Public comment regarding Item 6a Planning Commission 4-10-24
Receive a Report, Continue a Public Hearing, and Consider Approval of Coastal Development Permit 2-23 (CDP 2-23), Design Review 3-24 (DR 3-24), Sign Permit 2-24 (SP 2-24), and Variance 1-24 (VAR 1-24), proposing to remodel an existing 1,536 SF convenience store with an addition of 447 SF into a 1,809 SF convenience store; install 660 SF of new landscaped area; replace and expand an existing gas station canopy; replace gas dispensing units; and replace existing canopy signs and monument sign face located at 105 South Main Street.

Commissioners,

My comments are in regards to item 6a on your agenda for the 4-10 meeting.

It is obvious that the former owner of this gas station had no interest in dealing with the gas station anymore as you had to send a code enforcement letter. I agree that this gas station could use a face lift, but do not agree with the extensive changes. I am glad that I am given a chance to comment on this project as I did not realize the extent of this project when it was before you on March 27.

Reading the staff report it was at first unclear to me who MJC is. It would help to spell out the acronym for the public. I assume it stands for Marie Jones, Consulting.

Where is the letter from Public Works? It would help the public to be able to read that.

I understand that it took a long time for this project to even come before the Planning Commission, but question why it will be possibly voted on when so many issues are still not settled.

Unfortunately the proposed site plan is not clear and contains many typos. #’s are in different fonts and sizes, some are not visible, bollard to be remain, awning misspelled, etc.

It seems that the new owner needs to still plant trees, possibly install a backflow device, and install night-sky compliant lighting that is downward facing, and shielded. I understand the need for a Variance, but would appreciate that the City would start the 1 year LCP process so that others who want to change their properties would not need a Variance. In addition it seems premature to me to vote on a project before the owner has secured a franchise agreement with a gas company. What if the particular company insists on using their color scheme? What if the exterior signage including a trademark or service mark does not fit in (not aesthetically pleasing)? It seems that many towns are being forced to accept very bright (day glow) signs on the already illuminated canopies, monument signs, and taller signs that are placed above 6ft (CLUDC code). The City recently approved a taller sign for the gas station at the corner of Main Street & N. Harbor Drive. The City also approved the color scheme for the gas station at Main Street and Elm Street. By doing that Fort Bragg looses its charm and becomes a town like any other US town. The eco tourists that came here do not come to see Fort Bragg turn into any other US town. It is mentioned in the staff report that the brown color of the canopy signs does not match the other structures. Why does MJC recommends leaving the colors as proposed? Even if we only see a sliver of the ocean between buildings to allow the many bright non matching colors next to the ocean does not seem to be aesthetically pleasing. Neither is it aesthetically pleasing to have the height of a new convenience store instead of 16ft. 8 in. be 20ft, 4 in tall.

What if more and more people have electric cars and we do not need gas stations anymore? Has the Commission demonstrated a need for a bigger gas station, and a bigger convenience store with kitchen?

Don’t we have enough stores, restaurants, and food trucks already? These places offer junk food. We do not need more of them. It looks as if instead of 2 pumps there will be 4 pumps.

Considering the increasingly worrisome climate situation worldwide and the sordid role of fossil fuel corporations we need to rethink the way we do business in our County. Are you aware of the County’s Climate Crisis Policy? We know that by 2035 California will ban the sale and registration of new internal combustion engine autos & light truck vehicles.

Was the climate emergency and the need to phase out fossil fuels considered? Why do we not prepare for a time (2045) when 100% of the energy needs to be Clean Energy (SB 100)? Are you aware that Mendocino County already has 2 times the amount of gas stations per county resident than Sonoma and Humboldt have according to the California Energy Commission data? Sonoma County successfully lobbied for the enactment of a prohibition of new gas stations. Prohibiting the construction of new gas stations requires simple changes to a jurisdiction’s zoning regulations. Benefits of enacting such a prohibition include the avoidance of new, potentially toxic hazardous waste sites, and a renewed focus on alternative transportation options that avoid the use of fossil fuels.

The Energy issue was not addressed in this project. Constructing the new gas pump stations would result in a significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy, or wasteful use of energy resources, during project construction and/or operation. To at least place a charging station for electric vehicles would help counteract the wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy, or wasteful use of energy resources. Why were no EV charging stations considered?

Are you aware that the Mendocino Grassroots Institute (GRI) launched a campaign to prohibit the construction of new fossil fuel stations in Mendocino County. GRI has also been in touch with our Supervisors Gjerde and Haschak who created a subcommittee to look into this. Mendocino County also adopted on June 27, 2006 a Precautionary Principle Policy.

Will you require that the new owner hires a compliance consultant to ensure that they properly maintain underground storage tanks, leak detection equipment, spill control measures, and other methods to ensure health and safety?

Why is it that the Director of the Community Development would potentially be tasked to have the final say about the sign design, and the Monument Sign versus the Planning Commission with the help of the public?

Why would a non-conforming sign be tolerated for 5 years?

It is my belief that this project will be detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare, or materially injurious to properties or improvements in the vicinity. Please consider it carefully and at least insist on having a project ready proposal that addresses some of the above mentioned issues.

The Notice of Public Hearing mentions that this project can be appealed to the City Council. There is no mention of a possibility to appeal it to the Coastal Commission.

Sincerely, Annemarie Weibel
4-8-2024