that some of the timing has not be handled well. Chairman Mercer stated that this project appeared to be geared by financing. Commissioner Hall asked who would maintain the property, if it would be local people or in house. Commissioner Boone asked if the Interstate noise would be of concern to them.

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There being no further discussion, Chairman Mercer called for a motion. Commissioner Bradshaw made a motion to recommend the Board of Supervisors deny the application based on the applicants purposed use being prejudicial to the character of the neighborhood; and the purposed use being detrimental to the use or development of adjacent properties or the general neighborhood with the possibility to impair the value of buildings or property in surrounding areas. Commissioner Hermansen provided the second. The following votes tendered:

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| Meagan Bradshaw..... | Yes |
| Guy Boone.....       | Yes |
| Elmer Chewning.....  | Yes |
| John Dodson.....     | No  |
| Wade Hall.....       | Yes |
| Steve Hermansen..... | Yes |
| Randy Johnson.....   | Yes |
| Jerry Mercer.....    | Yes |

The motion was approved to recommend the Board of Supervisors deny the application by a vote of 7 to 1.

**NEW BUSINESS**

-None

**OLD BUSINESS**

-None

**ITEMS TABLED FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

None

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**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Planning Commission at this time, Commissioner Johnson made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Commissioner Hall provided the second, the motion passed unanimously and the meeting was closed at 7:40.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Joel K. Cagle- Secretary  
Planning Commission  
County of Bland