

**Albemarle County Planning Commission
Work Session and Regular Meeting
Final Minutes December 10, 2024**

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public hearing on Tuesday, December 10, 2024.

Members attending were Fred Missel, Chair; Karen Firehock; Lonnie Murray; and Nathan Moore.

Members absent: Luis Carrazana, Vice-Chair; Corey Clayborne; Julian Bivins.

Other officials present were Michael Barnes, Director of Planning; Andy Herrick, County Attorney's Office; Tori Kanellopoulos, Principal Planner; Scott Clark, Conservation Program Manager; Kevin McDermott, Deputy Director of Planning; Syd Shoaf, Senior Planner; and Carolyn Shaffer, Clerk to the Planning Commission.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Ms. Shaffer called the roll.

Mr. Missel established a quorum.

Public Hearing

SP202400012 City Church Multi-Use Space Addition

Syd Shoaf, Senior Planner, said that he would be providing staff's presentation for Special Use Permit SP202400012 City Church Multi-Use Space Addition. He said that this special use permit would amend the previously approved SP202200012 to construct a multi-use building and a parking lot expansion. He said that the subject property, located on the northwest border of the City of Charlottesville and the Albemarle County jurisdictional line at 1010 Rio Road East, is 4.23 acres, zoned R-4 Residential, and designated as Urban Density Residential in the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Shoaf said that to the west lies the City of Charlottesville, with primarily residential uses; to the northeast and south are institutional uses, such as the Charlottesville Albemarle Technical Education Center (CATEC) and other churches; and to the west, single-family residential were the primary uses. He said that the site currently features an existing church building, two parking areas, and a Tier 2 personal wireless service facility. He said that there are 74 existing parking spaces between the two lots. He said that a shared use parking agreement between the City Church and CATEC allows them to use their parking lot for church services.

Mr. Shoaf said that the first proposal, SP202400012, seeks to amend the previously approved SP202200012 to allow a 13,100 square foot multi-use building and a parking lot expansion for up to 87 additional spaces on site. He said that the second proposal is a special exception, for which the Commission does not need to make a recommendation but can provide comments, which will

be included in the transmittal summary to the Board. He said that he would be happy to discuss the special exception at the end of his presentation if the Commission is interested.

Mr. Shoaf said that provided was the proposed concept plan if the special use permit and the special exception were to be approved by the Board. He said that the applicant proposes constructing a 13,100 square foot multi-use building, circled in purple, and two parking lot areas, shown in red on the plan. He said that the previously approved special use permit, approved in May 2023, approved a 10,600 square foot multi-use space building and a parking lot expansion for 43 parking spaces. He said that the new building, in purple, and parking lot expansions, in red, are located in the same general area as the previously approved project.

Mr. Shoaf said that the applicant would provide further detail regarding their proposal during their presentation. He said that the special use permit application was reviewed under the factors for consideration as outlined in the zoning ordinance. He said that staff believed that the proposed special use permit would not be detrimental to adjacent parcels, would not change the character of the nearby area, would continue to be in harmony with the R-4 Residential Zoning District, and was consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Shoaf said that there were five conditions for this application, with most carried over from the previously approved SUP. He said that the first condition required the development to be in general accord with the provided concept plan, which included the location of the proposed building, location of parking, a 20-foot buffer along the western property line, and for the wooded areas to remain. He said that the second condition was in response to the larger parking area along the entrance corridor, going above the minimum requirements for landscaping.

Mr. Shoaf said that conditions three, four, and five carried over from the previously approved SP. He said that condition number five, which was bolded, specified that it must be implemented five years after approval by the Board of Supervisors. He said that in summary, there were two positive aspects for this application: it was consistent with the review criteria for special use permits in the zoning ordinance and was consistent with the Places 29 Master Plan. He said that one concern was the expansion of the parking lot to 161 spaces, which would result in a larger parking area along the entrance corridor. He said that staff recommended approval with the conditions as recommended in the staff report, and he was happy to answer any questions or provide further information on the special exception if needed.

Ms. Firehock said that the applicant was requesting to extend beyond the maximum number of parking spaces allowed. She asked if the County had a cap, or if it was a specific limit to this site.

Mr. Shoaf said that Ms. Firehock's question was a great segue to discuss the details of the special exception, SE202400018, a request to modify the limitation on the maximum number of parking spaces. He said that the code allowed for this modification of the limitation as provided by the minimum requirement for this use. He said that the subsection states, "the number of parking spaces in a parking area may not exceed the number of spaces required by this section by more than 20%." He said that the proposal breakdown was shown in the top left of the slide.

Mr. Shoaf said that there were 74 parking spaces existing on site, and the code required a minimum of 107 parking spaces on this site. He said that applying the 20% maximum would result in 128 maximum parking spaces for this site. He said that with the special exception, the applicant was requesting a total of 161 parking spaces, approximately 50% above the minimum requirement.

Mr. Missel asked if Mr. Shoaf could discuss any involvement the Architectural Review Board had in this process.

Mr. Shoaf said that they distributed special use permits to their partners, and one of their partners was the ARB staff. He said that the ARB staff reviewed this and provided the information he mentioned earlier regarding landscaping. He said that they required the minimum standards to be met, but also suggested that, given the site's size and its proximity to the entrance corridor, it would be beneficial to exceed those minimum requirements. He said that if this were to be approved, it would be subject to a site plan, which would then be reviewed by the ARB staff.

Mr. Missel said that he did not see any additional accessible spaces. He asked if he should ask the applicant about that.

Mr. Shoaf said that the applicant could provide more information. He said that those would be determined at the site plan stage, but he believed they were on the south side of the existing building. He said that if they got to the site plan stage, staff would ensure all American Disabilities Act (ADA)-required parking spaces were in compliance.

Mr. Missel opened the public hearing. He asked if the applicant had a presentation.

Chris Becker said that he was the Operations Pastor at City Church. He said that he was joined by Thomas Ruff from the Timmons Group to help answer questions. He said that they previously held a meeting at Charlottesville High School before the COVID-19 pandemic. He said that when COVID-19 arrived, they had to relocate back to their main site, the church. He said that they had initially moved to Charlottesville High School because they had outgrown the church. He said that as they began growing again and people started returning to church, they encountered an issue with having too many kids for their downstairs space.

Mr. Becker said that they had a good working relationship with the church across the street, so Harvest Church kindly offered them their gymnasium, which they use regularly each week. He said that they utilize that space for their first and fifth graders. He said that at the same time, they have limited adult space on Sundays, so they also use the Center at Belvedere, approximately 0.5 miles away, for adult space. He said that they have a parking agreement with CATEC, but when CATEC was sold to the City, they lost the indefinite agreement. He said that when that relationship ended, they felt compelled to pursue a second special use permit to ensure they had sufficient parking on their site to accommodate their needs.

Mr. Becker said that they currently use four sites on Sundays: CATEC, their site, Harvest Church, and the Center. He said that they would like to consolidate these uses onto their own property, eliminating the need for people to travel to various locations. He said that he was aware that staff discussed parking, and that they have worked to accommodate their service schedules. He said that in the spring, they had three morning services, which typically drew around 500 adults and 70 kids. He said that they transitioned to two Sunday morning services and one evening service in the fall, so they are attempting to optimize their parking space.

Mr. Becker said that it had separated the attendance into a better ratio for services, but they would like to utilize their building to its full capacity, which as one of the reasons they will need to continue providing parking in the future. He said that they recently mentioned carpooling to their congregation as something to consider, but they have a diverse group of people, including families

with kids and college students, who use their facility on both Sunday mornings and throughout the week. He said that this proposal would enable them to establish a more permanent presence in the community.

Thomas Ruff said that he was with Timmons Group. He said that he had a few slides to share with the Commission. He said that the two slides provided a brief overview of the site and added some context regarding Mr. Becker's previous comments. He said that the 2023 rezoning application had been shown here, and he had also included a site plan to illustrate the differences. He said that the previous proposal was for a 10,600 square foot multi-purpose building with 40 additional parking spaces.

Mr. Ruff said that although it had been approved, it was never constructed, and there were no additional seats in the sanctuary building. He said that the main difference between the two proposals was the addition of a mezzanine level, which increased the building's square footage from 10,600 to 13,000. He said that the actual footprint of the building remained the same, but the number of parking spaces increased to 161.

Mr. Ruff said that the site was familiar to everyone, but he would show how the parking area had been expanded and slightly reconfigured. He said that they had worked with the church to shift some services, and their counts had shown that they were consistently in the 150s during peak hours when considering all of their services. He said that the proposed parking lot would fit the maximum capacity without needing to expand onto the adjacent property or other locations.

Mr. Ruff said that there was sufficient space along the Rio corridor to implement landscaping and buffering changes. He said that they had looked at it a bit closer and there were a lot of opportunities to work with the ARB to improve the buffering and landscaping. He said that behind the proposed addition included a stormwater management facility, which addressed concerns about runoff. He said that they were not treating off-site runoff, but they were treating the runoff from the impervious surfaces on their site with an appropriate stormwater management facility as they worked through the site design process.

Mr. Missel asked if the Commission had any questions for the applicant.

Mr. Murray said that he understood they were not in the site design process yet, but because there was concern about impervious surface and because they were going over the maximum for parking spaces, he wondered if they had considered alternatives for enhancing stormwater treatment on the site. He said that for example, they could use pervious pavement or having biofilters instead of a retention basin, as ways to increase treatment on the site.

Mr. Ruff said absolutely. He said that with the amount in the layout, there was more opportunity in the northern corner where there was space between the parking lot spaces to build in landscaping to break up the amount of impervious surface on that north side. He said that they were looking into some different materials and methods to ensure they treated everything onsite to the best of their ability. He said that however, it was not fully designed at this point.

Mr. Murray said that a retention basin was not really good for anything; it was wasted space on the site that could otherwise be an attractive biofilter feature that could add value to the site.

Ms. Firehock said that they were asking for something greater than what was allowed by the County, so in order to grant that, she hoped to see more progressive stormwater management

techniques than simply a stormwater pond. She said that if they decided to use permeable parking spaces, they could still have a regular travel way. She said that she was certain they had older parishioners, and those types of treatments did not freeze in the winter because the water went all the way through and did not sit on the surface. She said that therefore, people getting out of cars would not trip and fall like they would on traditional pavement.

Ms. Firehock said that another aspect was that with a biofilter, they could meet landscaping requirements while also treating stormwater. She said that they would appease the ARB with the plant palette and also create a stormwater facility. She said that they could even promote the fact they were conserving the Earth in accordance with God's mission. She said that she would definitely prefer to see better environmental stewardship for this proposal before they presented it to the Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Ruff said absolutely. He said that the parking lot, as designed, was meant to fit the 161, so they had already thought about how to shape that and make more room.

Ms. Firehock asked if the applicant had talked to the new landlords of CATEC in order to work with the City on an agreement.

Mr. Becker said that they had talked with them in the past, but not since the sale.

Ms. Firehock said that it would be more compelling for the applicant's argument if they had tried to talk with the City and they were rebuffed.

Mr. Becker said that he understood, and they definitely would do that. He said that however, he could see how it would be a challenge for them to say yes to that indefinitely.

Ms. Firehock said that she understood, but they were also hoping to construct that new building, so they had the demand. She said that she understood they had asked people to carpool more, but coming from different places and having different schedules made it difficult to coordinate in an effective way. She said that perhaps they could get a couple of church buses.

Mr. Missel said that related to the parking, he was curious to know if they had considered the proposed building's location at any point, with the intention of creating an L-shape with the existing building and bifurcating the parking to avoid having two 60-foot parking lots together. He said that he just realized that the building was about 60 feet wide and roughly the same length as the second bay of parking. He said that if possible, breaking up the building in this way could have achieved a more desirable parking layout.

Mr. Ruff said that when they were grading, they were trying to keep it level, but there was already some existing mis-leveling between the existing building and the proposed building. He said that this had created a challenge on the site there, so if they were to shift the parking area to accommodate vehicles and address the ADA requirements, it would become a more complex issue. He said that however, it may be worth exploring this option further.

Mr. Missel said that it struck him that the facility was a flat, 60-foot-wide area that was roughly the same size as the existing 60-foot-wide parking area.

Ms. Firehock said that the contour lines were very close in one area versus the other.

Mr. Missel said that it was still relatively flat. He said that the second thing that came to mind was the old adage about building parking for Easter Sunday, where they loaded it up based on maximum need. He said that in the past, the applicant had done a great job of sharing parking. He said that if the County agreed to this special exception, he would encourage them to explore ways to share parking when it was not needed with others around. He said that this could potentially reduce parking requirements for other businesses.

Mr. Becker said that when CATEC requested that they use their parking lot when needed, he was more than happy to accommodate them. He said that he believed it was reasonable for staff to use the lot when they needed it, or when CATEC had large events. He said that they served as CATEC's bomb shelter at this point, so they had a good working relationship, but the concern when it got sold triggered this issue.

Mr. Missel said that it might save the church money if they were able to work through that process. He said that his final question was whether they had thought about phasing the parking in, or if they planned to do all the work simultaneously.

Mr. Ruff said that from a cost perspective, doing everything at once was the best option for the church. He said that although had planned on creating a single construction plan, they also had talked about how to integrate the funding with the staff's and parishioners' efforts as the project progressed. He said that as the funding became available, they would need to work out the numbers to ensure they were not overbuilding. He said that Mr. Becker had been keeping track of this, and they shifted their services around to spread out the peak attendance of 300 people. He said that they had tried to minimize the impact and keep it as non-invasive as possible.

Mr. Missel said that they were seeking a special exception to go up to 161 spaces, from 20% more to 50% more. He said that this was outside of their current discussion, but he suggested that, in the future, if they encountered funding issues, they should not tie that to the approval of their site plan. He said that in that case, they would not be required to go to the 50% increase, and instead, they could just do the 20% increase and phase in the second part.

Mr. Missel asked if any members of the public wished to speak on this item. Seeing none, he closed the public hearing, and the matter rested with the Commission.

Ms. Firehock said that she thought it was a good problem that their church has become so successful. She said that it sounded like they had tried really hard to work on the scheduling. She said that she had already made all her comments about her hope that they fulfilled God's mission of protecting the environment.

Mr. Moore said that he lived just up the road, so he had seen the traffic management coming in and out of the site on Sundays, which was well done.

Mr. Moore motioned the Planning Commission recommend approval of SP202400012 City Church Multi-Use Space Addition, with the conditions stated in the staff report. Mr. Murray seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (4-0). (Mr. Bivins, Mr. Carrazana, and Mr. Clayborne were absent.)

Mr. Missel asked if the Commission had any recommendations or comments regarding the special exception, which they did not require a vote on.

Ms. Firehock said that the minutes should reflect the discussion about how the applicant should use low-impact development and green infrastructure techniques, such as pervious pavement, bioswales, and efforts to make the site more attractive, safer, resilient.

Adjournment

At 8:15 p.m., the Commission adjourned to Tuesday, December 17, 2024, Albemarle County Planning Commission meeting, 4:00 p.m.



Michael Barnes, Director of Planning

(Recorded by Carolyn S. Shaffer, Clerk to Planning Commission & Planning Boards; transcribed by Golden Transcription Services)

Approved by Planning Commission
Date: 01/14/2025
Initials: CSS