

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING  
OF THE  
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD  
July 11, 2016**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The regular meeting of the Great Falls Design Review Board was called to order by Chair Dani Grebe at 3:00 p.m. in the Rainbow Room in the Civic Center.

**ROLL CALL & ATTENDANCE**

Design Review Board Members present:

Dani Grebe, Chair  
Tyson Kraft, Vice Chair  
David Grosse  
Ann Schneider

Design Review Board Members absent:

Kevin Vining

City Staff Members present:

Craig Raymond, Director P&CD  
Tom Micuda, Deputy Director P&CD  
Galen Steffens, Planner II  
Gregory Gordos, Planner I  
Connie Tryon, Sr. Admin Asst

Others present:

Brian Belderrain, Lithia Motors  
Brett Doney, Great Falls Development Authority  
Alex Huffield, KLJ  
Doug Oswood, Oswood Construction  
Nicholas Oswood, Oswood Construction  
Troy Oswood, Oswood Construction

**MINUTES**

Mr. Kraft moved to approve the minutes of the June 27, 2016, meeting of the Design Review Board. Mr. Grosse seconded, and all being in favor, the minutes were approved.

**NEW BUSINESS**  
**DRB2016-12 Lithia Great Falls Subaru**  
**800 Central Avenue**

Gregory Gordos, Planner I, entered the staff report into the record for Lithia Great Falls Subaru. The applicant is proposing demolition of the existing showroom and replacing it with a larger, more contemporary automotive sales and service facility. The proposed building would be approximately 13,669 square with a property area of 30,000 square feet consisting of four parcels, which would be required to be aggregated as part of the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) being pursued by the applicant.

The existing showroom was built in 1928 and is part of the Central Business Historic District (CBHD). Mr. Gordos noted a correction in the staff report, and said though the staff report references the building as a Primary Contributing building to the CBHD, is just simply a Contributing building to the District. The applicant is proposing demolition of the existing structure due to the significant amount of structural damage and costly repairs, which City staff was able to verify. The building as proposed would expand the showroom through the addition of a vehicle repair area.

The applicant is proposing the addition on 14 on-site parking spaces, and the addition of one ADA accessible space; however, the proposed space is not located on the shortest accessible route of travel between the parking and accessible entrance which is require per City Code, thus requiring relocation of the space. Staff also finds the combined square footage of the proposed sign larger than permitted under the Sign Code, but the applicant does have additional time to submit a compliant sign package. The applicant is applying a significant amount of landscaping to meet Code; however, the interior rate of planting does not meet the requirements, therefore staff requires four additional trees be added.

Staff has found that the proposed project is inconsistent with the landscaping requirements as mentioned, as well as compatibility of exterior materials and finishes with surrounding buildings. Mr. Gordos stated the purpose of the Design Review Board (DRB) is to promote development that is compatible with nearby properties, neighborhood character, and natural features. He emphasized that the DRB decision shall be based on whether or not the proposal meets the design guidelines to the greatest extent possible. He said staff cannot make this finding for this proposal. Staff evaluated the policy guidance contained in the 2013 Great Falls Growth Policy Update and Downtown Master Plan, and determined the design proposal does not adhere to the guidelines that state the unique aesthetics of Downtown are an asset that should be preserved, enhanced and celebrated.

Mr. Gordos said ultimately the gray/blue color scheme of the Subaru franchise brand is not consistent with CBHD, as the majority of the buildings utilize masonry or brick as their primary material, including the Lithia Subaru located at 26 9<sup>th</sup> Street South. Mr. Gordos discussed previous actions by the DRB in similar cases where the Board ruled in denial of the designs and upheld staff's recommendation.

Staff does not support this application based upon the standards and guidelines that show the proposal as submitted is contrary to the purpose statement for the Design Review Board which encourages development/redevelopment that is compatible with nearby properties and

neighborhood character, in addition to the landscape plan not currently complying with standards.

### **PETITIONER'S PRESENTATION**

Brian Belderrain, 280 Encino Drive, representing Lithia Motors, said Lithia has agreed to add four additional trees to comply with landscaping, as well as adjust the ADA accessible space to the closest available space to the entrance. He explained the steps Lithia has taken design wise to be more compatible with the surrounding areas while still representing its modern use, including changing the color scheme to a more neutral tone.

Nicholas Oswood, 5000 49<sup>th</sup> Street SW, Oswood Construction Company, said he is thrilled Lithia is facing the challenge of putting money into a property that is difficult to develop, as well as investing money and bringing business to our downtown. He said Lithia has been willing to make concessions with the City regarding the design, and he pointed out the color scheme does indeed match many buildings downtown. He said Subaru has very stringent design requirements and if we push them too hard, they will pack up, leave, and not invest money in our downtown; he stressed that this project would help bring business downtown.

Doug Oswood, 5000 49<sup>th</sup> Street SW, Oswood Construction Company, expressed his frustrations with the development process with the City of Great Falls. He said he wants to see a vibrant downtown, much like other cities in Montana, and feels like this project is a step in the right direction. He said he hopes to see everyone come together and make decisions that make sense for our community and improve our downtown.

Mr. Belderrain noted that they had worked with Lithia to the extent that they could, and believes they have reached the limit of compromise with Lithia; now he hopes to see some compromise from the City. He also expressed the desire to stay downtown in order to facilitate growth.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Brett Doney, Great Falls Development Authority, said they have been working on anchoring this project into the Central Business District due to the importance of its location, with the hope that this project will result in bringing other large businesses downtown. He commended the project and expressed his desire to see Lithia stay downtown. He said it will make downtown substantially better than it is today, and hopes to see the project move forward.

### **BOARD DISCUSSION AND ACTION**

Mr. Grosse inquired about the ability to incorporate the design of the surrounding sidewalks, and making sure they match the streetscape. It was agreed that since the sidewalks are already being replaced, it was something that could be done. There also discussion about reducing the four additional trees to two in order to help with spacing.

Ms. Schneider asked for clarification on what specifically was not meeting the design requirements. Mr. Gordos explained the materials used in this project do match the majority of the buildings in the CBHD, nor some of the Contributing buildings immediately adjacent to it. Mr. Micuda said the applicant looked at the immediate buildings nearby when comparing designs, while staff viewed the compatibility with the District as a whole.

Mr. Raymond said what staff is asking is that the applicant make a greater effort to conform to the surrounding aesthetics and historic character of downtown. Mr. Belderrain explained that they have pushed Subaru as far as they will go regarding design changes, and there is a franchise standard that has to be met, so Lithia will not make any further concessions.

Mr. Grosse pointed out that Great Falls doesn't have the feel of other cities in Montana like Bozeman, or Missoula, because when franchises refuse to conform to our design standards, we lose our identity as a City. He said it is difficult as a Board to balance the decision between requiring the aesthetics of a building conform to Great Falls standards and identity, versus being told the company won't do business here and risk losing possible development. There was more discussion regarding the City's position of not being able to turn away development.

Ms. Grebe said she has worked for Subaru and noted they were not flexible; she also noted their flexibility is directly related to the income being generated by a particular franchise. She clarified the color scheme, and they viewed pictures of buildings downtown that were similar in color.

Mr. Belderrain reiterated it would be cheaper for Lithia to move on 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, however, they want to stay downtown to begin developing and encouraging a vibrant location.

There was discussion on the timeline of the project, and the multiple moving parts involved, including the requested Conditional Use Permit scheduled for the Planning Advisory Board meeting on July 26, 2016.

There was more Board discussion regarding the struggle between possibly losing a business downtown, and enforcing aesthetics to build a strong identity for Great Falls. Ms. Grebe said ultimately this development complies with the Downtown Master Plan by enhancing the value of the area, and serving as a catalyst to retain existing businesses and residences while also attracting new ones. She said because we are not working to save an existing building, the proposed building will attract new businesses as well as enhancing the value of the current area.

Motion: That the Design Review Board approve with conditions the Design Review Board Application for the Lithia Great Falls Subaru automotive sales and service, as shown in the conceptual development plans contained within this report and provided by the applicant's representative. If denied, the applicant may resubmit building elevations and renderings in full compliance with Land Development Code Exhibit 28-1 and schedule the next available Design Review Board meeting or appeal the decision. If approved, the application is subject to the following Conditions of Approval:

- A. The proposed project shall be developed consistent with the conditions in this staff report, all codes and ordinances of the City of Great Falls, the State of Montana and all other applicable regulatory agencies.
- B. If after the approval of the concept development plan as approved by this Board, the owner proposes to expand or modify the conceptual development plans, the Director of the Planning and Community Development Department shall determine in writing if such proposed change would alter the concept for one or more review criteria. If such

proposed change would alter the plan, the proposal shall be resubmitted for review as a new application.

- C. The applicant shall submit plans and specifications to Planning and Community Development Department in conformance with the relevant requirements of Title 15 - Building and Construction, of the Official Code of the City of Great Falls.
- D. The ADA accessible parking space is relocated to the closest available space to the entrance, in accordance with 17.37.2.070 of the Land Development Code. Accessible spaces serving a particular building shall be located on the shortest accessible route of travel between the parking and the accessible entrance.
- E. The applicant shall install an additional two boulevard trees.
- F. The applicant shall incorporate the surrounding sidewalk pattern and tree grades.

Made by: Mr. Grosse  
Second: Mr. Kraft

VOTE: All being in favor, the motion carried.

### **BOARD COMMUNICATIONS**

There were no Board communications.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Mr. Kraft moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Schneider. All being in favor, the meeting was adjourned at 4:19 p.m.