

Fact Sheet

Site Review documents for 4775 Spine Road, January 2021

Summary description of the new plan to build ultra-high density apartments at Celestial Seasonings

The plan as presented in these site review documents has changed considerably from the concept proposal of January 2020. Some facts and concerns below:

- The layout of the units has completely changed, now 230 dwelling units in 20 three-story buildings over 9.57 acres. This is a reduction of 14% in the number of units, but the total square footage is almost exactly the same as the initial proposal, now 250,669 square feet.
- The density is now 24 units/acre. Powderhorn is 17 units/acre. Orchard Creek is 3 units/acre.
- The affordable housing component (25% of the number of units) has been moved to the northern parcel, separated from the market-rate units by an open area, called the “central park.” Six of the affordable units are townhouses built by Habitat for Humanity and will be owner-occupied, not rentals.
- The central park extends east-west all the way from Zinger to Spine and includes a playground, grilling areas, a very small community garden, and seating areas. The total open space is + shaped, with an open central area and narrower arms extending north-south. The developer claims this exceeds the area required for contiguous open space.
- The plan includes space for a library at the northeast corner and two cafes, as well as an art workspace and “infrastructure” outside for public art, and what they call a “mobility hub,” where shuttles and car share and other alternative transportation services can come and go.
- Parking has been reduced to 316 spaces, of which 53% are compact car size (7’9” by 15’), 44% are standard size (9’ by 19’), and 3% (10 spaces) are standard accessible size (8’x19’ with 8’ on either side). 19 of the spaces are for the leasing office, library, and commercial users. Parallel parking appears along the west side of Spine Road and along the east side of Zinger Street. Some parking is under carports, some in garages (called “tuck under”), and some out in the open on the side of the buildings away from the streets. The 316 spaces is more than the city requires (according to these documents).
- The plan includes a total of 314 short-term and long-term bike parking spaces, which is 19% more than the city requires (according to these documents).
- Several ground-floor units will be slightly larger than the rest to serve as live/work units.
- The plan assumes that 20% of residents will use alternative transportation.
- One swimming pool is included in a central location.
- Spine Road will be widened where it fronts the development, and will include a bike lane next to the parallel parking. No other streets on the plan appear to be widened.
- The construction will involve the destruction of all the trees on the property.
- The prairie dogs will be relocated (if a site can be found to relocate them to) or killed.
- The drainages flowing east to west across the property will be piped eastward into the existing drainage system and the surface filled in. “Water quality detention ponds” will be built to hold back storm drainage so it feeds into the drainage system at the same rate it does now, instead of at the higher rate it otherwise would without these structures.
- Some environmental information is missing; 2 blank pages and a partial blank page.
- Drilling on the site in May 2020 identified the subsurface conditions, finding swelling clays in the top several feet just below the surface, which will require engineering to avoid damage to the structures after they are built. Bedrock was not found in any of the 27 drill holes, some of which went to 35 feet deep.
- The water table is about 15 to 25 feet down and it can vary seasonally.
- The developers are requesting an exemption from some setback requirements, but no details are apparent from our quick read through of these documents.

Concerns of Gunbarrel Community Alliance

This proposal is sprawl into undeveloped land that supports a vibrant wildlife population. Boulder should not break new ground at a time when many locations in Boulder need to be redeveloped. Sustainability and climate sensitivity tell us to not build over more natural places, but reuse existing buildings. And COVID is exacerbating the situation. Moreover, this proposal is a bad fit for this location. It proposes residential use of land zoned Industrial Manufacturing, a use not adequately justified by the applicant. It proposes ultra-high density in a place that is semi-rural. It will bring congestion to the roads and neighborhoods nearby. It builds more apartments where enough are available (and vacant). We need houses people can buy, not rental apartments. Below are additional concerns.

HOUSING NEEDS

- Gunbarrel already has a large number of rental apartments, which in fact have a high vacancy rate in spite of the rental costs being lower than nearby affordable housing units, many of which are vacant. Gunbarrel apartment rental rates are probably lower than this plan's affordable housing rates.
- People need single family homes they can BUY rather than more multifamily housing to RENT. This is increasingly true across the US, as we move toward a post-COVID reality in which people want and need more safe space for themselves and their families.

DENSITY

- The ultra-high density (24 units per acre) is inappropriate for this site. This is an urban design in a semi-rural location immediately adjacent to open land and condos that have a density 17 units per acre.
- COVID is here to stay, and people are seeking more space, especially to accommodate work-at-home and whole-family-at-home living. People need more space indoors and outdoors, not tiny apartments.
- Ultra-high density does not fit with the adjacent low and medium densities.
- The ultra-high density in this location fails Boulder's "transition" requirement. Instead of this site being a transition between the low density to the south and the medium density to the east, this plan injects ultra-high density in the middle, immediately adjacent to open space on the west and north — another way in which this is a very bad fit for this location.

ZONING

- These parcels are zoned Industrial Manufacturing (IM), not residential. The first priority of the City of Boulder should be to retain these parcels for those uses, not enable residential uses to gobble up the dwindling number of these spaces, when alternative locations exist in Boulder.
- Although residential may be allowed on IM zoned land in appropriate locations, this location is unique and should not be disturbed for residential use. The one and only Celestial Seasonings tea factory, a world-renowned company started in Boulder more than 50 years ago, occupies the adjacent parcel to the west. This site is to many of us part of a historic landmark, and a source of pride and inspiration to Boulderites and friends. This vibrant "prairie dog preserve" is not only a popular tourist attraction, but it supports a complex ecosystem of wildlife, an asset to Gunbarrel residents and our guests, some of whom come from around the world to appreciate it. Until such time as development of this land is NEEDED for IM use, we should continue to be stewards of this important wildlife resource and historic place.

LOCATION

- The site is undeveloped land that could and should remain undeveloped until alternative locations that need redevelopment are exhausted.
- The site houses a wildlife colony that supports many additional species over a wider area, and Boulder should insist this plan be taken to a more appropriate location.
- The site is a semi-rural location miles from the educational, employment, commercial, cultural, and recreational opportunities in the center of Boulder. The urban design is a bad fit here, but it would be a fine fit elsewhere in Boulder.
- Gunbarrel is “out there” northeast of the City, surrounded by farms and open spaces. Being “outside Boulder” means that Gunbarrel residents need cars to go anywhere. Yes, bikes work, too, but our main connection to Boulder is Jay Road and the Diagonal Highway, on which bicyclists have been killed by careless drivers. The lack of a safe, continuous bike path between Gunbarrel and Boulder stands in the way of realizing the projected 20% use of alternative transportation.

TRAFFIC AND ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

- Gunbarrel is so far outside of Boulder that the residents need cars to go anywhere. The new residents of this development will need cars and adequate parking.
- The flawed estimate of 20% for alternative transportation is not supported by Gunbarrel’s use of alternative transportation, especially now that we are underserved by bus service and miles from the services of downtown Boulder.
- The plan mentions working with Via and the Boulder Chamber of Commerce to “coordinate and establish a shuttle” between Gunbarrel and Boulder, a good idea, but one that raises questions. How will this coordinate with RTD service, if it continues? When might this be a reality? Who will pay for it? Would all residents of Gunbarrel be taxed for this?
- Dependence on bicycles as alternative transportation is unrealistically represented in this plan in order to reduce the number of parking spaces. It neglects to account for cold/windy/rainy/snowy weather or nighttime errands, as well as how to transport small children, pets, or bulky items such as groceries.

ACCURACY AND VERACITY

These documents include many, many rosy statements that are exaggerated, vague, inaccurate, misleading, unsubstantiated, and in other ways essentially false:

- Rendering diagrams in which buildings appear small and people and green spaces appear large.
- Overly optimistic or unfounded assumptions presented as “data.”
- Difficulties that are minimized or ignored.
- The plan is even referred to in the Utility Plan as “medium density.” Is this part of the plan sized right?
- Terminology that implies future work, for example, “solar ready.” Why not make it solar powered?
- Basic requirements met that are presented as “enhancements” or special improvements beyond what is required in the code. Connections of sidewalks to existing sidewalks cannot be considered an enhancement.

The frequency of these problems in the documents raises questions with the remainder of the documents and planning, and destroys our trust in the ability of this organization to effectively build what they are claiming they will build.

- What will this development be in the long-term? Certainly not the fairy tale they claim it to be.
- Will the engineering be adequate and the construction careful? Will the materials be of good quality?
- Will it be the wonderful improvement to the community that it promises to be?
- Is this gamble worth the sacrifice of the wildlife and open space the community now enjoys?