

City of Alamosa
Planning Commission
July 23, 2014
6:00 p.m.
Minutes of the Meeting

The regular meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order on the above date at 6:00 p.m. by Chairperson Shirley White. Present were the following members: Farris Bervig, Debbie Clark, Mark Manzanares and Robert McWhirter. Excused: Barbara Kruse and Don Martinez. A quorum was declared. Staff present: Pat Steenburg, Harry Reynolds and Julie Scott.

Agenda Approval: M/S/C. McWhirter, Clark. Motion was made to approve the agenda as presented. (Unanimous)

Approval of the Minutes: M/S/C. Manzanares, Clark. Motion made to approve the minutes of the June 25, 2014 meeting as presented. (Unanimous)

Regular Business- Conduct Public Hearings

1A. The request of Mark McLauchlan and Claire Van des Plas for a variance from the City Code of Ordinances. The applicants seek relief from the allowed side yard setback of 7ft. to three ft. to allow the addition of an attached garage. The property affected is Lot 21, Val Verde, Block 10, City of Alamosa, Alamosa County, also known as 421 Poncha Ave.

The public hearing opened at 6:01p.m.

White: Please step up to the podium and state your name and address for the record. Let us know what you've changed.

McLauchlan: Mark McLauchlan, 421 Poncha Ave., and since last month's meeting when I was here, I have re-measured the lot and found I have an additional two feet. The building inspector has come by the site. The second issue was drainage; we also have changed the roof arrangement no water will drain on the adjoining property. The third issue was emergency vehicle assess. The fire chief visited our property and I believe you have a copy of the conversation I had with him stating he has no problem with this. The variance would be from the required seven feet to three feet.

White: Thank you. Is there anyone else that would like to speak for this? Against?

The public hearing closed at 6:04p.m.

White: Any other questions? Is there a motion?

Bervig: We appreciate that you worked with the building dept. and found a solution.

For the record, all adjacent property owners were notified of the hearing for the revised variance.

M/S/C. McWhirter, Clark. Motion made to approve the revised variance request of Mark McLauchlan and Claire Van des Plas for relief from the required 7 ft. side yard setback to 3 ft. on the south side of the property. The property affected is Lot 21, Val Verde, Block 10, City of Alamosa, Alamosa County, also known as 421 Poncha Ave. (Unanimous)

Staff informed the applicant this was final action on the request. A building permit must be obtained before work begins.

Next Item:

Planning Issues

1B. The request of Viaero Wireless for a Permitted Use by Special Review to allow a telecommunications tower, 120 ft. in height, in a Commercial Business zone (Use Group C-32). The property affected is Lots 18-20, Lakeview, Block L, City of Alamosa, Alamosa County, located on the west side of Railroad Ave. between 11th St. and Highway 285.

The public hearing opened at 6:06 p.m.

White: Please state your name and address for the record. I know we have some new material we just received from you.

Gonzalez: I will be happy to go over that. My name is Ed Gonzalez, Site Acquisition Specialist for Viaero Wireless. Address is 2604 Northcrest Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80918. I am representing the owners of the property, Zerbi Law Firm, PC for Anna Cordova and Marveen Manzanara who own Lot 20 together. We are proposing a permanent 120 ft. telecommunications tower, self- supported, lattice type. There will be a 9' x 17' equipment building, an emergency backup generator, 1,000 gal. propane tank enclosed by a six foot tall security fence. As part of the application, the existing rubble foundation and weeds and debris would be removed. It's on the west side of Railroad Ave., east of Highway 285 as indicated on the site map I submitted.

Staff pulled the site up on Google and indicated the area where the proposed tower would be located.

Gonzalez: To the south the zoning is CB, to the west is CB, north is CB, east is the railroad and the right of way which is industrial in nature and it's about 200 ft. to the residential zoned property to the east. After I put together the application and looked at the zoning code and submitted it, I received a copy of the memo from Pat recommending denial and would like to address that.

Mr. Gonzales went on to explain the “search ring” which is the basis for his search; this is generated by Viaero’s engineers. They analyze deficiencies and find areas to improve service. This area is inside the search ring. This property had a For Sale sign and Viaero came to an agreement with the owners.

He explained there is an explosion in use that is driven by data using smart phones. For example the Galaxy, and tablets as we have moved to 4G coverage, customers are maxing out towers. Flip phones are being phased out. People also want to use electronic devices indoors. Viaero has four cell sites in the Alamosa area. As people switch over to smart phones and tablets the cell towers existing are being maxed out.

He also stated he had contacted numerous property owners in the area but concluded that the proposed site met all the criteria as well as being a permitted use by special review in the commercial business zone.

In regards to the “improvement of gateway corridors” Mr. Gonzales noted that the City did approve the cell tower on the west side of town that was approved by City Council a couple years ago at their retail store. He was not aware of the improvement of gateway corridors as an action item by Council. Beautification of a gateway can take many forms. After they are done, the crumbling foundations will be removed, all weeds and debris will be gone, and I would say the site is blighted today. It would be a clean facility. Use by right could be a hotel, retail sales, bar, restaurant and would be a use by right and would have lights increase in traffic and kinds of use with big impact. All these uses would be much more intense than a cell tower site. This use would generate only ten trips per year. There would be property maintenance. I feel it would be an appropriate transitional use. It will not require lighting at the top, it does not require red and white painting, and it would be galvanized steel. It will not generate noise, lights, traffic as other allowed uses would.

In response to the propose facility not being compatible with the existing land use to the north, he stated there is one residence north of the proposed site which is similar to the situation at the retail store on the west side where a residential area is surrounded by commercial and industrial uses. Viaero would be open to discussion as to screening to further soften the transition.

Mr. Gonzalez also stated reasons that co- location with the CDOT tower to the west would not be possible due to the tower being fully populated on the upper half, only 85 ft. tall and below the optimal height needed. He referred to the photo supplied and showed the dipole and metal antennae’s. The only place would be about 6-8 ft. above roof line and would not be usable at such a low level.

Viaero has obtained the state and Federal approvals needed to construct and operate the propose facility at this location along with the State Historical survey. The tower itself is a permitted use by special review. With the exception of the height we meet all those requirements, setbacks. In my opinion I believe it is a good compatible use with the residential area to the north. I believe it will provide a public benefit. I respectfully request the commission recommend approval.

White: Thank you. Is there anyone else that would like to speak for this proposal? Against? Step up to the microphone and state your name and address.

Romero: Frankie J. Romero, 1012 State, better known as Boogie Romero Jr. I was raised on that land .I own the triangle piece next to this, with my Dad. It will clean up the property; it never used to look like that. I have no problem with the tower being located there. I know the City Council is looking at a moratorium on towers. I was hoping they would buy my land.

Steenburg: Just to clarify the issue, there was a first reading regarding a moratorium on telecommunication towers. We are not trying to discourage it, good cell communication benefits the City, we just want to better address some of the issues with solid ordinances and regulations. We want an opportunity to put together in the zoning ordinances on how to handle these requests.

White: We will be informed of any changes? This does not affect this application, correct?

Steenburg: Yes, it will be incorporated in the zoning regulations. This application was received before the first reading.

White: Okay. Is there anyone else that would like to speak?

Gallegos: Mary Ann Gallegos, my husband and I live in La Jara but we own Lot 21.directly north. We have it for sale it's only one lot and contacted the people next door if they would be interested. We have no use for it. In that way I am for it. There is not much to do with it. Driving in, I don't know if I would like to see a tower but there is a lot of things like that when you drive in. You have a tough job. I am for progress.

The public hearing closed at 6:38 p.m.

Bervig requested clarification on the map of the central Alamosa tower.

The towers are fully populating. It's an issue that needs to be addressed, dropped calls, inability to make calls this tower will be robust enough to handle one or two more carriers and if we can provide the structural stability.

Bervig questioned franchise fees.

Steenburg: No serious discussion on municipally owned towers that I know of.

Gonzalez: Nationally they are talking about doubling the number of cell towers by 2020. We have 15, 16 towers just in the Valley- La Jara is getting another one , Manassa has two, in Monte Vista, Del Norte two, possibly three. This is the magnitude of the problem. Earlier this year, globally there are more cellular devices than people on the planet. This is not just a Viaero problem.

Manzanares: They should all play together. When you started there was an objection to the west tower and the railroad tower. Why in the drive entrances of our community? Why not more hidden areas?

McWhirter: Is council looking at an engineering firm on how to manage this? This is a recommendation, correct?

Steenburg: Assuming the moratorium passes, it will allow time us to prepare a more standardized response to this requests. We will check on how it is handled in other communities. It is not my intent to stifle their business, or any other cell phone business my recommendation for denial is based solely on the location. You have the opportunity to take the recommendation or not.

Manzanares: Back to my question, and also in other communities I have seen towers that are designed to look like trees for example. What about making them blend in with the area?

Gonzalez: To answer the first question, we do try to play nice actually there are multiple carriers on the railroad tower. We make every effort to co-locate on an existing tower. AT& T uses fiber optic and we use microwave, we're trying to provide coverage. Why are we locating in gateway? That is where the traffic is. The further away, the less reliable the coverage. Apple has just introduced technology for cars to become cellular compatible. It's going to get worse and worse. That is what is driving this. We want to be able to provide service while people are at their desks at work. When 5G comes out I will be most likely looking for more sites in Alamosa to fill the holes in coverage.

White: Tonight, he meets all the regulations except the height. We are looking at this now, not in the future and what might happen.

Gonzalez: That is correct.

Steenburg: The moratorium has nothing to do with this. The reason for my recommendation is I don't think it's compatible with the residential area to the north.

Gonzalez: I don't know if the gateway plan is a part of the zoning code.

M/S/C. Bervig, Manzanares. Motion made to recommend denial of the request of Viaero Wireless for a permanent telecommunications tower in a Commercial Business zone. The property affected Lots 18-20, Lakeview, Block L, City of Alamosa, Alamosa County, located on the west side of Railroad Ave. between 11th St. and Highway 285 S. (Four yeahs, Manzanares, Clark, McWhirter, Bervig. One nay, White)

The applicant was informed that the recommendation would go to City Council on August 6, 2014.

Other Business:

The weeds at the Alamosa Elementary School were brought up and at the railroad. Weeds were also left at Carroll Park after trimming on the sidewalks.

Correspondence: Distributed.

After no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Scott
Recording Secretary