

Meeting of the Planning Commission, February 17, 2015

Notes taken by Nancy Young

6:30 pm. Commissioners present were Caswell, Goff, Hannan, Sullivan, and Connell. Commissioner Crouse was excused.

Commissioner Rothschild recused himself since he recently purchased a home in Whisper Creek.

Citizens present - 6. Presenters present – 3.

Chairperson Sullivan opened the public hearing regarding Whisper Creek III at Wildgrass, including four items: 1) rezoning, 2) Outline Development Pland (ODP) amendment, 3) Preliminary Development Plan (PDP), and 4) preliminary plat. These four items were considered together for purposes of the public hearing. Chris Elliot of Alkire Investment presented the overview.

Whisper Creek III at W. 87th Parkway and Indiana is the third portion of a larger development originally known as Mountain Shadows and approved in 2004. When the original, larger development was approved, it was intended to be mixed-use with retail-commercial on the north and south sides of W. 87th, on the east side of Indiana. In part, this parcel was considered an “employment opportunity” for Arvada.

Since 2004, Whisper Creek I and II (residential) have been completed, and the Goddard School was established on the NE corner. Further development in the area was adversely affected by the poor market conditions beginning in 2009.

The developer has been unable to attract any retail or commercial projects for this parcel (on the SE corner). The parcel has two major drawbacks for such development:

- topography - the site is an hillside
- access - primary access was limited to W. 87th, which is not conducive to retail-commercial developers, who preferred access from Indiana.

During the recent Comprehensive Plan revision, the developer discussed this issue with city staff. Staff agreed that in the absence of interest by retail or commercial developers, it would be appropriate to rezone the parcel for residential use.

The proposed plan calls fro 50 patio-style homes on 12.9 acres, for a density of 3.87 units per acre. It is anticipated that primarily older couples who are downsizing, or younger couples, would be the primary occupants of the development.

Public Comments:

Bruce Smith, a relatively recent purchaser in the area, had been advised that the vacant land was earmarked for retail-commercial, and now a residential development is being proposed. The stories don't match. He also noted that traffic on W. 87th has visibly worsened since he has lived there. With so many new residential developments in the area, it seems that everyone is using W. 87th to access Indiana. With the entrance to Whisper Creek III so close to Indiana, the traffic problems could only worsen.

NOTE: A written comment from William Rehrig, Whisper Creek resident, also noted that this neighborhood has no locally accessible retail outlets - grocery, medical, or gas stations. As a result, residents must drive to obtain these services. He also noted that traffic on Indiana is "increasing at an alarming rate. As usual, private and municipal authorities have let housing take priority over access and infrastructure causing vehicular overload." He noted that the availability of local amenities would ease the traffic burden on Indiana.

In rebuttal, the developer noted that the property is currently zoned for business and professional uses. They are requesting a change in that zoning to residential. Regarding traffic, the zoning change would result in an estimated 2100 fewer trips than anticipated by the 2004 traffic study for Mountain Shadows and by the current zoning. He also stated that the northbound portion of Indiana, along the boundaries of this development, will be improved. Whisper Creek III will also require payment of their pro-rata share of a new traffic light at W. 87th & Indiana. The City of Arvada will decide when to install it.

Commissioners asked a number of questions, summarized here:

- Fire protection. In response to Arvada Fire concerns, an emergency access from Indiana will be included in this development on the SE corner. This access, along with the primary access along W. 87th, is satisfactory to Arvada Fire.
- Schools. The developer will pay the school escrow fees rather than dedicating land. Other developments in the area (Candelas and Leyden Rock) have set aside land for schools. In the meantime, students from Whisper Creek, Candelas, and Leyden Rock are expected to attend Sierra Elementary, Oberon Middle School, and Ralston Valley High School. As a result, the schools have the money and the land to build a new school.
- Traffic. One Commissioner asked if either Arvada or the State had any plans to improve the length of Indiana, noting that traffic there is already awful and this development "increases the pain". City staff noted a new signal might be installed at the intersection.
- Delay in developing this parcel. Since the original Mountain Shadows plan (including all three Whisper Creek parcels) was approved, market conditions created unforeseen delays. It was not due to inaction on the part of the developer.

All four items related to Whisper Creek III were approved on a vote of 5-0.

The next meeting will be on March 3, 2015. The only items on the agenda are:

- Rezoning the Reno Park neighborhood
- Training session regarding Australia.

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 pm.