

**Albemarle County Planning Commission
FINAL Minutes May 18, 2021**

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public hearing on Tuesday, May 18, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

Members attending were Julian Bivins, Chair; Karen Firehock, Vice-Chair; Rick Randolph; Daniel Bailey; Corey Clayborne; Jennie More; Tim Keller.

Members absent: Louis Carrazana (UVA Rep.).

Other officials present were Charles Rapp, Director of Planning; Andy Herrick, County Attorney's Office; and Carolyn Shaffer, Clerk to the Planning Commission.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Mr. Bivins said the meeting was being held pursuant to and in compliance with Ordinance No. 20-A(16), "An Ordinance to Ensure the Continuity of Government During the COVID-19 Disaster." He said opportunities for the public to access and participate in the electronic meeting will be posted at www.albemarle.org on the Community County Calendar, when available.

Ms. Schaffer called the roll. All Commissioners indicated their presence.

Mr. Bivins established a quorum.

Other Matters Not Listed on the Agenda from the Public

There were none.

Consent Agenda

There were no items on the consent agenda.

Public Hearings

SP202100002 St. John Family Life and Fitness Center

Ms. Gleason, senior planner in the planning division of the Community Development Department in Albemarle County, presented the staff report. She said the subject property for this proposal was located at 1569 St. John Road on tax map parcel 66-78. She said the property is located in the rural area about 0.6 miles south of the intersection of Gordonsville Road and St. John Road. She said the parcels surrounding the property here generally are used for residential and agricultural uses.

Ms. Gleason said there are two existing buildings on this 6.1-acre parcel; the larger building to the north is St. John Baptist Church, and located directly behind the church is a small cemetery. She said the second building on the property is a single-story frame building that is the historic Rosenwald School. She said the building was constructed around 1923 as a school for rural African American students until 1954 when schools were desegregated. She said the applicant is requesting to adaptively reuse the historic school building as a local community center.

Ms. Gleason said the applicants' narrative states that they plan to use the renovated space to offer an exercise room and a display room with amenities that include a library, computer, and a museum to share the building's history. She said the renovated space would also offer multiple meeting areas for groups, classes, lectures, and workshops. She said the building is approximately 1,500 square feet in size, and the applicant was not proposing extensive external changes to the site to accommodate the use; that said, there would be some on-site improvements to make the proposed community center building handicap accessible. Ms. Gleason noted that during the review of this proposal, no outstanding concerns were identified by staff or members of the public.

Ms. Gleason said staff found a number of factors favorable to the proposal including the restoration and preservation of a historically and culturally significant local building; the proposed use would act as a publicly accessible educational resource; and the proposed use would provide services and support to rural area residents. She said no unfavorable factors were identified.

Ms. Gleason said to preserve the factors that were found favorable, staff recommends the conditions in the staff report; the applicant has indicated that they are agreeable to these conditions as well.

Mr. Bivins asked if he saw an historic marker.

Ms. Gleason affirmed that approval for the historic marker was received in 2016.

Mr. Bivins asked if that was about the school or the church.

Ms. Kinney replied that it was about the school.

Ms. Kinney thanked the Commission for the opportunity to share the story and history of their nonprofit. Ms. Kinney said she was the board president, and their vice president, Pastor Kelvin Hawkins, was also present at the meeting in addition to Mr. Jody Lahendro and Ms. Kathy Garstang, both Building Goodness team members.

Ms. Kinney said with their mission, they will provide physical, educational, and spiritual programs that will enhance the participants in living a better quality of life. She said they will be located in the renovated elementary school built in 1922 and identified as one of the 382 historical African American Rosenwald schools in Virginia; this is one of seven in Albemarle County built and will be the only one available to the public once renovated. She said their goal is to preserve the history of this unique period in Southern African American education.

Ms. Kinney said they will continue the legacy of education established in the past into the future with the education of mind, body, and soul. She said their first goal is to restore and preserve the former historical Rosenwald school, which is where education began for the Cobham community of African American students. She said that would include her, her mother, her siblings, and this is the story for so many of the alumni that are still living in the community; if they are not there, their legacy will carry on with their families that still live there.

Ms. Kinney said this would be the home for their community center and fitness center. She said the programs offered would be available to anyone wishing to exercise or attend classes and workshops. She said in addition, they would be able to spend time in the resource library or walk down memory lane in the museum and experience the environment of learning from the African

American community during that time.

Ms. Kinney presented a slide listing the two participants from the nonprofit center as well as all the people who are donating their precious skills and knowledge from the Building Goodness Foundation. She said this is a well-thought-out project with people who have skills and knowledge; they have designed and constructed a team that has laid out plans and designs for electrical work, architectural work, plumbing work, HVAC work. She said they are a well laid out group that have the plans all laid out, and they are grateful to them and their support.

Ms. Kinney said since 2011, they have accomplished quite a bit. She said they have their board of directors as well as committee members and have 501(c) status that was also achieved in 2011. She said in 2016, they had a highway marker. She said in 2018, they completed a septic system with private funds from donors and also from the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation, which has been very supportive towards them, with a Bama Dave Matthews grant which contributed towards the septic system, and that is complete. She said in 2019, they received a \$75,000 grant from the federal government, and that was to stabilize the building; in addition to that \$75,000, they also received another \$15,000 from CACF, and that is complete now, so they have completed stabilization of the building and the septic system.

Ms. Kinney said they are also listed with the help of Niya Bates on the national registry and also the Department of Historic Resources in 2019. She said in 2020, they were blessed with the Building Goodness Foundation to help with phase III of their renovation, which is the interior part of the renovation. She said additional funding is required; it is quite a large project. She said in addition, they have submitted two other grants, another one to the federal government, which is an African American civil rights grant. She said they are requesting this time \$108,000. She said they will know the results of that request by the end of June. She said they also requested another \$10,000 from Bama Works and will know from them also in June, and they look forward to hearing those results and feel very positive about that. She said additional funding is required, and they will be working with private donors, fundraisers, additional grants to achieve that goal.

Ms. Kinney said as far as the timeline is concerned, they project subject to availability of funds that they can complete this project by the end of the summer/early fall.

Mr. Lahendro said Ms. Gleason had covered the location, and he presented a timeline for the building with early photos of the school once it was completed. He said the Rosenwald program and Tuskegee were very careful in recording the schools that were built.

Mr. Lahendro spoke more about the Rosenwald program. He said it was a creation between Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee Institute and Julius Rosenwald, the president of Sears Roebuck, to fund over 5,000 schools through the rural South for the education of African Americans from about 1912 to 1932. He said, as Ms. Kinney had pointed out, there were seven constructed in Albemarle County; five of them still remain, but of those, they are either residences or abandoned derelict buildings. He said about a tenth of the 5,000 still remain in the country, and about a third of those built in Virginia remain.

Mr. Lahendro said Ms. Gleason also talked about the few exterior changes they are making. He said they are very small with a couple of sidewalks, a handicapped ramp, and reopening one of the historic doors that was closed up during its conversion to a residence.

Mr. Lahendro said inside, through his on-site research, he discovered that almost 85% of the

interior finishes still remain underneath the renovations and added drywall put in by the house conversion. He said he was able to document the changes created by that house conversion. He said for their proposed adaptive reuse, they are restoring the interiors, restoring the finishes and the doors, and they are constructing a new exterior ramp and then putting in new walls that will be complying with the Secretary's standards for rehabilitation, in that they will be obviously modern changes to the building. He demonstrated the elevation of the ramp.

Mr. Lahendro said they are complying with several comprehensive plan goals and objectives: for the rural areas, they believe they are complying with objectives 1 and 3; for the historic cultural scenic resources, they believe they are complying with objectives 2, 3, and 4.

Mr. Clayborne asked if there was any thought now or in the future if there would be any exterior interpretative signage or exterior displays outside the building located on site.

Mr. Lahendro said he had not thought about that and asked Ms. Kinney to talk about that.

Ms. Kinney said the only thing that came to mind was that they were planning a memorial patio; that has been since 2011 when they started to fundraise a buy-a-brick, and these bricks are inscribed with a memory of people and contribute to the memory of this project. She said they are not sure where it is going to be located because they need to be careful as to where they locate it.

Mr. Lahendro asked if there would be signage for the family fitness center itself.

Ms. Kinney said they had not thought about that yet.

Mr. Clayborne said sometimes on these projects (for example, statues or at a battlefield), there is signage that might tell stories and so forth. He said if that is part of future plans to give some careful thought about where it might go on the site. He said he loved the project.

Pastor Hawkins added that they already have an historical marker there located in front of the building now for the school.

Mr. Keller congratulated Ms. Kinney and Pastor Hawkins. He said he was fortunate to be at the 2016 dedication of the state marker and the celebration Eva Walker had. He said they had been welcomed into the community, and it was a wonderful experience. He mentioned the survey that Preservation Virginia undertook of Rosenwald schools starting in 2013 and said he would put the link on for the Commissioners to see all the data for the state that Mr. Lahendro was referring to. He said this has been a great project. He said they had a vision from the beginning of what they wanted to do, and it was exciting for the Commissioners as appointed officials to see a vision that is thoughtfully worked through, and they are achieving it. He said they were excited to see that.

Mr. Bivins noted that one of the conditions was that the days of operation would be from Monday to Saturday. He asked if St. John had a space that he would call a church hall or a parish hall, an internal space there, for example, where if there was a special event on a Sunday, they would ever need to use that space.

Pastor Hawkins said they have a fellowship hall in the sanctuary currently so they would not need that space.

Mr. Bivins said he wanted to make sure because sometimes when families come together or when there is a reunion, there may be a need for space on a Sunday, and he wanted to make sure that everybody was okay because of the Monday through Saturday use of the space.

Mr. Bivins opened for public comments. There were none.

Ms. Kinney thanked the Commissioners for taking the time to hear their presentation and was looking forward to hearing their results.

Ms. Firehock commended them for their work and said it was a great application, and she was glad they had spent all the years and diligence to bring it to this point.

Mr. Randolph echoed everything Ms. Firehock and Mr. Keller said.

Mr. Bailey said he was excited to see it be completed and to be able to visit and learn more about the site and its history.

Mr. Bivins encouraged the applicants to give some serious thought to being able to put some interpretative signs around the project when they do finish it. He said he would connect this to the reason why he would stress that with them. He noted that the Charlottesville-Albemarle Tourist Bureau recently had said that it was seriously considering putting together a route to lift up Black history in the area, and so he would hope, since they are the only Rosenwald school that would be open to the public, that they would be on that route.

Mr. Bivins said the other interesting thing is that they sit in an area that has a number of wineries and a cidery, so with lots of people being in that area just doing the other things that are promoted, it would be wonderful that as they were driving down 231, they might take a right-hand turn and learn something about the other part of the community that has been there for all these years. He encouraged the applicants to work with people in the town to make sure they get those interpretative signs.

Mr. Lahendro confirmed that what Mr. Bivins had recommended was part of the proposal that they have made.

Mr. Clayborne echoed what Mr. Bivins had said as the reason for his question about the interpretive signage on the site; it would be amazing to be able to attract people even when it is not open to come by and read and learn and so forth while they are in the area. He said he was proud that this was actually in his district. He said it is not too often where they get something that is not run of the mill and be proud of that. He said as a fellow architect, he could also sleep at night because with Mr. Lahendro on the project, he knew it was in really, really good hands, and as an architect, he would also say these are the kinds of projects that breathe new life into a community, and so with that, he was prepared to give his enthusiastic support behind this project.

MOTION: Mr. Clayborne moved to recommend approval of SP2021-00002, St. John Family Life and Fitness Center, with the reasons and conditions stated in the staff report.

Ms. Firehock seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (7:0).

Mr. Bivins told the applicants that this part of the process had been approved by the Planning Commission and would be going forward with their recommendation to the Board of Supervisors,

and Ms. Gleason would be working with them for that next stage.

Mr. Bivins recommended to his colleagues if they had not had the opportunity to go to this location and just stand there. He noted that he found out his ancestors were from Danville, where there is also a host of the Rosenwald schools. He said when the Black people migrated to the North, they did not talk a lot about what they left behind; it was a new time. Mr. Bivins remarked on being able to stand in that space and to recognize that this was where Black people were educated when they could not be educated anywhere else (particularly with the history of Charlottesville and Albemarle and being a place of resistance). He said he would just encourage the applicants to tell their story and tell the story of that place and the people who went through there and the way lives there were shaped through that school because it is a story worth knowing and a story worth telling. He wished the applicants great success as they continue with the process.

Mr. Keller reminded Mr. Bivins that he had put the address for people who were interested in more information on the chat.

Old/New Business

Mr. Rapp said he wanted to touch base on their upcoming schedule; he said he had work sessions planned out for the Planning Commission for the next two to three months, and then they had the comp plan coming their way that would consume their work sessions for quite a while. He said on that topic, the Crozet master plan team are planning to come to the Planning Commission June 8th to talk about the implementation section and the overall draft of the whole plan. He said later in the month of May, they plan to have another meeting out in the Crozet community as well as a couple of pop-ups out there to engage them on the implementation components, and then it would be time to wrap it all up into one final draft that they would like to bring back to the Commission in June.

Mr. Rapp said the June schedule tentatively had a work session on the 8th, and there are two open dates in June on the 22nd and the 29th; they have asked, if possible, if they could move that work session in June to the 22nd just to give them a little more time in between the outreach with the Crozet community and finalizing that chapter, so he wanted to pose that to the Commission and see if June 22nd worked instead of the 8th for the next month with their work session, and if so, he would send out an updated schedule in the next few days for the month of June.

There were no objections to that.

Ms. Firehock asked if they had any information about when they would be coming back in person.

Mr. Rapp said not at this time. He said he knew the Board has the emergency ordinance on their agenda for the following day to discuss what if any changes are going to happen to that, but as of now, no specific information. He said he assumed they would wait and see what the Board said the next day.

Mr. Bivins said he wanted the Planning Commission to be aware that they actually have done two chapters in the comp plan (the climate action, which is going to be incorporated into the comp plan, and the housing chapter, which they incorporated into the comp plan). He said right now, as everything else in Albemarle County, they were ahead of everybody. He said he recognized they were not going to stay there, but for right now, they were ahead of everybody.

Items for Follow-Up

There were no items.

Adjournment

At 7:29 p.m., the Commission adjourned to June 1, 2021, Albemarle County Planning Commission meeting, 6:00 p.m. via electronic meeting.



Charles Rapp, Director of Planning

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

Approved by Planning Commission
Date: 06/01/2021
Initials: CSS