

BENTON PARISH METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES

Monday, April 4, 2022 – 6:00 P.M.
Benton Town Hall
105 Sibley Street
Benton, LA 71006

MEMBERS PRESENT

Steve Vercher
Michael Jorgenson
Wes Shepard

MEMBERS ABSENT

Brian Kauffer
Martha Reyenga

OTHERS PRESENT

Carlotta Askew-Brown
Jayme Gilmour
Phil Lewis
Wayne Cathcart
Kurt Nixon
Bobby Masters
Rev. John Fream
Tim Chance
Charlie Coyle
Pat Doane

- (A) Steve Vercher, Vice Chairman called the meeting to order.
- (B) The invocation was led by Michael Jorgenson.
- (C) Pledge of Allegiance was led by Wes Shepherd.
- (D) Jayme Gilmour called roll and stated a quorum was present.
- (E) Carlotta Askew-Brown addressed the Commission and asked board members to consider an amendment to the agenda by adding the following application as item 5:

BP-9-22 - The application of Cypress Baptist Church for a Temporary Use Approval for a gravel overflow parking lot located at 4705 Palmetto Road, Benton, Louisiana.

After no comments, a motion to approve the addition to the agenda was made by Shepherd and seconded by Jorgenson.

A roll call vote was held and the motion carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Jorgenson to approve the amended agenda and seconded by Shepherd.

A roll call vote was held and the motion carried unanimously.

(F) PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. BP-4-22 – The application of Phil Lewis requesting a Zoning Amendment to change the zoning classification of a tract of land being 26.22 acres, more or less, from R-1 (One-Family Residence District) to R-A (Residence - Agriculture) for agricultural purposes located in Section 24, Township 20 North, Range 12 West, Bossier Parish, LA. (Police Jury District 3)

Phil Lewis was present to answer any questions.

Lewis: I am here on behalf of Chris Johnson and Jessica Johnson.

Vercher: I think we have a little information from our last preliminary meeting. Can you briefly tell us what you are doing?

Lewis: Chris bought the property as a horse farm. Back in 1977 it was rezoned for a subdivision. He is just trying to make sure it remains a horse farm so that nothing changes for him. He wants it to remain the way it is.

Vercher: That is what I understand too. Are there any questions? Questions from the board?

Jorgenson: There are no plans to build anything, correct? He is just trying to keep the property zoned R-A, right?

Lewis: As it stands right now, no.

As there were no further comments from the Board or the public, the Vice Chairman called for a motion.

A motion to approve the application was made by Jorgenson and seconded by Shepard.

A roll call vote was held and the motion carried unanimously.

2. BP-8-22 – The application of JDF Holdings, LLC requesting Minor Plat approval for Miciotto Subdivision Unit 1, being 6.147 acres, more or less, located in Section 16, Township 19 North, Range 13 West, Bossier Parish, LA. (Police Jury District 3)

Charlie Coyle was present to answer any questions.

Coyle: We are just carving out a tract of this land that Mr. Festervan is going to buy.

Vercher: It looks very simple. He is just carving it out at this time and zoning will come later.

Coyle: That is correct.

Vercher: It is a strategic location.

Tim Chance was present.

Chance: I am curious where it's at.

Askew-Brown: The southwest corner of Airline Drive and West Linton.

As there were no further comments from the Board or the public, the Vice Chairman called for a motion.

A motion to approve the application was made by Jorgenson and seconded by Shepard.

A roll call vote was held and the motion carried unanimously.

3. T-3-22 – The application of TL Chance Properties, LLC requesting Minor Plat approval for Chance Office Subdivision, being 1.937 acres, more or less, located in Section 13, Township 20 North, Range 13 West, Bossier Parish, LA. (Town Council District 5)(Police Jury District 3)

Kurt Nixon was present to answer any questions.

Nixon: This is a Minor Plat. This piece of land is in two tracts. The Assessor has it shown as two tracts. We are going to change how those two tracts sit and carve out the building that is in front.

Vercher: The same property owner owns Lot 1 and 2, right?

Nixon: Yes.

Askew-Brown: Did DOT have any comments?

Nixon: No. We are using the existing driveways.

Vercher: Did they want to see the site plan as far as density or anything like that?

Nixon: We sent it to them. He had some comments. I don't have those comments with me. He said he would like to see the second driveway have some limits to it but I don't know if that will be possible. He and I will have to work some of that out. Right now, it is not really all of this owner. You have a length of about five driveways. We are not changing the existing driveways.

As there were no further comments from the Board or the public, the Vice Chairman called for a motion.

A motion to approve the application was made by Shepard and seconded by Jorgenson.

A roll call vote was held and the motion carried unanimously.

4. T-2-22 – The application of TL Chance Properties, LLC requesting Planning Approval for a Planned Building Group located at Chance Office Subdivision, also located in Section 13, Township 20 North, Range 13 West, Bossier Parish, LA. (Town Council District 5)(Police Jury District 3)

Kurt Nixon was present to answer any questions.

Vercher: This is the same development. Now we are just looking at a site plan, right?

Nixon: That's right. This is the site plan that goes along with the plat we were just discussing. There are two different mobile home parks. This is the southern mobile home park of the two parks that are there. We have removed the trailers. The intent of these buildings is to be something similar to Chinaberry. It will be one story, professional office condos. As part of the site plan approval, there is a request for a reduction in parking. The Benton MPC requires one to two hundred of parking space for one to two hundred on your square footage. We do not have that many. We have seventy spaces. By ordinance, we need to have one hundred.

Vercher: Well, it all depends on who they are sold to. These will be sold, right?

Chance: Leased.

Vercher: In Chinaberry, they actually buy the condos. These will be leased. It all depends on who wants to come in and lease and set up something. We have to see what we have as far as usage. Some things will fit there and some things won't fit there.

Chance: If someone comes along and offers me bunch of money for one set of four offices I would be willing to sell it.

Vercher: We were talking earlier about what was going to be allowed here.

Chance: That was the Mayor's concern. I've been given a parking variance before. Now this building has a parking issue. I think it is mainly exacerbated by the bridge being out and the other traffic up here, too. In building that, I was getting calls from people wanting office space and I realize there is a demand for that up here. I think there are office people leaving downtown Shreveport wanting to get up here. I think this is a great spot for that, right here by the courthouse and it cleans up an eye sore at the same time.

Askew-Brown: Can you talk about your discussion with the Mayor?

Chance: We have gone back and forth with this. It is less about what is going to be there and more about what we don't want there. We don't want anything that will be high traffic, heavy retail or anything like that. We were trying to come up with a definition of what will be there. Carlotta gave me a list of everything that can go in a B-2 and the Mayor and I went through it line by line and agreed to the things that we don't want there and came to an agreement of what we could have there. We took out anything that could cause parking issues.

Jorgenson: For clarification purposes, this Lot 1, the current structure there, it could potentially be a restaurant, correct?

Chance: Yes. We plan for that to be a restaurant.

Jorgenson: Drive through windows are already installed in there?

Chance: Yes. It is drive through only.

Vercher: How much stacking room do you have so we won't have people sitting out on Benton Road waiting to turn in there?

Nixon: I didn't calculate stacking but you will probably have about eight cars.

Jorgenson: I have a couple of other concerns. There's all of this parking here but there is only the one ingress and egress from Benton Road. Is there not a way to put one in this south part somehow on another road?

Nixon: That is the Police Jury's parking lot.

Chance: We tried. From a liability standpoint, Eric thought there might be... That was the goal. I'd like for that to be the main entrance. That would've made the whole thing work better. People will still be able to park there. We will have a sidewalk from the parking lot to the development. If there were any overflow, they can't tell people that they can't park there.

Vercher: I'm looking at this aerial photo. When you look at the aerial photo, these people will be turning here in front of what I call the old Donut Shop to get back to the trailers?

Nixon: That is not their legal access.

Chance: I don't have to give them access.

Vercher: You are going to block this off?

Chance: Yes.

Shepard: Does this have to go to the BOA for the parking variance?

Askew-Brown: No.

Jorgenson: I know that your goal here is to have plenty of office space to lease so you can make a profit. Is there no possible way to decrease an office space to make more parking?

Chance: It could be done but if you look at how this is laid out, it couldn't be done without costing me a lot of money in the long run. I don't see how this parking lot could fill up. If it does, the property to the south, there are spots to park there.

Jorgenson: You said you had a lot of demand for office space. Do you think you will have trouble leasing these as soon as you are done building all of these?

Chance: I am probably going to do it in phases. The south two buildings would be first. Then the top two buildings. I would do the whole parking lot.

Jorgenson: I am excited about the project. I don't like restrictions on businesses but I understand people wanting a clean town.

Alderman Wayne Cathcart was present.

Alderman Cathcart: I spoke to the Mayor about it today. He mentioned a couple of things to me. He gave me this sheet of paper with comments from Balar, the town's engineering firm, regarding the plat. Carlotta, I noticed that it is incorporated in the documentation that we have here tonight, or is it?

Askew-Brown: Yes, Kirk has addressed the issues. I think there were two outstanding issues that we need to discuss.

Cathcart: There is nothing major in this. It is just house cleaning type things.

Nixon: Yes sir. Those were all addressed. I met with Mr. Dave Koonce and we went over everything. He was happy with everything.

Cathcart: That has all been incorporated in this document?

Nixon: Yes.

Carthcart: The other thing the Mayor mentioned is this parking issue. Is it my understanding that there is a list of "acceptable" businesses to go in there? My question would be – acceptable to whom? I understand the reason you are asking for the variance. The Mayor is concerned about the parking and as I look as the layout I can understand why he is concerned about that because in front of each one of the five thousand square foot buildings is four or five parking spaces which would probably be fine for an insurance office. Is that list in these documents and has that list been agreed to?

Chance: He and I went through it line by line.

Carthcart: How has that list been memorialized?

Chance: We will create a deed restriction.

Jorgenson: Even for future sales?

Chance: Correct.

Vercher: The only problem I have with the list and why it is confusing me is this list contains seventy four things allowed here. You've excluded fifty three of those. What is allowed? I know what's not allowed here. It would be easier for me to understand with a list of what is allowed.

Chance: Accessory use, apothecary, art gallery, artificial limbs manufacturer and sales, barber shop, beauty shop... I don't intend to have a beauty shop or barber shop.

Vercher: Let's talk about that. My barber has around fifteen spots. Sometimes I pull in and wonder if I can park. That could be a lot of people if you are a good barber.

Chance: How much square footage does your barber have?

Vercher: Well, I think you could put at least four in there. It depends on how many chairs and how far apart they are. This is why I am having a hard time wrapping my head around this. I understand it when we just say an insurance office or what we see at Chinaberry. Some things, though, may require a lot of turnover.

Chance: Like I said, I don't envision that. I'll be glad to delete barber shop from the list.

Carthcart: This is as much to your benefit as it is to the Town of Benton. When someone turns off of that highway there and cars are backed up trying to get into one of the parking lots, it probably affects you more. The other side to it is that we do have an ordinance and that ordinance is there for a purpose. Right, Pat?

Doane: It is.

Chance: From my standpoint, I'd much rather say let's not do any barber shops there than give up four units.

Carthcart: If there is a way for us to memorialize the restrictions in a deed that is not so restrictive on you and your business that it limits you to the point to where you cannot be successful, then that is what we need to accomplish. Either that or we stay with what the ordinance says and you make the adjustment.

Chance: From a financial standpoint, I'd be better off to put in new trailers. That is not what I want to do. I want a nice office complex.

Vercher: We understand. Can we hear the rest of the list?

Chance: Business machines store, camera and photographic supplies, clinic, dental or medical or like a physical therapist.

Vercher: Quick Care would be considered a clinic. I don't think you would have enough parking for a Quick Care.

Chance: I could restrict it against Quick Care, but I wouldn't want to restrict it against clinics.

Vercher: It seems you don't have enough parking for some of these uses. I don't think you have enough parking for clinics. If someone wanted to lease all four units and tear down walls, you would have a 4000 square foot clinic without enough parking.

Askew-Brown: Mr. Jorgenson, just for clarity, you have a single occupancy practice. How many people would you say you see per hour?

Jorgenson: About 2 an hour. But there are five employees that park their vehicle there.

Nixon: There are 70 spaces for 18 units. That's roughly four and a half spaces per unit.

Vercher: Think about this. If you have two employees for each unit, that only allows for two cars for people to come see you. That's not enough for a clinic. That would be enough for an insurance salesman or an attorney.

Shepherd: Tim, when you originally develop the first two, will the whole parking lot be done when you build the first two?

Chance: Would that be easier for me to get a variance?

Nixon: What if we do this in phases? If we build the first two buildings and the whole parking lot, there are more than enough parking spaces. Once those two buildings are done, we can do parking lot study to see what the demand is.

Carthcart: Does it meet the requirement on parking if you only do three buildings?

Askew-Brown: It would be short by about ten spaces.

Chance: If you are looking at this map and the top two buildings, there are plenty of parking spaces to service those top two buildings.

Then with the bottom two buildings, there is about five hundred parking spaces just to the south of that.

Vercher: I get that. If the person you are leasing to feels like he is not getting enough parking, he will not stay there. I know this based on my experience with Chinaberry. I'm just trying to make sure you don't have people trying to park on the grass or over at the courthouse and the Sherriff starts writing tickets.

Vercher: This goes to the town, correct?

Askew-Brown: It stays at this level. The plat will move forward.

Doane: Will the parking be shared among the different buildings or are they assigned to each individual office space?

Chance: I would expect it to be shared.

Doane: Mr. Vercher has probably seen shared parking agreements where you have different traffic loading at different times of day and when you have a shared parking agreement you can reduce the amount of parking required.

Vercher: That would make you (Chance) a traffic engineer. Once you've leased it you would have to manage your tenants.

Chance: I am familiar with being a traffic engineer.

Doane: One thing that is really problematic in trying to work out what can be placed there is the state of this very old zoning code. It itemizes things that don't even exist today. A modern code would break this down into offices, personal services like hairdressers, clinics, retail and sometimes different kinds of retail and restaurants or food services. You wouldn't have to have seventy five detailed, itemized things. You could have something that describes it in more general terms. I did speak with the Mayor this afternoon. What he told me was that he did not want any retail there because retail generates too much traffic. Some of what has been described sounded to me like no personal services but I think you have gone through a list and cherry picked some personal services. It would be really helpful if you had a list keeping in mind, is this personal services or is this an office type use. With retail, take it out completely. Since it is a planned building group, having an itemized list of what goes in there as part of the site plan submission would be a real help to this commission.

Chance: I've spent the better part of a couple of days trying to come up with where to find this classification. Carlotta has directed me down this path. The Mayor also thought this was the right path.

Vercher: We are just trying to make sure that we all agree in the end.

Jorgenson: I don't like putting limitations on business. Turning down someone to go into that space just because we don't agree with the type of business going in there based on the number of parking spots doesn't seem conducive to the growth of the town.

Vercher: That is not what we are doing here. The developer is in charge of providing adequate parking per the code. If he puts in less buildings and enough parking, then we've done what we are supposed to do.

Change: If we take the big things out and let the market take care of itself, I think this can work. I don't want to come in here and say I will only lease to insurance agents, or I'm only going to do attorneys. That is why I got rid of some of the big things.

Vercher: I would like to make a list of what is allowed. Right now, I just have a list of what is not allowed.

Cathcart: Pat, did you say that our subdivision ordinance is not detailed enough or up to date that we don't have these break downs that you would find in some municipalities that would better define what Mr. Chance is trying to accomplish?

Doane: It's the Zoning Code that is out of date.

Cathcart: Would that zoning code be constructed to possibly solve this issue?

Doane: Yes, that could happen eventually. You have a path now, with this being a Planned Business Development, if he would incorporate what is allowed as a part of your site plan, then these people can approve or deny that.

Vercher: We can make a list right now and enter into the record.

Chance: Office, picture framing shop, studio for professional work or teaching any form of the fine arts: photography, music, drama, dance but not including a commercial gymnasium. Do we need to go back over clinics?

Vercher: I think the market will work its way out. I think offices will work best there.

Chance: OK. Clinic – dental or medical. Interior design. Jewelry store. Loan or finance office. Mortgage company. Financial advisor. Teaching of the fine arts.

Jorgenson: This is my perspective: I don't like limiting business. If there is an upstanding decent business that people want to go to and enjoy, that is what our community needs. I would rather see you take out two of the spaces and add more parking.

Vercher: We are not restricting him. He is restricting himself. If we are going to do this, we need to decide this now and approve or deny it.

Chance: I am ok with the restrictions we have discussed for the entire development.

Jorgenson: I understand that Mr. Chance is putting these restrictions on himself. I'd much rather he make the proper parking spaces and allow any business whether it be another restaurant or some other establishment. I love the Town of Benton but anytime I might want to have a nice dinner and a glass of wine at a restaurant, I have to go all the way to Bossier.

Chance: This site would not work for a restaurant. I am very ok with restricting myself. I've run the money numbers and this makes sense if I could get to full capacity.

Doane: Has the Police Jury approved pedestrian access between their parking lot and your parking lot?

Nixon: Verbally, yes. Eric agreed to a sidewalk but not to a driveway.

Doane: It is almost like they are agreeing to shared parking. If they are ok with pedestrian crossing then it makes sense that they are ok with shared parking.

Askew-Brown: Right now, the list reads as follows: Apothecary, art gallery, museum, artificial limbs, clinic, interior decoration shop, jewelry store, loan or finance office, office, optician, picture framing shop, studio for professional work such as dance, drama, photography or music. This list has been approved by the Mayor.

Vercher: We basically just flipped it to get a better understanding of what is allowed there.

As there were no further comments from the Board or the public, the Vice Chairman called for a motion.

A motion to approve the application and the approved list of uses was made by Shepherd and seconded by Jorgenson.

A roll call vote was held and the motion carried unanimously.

5. BP-9-22 - The application of Cypress Baptist Church for a Temporary Use Approval for a gravel overflow parking lot located at 4705 Palmetto Road, Benton, Louisiana.

Bobby Masters was present to answer any questions.

Masters: We just acquired the 7.5 acres Mrs. Brown just mentioned and it has a 2 plus acres of an oilfield pad of gravel. We have three big dates coming up this month. We are expecting large crowds and we'd like to make that gravel pad an overflow parking lot. We would kill the grass on it and add more gravel.

Vercher: I am familiar with this. How far off the fence would you say your gravel is? We don't want to push water into the backyard of those homes. You would need to leave enough grass so the water soaks into the ground.

Masters: The gravel itself is quite a distance from the fence. There is a large border around it. They had a swell there that is about 150' long and 50' feet wide that spills into the Willow Chute ditch. We won't be encroaching on that fence.

As there were no further comments from the Board or the public, the Vice Chairman called for a motion.

A motion to approve the application for Temporary Use for one (1) year was made by Jorgenson and seconded by Shepherd.

A roll call vote was held and the motion carried unanimously.

REGULAR MEETING

1. Approval of Minutes

- a. A motion to approve the February 17, 2022 minutes was made by Vercher and seconded by Jorgenson.

The motion passed unanimously.

2. Old Business

3. New Business

Carlotta Askew-Brown introduced Jayme Gilmour, Bossier Office Manager, who will be helping with the Benton administrative duties.

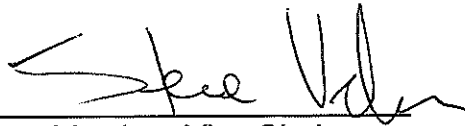
Carolotta Askew-Brown requested to amend the Benton MPC May calendar by moving the scheduled MPC Meeting for May 2, 2022 to May 9, 2022 and for that meeting to be held at the Bossier Parish Courthouse in the Police Jury Chambers at 6:00 pm.

A motion to approve the amendment to the MPC May calendar was made by Vercher and seconded by Shepherd.

The motion passed unanimously.

4. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 7:11 pm.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Vercher". The signature is stylized with a large initial "S" and a prominent "V".

Steve Vercher, Vice Chairman