

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
December 22, 2015 at 7:00 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:

Scott T. Miller, Stackhouse Bensing Inc.
Todd A. Fiucci, Construction Associates LLC
Russell DiGiallorenzo Jr., Russell Plywood Inc.
Stephen Koyste
Andrew J. Barton, Larson Design Group
Gabriel A. Hutchinson, Hutchinson Realty Development LLC
Dee Anderson, Hutchinson Realty Development LLC
Stephen F. DeLucas, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the December meeting to order, reminded presenters to sign the attendance sheet, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Andrew Miller announced that the first scheduled presentation was postponed by its project manager, who'd instead offered an extension agreement. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the December 22nd agenda, as modified. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the December agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Russell Plywood Building Addition – final land development plan [0:01.26]

Scott Miller described the location at the end of Old Wyomissing Road, and a proposed 5576-square-foot building addition and widening of the loading facility to allow better access to it. He estimated the existing facility at 52,236 square feet, and described the zoning variances granted by the Zoning Hearing Board: expansion of an existing non-conforming use in the Preservation district, the setback minimum and coverage maximum. He said a permit has since been issued. The construction type of the addition will match the existing building. He acknowledged the reviews of the Planning Office and Public Works Department, characterizing their content as minor issues that they could satisfactorily resolve. Andrew Miller mentioned additional detail and information requested, including additional stormwater study and documentation. Scott Miller described the existing downspouts, currently discharging at the ground level, to be captured by the new addition and its flows temporarily detained in an underground pipe. He said they'd be meeting with the Public Works Department regarding the water-quality issues. Ms. Hoag noted the addition's close proximity to Wyomissing Creek, with a 'total maximum daily load' regulation for sediment, seeking to determine the discharge location. She mentioned two dumpsters and other debris collecting at the rear of the property, advising that extra care to be taken based on the adjacent Creek. Scott Miller offered a meeting to discuss the matter, adding that his surveyor was unable to locate a discharge pipe. Ms. Hoag thought it somewhere within the 'breezeway' of the existing facility. Asked about the neighboring land ownership, Scott Miller mentioned the route of the Thun Trail as among the concerns raised at the zoning hearing, and some additional landscaping preferred. He said the vegetation management by the utility company, for the overhead electric lines, might make such a landscaping project infeasible given the limited space between it and the edge of the property. Ms. Hoag asked if the neighboring owner was aware of the addition's location. Scott Miller said they were notified as part of the zoning hearing procedure. He said they weren't pursuing any construction easements and that, at only two feet high, the retaining wall wouldn't require the crossties that would require an encroachment. Asked if the addition was for storage, he called it an expansion of the existing uses, including storage and shipping. Mr. Lauter questioned the traffic. Scott Miller referred to prior testimony projecting a reduction in trips, due to the additional storage area. Mr. Raffaelli suggested providing an alternate route, by a new road toward Lancaster Avenue, and questioned the zoning classification of the truck route. Scott Miller described Preservation and Manufacturing-Commercial districts on either side of Old Wyomissing Road, unsure of the whole route. Mr. Raffaelli described the turns from Old Wyomissing Road to Parkside Drive South, to Hancock

Boulevard, to Lancaster Avenue, and finally the West Shore Bypass (US Route 422). Andrew Miller thought that route crossed through several zoning districts. Mr. Raffaelli noted the Residential 1 zoning in the vicinity of the project, and prior additions having been approved with the same questions and concerns about traffic impacts. He said that impact has increased over the years, becoming a '24/7' nuisance. Mr. DiGiallorenzo countered that his business is open 'five days a week'. Mr. Raffaelli claimed the trucks arriving afterhours and on weekends tend to park in the residential setting of the 700 block of Old Wyomissing Road, rather than at the business location, and are kept running throughout the night, disturbing the residents. He mentioned the Schuylkill River Greenway Association having conveyed to Russell Plywood the land around the Thun Trail, suggesting a new path available to Lancaster Avenue. Mr. DiGiallorenzo explained that the width suggested crosses into a neighboring property (Reigel Enterprises Inc.). Mr. Raffaelli said some of it belonged to Russell Plywood, and that they should 'work it out' with that neighbor. Andrew Miller considered the difficulties in making a new intersection at Lancaster Avenue and Morgantown Road, especially for the intended left turns toward the Bypass. Mr. Raffaelli mentioned the safety and quality-of-life concerns at issue in the current route, and the damages to the street surfacing. Mr. DiGiallorenzo disagreed with the characterization of the amount of land under his control for the development of a new street. Mr. Raffaelli thought they should pursue it. Andrew Miller countered several of the assumptions, explaining that the suggested route is not a public right-of-way, is not on Russell Plywood's land, and would likely involve a complicated design and permitting process in connecting it to an already complex intersection. Mr. Raffaelli said the residents of a Residential 1 district pay higher taxes, and expect safe, tree-lined streets. He doubted the heavy trucking would be tolerated in other comparable neighborhoods. Asked for additional explanation of the traffic projections, showing a reduction, Mr. DiGiallorenzo mentioned another facility in West Reading, to and from which they currently 'shuttle' about ten trucks daily. He said consolidating that part of the operation with the Old Wyomissing Road location will reduce those trips to about one a week. He said the traffic associated with the receiving of initial materials and shipping of their finished products wouldn't change. Asked for the specific numbers, Scott Miller answered that he hadn't brought them. Andrew Miller intended to seek the transcript of the zoning hearing. Ms. Hoag suggested informing the drivers, thinking the problem behaviors may be limited to a few offenders. Mr. DiGiallorenzo considered adding a written policy with their purchase orders. Mr. Lauter referred to a recent ordinance prohibiting truck parking in certain areas and at certain times, unsure of its exact terms, but to involve posted signage where applicable. He said he would prefer to review the traffic counts and projections. Mr. Cincici recalled similar problems in the College Heights neighborhood, and the enforcement efforts since. He understood the disturbance caused by the passing of trucks and the idling of their diesel engines.

Mr. Koyste, identifying himself as a neighbor for 49 years in the 700 block of Old Wyomissing Road, complimented the business, and described another issue related to the damage in the asphalt paving. He said that as repairs and voids had previously been filled with cinders, which react with and deteriorate the cast iron water pipes, the vibration of the passing vehicles breaks up the sediments therein, which then flow to his house and destroy his water heaters. He mentioned purchasing several replacements over the years and the need to fully drain his house lines following service interruptions. He said the area needs new piping.

The discussion turned toward the location of municipal boundaries, and the municipal land ownership complicating that picture. Andrew Miller said he was not recommending approval, given the 'final' status of the plan and the corrections and other reviews still required.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the final plan, requested that the zoning hearing transcript be provided ahead of any subsequent consideration and, if not included, that present and projected traffic counts be studied and provided. He asked that the recently-ordained parking restrictions be considered, as well. Mr. Bealer seconded. Andrew Miller recalled another, earlier ordinance, also restricting truck parking and based on the adjacent zoning districts. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the 'Russell Plywood Building Addition' final plan.

S. 6th Street Family Dollar – final land development plan [0:57.49]

Ms. Anderson thanked the Commission for its patience and introduced their new engineer. She said everyone on the City's side was 'extremely helpful' in making that transition. Mr. Barton said they became involved on December 1st, and still needed to conduct their own site survey and stormwater testing. He said they submitted 'something' in order to make the December 8th deadline intending to follow up later with the details. He called the latest design 'pretty similar' to what the Commission had already seen. He mentioned some modification to the layout at the rear of the building, in order to facilitate easier trash pickups. He said the stormwater management plan changed from the infiltration chamber beneath the parking lot to a simpler rain garden design in the landscaping area at the northeast corner, with the roof leaders to be connected. He mentioned some additional changes to the grading plan, details added for the accessible ramps, the building height, and truck access. Mr. Raffaelli asked if all the requirements had been addressed. Andrew Miller said he was still reviewing the follow-up plan, delivered December 18th. Asked about a proposed fire hydrant relocation and some earlier confusion regarding the stormwater piping arrangement, Mr. Barton said the Fire Department had okayed the new hydrant

location, and the storm sewer issue was made moot by the design of the rain garden basin. Mr. Bealer asked about the position of the Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB). Mr. Barton referred to the latest rendering, which he understood to reflect the conditions of the HARB's October approval. Ms. Anderson said the only issue remaining concerned the color of the window glass. Mr. Hutchinson described the other changes made: a front parapet 'return' along the side of the building, brick soldier courses at the window openings, additional pilaster detailing, and brick pavers surfacing the loading areas. He believed they'd also satisfied the outstanding utility service questions. Mr. Barton confirmed that they had, except for the natural gas supply, though its proposed lateral is now shown on the plan. Mr. Hutchinson continued, noting the revised photometrics of the site lighting and the means of illuminating the signage, the relocation of all the gutter downspouts to the rear of the building, a roof sloping from the front toward the rear in a way that will screen the rooftop material, the parapet to screen the heating and ventilation equipment, landscaping and recessed windows to enhance the South 6th Street façade, canopies, gooseneck-styled lights and real brick. He said the HARB will be monitoring the site during construction. Mr. Lauter asked about the look of the reverse side of the 'signage parapet' extending further above the primary parapet and without the return along the sides. Mr. Hutchinson answered that it would be metal panel. Mr. Raffaelli asked for a discussion outside the meeting. Andrew Miller said he wasn't comfortable with any such recess. Messrs. Raffaelli and Bealer excused themselves for a conversation outside the meeting. Upon returning, Mr. Raffaelli complimented the developer's effort, and that of the new design consultant only involved a couple weeks prior. Asked about the time available, Andrew Miller confirmed that they were still within the statutory allowance. Mr. Raffaelli hoped that everything would be resolved in-time for the January meeting.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the 'S. 6th Street Family Dollar' plan. Mr. Lauter seconded. Andrew Miller said he was more confident in the latest version he'd received, based on a first glance, and understood the HARB to be more satisfied with the façade details included. Ms. Hoag agreed that the first impression was positive. Asked if they'd yet submitted to the Berks County Conservation District, Mr. Barton said not, needing to first complete the infiltration testing and a grading design that would affect the design of the erosion and sedimentation controls. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Family Dollar final plan.

Other business:

§603.c.2 conditional use review-403 Elm Street (conversion) [1:22.41]

Mr. Raffaelli referred to the written recommendation against the application provided by the Zoning Office. Mr. Cinfici observed that some of the plan's area totals didn't equal the sum of the room-by-room measures, and criticized the applicant's subjective statements in support of the conversion. He suggested that, having been designed as a single unit, it should so remain. Mr. Raffaelli quoted that section of the Zoning Ordinance prohibiting new conversions in the Residential 3 zoning district. Mr. Cinfici added that unpermitted construction can't continue being a means of getting a 'foot in the door' toward recognition of additional units. Mr. Bealer noted that certain occupants of the home represented a potential danger never disclosed to the neighbors.

Mr. Bealer moved to recommend City Council's denial of the additional dwelling unit, for those reasons identified by the Zoning Office. Mr. Cinfici seconded. Mr. Raffaelli asked if would help to include, within their recommendation, an order to remove the unpermitted work. Andrew Miller thought that unnecessary, having seen such orders attached by City Council in their denials of previous applications. And the Commission voted unanimously to recommend that City Council deny the proposed conversion of 403 Elm Street.

Resolution #59-2015

Mr. Cinfici wondered whether there were any City programs incentivizing the de-conversion of multi-unit residences back to their single arrangements. Andrew Miller recalled that having been considered in the past, with regard to the expense. Mr. Bealer remembered talk of reserving a portion of the City's Community Development Block Grant funds to do so, before said funds were redirected. Mr. Lauter remembered a one-time moratorium on new conversions. Andrew Miller noted a weakness in a moratorium, and other stand-alone acts regulating land use, when it's never followed by the necessary amendments to the existing regulations that still provide for the suspended activity.

§513.a approval reaffirmation-DoubleTree Hotel Project [1:31.50]

Andrew Miller said the plan had already been signed by the Commission, and has been delayed since by questions over the improvements agreement.

Mr. Bealer moved to again reaffirm the March revision plan approval for the DoubleTree Hotel Project. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to reaffirm their March 24th approval, Resolution No. 14-2015, for the 'DoubleTree Hotel Project' revision-to-record land development plan.

Resolution #60-2015

§513.a approval reaffirmation-Hydrojet, Inc. [1:33.41]

Mr. Lauter moved to reaffirm the September revision plan approval for Hydrojet, Inc. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to reaffirm their September 22nd approval, Resolution No. 47-2015, for the 'Hydrojet, Inc.' revision-to-record land development plan.

Resolution #61-2015

review the draft November 4, 2015 meeting minutes [1:34.01]

Mr. Bealer identified a few grammatical errors.

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the November 4th minutes, with the requested corrections. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the November 4th meeting minutes.

Resolution #62-2015

review the draft November 24, 2015 meeting minutes [1:38.43]

Mr. Cinfici found one grammatical error. Mr. Lauter requested a clarification.

Mr. Bealer moved to accept the November 24th minutes, as corrected. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the November 24th meeting minutes.

Resolution #63-2015

advertisement-the 2016 Planning Commission regular meeting dates [1:43.07]

Andrew Miller explained that he'd forgotten to discuss the next year's schedule at the November meeting, and had since been asked for the dates. Not finding any public holidays conflicting, he'd advertised the 'fourth Tuesdays' of each month, continuing the 2015 pattern.

Mr. Cinfici moved to accept the 2016 meeting schedule, as advertised. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to continue the 'fourth Tuesday' meeting schedule through 2016.

Resolution #64-2015

Mr. Raffaelli made some year-end observations on the Commission's membership and function.

§508.3 agreement to extension-3150 S.F. Building Addition at 1001 Lancaster Avenue [1:50.06]

Andrew Miller, almost forgetting the first item of the agenda, reminded the Commission of the time extension offered on the Piazza application.

Mr. Bealer moved to extend the review of the '3150 S.F. Building Addition at 1001 Lancaster Avenue' plan by three months, as requested in a December 22nd letter emailed from the project manager. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve a three-month extension for the Piazza Honda and Acura dealerships' final subdivision and land development plan.

Resolution #65-2015

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the December meeting. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission adjourned the December 22nd meeting. – 8:52p