

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
February 26, 2013 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
Michael E. Lauter, Secretary
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Assistant Secretary

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office
Twila J. Ramirez, Department of Community Development

Others present:

Michael D. Hartman, dH Enterprises Inc.
David M. Settle, Aurora Architecture
Gregg A. Bogia, Bogia Engineering Inc.
James W. Miller Jr., MBC Development LP
Carole Duran, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the February meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Bealer moved to accept the February 26th agenda. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the February agenda.

consideration of newspaper corral regulation and location in the Commercial Core [0:00.40]

Ms. Ramirez thanked Mr. Bealer for his help in gathering some background information. She then distributed some photographs depicting the style chosen as a standard. She explained that it was a joint effort of the City's Community Development Department, the Mayor's Downtown Task Force and the Downtown Improvement District, all in pursuit of the state's Main Street Program designation. She said the corrals are retractable/expandable to accommodate different numbers of vending machines. She couldn't commit to exact locations before another meeting with the vendors, for their input. She said twenty units are projected, at \$1297 each, for a total expenditure of \$25,940. The corrals will organize what is currently a scattered distribution of vending machines, often chained to light and sign poles. She mentioned that the City of Philadelphia uses the same. Permits have always been required, but the process wasn't enforced. Mr. Raffaelli questioned the "catering" and public spending on behalf of those violating an existing rule. Mr. Bealer mentioned that the discussion started in 2008, as the Vending License Board was established. He said they didn't envision another such board, but a permitting process. Asked about an application/permit fee, Ms. Ramirez mentioned a planned \$25 levy. Mr. Lauter thought the fees should cover the cost the corrals. Mr. Raffaelli wondered if the fronting property owners would have a right to refuse placements in front of their businesses, and how future expansions would be considered. Ms. Ramirez said they've established a number based on one meeting with the vendors. She said Philadelphia uses a lottery to award the preferred placements. Asked if anyone would be exempt from the regulations, Ms. Ramirez wasn't sure. She was also asked if the curb-side placements of the boxes would result in any parking or loading restrictions. Andrew Miller suggested that any organization would be better than none but, considering the photographs, warned they could be targets for graffiti. Ms. Ramirez said the Downtown Improvement District will take responsibility for their maintenance, and 'resistant' materials have been specified. Mr. Bealer said the corrals would prevent the damage to property from chained boxes. Mr. Raffaelli suggested they cut the chains and collected the violating boxes for disposal. Andrew Miller said there was no draft ordinance, but suggested the Commission take the opportunity to comment on the proposal. Ms. Ramirez didn't anticipate changes to the regulations, but rather an implementation of permitting and enforcement. Asked about the number of existing boxes, Ms. Ramirez wasn't sure, but guessed over one hundred. She said that most of the vendors at the initial meeting weren't upset, and simply wanted direction on the new process. Mr. Bealer noted that the locally-based Rose Corporation will fabricate the corrals.

Humane Society Building Addition – final land development plan [0:21.11]

Mr. Hartman explained that the surgical suite is currently housed in a trailer. The Society wants to modernize it, their cattery and kennel facilities. The remaining area will be used to organize the employee off-street parking. He said they didn't anticipate any increase in employment. Recognizing that the plan wasn't yet eligible for approval, he said the architect planned to attend the next meeting to discuss the building design. Mr. Bealer, referring to a question in the staff review, opined that the missing sidewalk on Bern Street would be required based on the precedent of other nearby projects. Asked about the function of the Bern Street driveway, Mr. Hartman said he wasn't sure, and was himself waiting on a response to that question. He guessed it was a vestige from before the

Humane Society's occupancy and conversion. Mr. Bealer asked about the existing trees. Mr. Hartman said every effort would be made to preserve the front yard trees, though one may be removed because of its condition. Andrew Miller said the Zoning Ordinance may also bear on that count. He agreed the Commission couldn't yet take action, but felt his own review was limited to the standard issues.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the plan, pending other requisite reviews and permits. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Humane Society's final plan.

Rockland Professional Center Renovation (Albright College) – sketch land development plan [0:32.46]

Mr. Settle, himself an architect but acting in this case as the College's project manager, explained the existing and planned use of the Rockland Center. He said it has been leased as professional office space, to include doctors' offices and a state senator. He said College functions have migrated into those spaces, and additional classroom and office space is needed. He said the current tenants will vacate their spaces by June 1st, except for the Wells Fargo bank branch which provides services to the College. The rest of the building will undergo a complete renovation, and include an addition on the North 13th Street side. It will function as a new entrance vestibule and lobby, and an informal gathering space. Essentially a two-story open stair with a glass façade, it will help light the building by day, and project an inviting light outward at night. The stair will complement the existing elevator core, for primary circulation. An existing entrance from the west, from the off-street parking, will remain. Mr. Bealer suggested an emergency exit at the bottom of the new stairs. Mr. Settle said the record architect has elected to include a second-floor automatic fire shutter, to close the stair and direct egress to the existing emergency stair towers. Explaining the still-separate parcels, he said the College has non- and for-profit management entities, with differing taxing statuses. The parcels were treated as one for the original (1987) land development approval. Andrew Miller noted that plan had never been recorded, though evidence of its approval is in the meeting minutes. He said that if that status were to change, the parcels should be combined by recording a new legal description. Mr. Settle assured the zoning standards work in either configuration, except the front yard setback which must be appealed. He said the zoning at the time of the original construction required only a five-foot setback, which they'd prefer to match. Asked about the classroom numbers, he counted 14 rooms, for between 25- and 50-person capacities, and some conference spaces. Mr. Lauter expressed concern for the potential increase in foot traffic crossing North 13th Street. Mr. Settle mentioned crosswalks and a light at the Rockland Street intersection, and a stop sign at Richmond Street. He elaborated on the architectural plan, including interior translucent partitions that will allow day-lighting of the hallways, informal "break-out" spaces for group work, a Bloomberg Terminal for finance/business students, and a coffee counter on the ground floor. He mentioned that the building serves an accredited degree program for non-traditional and working students, and is typically open between 8a and 9p.

Given the limited increase in building size, and the presentation provided, Mr. Bealer moved to waive further review, in exchange for a revised copy of the sketch plan, to be handled by the Planning Office staff. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the sketch plan in lieu of a formal record land development plan.

Resolution #1-2013

219 Buttonwood Land Development (Dollar General) – preliminary land development plan [1:02.40]

Mr. Bogia explained that the site was formerly occupied by Argo Furniture, before being destroyed in a fire. He said the Redevelopment Authority had since demolished and cleared the site. A standard Dollar General "prototype" would take its place, and on a site larger than absolutely necessary, allowing for landscaping of the excess. He called the site a good business opportunity to pick up foot traffic. He presented some renderings of the building materials and textures: split-faced block on the front elevation and metal siding on the rest of a prefabricated steel building. Mr. Raffaelli cautioned that smooth and uninterrupted aluminum siding is often a target for graffiti. Ideas were floated on possible remedies, such as resistant paint, security cameras, a mural, color variation, banding patterns, additional lighting, faux windows, et cetera. James Miller said his company had previously built about 15 of the stores, and never had an issue with graffiti. He appreciated the point, adding that he was open to the suggestions, but noted that two of the three sides would be rendered inaccessible by fencing. Possible types of fencing were discussed, and whether it could be 'seen through'. Andrew Miller felt the proposed landscaping would make a dramatic visual impact. He asked a few other questions about the plan itself, including the fate of several brick pillars and a macadam area on the Buttonwood Street side. He requested additional information on the environmental assessment underway. Mr. Bogia elaborated on the proposed site lighting. Asked if he had any specific questions about the Planning Office review, he alluded only to the requested waivers. Andrew Miller deferred to the City Engineer's judgment of the stormwater issues. He said the Commission couldn't act on the plan without a zoning permit and County Planning review. He added that he wasn't opposed to inviting a final plan in the meantime.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the preliminary plan for the 219 Buttonwood Land Development. Mr. Bealer

seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Dollar General preliminary plan.

§603.c.2 conditional use review-600 North 12th Street (conversion) [1:29.31]

Andrew Miller mentioned ambiguities and conflicts in the City record, but evidence of a commercial space with two residential units, or three residential units without commercial. Asked if the commercial space had been in residential use, he thought it appeared to be, unsure by what process. He said it had been inspected and documented as it is proposed, but that those records don't reveal *permission*. He characterized it as a question of 'existing condition', and added that the Commission rarely gets enough of that background to formulate a clear recommendation. Mr. Lauter asked about the 'availability' of the off-street parking, and its assignment by lease. Andrew Miller said its existence has been verified, while its use should be an obvious condition of approval. Members agreed that the parking issue was the foremost concern.

Mr. Bealer moved to recommend City Council approve the application if the balance of the evidence, including the payment history of fees, shows a three-unit configuration, whether commercial or residential, and provided the off-street parking spaces are included in the lease of the apartments. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to recommend conditions of the approval of the 600 North 12th Street to City Council, for its hearing on March 4th.

Resolution #2-2013

review the draft November 27, 2012 meeting minutes [1:42.35]

Mr. Bealer noted one grammatical error. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the November meeting minutes, with the requested correction. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the corrected November 27th meeting minutes.

Resolution #3-2013

review the draft 2012 Planning Commission Annual Report [1:43.24]

Mr. Bealer suggested a few edits and other clarifications. He then moved to accept the draft 2012 annual report, for its general content. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept their draft 2012 Annual Report.

Resolution #4-2013

By unanimous consent, the Commission adjourned the February 26th meeting. – 8:49p