

**GUNNISON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, November 7, 2024**

The Gunnison County Planning Commission conducted a regular meeting in the Planning Commission Meeting Room in the Blackstock Government Center, 221 N. Wisconsin, Gunnison, Co. and on Zoom **Present:**

Chairperson-Roland Mason Commissioner- Julie Baca Commissioner- Eric Phillips Commissioner Matt Schwartz Alt. Commissioner- Bill Barvitski Alt. Commissioner Catherine McBreen	Director of Planning- Hilary Seminick Planning Technician – Jena Greene Others present as listed in text
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Absent: Vice-Chairperson- Fred Niederer

Recused: None

Zoom: Mason, Phillips, McBreen

With a quorum present, Baca opened the November 7, 2024 regular meeting of the Planning Commission at 8:44 am.

Baca sat Barvitski as moved by Schwartz and seconded by Mason.

Moved by Schwartz, seconded by Mason to approve Planning Commission meeting minutes as amended, dated October 8, 2024. The motion passed unanimously in support.

Moved by Barvitski, seconded by Schwartz to approve Planning Commission meeting minutes as amended, dated October 17, 2024. The motion passed unanimously in support.

Staff announcements/ miscellaneous: Applications for Planning Commission for members who wanted to reapply were due Monday December 2nd at 5pm.

Work Session: LUC-24-00016 | Minor Impact Petrus Holdings, Building over 7000 sf.

The Applicant Petrus Holdings Inc., represented by Nathaniel Smith, Esq., proposed the construction of a 13,350 sq. ft. Hermitage House with a 3,600 sq. ft. unfinished basement, a 3,200 sq. ft. Secondary Residence, and 16,600 sq. ft. Barn at 4500 Forest Service Road 563. Development is proposed to take place on a single parcel out of three parcels of land, which total approximately 1,200 acres.

Applicant Presentation

Smith attended the meeting on Zoom. He was joined by Jerry Burges and Alez Nees of SGM Engineering, and Andrew Schulman of Petrus Holdings. The applicant proposed the construction of three structures: 13,350 sq. ft. Hermitage House with a 3,600 sq. ft. unfinished basement, a 3,200 sq. ft. Secondary Residence, and 16,600 sq. ft. Barn at 4500 Forest Service

Road 563 which would be lived in year round by a small group of Catholic monks called hermits studying in prayer and nature; living like a large family. Smith stated that they planned to have limited public interaction, and no commercial activity would take place on site.

After the August work session, the planning commission requested that the applicant address comments and wildlife concerns from Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), in addition to providing more information concerning the overall size of all of the proposed structures.

CPW Comments and Wildlife concerns – Smith stated that they worked closely with CPW to address their concerns, which included adjusting plans and construction times to minimize the impact on wildlife. During construction, they would aim to reduce time onsite and materials on the roads by operating an intense construction period from July 1 to October 15 and do a large amount of building offsite and bring the buildings onsite in panels. In the shoulder seasons, the applicant proposed having crews of 2 or 3 onsite at a time and limiting the noise levels to 85 decibels, which would be measured from 50 ft. of the boundary of any structure. They were not proposing to do any work in the winter, and there would be no plowing on Forest Service roads. CPW requested that hand tool work be limited to daylight hours, 9am to 1 hour before sunset.

When the construction was completed and the hermits were living onsite, smith noted that the quiet lifestyle of the hermits would blend well with the site. The proposed agriculture on the property and impact on wildlife would be minimal, and he emphasized that there would be no commercial activity. The agriculture would be a kitchen garden and a hen house for eggs. The hermits wouldn't be planting fruit or doing any large scale growing of crops, noting limited flowering abilities for growing at 10,000 ft., and that they would also be getting some food from town.

Alex Nees of SGM was the biologist on the project. He had spent a few full days on site in the summer. Nees stated that this was a special site that was subject to a wide variety of land uses. There was a clear indication of logging in the past and that the property had been subject to seasonal grazing by local ranchers for years. The grazing hadn't been carefully or actively controlled (fall grazing) but the property was in good shape. The site had perimeter fencing, in agreement with landowner allowed a lease for grazing 40 head of cattle. Nees also noted the presence of up to 7 semi-permanent hunting blinds onsite. He stated that the property was quite dry, there were no perennial streams, and the seasonal streams were "pretty trampled". He added that the high value production area for elk was in the lower portion area of the property western half, while the building was to take place on the other side of the property. The major impact was the road which ran through.

The applicant didn't want to introduce linear features/barriers to the property. They were willing to remove fences, except for the perimeter fence, aimed to have it be high tension wildlife friendly. Smith stated that the hermits weren't interested in driving around on ATV's though and that that large game would avoid the building area during migration. The most impactful concern was during construction, but they hoped that limit the activity withing the July 1 to Oct 15 time frame would help with that.

Size of structure – the project was designed to house and support 25 hermits onsite. The hermits lived a “self-sufficient/self-supporting lifestyle” and would do most everything themselves, but the intention of that project was that they would be able to be safe and supported year round. The hermitage house would include individual spaces for each hermit along with a shared kitchen to cook meals, a shared Chapple, and space for storing 15 chords of wood for heating.

The secondary residential structure was intended to be more modern. It would be used to house visiting hermits, other guests, and provide a safe space to quarantine in the event that one of the hermits was to become ill.

The Barn structure was intended to house a list of large equipment provided in the packet to planning commission that would be stored onsite, enough space dedicated to store an additional 15 chords of wood, storage of supplies, space for a hen house, as well as space dedicated for shop needs – space for canning, a wood shop, and a sewing room.

Planning Commission Questions

Barvitski asked about emergency use for the secondary residence. Smith stated that the primary concern was for quarantine purposes. The main house would be built fairly simply. Which would help with the speed of construction, but they wanted to make sure that there was a modern residence on site. The secondary residence would also be for visitors, who would be nature encouraged to come and visit, but wouldn't be able to enter the main house. Schulman added that this structure would have heat and hot/cold water, as well as a few small 10x10 offices with computers. Intended to be a “discreet” 3000 sf facility.

Baca expressed concern for the scale of the secondary residence.

Mason asked about sprinkling and water storage. The applicant noted that residences would be sprinklered. Mason also asked if there would be plans that the planning commission could look at to help get an idea about the massing. Schulman noted that the plans weren't ready to be shared because they wanted to be approved by planning commission first. Concerning the WUI Code, Mason asked if the storage of 15 wood cords comply. Yes, as long as it was inside. The applicant added that the wood would be delivered because it wouldn't be sustainable to harvest all of that wood onsite.

An emergency landing zone for a helicopter was discussed. That applicant stated that they hadn't thought of that, Phillips noted that the minimum size for a medevac helicopter was 100x100 feet. Seminick added that non-commercial use of a helicopter would have a minor impact, or would need to be wrapped into CPW comments were specific to construction.

Snow plowing was discussed. Nees noted that post construction, the heavy equipment usage would be limited to the immediate site. No plowing of the roadway was proposed. The applicant was working on permit for the road. They had a permit to do maintenance but they didn't have a special use permit to improve the road for construction access.

Seminick asked about the proposed structure on the access road as shown on the site plan. The applicant noted that it was to be a symbolic gate house, to receive the public and a symbolic dividing line. Visual impact standards. Burges noted that there would be tweaks to the site plan. Baca requested that the site plan be cleaned up for a public hearing.

Seminick added that as part of the standards for this type of review that the site location was imperative. A final site plan would need to be submitted before they could move on to a public hearing.

The Commission reviewed the decision that a site visit wasn't needed due to weather and remoteness of property, and that the visual impacts were minimal, and determined that a site visit still wasn't needed.

McBreen asked what would happen to the property in the long term? Was it possible that this would be a large empty building in the middle of the forest? Smith stated that the applicant anticipated the hermitage house to be actively used for decades to come. Anticipated that the program would proceed for a long time to come, at least for the near term. The hermits were focused on finding a place that would exist for generations to come, would be a home to hermits well after all of us were gone. Argued that there were checks and balances in the LUR to help mitigate future uses.

Schwartz commented that most future uses would need get a land use change, but expressed concern about the overall scale. He understood the desire to keep this as a hermitage house, but he didn't understand why the project needed to be so big and the amount of equipment proposed to be kept onsite based on the lifestyle as described.

Smith replied that they wanted to have all of the equipment onsite so the hermits could do all of the work themselves. It would be an operational necessity. It was considered basic equipment for a ranch. The hermits would have the skill set and the ability to do the work themselves. It was not contemplated that the equipment would be used every day, but that it would be there when/if needed.

The commission reviewed the applicant provided renderings and massing studies. The applicant noted that the site was surrounded by trees. The final site plan was to be submitted for the public hearing. Noted that the rendering didn't exactly match the site plan. The planning commission had the ability to request additional plans/designs.

Next Steps

There was support from the commission for moving forward to a public hearing. Mason made a motion to move LUC-24-00016 Minor impact of Petrus Holdings to a public hearing. Seconded by Phillips. The motion passed unanimously in support.

Staff would be in contact with the applicant in regard to scheduling.

Baca adjourned the meeting at 10:06 am.