

**Albemarle County Planning Commission
Final Minutes Work Session and Regular Meeting
March 12, 2024**

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public hearing on Tuesday, March 12, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

Members attending were Fred Missel, Chair; Julian Bivins; Corey Clayborne; Nathan Moore; Lonnie Murray

Members absent: Luis Carrazana, Vice-Chair; Karen Firehock

Other officials present were: Michael Barnes, Director of Planning; Andy Herrick, County Attorney's Office; 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

a. SP202300016 Charlottesville Climbing Gym

Syd Shoaf, Senior Planner, said that he was presenting the staff report for Special Use Permit SP 202300016 concerning Charlottesville Climbing Gym. He said that this was a request to amend an existing Special Use Permit for an indoor climbing gym situated on a 0.94-acre lot within the development area. He said that the subject property was located west of Charlottesville City limits after the Ivy Road and Old Ivy Road fork. He said that the tax map parcel was 60-46C, and the site's address was 2200 Old Ivy Road. He said that the entire parcel was approximately 0.94 acres and contained an existing structure. He said that the site was zoned Commercial Office and was affected by the Steep Slopes Managed Overlay District and the Entrance Corridor.

Mr. Shoaf said that in the Albemarle Comprehensive Plan, it was part of Neighborhood 7 of the Southern and Western Neighborhoods Master Plan, designated as Community Mixed Use. He said that the surrounding properties consisted of various uses, including other office uses, a restaurant, an apartment complex, and some of the University of Virginia's athletic facilities and buildings. He said that lastly, the site was bordered by the Buckingham Railroad to the south and an underpass to the southeast. He said that in the previous slide, there was an existing 13,378 gross square foot building, which was currently used for mixed purposes including office space, retail, and an indoor athletic facility of up to 2,000 square feet. He said that this facility was approved under SP201200001.

Mr. Shoaf said that due to the site's elevation, there were two driveways leading onto Old Ivy Road and two parking lots. He said that between these parking lots, there were 49 existing parking spaces. He said that the northwestern driveway was shared with the adjacent parcel to the northwest. He said that for this proposal, they were requesting an amendment to the existing special use permit SP 201200001 to allow for an indoor climbing gym. He said that this proposal involved expanding the existing special use permit area from 2,000 square feet to 6,125 square feet for the indoor athletic facility.

Mr. Shoaf said that this included climbing walls, bouldering areas, strength and fitness zones, yoga space, kids' zone, retail space, locker rooms, storage, a group fitness room, and a small office associated with the gym use. He said that the attached concept plan in the staff report showed this proposal. He said that the applicant had proposed minimal changes to the site itself. He said that the proposed building footprint remained unchanged, however, the applicant was proposing to raise the existing two-story building to three stories. He said that the existing 49 parking spaces were also sufficient for the requested recreational use. He said that additionally, the applicant proposed remodeling the bicycle parking area and adding more landscaping to the site.

Mr. Shoaf said that, as he had stated in the previous slide, the existing footprint of the site would remain unchanged, however, the applicant proposed raising the current two-story building from 16 feet and 1 inch to a three-story building at 32 feet and 4 inches. He said that Old Ivy Road was not an entrance corridor;

however, the Architectural Review Board reviewed the proposal due to its potential impacts on Ivy Road, which was an entrance corridor. He said that the Architectural Review Board had no objections, and Albemarle County's Fire Rescue did not raise any issues concerning the increased height. He said that the Special Use Permit was assessed under the Factories for Consideration as outlined in the Zoning Ordinance.

Mr. Shoaf said that staff believed that the proposed Special Use Permit would not be detrimental to adjacent properties, would not alter the character of the nearby area, would continue to be in harmony with the Commercial Office Zoning District, and was consistent with the comprehensive plan. He said that staff recommended one condition, which was that the indoor athletic facility use should not exceed 6,125 square feet.

Mr. Shoaf said that in summary, there were three factors that were favorable. He said that the first was that it met the review criteria for Special Use Permits contained in the Zoning Ordinance, the second was that the use was consistent with the Land Use Plan, and the third provided an additional athletic facility for people who lived and worked in the area. He said there were no unfavorable factors. He said that with this in mind, staff recommended approval with the conditions outlined in the staff report.

Mr. Murray asked why there was a condition placed on the limit of athletic space.

Mr. Shoaf said that the purpose of limiting indoor recreation space was to match the 49 total parking spaces allowed on the site. He said that their ordinance specified one parking space for every 125 square feet of usable recreation space. He said that the applicant was requesting the maximum allowance to match the existing site conditions.

Mr. Missel opened the public hearing. He asked if the applicant would like to address the Commission.

Eric Wooley said that he was joined this evening by Mike Kinnick, co-founder of Rock Revolution, and Robert Nichols, an architect from Formwork Design. He said that they were pleased to present their proposal for the renovation and remodeling of the existing office building at 220 Old Ivy Street in the White Hall District. He said that the purpose of this project was to turn the building from a traditional office into an indoor climbing gym.

Mr. Wooley said that for those unfamiliar with indoor climbing gyms, they typically featured climbing walls adorned with colorful holds that recreational users could utilize to simulate rock climbing in a safer environment. He said that their team had done an excellent job in preparing this proposal, covering all aspects from the existing condition to the proposed changes.

Mr. Wooley said that they would like to take a moment to address any concerns regarding the expansion of the indoor athletic space. He said that the existing special permit allowed for 2,000 square feet; however, they were requesting an expansion to 6,000 square feet. He said that it was essential to note that the remodeling process would actually reduce the overall square footage of the building. He said that he would provide slides to illustrate this further. He said that before proceeding, he would like to invite Mr. Kinnick to share more about Rock Revolution's involvement in this project.

Mike Kinnick said that he was the co-founder of Rock Revolution. He said that he and his wife had established Rock Revolution at the beginning of 2020; unfortunately, she could not attend tonight due to work commitments. He said that they developed this concept to create a modern, clean, and safe indoor rock-climbing facility in Charlottesville and Albemarle County. He said that their motivation stemmed from observing the benefits of rock climbing for their six and eight-year-old daughters and themselves.

Mr. Kinnick said that they noticed their youngest daughter, who initially lacked confidence, blossom in self-assurance after visiting an indoor rock-climbing gym in Richmond over a couple of years. He said that rock climbing offered numerous mental and physical benefits, such as confidence, focus, courage, resilience, improved coordination, endurance, and strength. He said that they aimed to bring these benefits to their facility on Old Ivy Road.

Mr. Wooley said that he would discuss the appearance of the building from the outside. He said that if one imagined approaching from the City via Ivy Road and turning onto Old Ivy, as they traveled in this direction,

the first visible aspect of the building was its south face, which was two stories tall. He said that the entire structure was built at ground level; however, there was a grade change. He said that as seen in the photograph provided, on the north side, one could see the first floor, so there were two stories on one side and one story on the other. He said that there were 49 paved parking spaces on site, which they did not anticipate needing to modify or increase. He said that the site featured several mature trees, which would not be disturbed by their proposal.

Mr. Wooley said that Mr. Shoaf had mentioned that the site plan included Old Ivy Road and Ivy Road, with Ivy Road situated within the entrance corridor. He said that they had no intention of altering or adding any impervious surfaces due to this proposal. He said that the gray circles on the concept plan represented existing mature trees that they planned to preserve. He said that they would also add additional trees to meet the County-regulated code for parking space requirements.

Mr. Wooley said that they proposed adding some additional parking for bicycles, which would provide secure spaces for storing bicycles to promote bike usage. He said that the darker red shape on the plan indicated the area that would be raised from two stories to three stories. He said that one of their objectives was to evaluate and present the impact of this change. He said that they utilized the IT trip manual to predict the potential impact of parking and traffic on the area. He said that the existing office space generated higher peak demand for trips than the gym. He said that overall, they should not see any negative impact from traffic.

Mr. Wooley said that moving to the section depicting the north side and south side, he pointed out that there was an open space upon entering. He said that the first floor's existing roof line was shown, and their plan was to raise the roof line to three stories. He said that this space became two stories tall inside. He said that on the other side, approximately one-third of the first floor's square footage would be removed, allowing for a full three stories of potential climbing space. He said that Robert Nichols would provide some background information about the architectural design.

Robert Nichols said that his firm was Form Work Design. He said that they operated in Charlottesville and its surrounding areas. He said that he would like to discuss some aspects of the building's appearance. He said that the most notable characteristic was its increased height. He said that the upper portion was entirely new, featuring limited narrow windows at the top for natural light while allowing for climbing walls. He said that in the evening, this design would create a lantern effect, making the building appear occupied. He said that the primary difference between the current building and this proposed design was its purpose.

Mr. Nichols said that the current building was office space, but with limited room for athletic activities. He said that it was a multi-tenant building, which gave it an anonymous appearance. He said that as more people worked from home and office dynamics changed, this building may seem underutilized. He said that this project aimed to transform the building into a single-use destination for activity. He said that they wanted the building to appear occupied and active, attracting people and bringing life to the area. He said that the increased visibility, height, signage, decorative elements, and lighting would contribute to this goal.

Mr. Bivins asked where the other activity spaces would be for the activities such as yoga.

Mr. Nichols said that the sectional view primarily explained the building's appearance changes but failed to address the question. He said that as they examined the lower level, the perspective was from the west side of the city. He said that the ground-level space was divided, so the lower right corner housed a yoga and group area. He said that the spaces towards the back of the building, which were largely subgrade and lacked daylight, contained locker rooms, utility areas, and a gym featuring strength and machine equipment.

Mr. Nichols said that the area above the existing floor, occupying more than 25% of the space, was effectively three stories tall. He said that ascending further revealed the missing floor's position, allowing individuals in various locations to look into lower positions. He said that this area served as a break spot for climbers to discuss their achievements. He said that it was still a sizable space, standing two stories tall. He said that bouldering, or smaller-scale wall climbing, took place in this area as well, and then they reached the higher side of the building,

Mr. Murray said that he understood that many commercial buildings with flat roofs had already been designed to accommodate the weight of a green roof. He said that if this had not been considered, it was

worth evaluating. He said that it was essential to note that new construction may qualify for up to \$30,000 in financial assistance towards a green roof, provided that other stormwater requirements had been met.

Mr. Missel said that he had a couple of questions regarding this item. He said that he would like to confirm if there would be any pedestrian safety measures in place, as he understood that this area could be quite hazardous for pedestrians. He said that additionally, he noticed that bike storage and bike racks had been mentioned several times. He asked if they could please provide more information on how one would access these facilities while riding a bike. He said that he wanted to know if there were designated bike lanes or paths available.

Mr. Wooley said that in Old Ivy, there were currently no sidewalks. He said that approximately one thousand feet to the west and northwest was where the first sidewalk could be found. He said that currently, VDOT and the City and County were studying the intersection. He said that they had completed Phase 1, which involved sending out surveys to gather public opinions. He said that many people expressed concerns about safety due to the narrow railroad underpass, which restricted biking and walking. He said that this issue required a great solution, but for now, they could only be prepared for potential improvements in the future.

Mr. Missel asked if understanding that further improvements might require sidewalks would lead to their consideration for incorporation in future improvements.

Mr. Wooley asked if Mr. Missel was suggesting this be included in a proffer or condition.

Mr. Missel said yes.

Mr. Wooley said that they could certainly talk to the owner of the property. He said that Mr. Kinnick was leasing the property, and the owner was very supportive of the project and proposed use. He said that he was sure they could talk to that owner about that potential. He said that they would be pleased to meet with staff and collaborate with them.

Mr. Missel said that they mentioned that peak hour demand for a particular location was slightly lower than that of an office building. He asked if the overall average daily traffic for this location was also lower than that of an office building.

Mr. Wooley said that it was likely slightly more due to the hours of operation. He said that the hours of operation were from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. He said that this was a longer operational period. He said that the aim was to ensure that there was enough parking to meet the County minimum standards but also accommodate the anticipated demand for the facility.

Mr. Missel asked if there were any members of the public who wished to speak on this item.

Sean Cosette said that she owned a business called Be Just, located on the west side. She said that she would love to see this use happening on that side. She said that the west side had a different vibe that needed to be updated, and this would contribute positively to the community. She said that she loved the idea of doing a traffic study due to the severe traffic issues in the area. She said that she would love to see sidewalks, so it felt like more of a community and less of a suburb.

Mr. Missel asked the Clerk if there were any attendees signed up online who wished to speak.

Ms. Shaffer said that there were none.

Mr. Missel closed the public hearing and the matter rested with the Commission.

Mr. Moore said that the proposal appeared entirely reasonable. He said that although he was familiar with that traffic bottleneck due to his work experience nearby and frequent travel through it, addressing this issue was beyond the scope of one proposal. He said that they could hope for positive outcomes from the VDOT study and City study.

Mr. Bivins said that he supported this effort. He said that he particularly appreciated this initiative since they had consistently discussed the importance of repurposing buildings, which was something they had been supportive of for some time. He said that this initiative aligned with their stated desire over many months, so he was glad to see that the property, which formerly had a tennis court, was being utilized in this manner.

Mr. Missel said that his sole comment was to encourage consideration of adding a sidewalk. He said that he was unsure if they needed to include this as a condition for the application. He said that considering the current extensive study being conducted by VDOT and the County, he believed his stance would be different if not for their efforts. He said that he was content to leave the decision as is, but for the record, he highly recommended including a sidewalk in the project.

Mr. Bivins motioned that the Planning Commission recommend approval of SP202300016 Charlottesville Climbing Gym, with the condition as recommended in the staff report. Mr. Murray seconded the motion, which passed unanimously (5-0). (Mr. Carrazana and Ms. Firehock were absent.)

Adjournment

At 8:40 p.m., the Commission adjourned to March 26, 2024, Albemarle County Planning Commission meeting, 6:00 p.m., Lane Auditorium.



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: 03/26/2024
Initials: CSS