

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
April 26, 2016 at 7:33 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Vice Chairman
Michael E. Lauter, Secretary
William F. Cinfici, Assistant Secretary

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office
Deborah A.S. Hoag, Department of Public Works

Others present:

Bradford R. Grauel, OTM LLC
Ryan K. Gehris, Reina Anne's LLC
Charles M. Rubendall, Witman Engineers & Consultants LLC
Dale C. Egan, Egan & Egan LLC
Thomas P. Egan, Egan & Egan LLC
Andrew J. Barton, Larson Design Group
Dee Anderson, Hutchinson Realty Development LLC
Gary Winkleman, Hutchinson Realty Development LLC
Denise L. Dieter, Drier & Dieter Law Offices
Aristides I. Otero, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
John D. Scholl, Albright College
Gregg A. Bogia, Bogia Engineering Inc.
David M. Kleckner, Kleckner Laucks Architects PC
David H. McLain, Radkra LLC
Daniel P. Kelly, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the April meeting to order, relocated to Council Chambers because of the primary-election polling open in the Penn Room and delayed a half hour by another meeting wrapping up in the same location. He asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the April 26th agenda, as presented. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the April agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Gehris Self Storage – revision-to-record land development plan [0:01.03]

Mr. Graul described the location on the west side of McKnight Street, between West Oley Street and West Greenwich Street, as an existing self-storage facility, proposing new paving to allow for additional rental parking spaces. He said they'd already received the zoning approval and acknowledged the Planning Office review and the Berks County Planning Commission comments. He characterized most of the deficiencies as 'administrative items'. He referred to the original 2012 Ludgate Engineering design of infiltration trenches, intended to capture stormwater runoff. He has since revealed that the two smaller buildings, to be connected via their roof drains, never were, calling it an 'oversight in construction'. He proposed an additional infiltration bed to offset the additional impervious surfacing, and will clarify the design on a revised plan. Asked about the current function of the existing infiltration bed, Mr. Graul couldn't answer, and suggested an additional inlet may be needed. He said he couldn't find the original stormwater management report. Referring to questions about the landscaping, he hoped to gauge the Planning Commission's preference in the meantime. He described the site as already having a six-foot fence, including privacy slats in three of its four sides. He described the existing landscaping, including street trees and others in containers. Ms. Hoag voiced a concern for the potential compaction of the existing infiltration facilities by the new construction activity. Mr. Graul felt they'd be able to keep the machinery off of those areas. Asked about the intended use of the new spaces, Mr. Gehris thought automobiles, thinking the stalls too small for recreational vehicles. He said most of his customers live nearby and use the facility for their everyday parking needs. He said that vehicular maintenance is a violation of the written lease terms that they occasionally have to enforce. He added that they'd installed video surveillance because of vandalism. Mr. Graul indicated the location of a small office space, which Mr. Gehris described as more of a utility room. Asked about additional landscaping opportunities, Mr. Graul described a proposed two-foot retaining wall and a relocation of existing trees to accommodate it, without proposing anything new. Mr. Miller advised they plant them in the ground, as shown on the original plan, especially

if they were used as a stormwater management practice. He mentioned other inconsistencies between that plan and the construction. Ms. Hoag asked if they had any photographs or otherwise documented the installation of the infiltration trenches. Mr. Graul said not. Ms. Hoag intended to search the Public Works Department files for any such documentation. The grading and relatively-elevated setting of the northeast corner were discussed, as well as its availability for further landscaping. Ms. Hoag suggested a camera inspection of the existing infiltration facilities. Mr. Graul preferred not to, and offered instead to excavate to reveal the stone base and inspect the cleanout pipes. Ms. Hoag cautioned against waiting until construction is underway and only then realizing more is missing than the rooftop connections.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the 'Gehris Self Storage' revision plan. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the expanding self-storage project at 612 McKnight Street.

Egan Storage – final land development plan [0:25.36]

Dale Egan believed they'd made the required changes, recalling several conversations with the Public Works Department regarding the stormwater management plan. He understood the Fire Marshal had communicated his satisfaction. Mr. Miller acknowledged his April 23rd email. Ms. Hoag acknowledged the conversations with Public Works. Mr. Rubendall presented a written request for stormwater-related waivers. Asked her opinion, Ms. Hoag disputed the reasoning and justification for the exemption, as written, but verified the sections referenced and the applicant's eligibility for a 'quantity control' waiver. Mr. Miller questioned the *exemption* versus *waiver* classification, for the purpose of the resolution language. Ms. Hoag clarified that it must be so requested. Mr. Rubendall confirmed that a fencing detail would be added to the plan.

At Mr. Miller's recommendation, Mr. Bealer moved to approve the 'Egan Storage' final plan, conditioned on revisions satisfying the latest Planning Office and Public Works Department reviews, and granting a waiver from §505-142.B(1) and Table 505-142.1 of the Watershed Stormwater Management Ordinance. Mr. Cinfici seconded, adding that he didn't consider storage as the optimum use of the property, but appreciated the interest in improving the property and understood the present challenges. And the Commission voted unanimously to conditionally approve the proposed self-storage project at 245 West Greenwich Street.

Resolution #13-2016

LGN: Lancaster Ave. Family Dollar – final land development plan [0:35.35]

Mr. Barton said there weren't any substantive changes to the plan's layout. He reported receiving the highway-occupancy permits for the driveway design and sidewalk replacement. He acknowledged receiving the latest Planning Office review the week before, and one from the Public Works Department earlier this day, feeling he could address each of the points raised. Mr. Miller expressed some doubt, alluding to his recurring comments and mistakes that continue to appear on revised plans. Mr. Barton said he thought they'd 'worked that out' with the last revision. Mr. Miller recognized the same mistakes, unsure how to make the direction any more explicit than by his references to specific page numbers. Mr. Barton agreed to reconsider it. Mr. Bealer asked about the outcome of an earlier concern over truck-turning radii. Mr. Miller said that issue was resolved by a designated route eliminating the turn from (southwest-bound) Lancaster Avenue to (northeast-bound) North Carroll Street. Asked if sidewalk was shown for Brookline Street, Mr. Barton and Mr. Miller confirmed it was. Mr. Raffaelli asked about planting strips between the curb and sidewalk. Mr. Barton mentioned small trees and shrubs lining the perimeter. Mr. Raffaelli asked if all the required Pennsylvania Department of Transportation permits were in order. Mr. Miller said what was under the developer's control were issued earlier this day, with a utility issue still pending. He said that was the most-substantive issue precluding an earlier approval and, while restating his concern about the repetitive nature of his reviews, was ready for action on the plan. Asked for specifics, he noted plan sheets missing, numbering errors, inconsistencies between the plan and profile views, and other mistakes that would have been caught with a thorough proofreading. He said he hoped he wouldn't be put in a position of reviewing the plan repeatedly, after the fact, and recommended a conditional approval.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the 'LGN: Lancaster Ave. Family Dollar' final plan, conditioned on revisions satisfying the latest reviews of the Planning Office and Public Works Department. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to conditionally approve the Family Dollar final plan for 231 Lancaster Avenue.

Resolution #14-2016

Ms. Dieter, the attorney representing LGN Management LLC, asked for a signed improvements agreement covering the 'S. 6th Street Family Dollar' project and offered one for the present issue. Mr. Miller wasn't sure what was being requested, having just spoken with the City's attorney earlier this day. A brief discussion followed concerning the order of the agreement signatures, the 'conditional' status of the now-two verbally-approved plans, and what the developer needed to obtain the financial surety.

Albright Turf Field – sketch land development plan [0:52.44]

Mr. Otero mentioned earlier consultations with both the Zoning Administrator and the Planning Office. He described the location of the site and its neighboring Shirk Stadium (at 1700 North 13th Street) that had been ‘re-turfed’ in the last year. He said the existing grass field has been used for sports practices and, consistent with a trend, Albright is looking for a more-durable option, able to handle the traffic and more-readily available following rain events, estimating that artificial turf can be used within 30 minutes of a hard rain. He expected the field markings to be similar to those applied to the Shirk Stadium field, for five different sports: football, men’s and women’s lacrosse, field hockey and soccer. He mentioned lighting, but hadn’t yet settled on a type – metal halide or light-emitting diode – let alone any other details. He said they would be fitted with the appropriate shielding, noting that the technological advancements allow for better aiming and confinement. He intended to provide those details and demonstrate compliance with the City’s regulations. He proposed a fence enclosing the perimeter of the field, preferring an eight-foot chain-link fence, for blocking errant balls and the added security. He compared it with the installation at Shirk Stadium, and its backstop netting. He recalled a conversation with the Public Works Department about a reconstruction of the Exeter Street sidewalk, hoping to eliminate the grass strip and align sidewalk directly adjacent to the back of the curb. He cited the narrow shape of the lot and the sideline needs, and noted a similar pattern in other nearby blocks. He acknowledged the ‘sketch’ level of the plan’s detail, and the questions yet to be answered. He explained a proposed encroachment of a six-to-eight-foot retaining wall extending into Humane Pennsylvania’s 1729 North 11th Street property, reporting that the organization is amenable and working on the easement language and descriptions. He indicated the areas of some additional concrete paving: at the northeast corner for an access to the field and along the northern perimeter as a pad for portable bleachers, assuring that the facility would remain a ‘practice field’. He suggested that the fencing may connect to the College’s basketball courts and parking lot at 1716 North 12th Street, also at eight-foot in height, in order to avoid a small open area between the two fences. He mentioned some feedback from the Zoning Administrator, and a possible appeal to the Zoning Hearing Board for setback relief, thinking some of the issues identified may be a matter of ‘interpretation’. He mentioned the lighting details as another consideration. Mr. Miller thought the retaining wall’s encroachment was another matter in itself. Mr. Otero said the Zoning Office also weighed in on the measurement of the street right-of-way, advising it be measured from the edge of the pavement, rather than the centerline. Mr. Miller wasn’t sure what that meant and intended to follow up. Asked about the sidewalk width, Mr. Otero estimated five feet. Mr. Raffaelli felt that too narrow, especially when considering the removal of the planting (buffer) strip between it and the curb and the numbers of pedestrians associated with Shirk Stadium events.

Turning to the stormwater management concerns, Mr. Otero said they were still working on that design, but anticipating something like that underlying Shirk Stadium, where the turf surfacing itself is permeable, with a stone base underneath, a compacted-soil grade beneath it, and underdrain (panel) pipes arranged in a herringbone pattern and discharging to perimeter pipes ultimately tied to the public storm-sewer system. He stressed the need for proper compaction of the underlying soils to prevent any risk of settlement. He speculated on alternate methods to slow the discharge to the storm sewer, such as a deeper stone bed to allow for storage capacity. Mr. Raffaelli noted the site’s more-elevated position relative to other loads on the storm sewer system, concerned that increasing volumes might preclude further development elsewhere. Mr. Otero affirmed his company’s preference for infiltration designs – arranging for the related soil testing later that week – and open to such on-site management practices if it can be accomplished without risking adverse effects to the finished field surface. Asked what surrounded the turf field and not already identified for paving, he answered ‘lawn’. Mr. Lauter wondered if those areas might provide the infiltration opportunity. Mr. Otero said they considered it, but the limited space and required grading would result in an undesirable slope. He thought a swale might be designed for the space between the proposed field and the basketball courts to its north. Mr. Lauter suggested the area between the basketball courts and the Humane Pennsylvania property. Mr. Otero circled back to the idea of a deeper stone bed, for the increase in void space it provides, intending to do whatever was necessary to meet the management requirements.

Asked to compare the maintenance costs, between artificial turf and natural grass fields, Mr. Otero described some ‘pros and cons’, acknowledging a certain lifespan of the turf and some required maintenance. He noted its durability and the lack of mowing, watering and fertilizing requirements, while referring to the occasional repair and cleaning needs. He mentioned a sweeping machine, designed for the purpose, used to clean up the ‘crumbs’. He said the recently-replaced Shirk Stadium turf probably should have been replaced earlier. He described the injury ratings of the manufactured products, the ‘g-max testing’ for impact attenuation, and industry standards to be met throughout the guaranteed life of the product. Asked about some of the ‘nagging’ injuries associated with artificial turf, in contrast to the impact ratings, he wasn’t sure how the newer technology had addressed that reputation. Questioned about the cost of the project, Mr. Otero noted the contingencies to be resolved, including the turf and lighting products chosen.

Mr. Lauter, observing that no lighting was presently installed at the field, questioned the need and the planned use, wondering what ‘they do now’. Mr. Otero again described its use for ‘practices’. Ms. Hoag noted the

tendency to schedule early-morning practices, in other schools, where day length and programming demands make it necessary. Mr. Lauter recalled the experience stemming from Alvernia University's 2010 and 2011 'South Campus Project', where a new athletic field brought with it new noise and lighting nuisances to the nearby residential areas. He realized such issues wouldn't be altogether new in the vicinity of Shirk Stadium, but hoped to avoid a similar situation where some early communication with the neighborhood might. Mr. Miller suggested that, no matter what design the cutoffs, if lights are mounted in the northern corners, their lamps will be visible across Exeter Street. He advised limiting them to the southern corners and pointed north. Mr. Otero referred to the improvements in aiming and shielding, and the balance between adequately illuminating the field and meeting the required maximums. Mr. Miller noted that, in the Alvernia experience, the programming went beyond what they had represented to the Planning Commission, and was aggravated by an elevation difference. He said the glare impact was apparent from Mountain View Road. Mr. Raffaelli noted the additional complicating factor of the municipal boundary in that case (the University within the City, the affected neighbors in Kenhorst Borough). Mr. Otero wondered whether writing letters or a neighborhood meeting would be more effective. Mr. Cinfici identified the College Heights Community Council as an appropriate liaison. He noted the frequent use of Shirk Stadium, even for Reading High School's football games. He complimented the detail of the sketch presentation, and expressed his own preference for the maintenance of planting strips between the curb and sidewalk, for the buffer from the street in addition to the aesthetic. He noted existing grading and drainage issues on the existing grass field. He opined that, if opting for the chain-link fencing, it might be a situation where the visibility is appropriate rather than including any slats or other screening measures. Asked if the project included any storage structures, Mr. Scholl stated that the equipment needs are already met elsewhere on the campus. Mr. Cinfici asked if the 1716 North 12th Street property is ever actually used for parking. Mr. Scholl said so, for the College's football games at least. With Mr. Otero wondering how to proceed, Mr. Miller said he would still support a waiver of the full land-development requirements, but only when the Commission was comfortable and was satisfied with the answers to its questions, and once the several contingencies were resolved. He said the project involves a number of land-development permitting issues, in any case, and he'd look for an eventual plan with all the answers and details. Mr. Bealer suggested an update following the zoning appeal. Mr. Miller said he'd provide a summary of the questions and concerns, once he reviewed the meeting and drafted the minutes.

1100 Rockland Street Student Housing – preliminary subdivision and land development plan [1:50.14]

Mr. Bogia introduced the project team, explained the current ownership of the shopping center and the Manufacturing-Commercial zoning classification. He proposed a student housing/dormitory 'atmosphere' on an approximately 2¼-acre lot subdivided from the shopping center and replacing some of its retail units. He counted 268 beds, with spaces for restaurants on the first floor, figuring a required off-street parking count of 192 spaces for the project, and another 142 for the residual shopping center, for a total of 334 spaces. The current design yields a total of 445 spaces. He said each of the five floors measures 'just short' of 21,000 square feet. He described the orientation of the site, in relation to the surrounding properties, and the share of the parking between an area onsite and other spaces reserved by easement on the residue parcel. He speculated on marking those spaces for clear identification. He inferred that other revisions might be made to the access and circulation design, following the revelation of additional covenants related to the Tompkins VIST Bank property at 1210 Rockland Street. He indicated the pedestrian elements intended to encourage walking between the building and the Albright College campus, including a surface pattern highlighting that route and extra width in the steps. He briefly addressed the design of accessible parking, stormwater management and erosion controls. Asked about the extent of the demolition of the shopping center and what would be displaced, he recognized the vacant Fashion Bug store, a liquor store and a nail salon, believing the rest would be left intact. Mr. Kleckner confirmed that the new construction would be built directly against the existing. He described an 'L-shaped' building, with a ground floor of restaurant spaces and common spaces for the students, a lobby and eight (8) accessible-single-bedroom units, one (1) 'efficiency' unit, a canopy around the frontage for the look and outdoor dining potential, a circular drop-off area, and four floors above dedicated to living units: six (6) six-bedroom suites, one (1) five-bedroom suite, five (5) four-bedroom suites, one (1) three-bedroom suite, per floor, totaling 61 separate units with 265 beds, in a 'center-corridor layout', with rooms on either side, stair towers at the ends and elevators in the center. He said each suite would have a common kitchen, dining and living area, with the bedrooms to their sides. He said partitions are being considered, to further divide the sleeping areas, but they may be kept open. He displayed renderings, and architectural elevations of the different perspectives. He identified a polished-face masonry unit for the first level, with a synthetic-stucco system (EIFS) above, and in different colors. Asked if the renderings were representative of the colors intended, he indicated a 'dark gray-toward-black' polished block at the base, and dark-gray EIFS and medium-gray cement-board siding above it, with off-white and red EIFS elements. Asked about the type of construction, Mr. Kleckner described steel and concrete for the first level and its separation from the four stories of wood framing above. Mr. McLain confirmed that the project would privately-owned, and intended for Albright's

upperclassmen. Mr. Lauter wondered how the plan conformed to the City's Comprehensive Plan, and its references to the commercial uses of the Rockland Street corridor. Mr. Miller suggested that the design of the ground floor preserves some commercial opportunity, while noting the Manufacturing-Commercial zoning and other issues for the Zoning Hearing Board's consideration. Mr. Kleckner confirmed that the commercial part would be 'open to the public'. Asked again about Albright's role, Mr. McLain anticipated some kind of third-party-management agreement with the College, but insisted it would remain privately-owned, and therefore taxable. He thought there might be leasing options for terms coinciding with either the typical fall-spring-semester or on a year-round basis but, in any case, would only be marketed and available to Albright-affiliated tenants. He said the first-floor design may be more attractive to graduate students and teaching assistants. Mr. Raffaelli thought the 265 population 'excessive'. Mr. Cinfici opined, as an Albright neighbor, that he considered the project an opportunity for some relief from the nuisances and parking pressures associated with the student-rental homes. He cautioned against the efficiency unit mentioned, citing the City's square footage minimums. Mr. Kleckner measured it at 480 square feet. Asked if they were seeking a 'use variance', Mr. Bogia said yes, as the Manufacturing-Commercial zoning doesn't provide for the residential use and the site falls outside the 'Institutional' overlay district. Mr. Miller noted the provisions of that overlay wouldn't apply anyway, unless the project was *owned* by the College. Mr. Raffaelli asked about the effect on the remaining shopping center. Mr. Bogia referred to its several vacant spaces and the time since its full occupancy, considering it 'revitalization'. Asked about kitchen amenities, Mr. Kleckner said each unit would have its own, with many (those with four bedrooms or more) having two bathrooms. Mr. Cinfici appreciated the proposed stairs connecting the neighboring College properties at 1900 and 1940 North 13th Street, where is currently just a sloping lawn. He wondered what type of restaurants they were pursuing. Mr. McLain intended 'good, casual food' of a quality that would attract the business of the general neighborhood. Asked what would become of the displaced tenants, and the availability of the vacancies in the surviving part to accommodate them, Mr. Bogia said that's what he understood to be the aim. Mr. Cinfici wondered how their sizes compared with the still-occupied units. Turning back to the floor plans, Mr. Kleckner measured the restaurant spaces at 3104 and a 2855 square feet, acknowledging that those spaces weren't oriented with the frontage of the shopping center. He said that design could change with the restaurateurs' preferences. Ms. Hoag wondered if the leases would include behavioral policies similar to the on-campus dormitories. Mr. Miller asked for some explanation of the boundary, and the subdivision vis-à-vis the earlier plans for the shopping center. He thought it couldn't be a coincidence that the parcel proposed matched exactly that apparently approved in the 1990 and 1993 'Rockland Plaza' plans. Mr. Bogia said he wasn't yet prepared to answer that definitively, but suspected something wasn't recorded at the time. He mentioned other ongoing research into the easement arrangements. The state of the Richmond Street driveway, the use of that Street for tractor-trailer parking and its effect on sight distances was briefly discussed. Mr. Miller complimented the first effort, noting that more questions seem to surface the closer one looks, and advised the plan be tabled. He appreciated the early architectural presentation. Mr. Bogia intended an itemized response to the Planning Office review.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the '1100 Rockland Street Student Housing' preliminary plan. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the mixed-use student-housing project at 1100 Rockland Street.

Other business:

§603.c.2 conditional use review-436 South 18th Street (conversion) [2:37.28]

Mr. Bealer noted that the building appears to occupy the entire lot, such that no off-street parking could be designed. He said the application refers to 'plenty' available on-street, but countered that claim based on a personal visit to the neighborhood. He mentioned some confusion, from the floor plan itself, regarding the division and the potential building-code complications that might follow. Mr. Lauter read the plan as being limited to one space on each floor. Mr. Miller said that appeared to be Zoning Office's understanding. Mr. Bealer noted a third electric meter. Mr. Miller guessed it might serve the 'common areas' of the property. Mr. Cinfici also interpreted the application as proposing a change of use, from commercial to residential – two spaces, before and after – adding that some history of the commercial occupancy would have been helpful. Mr. Miller said he only received the information a couple days earlier, and that the Zoning Office hadn't yet made its own report. He said the Commission might have another opportunity to consider the matter before the hearing, depending on its scheduling, and with more complete information. Mr. Bealer said that, if the intent is for two units, he'd be more inclined to support the request, while reserving some concern for the parking limitation. Mr. Miller noted that an approval would imply a variance. Mr. Lauter noted a parking deficit, whether the space is used residentially or commercially. He recalled a former dry-cleaning business, and complimented the appearance of the property pictured in the application materials. Mr. Miller agreed the space had to be 'something'. Mr. Cinfici wondered about the use of the basement, and whether it made any difference.

Mr. Lauter moved that the Planning Commission, if correctly understanding the application to propose a commercial-to-residential change, for a total of two units, recommend that City Council approve the conversion, with due consideration of the available parking and identification of the third electric meter. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to recommend that City Council approve the proposed conversion of 436 South 18th Street.

Resolution #15-2016

§508.3 agreement to extension-Nature Place at Angelica Creek Park [2:54.32]

Mr. Miller reported on a requested one-month extension. He thought they might be eligible for a preliminary approval by the May meeting, but that he hadn't yet received a revised plan.

Mr. Bealer moved to extend the review of the 'Nature Place at Angelica Creek Park' plan by one month, as requested in an April 18th email from the project manager. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve a one-month extension for Berks Nature's preliminary land development plan for Angelica Park.

Resolution #16-2016

§207 nominations-2016 Planning Commission office holders [2:55.30]

Mr. Miller characterized it as a reminder to himself, as the by-laws call for those annual assignments at the May meeting, recalling that he'd forgotten to mention it ahead of time the year before. The members discussed their active and expired terms and the increasing documentation required for renewals. Mr. Bealer agreed to handle the conversation.

review the draft March 22, 2016 meeting minutes [2:57.55]

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the March 22nd minutes, with one minor grammatical correction already suggested. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the March meeting minutes.

Resolution #17-2016

Mr. Cinfici moved to adjourn the April meeting. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission adjourned the April 26th meeting. – 10:32p