



Developers are proposing to build a 62-lot subdivision on 24 acres off East Second Street in Whitefish.

Posted: Tuesday, June 10, 2014 12:00 am

2nd Street subdivision gets final approval

By HEIDI DESCH Whitefish Pilot

A subdivision along East Second Street has the go-ahead after first being proposed more than a year ago.

Whitefish City Council unanimously approved the 62-lot subdivision on vacant land east of Cow Creek. Will MacDonald and Sean Averill of Community Infill Partners are planning to develop the 24-acre property.

“What you’re seeing here is a collaborative effort,” Averill said. “We really met with the neighbors and had a group meeting on what they wanted to see here.”

The project originally came forward as the 2nd Street Apartments with 174 housing units. Developers returned asking for 150 housing units, and then reformatted the design to 143 units.

Through several public hearings, neighbors of the project continued to voice opposition. They said it was too dense for the area and raised concerns about the increased traffic they said the development would create.

The latest design calls for less than half the number of housing units originally proposed. The 62-lot subdivision will include 54 single-family lots and eight townhouse lots with a density of 2.61 units per acre.

Council approved a zone change and planned unit development for the 24-acre property, which overlays zoning and allows for greater flexibility in the design. The site is currently zoned as one-family residential and agriculture. The request seeks to change the zoning to estate residential district.

The proposed design includes 30 percent open space throughout the project, including a tot lot and a basketball court.

A sticking point before approval, however, became the park land surrounding Cow Creek. The developers proposed giving the area of wetlands on the east side of the property to Whitefish Lake Institute, but the city said that would not comply with state law.

“We’d like to deed the Cow Creek area to the institute,” Averill said. “That’s what we would like to do.”

Mike Koopal, institute executive director, said the institute would like to restore the wetland area and create a public interpretative trail.

However, during the city council meeting it became apparent that wasn’t going to be a viable option.

City attorney Mary VanBuskirk said state and city law makes it mandatory that developers dedicate parkland to the city or provide cash-in-lieu to the city.

“I don’t believe we can transfer the land to a third party,” VanBuskirk said. “Even though with someone with the reputation of the Whitefish Lake Institute, I see no exceptions that would apply to this subdivision.”

Council seemed to agree that giving the park area to the institute was a good idea, but couldn't come up with a mechanism to make it happen.

"I see the benefit of Whitefish Lake Institute having control of that," councilor Andy Fuery said. "We have city parks that are strapped for money every year. I'd like to see if there is another way to do that."

Mayor John Muhlfeld suggested that the open space be dedicated to the city with the exception of a future trail corridor.

"Then the developers could deed that trail easement back to the institute for construction and maintenance," he said.

Council agreed to include the condition as part of its approval of the subdivision.

The developer would still be dedicating enough parkland to the city to meet subdivision requirements. Only about one acre was needed and the total parkland proposed is about four acres.

The City-County Planning Board last month took issue with plans for the road to the east that ends in a cul-de-sac. There were concerns about emergency egress, especially with the property being blocked in by the railroad tracks to the north.

A condition was added that the cul-de-sac be removed and the road be looped back to Armory Road extension to create a "T" intersection or be connected to a possible future road to the east. The final location of the road will be approved by the city public works department before being developed.