

# City of Buhl Planning & Zoning Minutes

203 Broadway Ave N

**January 17, 2024 Meeting**

## **PRESENT:**

Barbara Gietzen            Commission Chair  
Maggie Himmelberger    Commission Member  
Jeff Gabardi                Commission Member  
Bob VandeWater            Commission Member  
Reme Pullicar              Commission Member

Molly Gould                Applicant Rep  
Steve Scaroni               Applicant via Zoom

## **STAFF:**

Andrew Wright            City Attorney  
Karen Drown                City Clerk  
Scott Bybee                 City Engineer  
Rick Brook                  Code Services  
Pamela McClain            Mayor  
Jazmine Mills               P & Z Administrator  
Teresa Robbins               Public Works Clerk  
Jason Scott                  Public Works Director

Concerned Citizens

**OPENING**— The meeting was called to order at 10:33 a.m.

## **PUBLIC HEARINGS**

**CONFIRMATION OF QUORUM for Public Hearing #1:** Jazmine Mills confirmed a quorum.

**PUBLIC HEARING #1**— Barbara Gietzen asked the applicant to make a statement.

Molly Gould of Buhl and an employee of Latitude 42/Scaroni Family Companies/SBMD Properties stated their farming operation in Idaho is currently located at 2000 E. She stated the company farms lettuce with the help of local laborers like herself and workers under the federal H2A visa program, this business is not government-funded, and all workers are vetted by the US Consulate before hiring. Molly stated the company has a zero-tolerance policy for alcohol, drugs, tardiness, and other issues; policy breakers are immediately dismissed and sent back. She stated the company has 50 housing sites in the western region, including a converted tomato factory in King City that now houses employees and supports the local economy. She noted they tried to acquire the Green Giant housing, but learned it had been converted and was no longer available for housing.

Molly added a personal statement as a Buhl resident working with this company. She emphasized that H2A workers were not in the country illegally because they undergo thorough screening to meet the visa's standards. She stated she understood the concerns about property values and high-density housing owned by a company and expected a heated debate on the project's pros and cons. Molly expressed her shock at the ignorance and racism of some of Buhl's residents.

She highlighted the vital role migrant workers played in the Green Giant and Seneca operations and noted Buhl and other agricultural towns in the Magic Valley were built on the backs of migrant workers. Molly stated her farm employs migrant workers, whom she considers family. She expressed her hope that the nationality of the potential residents is not the focus of the debate as future operations are presented to the City of Buhl and that the citizens of Buhl treat the migrant workers with respect and recognize them for their hard work as fellow human beings.

Molly concluded by reading the official letter from SBMD Properties that stated the withdrawal of their P & Z applications for 703 Locust St because of the overwhelmingly negative response of the community. It highlighted that they had hoped to add to the community and that the economic benefits would have offset the drawbacks of the location. It further stated the company will continue looking for housing opportunities and respect the concerns of the community.

Steve Scaroni, the owner of SBMD Properties, expressed his disappointment regarding the negativity and racism surrounding the topic of migrant farmworkers. He stated this company operates as the largest H2A user in America, employing 6000 people who are the backbone of their communities. Steve stated that there may be bad actors in any group of people, and SBMD Properties has a zero-tolerance policy towards any such behavior. He noted this is not the first time they have encountered such a project, in the past, they converted a 350-bed tomato factory housing in King City which helped revive the downtown area of the ag-dependent town. Steve stated they had hoped to provide a similar boost to Buhl but they do not have the bandwidth to take on the challenge of convincing people with negative and uninformed views about migrant farm workers and their character. He included statistics on the amount of lettuce shipped from Idaho between June and November 2023 and stated his gratitude for the Buhl city staff's efforts and assistance. Steve added that they chose this area for the project because he and his wife fell in love with Buhl, and they had immersed themselves in the community by living, shopping, and attending church here for half of the year.

Barbara closed Public Hearing #1 at 10:47 a.m.

There was no staff report nor public testimony taken because of the withdrawal of the applications.

Multiple citizen outbursts occurred due to the statements made by the applicant.

Barbara reminded the citizens that since the application was withdrawn, public testimony would not be taken, and any comments from citizens must not be related to the public hearing topic.

There was a 5-minute recess to allow the large group of citizens to exit the council chambers.

**PUBLIC HEARING #2**—This hearing was canceled due to the applicant's withdrawal.

### **REGULAR MEETING**

**CONFIRMATION OF QUORUM:** Jazmine Mills confirmed a quorum.

### **OLD BUSINESS:**

Minutes of December 20, 2023: Jeff moved to approve the minutes. Bob seconded. There was no discussion. All voted in favor. The motion passed.

**NEW BUSINESS:** Both applications were withdrawn, so there was no new business.

**COMMISSION COMMENTS**— Jazmine thanked the Commission members for attending despite the snowy weather. She reminded them of the upcoming Special Meeting on January 18, 2024, at 3:00 p.m.

**CITIZEN CONCERNS**—There was none.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**—Reme moved to adjourn. Maggie seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m. All voted in favor. The motion carried.