



## CITY OF READING, PA

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** City Council  
**FROM:** Naomi Crimm, Planner; David Peris, Planning Manager; Jamal Abodalo, Director of Community Development  
**DATE:** March 17, 2021, amended March 22, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** 2020 Planning Commission Annual Report

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In accordance with Section 207 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Act 247 of 1968, as reenacted and amended), the City of Reading Planning Commission respectfully submits its Annual Report for 2020. This Report outlines the Commission's activities throughout the year. The Commission would like to recognize all of those involved in its work over the course of 2020.

The City of Reading Planning Commission administers the City's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance, and those other functions delegated to it, in an effort to improve the quality of life in the City of Reading. To this end, the Commission holds regular meetings on the fourth Tuesdays of each month, which are currently being held virtually via Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic. The video from each regular meeting is available on the City's website. Meeting minutes are also prepared by Planning Office staff.

This report was reviewed by the Planning Commission during its regular monthly meeting held February 23, 2021.

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### SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Upon receipt of each subdivision and/or land development application, Planning Office staff and/or consultants provide a written review letter to the applicant, identifying defects and the corrections required by the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) prior to public meeting presentations to the Planning Commission. After review and approval by the Planning Commission, copies of approved plans are maintained digitally by the Planning Office, and final recorded plans are available via the Berks County Recorder of Deeds website.

Following are highlights of major proposals presented to the Planning Commission in 2020. For an exhaustive listing of all business considered by the Commission, see the '2020 Activity Summary,' attached in Appendix 1.

#### ***Alvernia CollegeTowne (401 Penn Street)***

A land development waiver request for reuse of an existing commercial building for Alvernia University dormitories and associated higher education and retail uses came before the Planning Commission during the November 24, 2020 meeting. The site is the former CNA building, and will serve as the University's first presence in downtown Reading. This project will have



dormitories on the third and fourth floors; the initial designs will house 66 students, with buildouts available to accommodate up to 200 (Figure 1). Commercial and institutional uses will occupy the ground floor and will include labs for new engineering programs, student gathering spaces, and classrooms; retail spaces will include a Starbucks at the corner of 4th and Penn Streets. The building will also be the



Figure 1. Alvernia CollegeTowne rendering. Source: <https://www.alvernia.edu/news/2020/12/alvernia-secures-record-breaking-4-million-grant>

home to the University's O'Pake Institute for Economic Development and Entrepreneurship, which will house a business incubator.<sup>1</sup> The Engineering School will offer post-graduate studies. The facility will also host international students. The Commission waived full land development review because new utility easements were not required and the building footprint was not altered, conditioned upon a revision to the plan of record. Renovations commenced in January of 2021.

### **Gateway West (467 Tulpehocken Street)**

This project for a residential land development of 47 units first came before the Planning Commission on May 28, 2019. The plan for the 2.6-acre space includes mixed multi-family, single, and twin rental units as well as a community center and increased green space (Figure 2). The site is part of a larger redevelopment initiative with the Reading Redevelopment Authority, and requires considerable brownfield remediation. The development area originally consisted of numerous parcels, so the plan consolidates them into a single deed. The city applied for two DCED grants (blight remediation for \$300,000 and Multimodal Transportation Funds) for repaving, curbs, sidewalks, lighting, and utilities improvements on Tulpehocken, Gordon, Speidel, and Lafayette streets. The plan received final plan approval on December 18, 2020. The plan was recorded on December 23, 2020.



Figure 2. Gateway West renderings. Source: Delaware Valley Development Company

<sup>1</sup> Alvernia breaks ground on \$20 million CollegeTowne renovation project. (2021). Alvernia University. <https://www.alvernia.edu/news/2021/01/alvernia-breaks-ground-20-million-collegetowne-renovation-project>

***Madison 2020 LLC (400 Washington Street)***

A sketch plan for the Madison Building was presented to the Planning Commission during the July 28, 2020 meeting. This is an adaptive reuse project that proposes 11 floors of 2-bedroom and 1-bedroom apartment units, with a ground-floor housing management office, and a restored Grande Lobby (Figure 3). The development also includes an existing 5-story addition, separated from the apartment tower by an existing atrium. The ground floor of the addition is commercial, and the upper stories are residential. The Planning Commission reviewed the project and approved a motion to waive land development requirements.



Figure 3. Madison Building. Source: Olsen Design Group

***Reading Skate Park Association (601 Canal Street)***

The sketch plan for the Reading Skate Park came before the Planning Commission on July 28, 2020. This project is a collaboration between the Reading Skatepark Association, which will develop and operate the project site, and the Reading Redevelopment Authority, which currently owns the property. The site used to be fully developed, but Hurricane Agnes destroyed most of the properties in 1972. The Redevelopment Authority acquired the properties in 1974, and consolidated them in 1987. The park is 26,500 square feet, and, in addition to the skate park, will include a parking lot with a stormwater bed underneath and shade structures. The preliminary/final plan was conditionally approved by the Planning Commission on February 23, 2021.

***Reading Soda Works and Carbonic Supply (640 Gregg Avenue)***

The site, which has been vacant for some time, used to be home to a four-story brick warehouse and manufacturing building. The applicant is proposing to use the site as a warehouse to store materials from the manufacturing plant down the street before shipping. A one-story building with a mezzanine is proposed. The development will include 15 parking spaces as well as a loading dock for short-body vehicles. The sketch plan came before the Planning Commission on August 25, 2020. The preliminary/final plan was conditionally approved by the Planning Commission on February 23, 2021.

***Jan and Wil Properties LLC (810 Windsor Street)***

The final land development plan for the adaptive reuse of an existing three-story commercial building into eight residential apartment units and one street-level commercial unit was brought before the Planning Commission during the September 22, 2020 meeting. The property has been vacant for many years. As of January 2021, the plan is pending Sewage Facilities Planning Module approval from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

***Reading Housing Authority (1001 Scott Street)***

The project is for the construction of 1,590-square-foot expansion of the administration building and a 44-space parking lot. The sketch plan came before the Planning Commission during the November 24, 2020 meeting. The City plans to realign the intersection of Liggett Avenue and Hancock Boulevard in 2021. A portion of the existing right of way of Liggett Avenue will need to

be vacated and transferred to the Reading Housing Authority for their parking facility in order for their plan to be approved and move forward. This plan will require close coordination with the Public Works improvements. This project is scheduled for preliminary and final review by the Planning Commission on March 23, 2021.

## **UPCOMING PROJECTS**

### ***Marion Street Fire Station (1201 North 9<sup>th</sup> Street)***

Design consultants engaged by the City of Reading Department of Fire and Rescue Services and Department of Public Works made an informal presentation to Planning and Zoning staff in December 2020 — following an initial presentation at the May 2018 Planning Commission meeting — for a proposal to construct a new fire station at the northeast corner of Marion Street and North 9th Street. The plan has been submitted for sketch review and is expected to be submitted for preliminary/final plan approval in 2021.

### ***Medical Arts Building (226 & 230 North 5<sup>th</sup> Street)***

A preliminary land development plan to consolidate two adjacent lots, redevelop an existing professional office building for a mix of residential and commercial uses, and construct a new building on a vacant lot to house both residential and commercial uses has been submitted for review in March 2021.

### ***Hope Rescue Mission (645 North 6<sup>th</sup> Street)***

This land development plan is for a 4.88 acre tract with two lots of 2.44 acres each. The existing lot contains a 17,644-square-foot Men's Residence and Office; while the proposed residual lot will contain a 24,986-square-foot Women and Children's Shelter, a conversion of the existing Hope Rescue Thrift Store. The preliminary plan was approved in January of 2020, and the final plan was conditionally approved in February 2021.

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## **ZONING ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS**

The Planning Commission reviewed the following zoning ordinance text amendments which were presented to City Council:

- Allow adaptive reuse in the Commercial Core (C-C) Zoning District by special exception
- Allow primary or secondary school as a use in the C-N district by special exception
- Revise definitions of schools, colleges and universities, dormitory, and dwelling unit
- Update parking requirements for college or university dormitories
- Update square footage and storage requirements for dwelling units

These recommendations were heard by City Council during public hearings, and were enacted by ordinance in January and February 2020 (Bill Nos. 3-2020, 4-2020, 5-2020, 6-2020, Jan. 13, 2020; 30-2020, 31-2020, 32-2020, 33-2020, Mar. 23, 2020.)

## UPCOMING ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS

### ***Adaptive Reuse in the M-C District***

In early 2021, the Planning Commission will consider text amendments to the zoning code to allow for adaptive reuse in the Manufacturing Commercial District or Riverfront Redevelopment Overlay by special exception if the lot contains at least one street-level principal business establishment.

### ***SALDO Technical Amendments***

The Planning Commission recommended a series of technical amendments to the city's SALDO to alter requirements for plan submission procedures. The amendments were presented to City Council in early 2021.

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## OTHER BUSINESS

### ***Members and Officers***

- *Ermete J. Raffaelli retired after more than 30 years as a member of the Commission.*
- *The current, active members of the Planning Commission and their terms are as follows:*
  - Lee Olsen, AIA, Chairman: appointed to the Commission on August 27, 2018 with a term ending April 1, 2022.
  - Wayne Jonas Bealer, Vice Chairman: reappointed to the Commission on June 25, 2018 with a term ending April 1, 2022
  - Robert Conklin, AIA: appointed to the Commission on January 14, 2019 with a term ending April 1, 2021
  - William F. Cinfici: reappointed to the Commission on November 9, 2020 with a term ending April 1, 2024
  - Philip Ashear: appointed to the Commission on November 9, 2020 with a term ending April 1, 2024

### ***2021 Schedule***

The schedule of the 2021 regular monthly meetings was advertised in the *Reading Eagle* newspaper on January 4, 2021, continuing with the same pattern of meeting on the fourth Tuesday of each month established in 2009.

The Planning Commission is expected to play an active role in upcoming City of Reading initiatives including a comprehensive parking study, a “Downtown Plus” strategic plan, and comprehensive planning activities.

The Planning Office continues to schedule Thursday-morning One Stop appointments – an advisory forum offered since early 2006, giving developers an opportunity to consult directly with representatives from Zoning and Planning, the Building/Trades Division, the Fire Marshal, and Property Maintenance.

**Appendix 1. 2020 Planning Commission Activity Summary**

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Subject</b>                                                                                                             | <b>Action</b>                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 28-Jan-20   | Carpenter Technology (1001 Schuylkill Avenue) - Waiver of Land Development                                                 | Waived land development review, resolution 01-2020.                                                                                                                                            |
| 28-Jan-20   | Ronald Mercedes (1722 N. 10th Street) - Moss Street Vacation                                                               | Recommendation to City Council to vacate Moss Street, resolution 02-2020.                                                                                                                      |
| 25-Feb-20   | Zoning Text Amendments for Alvernia University (Chapters 600-807, 600-814, 600-1603, 600-2202)                             | Approved zoning text amendments, resolutions 03-2020, 04-2020, 05-2020, 06-2020                                                                                                                |
| 26-May-20   | Suspension of Signature Requirements of Section 515-308 B(6) of the SALDO per Governor's declaration of disaster emergency | Signature requirements suspended until Governor's order is lifted, resolution 07-2020.                                                                                                         |
| 26-May-20   | Bucks Annexation (2020 Hill Road) - Final Subdivision Plan                                                                 | Final approval granted, resolution 08-2020.                                                                                                                                                    |
| 26-May-20   | Fairview Mennonite Church (545 S. 16th Street) - Final Subdivision Plan                                                    | Reaffirmed final plan approval, resolution 09-2020.                                                                                                                                            |
| 28-Jul-20   | Madison 2020 LLC (400 Washington Street) - Waiver of Land Development                                                      | Waived full land development requirements                                                                                                                                                      |
| 25-Aug-20   | Joint Municipal Authority Wyomissing Valley - Waiver of Land Development                                                   | Waived land development review                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 27-Oct-20   | Gateway West (467 Tulpehocken Street) - Final Land Development Plan                                                        | Conditional final approval granted, resolution 14-2020. Conditions: NPDES permit granted, municipal improvements agreement executed, stormwater operations and maintenance agreement executed. |
| 24-Nov-20   | Alvernia College Towne (401 Penn Street) - Revision to Plan of Record                                                      | Waived full land development review, conditional to a revision to the plan of record.                                                                                                          |
| 24-Nov-20   | Ryan and Amy Huber (615 S 16 1/2 Street) - Preliminary/Final Plan                                                          | Conditional final approval granted. Conditions: final changes approved by staff, written waiver request received, improvements agreement executed                                              |