



July 24, 2024

Planning and Zoning Commission Staff Report

Request for an exception to the commercial development moratorium to construct a 13,250 square foot building and parking lot at Longbranch Recovery and Wellness Center at 21516 Hwy 36.

Background

On February 20, 2024, the Town Council adopted Instrument 2024-002, which extends the commercial development moratorium, but provides for an exception to the moratorium for developments that meet certain criteria and standards. Such exceptions may be granted by the Planning and Zoning Commission. The Commission shall consider the following criteria in making a determination regarding an exception.

- Compatibility with the adjacent neighborhood
- Impact on existing infrastructure
- Adherence to the goals of the Town of Abita Springs, proposed or adopted Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Development Standards that are on file and available at the Abita Springs Town Hall and posted on the Town website.

The Longbranch Recovery and Wellness Center is located on a 2.90-acre property at the intersection of Hwy 36 and Gordon Street. The subject property is zoned Commercial District and the site is the location of the historic Longbranch Hotel. The Center has operated at the site since 2018. Existing buildings on the property include the main building, which is 10,200 square feet and an ancillary building which is 3,250 square feet. Three smaller structures totaling approximately 2,300 square feet are also located on the property. Currently the Center provides 32 beds and has about 30 staff.

The proposed building is 13,250 square feet (8,710 square feet on Level 1 and 4,450 square feet on Level 2). The new building will be an extension of the existing facility's services and will include 12 dormitory rooms, four (4) administrative offices, a wellness activity center, and four (4) group meeting rooms. An additional 16 new parking spaces would be added in the gravel parking area. The resulting expansion would add 24 beds to the facility as well as 10-12 new employees.

The property has access available from driveways on Gordon Avenue and Hwy 36.

Compliance with Applicable Criteria

- Compatibility with the adjacent neighborhood

The subject property is 2.90 acres in size and is located on Hwy 36, an area zoned Commercial District. The Center has operated at the site since 2018. The buildings on site are effectively screened from view by

a vegetative buffer along the highway frontage. The nearest residence is located southwest of the property on Gordon Avenue approximately 250 feet from the proposed building. A 9.0-acre property located directly south of the subject property adjacent to the Abita River is vacant. Commercial uses are located across Hwy 36 and Gordon Avenue more than 400 feet from the proposed new building.

The proposed building expands a commercial use that has operated in the neighborhood for some time. The property is 2.90 acres in size and the addition of another building can be accommodated on the property without overcrowding or imposing noise or visual impacts on neighboring properties. The size and scope of the project does not require a traffic analysis and should not create any adverse traffic impacts.

- Impact on existing infrastructure

The Town Engineer has reviewed the project and his comments are included as an attachment to this report. In the letter dated July 23, 2024, John Catalanatto, PE, PMP notes a lack of capacity in the sewer system in the Gordon Avenue area proposed for discharge from this development. He concludes that the proposed plan to discharge wastewater to the collection system in Gordon Avenue cannot be approved. He recommends that a building permit can be issued contingent upon conditions necessary to provide on-site sewerage treatment until such time as the collection system in the Gordon Avenue area is improved.

- Adherence to the goals of the Town of Abita Springs, proposed or adopted Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Development Standards that are on file and available at the Abita Springs Town Hall and posted on the Town website.

The following goals from the Master Plan are applicable to this request.

Master Plan Goals

Community Design 3.3 Considerations for General buildings	
C	New buildings should create an interesting street frontage, with parking hidden from view, typically located at the rear of the building. Setback requirements should be changed such that this is encouraged.
D	The relationship between the fronts and the backs of buildings should ensure that public spaces have natural surveillance; the fronts of buildings should facade the primary street adjacent to the property.
F	Parking should be located so that it is hidden from the street, either located behind the building or screened from view.

Community Design 3.5 Consideration for Parking	
A	Non-residential and multi-family buildings should have their surface parking lots placed at the side or rear of buildings.
B	Buildings should have no more than 20% of their lots devoted to surface parking lots, with no individual lot larger than 2 acres.
C	Parking lots should be designed for pedestrians as well as cars with pathways and shade trees.

The proposed building facade would face Hwy 36. Although the parking lot would be in front of the building, the proposed building and parking area would be screened from view by the vegetative buffer along

Hwy 36. The parking area does not cover more than 20 percent of the subject property and is not larger than two (2) acres. The parking lot is small with only 16 spaces, and most of the parking area is only a single parking space deep with an overall width of 42 feet. The area is also shaded by existing trees, thus ensuring that the parking area will meet pedestrian needs.

The following development standards from the Code of Ordinances are also applicable to this request.

The Commercial District does not have minimum building setback requirements; however Zoning Ordinance Section 9-707 requires that a 25-foot-wide managed roadway buffer be provided along all developed roadways. The existing vegetative buffer along Hwy 36 meets this requirement.

Zoning Ordinance Section 9-218 specifies that no building in the Commercial District shall exceed 35 feet in height. The Historic Design Guidelines specify that building height for a pitched roof with multiple roof planes is the mid-point between the highest ridge and the lowest eave in the same plane. The proposed building would have a height of 38 feet 6 inches at the highest point of the roof ridge. The height at the lowest eave in the same plane is 26 feet 2 inches. This translates to a building height of 32 feet 4 inches. This standard has been met.

Town Code Section 3-408 requires that a two-way driveway not exceed 24 feet in width. The existing driveway access on Hwy 36 meets this requirement. The driveway will need to be constructed to Louisiana Department of Transportation standards.

The Historic Commission reviewed the proposed building at the June 11, 2024, meeting. The Commission approved the proposed design and issued a Certificate of Appropriateness for the building.

Recommendation

The proposed building and parking area meets the applicable criteria for an exception to the commercial building moratorium. The project would be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood and would not exceed existing infrastructure capacity. The project meets Master Plan goals to screen parking areas from view and provide parking that meets pedestrian needs. The project meets other relevant standards regarding building height, roadway buffer, and driveway width. The Historic Commission has approved the design and issued a Certificate of Appropriateness for the building.

The Town Engineer concludes that connection to the under capacity in sewer collection system in the Gordon Avenue cannot be approved, however the applicant can install an on-site sewer collection system that can be used until such time as capacity in the collection system is improved. The suggested conditions would require connection to the Town's sewer collection system within 30 days after notification by the Town.

Based on the findings in this report, staff recommends that the Planning and Zoning Commission **APPROVE** the request for an exception to the commercial development moratorium subject to the conditions included in the July 23, 2024, letter from John Catalanatto, PE, PMP.