

MINUTES

CITY OF WOOSTER BOARD OF BUILDING & ZONING APPEALS

May 2, 2024

I. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Stewart Fitz Gibbon, Chairman of the Board of Building and Zoning Appeals, called the meeting to order. Board members Jason Anderson, Jeff Battig, Martha Bollinger, Stewart Fitz Gibbon, Ben Gunn, Mark Reynolds, and Jennifer Shatzer were present. Vincent Marion, Planning and Zoning Manager represented the City of Wooster.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Martha Bollinger made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 4, 2024, meeting of the Board of Building and Zoning Appeals. Jason Anderson seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously 7-0.

III. APPLICATIONS

BZA-24-7.

Forrest Lang requested a Use Variance from Planning and Zoning Code Section 1109.02(d) to allow a Recreational Facility in a C-4 (Central Business) zoning district at 111 South Buckeye Street with parcel number 64-02205.000.

Forrest Lang, 3619 Millersburg Road, stated that since opening Bullseye Ax Throwing in 2021, I had hosted countless company events and fundraisers. Mr. Lang explained that he has been an active Wooster Area Chamber of Commerce member, attending network events, volunteering my time at community events, and graduating from Leadership Wooster. Mr. Lang continued that through travel, I had seen many historic downtown areas, and one typical establishment I noticed across these areas was a recreational venue. Mr. Lang stated that his proposed business would fill that desire for our community. Mr. Lang explained that the plan was to move the current company, Bullseye Ax Throwing, to 111 South Buckeye Street, and that space is large enough to add a couple of golf simulators, pool tables, and arcade machines. Mr. Lang noted that many different activities were added for people to come and enjoy. Mr. Lang continued that he wanted to add a canned beverage bar serving non and alcoholic drinks, and hours of operation would be Thursday through Sunday in the evenings and all day on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Mr. Lang stated that he would be open to expanding those hours should the community support that and demand more lunch events or hours. Mr. Lang noted that the business would be on the main level of the building and behind the Cuttler Real Estate. Mr. Lang explained that the walls are brick, and the axe throwing would occur on an exterior wall, so there would not be as much noise generated from it. Mr. Lang continued that the hours would primarily be evenings and weekends, not necessarily when other businesses operate. Mr. Lang stated that he has spoken with the landlord and fully supports the idea pending approval from the Board. Mr. Lang explained that the bulk of business happens between November and March. Throughout that time, we get a lot of holiday parties and team-building events

during the lunch hour and estimate two per month for the rest of the year and up to ten during the busier season. Mr. Lang stated that the drop tile ceiling would reduce the noise, and the targets are on freestanding stands that hold the target so that they are not hitting the wall, significantly reducing the noise. Mr. Lang explained that they would have six ax throwing stalls, two golf simulators, and room to expand in other areas and activities that would produce revenue for the business.

Mr. Fitz Gibbon asked if anyone from the public would like to address the Board regarding the application.

Shannon Waller, Executive Director of Main Street Wooster, 2452 Barrington Way, stated that she learned that recreational facilities were not allowed downtown under the current zoning structure, which I felt pretty surprising. Ms. Waller explained that Main Street Wooster was trying to recruit gaming companies and arcades to come to the downtown because of the express desire for that kind of activity downtown, and looking closely at the allowed, conditional, and prohibited uses, I checked on page four, of the application the clarification that in the C-4 zoning district, a recreational establishment shall be located to minimize the amount of space located in a retail setting that is inactive during the regular business hours. Ms. Waller continued that the code needs to be more consistent in that it contemplates C-4 recreational facilities well, noting that they are prohibited as far as principal use regulations. Ms. Waller stated that the use should be allowed in specific ways or with considerations supporting the application.

Kerri Manley, 9375 Hiner Road, stated that bringing Bullseye Ax Throwing to our downtown would continue to make the historic downtown a destination for families, college students, and individuals looking to take day trips. Ms. Manley explained that entertainment is essential to a vibrant community and offers a solution for entertainment all year. Ms. Manley continued that Emily Bailey of UNC-Chapel Hill stated that a thriving downtown has a mix of uses: offices, residential, hospitality, retail, and entertainment are included. Ms. Manley noted that this mixture helps sustain daytime and nighttime activity. A thriving downtown should have life after 5 pm. Entertainment downtown should impact consumers' spending in our downtown businesses supporting local. Ms. Manley explained that as someone who works for Main Street Wooster and represents our partners, we would like to see activity all year round, not just in the Summer and Fall. Ms. Manley continued that, as of right now, our downtown businesses are primarily shut down other than our restaurants and bars, so if we have entertainment downtown, it can impact other small companies to allow or stay open later if they choose to. Ms. Manley stated that this can increase additional revenue and foot traffic.

Mr. Fitz Gibbon closed the public hearing.

Mark Reynolds made a motion to approve the application BZA-24-7 as presented. Ben Gunn seconded the motion.

Mark Reynolds voted yes and stated that this meets many of the criteria. The main component in this application's favor is that they will operate under hours that are different from those of the adjacent businesses in the area and minimize the noise during the day. This will hopefully keep good relationships with the neighbors and allow the business to stay there for a long time.

Ben Gunn voted yes and stated that he thinks this is the minimum that will afford relief to the applicant, no opposition from the current tenants, and anything you can do to keep the noise to a minimum.

Jennifer Shatzer voted yes and stated that the intent of the planning and zoning code, the updated Comprehensive Plan, and this application tie into the direction that the City would like to take.

Jason Anderson voted yes and stated that the variance would not adversely affect the rights of adjacent property owners or residences and that it is a reasonable use and a good addition.

Jeff Battig voted yes and stated that the ax-throwing would be an excellent fit for the community and the downtown.

Martha Bollinger voted yes and stated that the variance is minimal, in accordance with the general spirit and intent of the code, and especially in line with the 2023 Comprehensive Plan.

Stewart Fitz Gibbon voted yes for the reason cited by the Board. He stated that there was an indoor golf operation in that same building years ago, and this is not entirely new to downtown. He said this would be an enhancement to the downtown community, which makes really good sense.

The motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Ben Gunn moved to adjourn, and Jeff Battig seconded it. The motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

Stewart Fitz Gibbon, Board of Building and Zoning Appeals Chairman

Carla Jessie, Administrative Assistant