

**TOWN OF BOONE SPECIAL
PUBLIC HEARING JUNE 2,
2014, 7:00 PM
Meeting Minutes**

Boone Town Council: Andy Ball-Mayor, Lynne Mason, Jennifer Pena, Quint David, and Fred Hay

Boone Area Planning Commission: Eric Woolridge-Chairman, Greg Simmons-Vice Chairman, Jon Tate, Connor Boyle, Matt Long, Frank Bolick, Bob Cherry, and Tom Purpur

Planning Staff: Bill Bailey-Director of Planning and Inspections, Jane Shook-Development Coordinator, and Brenda Henson-Board Secretary

Others: Greg Young-Town Manager and Rick Miller-Public Utilities Director

Mayor Andy Ball called the meeting to order at 7:13 p.m. and announced that there was not a quorum of Planning Commission members present. He stated that the meeting would be recessed until 7:45 p.m. in order to allow the remaining Planning Commission members time to arrive.

Upon arrival of the remaining Planning Commission members, Mayor Ball reconvened the meeting at 7:45 p.m. Commission Chairman Woolridge then called the Planning Commission to order.

CASE 20140049 STANDARD AT BOONE, LLC

Standard at Boone LLC is requesting Conditional District Map Amendment approval to zone property to Conditional District B3 General Business for a site specific development plan for a mixed-use project containing commercial and multi-family uses to be located at: 784, 862, 862-B Blowing Rock Road; 299, 311, 325, 339 Faculty Street, and 3 vacant parcels (Watauga County PINs: 2910146823000, 2910147495000 and 2910148386000).

Jim Deal, attorney for the applicant, noted that the applicant had appeared before the Board of Adjustment to request eight variances, seven of which were granted. He stated that they had revised their plan based on the variance that was denied. Mr. Deal stated that the property is currently unattractive and has safety concerns. He noted that this property was on a major corridor and he felt that this project would enhance the area. Mr. Deal stated that there was a stream on the property that was mostly covered and most of the property was paved. He explained that the applicant would be daylighting the stream in order to help alleviate flooding. Mr. Deal noted that the stream created physical constraints for the location of the buildings on the property because it currently bisects the property. He stated that the stream had to connect back to the culvert at McDonald's and they would have to have a CLOMR, and that process was already under way.

Jeff Wakeman, member of The Standard at Boone, LLC, explained that they had hired local professionals who knew the area to help design the project, had worked with staff, and had waited until the new UDO was adopted so they could design to the most up to date standards. Mr. Wakeman stated that the creek and the current structures on the property were both major issues. He noted that the foundation wall for the Scottish Inn was the border wall for the creek and they would have to have state approval for the demolition of the building. Mr. Wakeman stated there would be asbestos abatement in both the Scottish Inn and the Red Carpet Inn. He noted that there are eight underground tanks on the property. Mr. Wakeman explained that they were trying to return the stream as close to its original position as possible and the North Carolina Fish & Wildlife Agency had approved their plan. He stated that the pipe currently bisects the property and they were planning to build a new stream bed and then divert the water into it. This, in essence, would create more area to accommodate flooding. Mr. Wakeman stated that the height variance in the transitional zone was not approved by the Board of Adjustment so they had revised the plan to reduce the residential building on Faculty Street from 4 stories to 3 stories in the transitional zone. He noted there would be a fitness center, coffee shop, and other businesses in the retail space of the Blowing Rock Road building. Mr. Wakeman pointed out that there would be a separate service entrance at the north end of the property for loading/unloading and trash pickup. He stated that the apartments would be aimed at students

and there would be courtyards in the rear of the Blowing Rock Road building with a covered wooden footbridge between the two buildings that would allow access to the parking garage from the residential building. Mr. Wakeman stated that they were trying to incorporate the mountain look with the proposed façade. He noted that the back of the Faculty Street building would be on piers and there would be community access to the stream. Mr. Wakeman added that the back driveway for McDonald's was actually on their property.

Mr. Deal asked Mike Trew to clarify the transitional zone narrative contained in the packet. Mr. Trew, an engineer with Municipal Engineering, explained that the windows proposed to be in the enclosed parking structure were actually window-like openings. Mr. Trew stated he was excited about this project because he had tried for years to get other projects to open up creeks but it is a very cost prohibitive venture. Mr. Trew felt that the approval by the Board of Adjustment of seven of the eight requested variances was an encouragement and incentive for the project. He noted that the development of this project would create a 20% reduction of impervious area on the property. Mr. Trew stated that height requirements with the approved variances were being met, a traffic impact analysis was performed and the recommendations incorporated into the plans, and they had spoken with GDS, AppalCART, and all the Town departments.

Mr. Deal pointed out that the building along Blowing Rock Road would have indentions and greenery so there would not be just a flat wall along the street. He noted that the Convocation Center and the old Quality Inn buildings were both taller than what was proposed for this project. Mr. Deal added that there would be no vehicular access from Faculty Street to the parking garage.

Council Member Mason stated she appreciated the daylighting of the creek. She asked about the reasoning for student housing when a recent housing study revealed that the Town already has a surplus of 2,000 beds. Mr. Wakeman replied that he was aware of the housing study results. He stated there was a significant amount of aged housing as well as students living in single homes several miles out of town. Mr. Wakeman stated that they had done a market study that showed students wanted to live in higher end units close to campus so they didn't have to drive. He felt this development would draw students from outlying areas and older units therefore creating more affordable housing options for others. Council Member Mason asked if they had considering structuring some of the units to be geared toward non-students. Mr. Wakeman replied that non-students have a different lifestyle and it is difficult to put them next to students. Council Member Mason noted that the conceptual plans in the packet were printed with Appalachian State University and she asked if the property would remain privately owned. Mr. Wakeman stated that project was entirely private with no involvement from ASU.

Commission Member Long asked Mr. Wakeman if his previous projects like this had attracted students only or if faculty and staff lived there as well. Mr. Wakeman replied that there was not a lot of faculty in this type development but they did get some graduate and post graduate students. He added that no one would be excluded from renting the units.

Commission Member Boyle stated he was glad they were daylighting the stream but expressed concern about noise, traffic, and trash. He noted that sometimes the people who live on the outskirts of town live there because they cannot afford to live in town. Mr. Wakeman replied that the market study considered a lot of demographics and they had done their homework. He noted that this was a \$45,000,000 project. Commission Member Boyle questioned the CLOMR. Mr. Wakeman stated that the CLOMR had been submitted to FEMA and they had no statutory time to reply but they had been out to look at the property. Commission Member Boyle asked if an analysis had been done of how daylighting the creek would affect downstream properties. Justin Church with Blue Ridge Environmental Consultants explained that there would be more storage created on The Standard at Boone property and the same amount of water should enter the pipe at McDonald's as it does currently, causing no additional impact on downstream properties.

Commission Member Tate asked if relocating the stream would push more water to Faculty Street and Mr. Church replied that it would not.

Commission Member Boyle asked if the bike lane along Blowing Rock Road would be removed. Mr. Trew replied that the only thing they would be doing on Blowing Rock Road was installing a deceleration lane. Frank Amenya, traffic engineer with Davenport Engineering, stated that the bike lane would be like the one at Hwy 421 and 105. Commission Member Boyle asked if the bike lane could be made a different color or made to stand out in some way. Mr. Amenya stated they would have to do whatever NC DOT would require or allow.

At 8:47 p.m. Mayor Ball opened the hearing for public comment.

The first speaker was Joan Lynn White. Ms. White, who resides at 170 Wintergreen Lane, stated she had lived in Boone for 50 years. She stated Wintergreen Lane was one of the oldest historic areas in Boone and was parallel to Faculty Street. Ms. White noted that several years ago she purchased the house next door to her and a young family currently lives there. She expressed concern about the Faculty Street building, noting that you would be able to see in her windows from this building. Ms. White provided Council and Commission members with a copy of the site plan depicting her properties as well as photos of the property from her home (**see attached**). Ms. White expressed concern with the adverse effect on her privacy, possible noise issues, lighting, and flooding. She stated this project would be student housing not multi-family housing. Ms. White asked that Council and Commission members consider the lives of the people on Wintergreen Lane who live in a single family neighborhood.

The next speaker was Tom Jamison. Mr. Jamison noted that he was speaking as a citizen of Boone. He stated that he had lived in Boone for 44 years and currently resides on Tracy Circle. Mr. Jamison stated that he was not really there to speak in favor or opposition of this project but wished to say he was in favor of height instead of sprawl. He noted that he did not want to see another Howard Street along Blowing Rock Road. Mr. Jamison asked if there would be on-site management and security for this project.

Mr. Deal addressed Mr. Jamison's question and stated there would be on-site management and security for the project.

Mayor Ball asked how many of the 497 parking spaces would be dedicated for commercial use. Mr. Wakeman stated there would be 78 parking spaces with signage provided for commercial use. Commission Member Tate stated it was vital to businesses to control parking.

Commission Member Pena noted that how the property is marketed would affect the types of occupants. John Williams, engineer with Landmark Properties, replied that they market heavily to undergrad students because that is what their product is geared toward. Mr. Williams explained that their lease would contain information stating that gatherings of 15 or more would have to be registered. The lease would also address items such as trash in the corridors and noise issues.

Council Member David stated he liked the look of the building and asked Mr. Williams if he could assure that the finishes of the building would be incorporated. Mr. Williams replied that they would be bound by what they have submitted if the project is approved. Mr. Williams provided Council and Commission members with conceptual drawings of the two buildings (**see attached**). Council Member David asked if other communities gave incentives for in-town development. Mr. Williams replied that there were not a lot of incentives for this type of development. He felt there was more of a discouragement of sprawl than an incentive for density.

Council Member Mason asked if the Council could receive a copy of the language in the lease due to the proximity to the neighborhood. Mr. Williams stated that they could provide some of the bullet points of the lease to the staff. Council Member Mason mentioned that the Town has additional noise requirements. Mr. Williams replied that other communities also have noise requirements. He explained that they typically offer one of their units to a local police officer at no cost or a reduced rate and this helps the residents feel safe and deters unfavorable activity.

Commission Member Long asked about the amenities. Mr. Williams stated that some of their typical amenities included a pool, an enclosed fitness center, yoga rooms, study rooms, and pool tables. He noted that they had won national awards for their amenities.

Council Member Mason asked about sidewalks and access to the creek by the public. Mr. Williams replied that there would be a sidewalk on Faculty Street but he was unsure about public access to the stream.

Commission Member Cherry questioned the vegetation along the stream. Mr. Williams stated he anticipated a portion of the stream would be wooded instead of all grassy slopes. Mr. Trew added that they would have to have a heavy riparian buffer.

Commission Chairman Woolridge questioned the placement of the sidewalk and grassy area along Blowing Rock Road and expressed concern about an awkward pedestrian area. Mr. Williams stated they would be happy to work with staff to create a more urban look.

Council Member David stated he liked the brick pavers and felt it would blend with other projects in town.

Mayor Ball asked if the residential units would have balconies. Mr. Williams stated that there would not be balconies on the Faculty Street building but there would be balconies on the rear of the Blowing Rock Road building.

Commission Chairman Woolridge questioned the possibility of having a restaurant on the back side of the Blowing Rock Road building with a view of the stream. Mr. Wakeman replied that access to the back of the building for a restaurant would be difficult. Commission Chairman Woolridge expressed concern that the town would be setting a precedent with this project. Mr. Williams stated that this was a unique property that had issues that were unaddressed by the UDO. Commission Chairman Woolridge stated that workforce housing would not be provided in the Faculty Street building because there would not be commercial on the ground floor. Jane Shook, Development Coordinator for the Town of Boone, stated that this building did not actually trigger the new multi-family requirements.

Commission Member Boyle stated he would like to eat by the stream and thought a restaurant in the back of the Blowing Rock Road building would be a good idea. Mr. Williams stated there would be not street access and customers would have to wind their way through corridors to the back of the building. Commission Member Bolick stated that it would be too much walking for customers which would render the restaurant unsuccessful.

Commission Member Long asked about the rent cost for the apartments. Mr. Williams replied that rent would be between \$550 and \$950 per bedroom. Commission Member Long asked what would be included in the rent. Mr. Williams stated that the units would be fully furnished and would include cable, internet, water & sewer, and partial electric.

Mayor Ball asked if there would be a fee for parking. Mr. Williams replied that parking would be \$25 per unit.

Commission Vice Chairman Simmons wished to confirm that there would be 560 bedrooms and Mr. Williams stated that was correct. Commission Vice Chairman Simmons noted that page 2 of the staff report noted there would be 2,397 trips based on 522 bedrooms. Frank Amenya, traffic engineer replied that they would still be within the threshold for the level of service even with the increased number of bedrooms. Commission Vice Chairman Simmons asked if there would be cars stacking at the service entrance and Mr. Williams replied that they would not stack at that entrance. Commission Vice Chairman Simmons asked about the unit configuration of the Faculty Street building. Mr. Williams noted that there would be 33 units with 92 beds. He stated there would be 1, 2, 3, and 4 bedroom units in the Faculty Street building. Commission Vice Chairman Simmons stated he was most disappointed about the range of housing options presented with this project. He felt the Faculty Street building could have been configured for workforce housing. Mr. Williams replied that it was not financially feasible for this project. Mr. Williams noted this was a smaller project than they typically build.

Commission Member Boyle asked it was more profitable to rent to students than to non-students and Mr. Williams replied that was correct.

Commission Member Bolick felt the project could allow houses to open up that could be used for workforce housing.

Commission Member Tate asked about the projected timeframe to begin work. Mr. Williams projected they would begin demolition the 3rd or 4th quarter of this year. Commission Member Tate asked if the buildings would be stick built or modular and Mr. Williams stated they would be stick built.

Ms. White asked how the denial of the variance was satisfied by lowering the building. Bill Bailey, Director of Planning & Inspections explained that the 100' transitional zone only covered one area of the building and per UDO Section 16.08.05 the height of a building in the transitional zone cannot exceed 35'.

Mayor Ball closed the public hearing for this case.

ADJOURNMENT

Commission Member Boyle made a motion to adjourn Planning Commission members from the public hearing at 10:18 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commission Member Tate.

Vote:

Aye – All
Nay – None

The vote was unanimous.

Council Member Mason made a motion to adjourn Town Council members from the public hearing at 10:18 p.m. The motion was seconded by Council Member Hay.

Vote:

Aye – All
Nay – None

The vote was unanimous.

Andy Ball, Mayor

Brenda Henson, Board Secretary