

**Minutes**  
**Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission**  
**July 23, 2013 at 7:00 pm**

**Members present:**

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

**Staff present:**

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office  
Charles M. Jones, Department of Public Works

**Others present:**

Peter C. Eisenbrown, LTL Consultants Ltd.  
Theodore Bassano, Reading Area Community College  
Michael D. Hartman, dH Enterprises Inc.  
Lee C. Olsen, Olsen Design Group Architects Inc.  
Karel I. Minor, Humane Society of Berks County  
Martin Deutschman, Stichler Products Inc.  
Bradley Deutschman, Stichler Products Inc.  
David S. Johnson, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the July meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the July 23rd agenda. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the July agenda.

**Subdivision and Land Development:**

Student Lot F (Reading Area Community College) – parking lot land development plan [0:00.40]

Mr. Eisenbrown described the boundaries of the site, estimating ‘a little over five acres’. He said the College aims to demolish one of the existing buildings and, in a second phase, construct a 237-space parking lot. He recalled the May 28th presentation of the College master plan’s recommendations on traffic patterns, adding that the parking plan was consistent, specifically that it would be set back further from Chestnut in case it is widened. He acknowledged the staff reviews from the Planning Office and Public Works Department, indicating that they would comply with each. He passed a copy of the Conservation District’s approval of the erosion controls, received earlier that day. He described the landscaping, generally matching that of the neighboring lots. Mr. Miller cautioned that the landscaping proposed along South 2nd Street may be ‘too generous’ and impact the existing, mature trees. Mr. Eisenbrown said they’d consider that, address the staff comments, and return the following month. Mr. Miller submitted some additional written comments. Asked about the west side of the property, what looked from the plan to be another street, Mr. Miller clarified was a railroad spur. Mr. Lauter asked about potential street trees for the Chestnut Street frontage. Mr. Eisenbrown said the College preferred to delay that until the implementation of the traffic/street plan. He explained the two entrance driveways, opposite the entrances to the neighboring lot. Addressing a recommendation to extend/return the sidewalk from South 2nd Street to the first driveway, Mr. Eisenbrown agreed, only preferring that it be positioned with the same recognition of the possible street changes. Mr. Miller described the plan as a ‘placeholder’ until other projects in the master plan are developed. Mr. Lauter asked if there were any special uses or restrictions on the parking. Mr. Eisenbrown called it ‘student parking’, and in an arrangement ready to absorb their needs in the event of a new building on existing parking lots. He noted that it may not be developed immediately upon demolition of the building. Asked about circulation during potential ‘peak periods’, Mr. Eisenbrown thought class schedules were staggered enough that mass departures were rare. Questioned on the use and occupancy of the remaining building, Mr. Bassano described it as a storage building for their maintenance staff, and not ‘occupied’. Mr. Eisenbrown described the intent to close the gaps in the fence made by the demolition, and recent conversations with the Public Works Department about the arrangement and capping of existing sewer lines. He expected the request for demolition bids shortly, adding that it has to be down by the end of the year. Mr. Miller advised the Commission to table the plan for technical reasons.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the parking plan, pending zoning approval and the revisions requested in the staff reviews. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the “Student Lot F” parking plan.

Humane Society Building Addition – final land development plan [0:21.00]

Mr. Hartman said that, since the last presentation, they'd gained design variances through a zoning hearing. He thanked the Commission for accommodating the late submission of their revisions. Mr. Miller felt the plan was nearly complete and deferred to the architect, making his first appearance for the project. Mr. Olsen presented a floor plan contrasting the existing and proposed portions. He described the proposed single-story addition: a new main entrance on Bern Street (the North 11th Street door will remain available as an egress), its vestibule, the expansion of the dog kennels, a new surgical suite and veterinary services. He intended a façade design that at once celebrates the happier parts of the operation, while respecting their more difficult experiences. An associated logo will be applied to certain parts of the exterior walls. The addition includes additional fenestration intended for the day-lighting benefit. They are currently estimating the cost of re-siding the existing building, in order to match the addition. Asked if the operation required any special ventilation designs, Mr. Minor mentioned some industry standards that call for extra turnover in certain areas (*e.g.* the cat kennels) and reduced flow in others (*e.g.* the veterinary section), with standard rates in the office sections. Mr. Olsen added that the arrangement of the windows will provide a natural, cross ventilation when open. Mr. Minor noted that the current 'indoor-outdoor' layout of the dog kennel will be fully enclosed with the renovation, making it outwardly quieter and easier for climate control. Mr. Miller said he was looking for that, and some other management practices to be explained in the plan notes. Mr. Minor said the cat kennel is the oldest part of the facility, dating to the 1950s. It and some other dated arrangements have prevented them from qualifying for a national accreditation. Asked about potential changes in employment, Mr. Minor ruled out any increase to the approximately 30 full-time, though the new efficiencies would allow them to serve additional clients. Continuing with the architectural presentation, Mr. Olsen described a standing-seam metal roof, metal siding, and split-faced block around the base, all with double-glazed low-emissivity glass. Sun screens, with laser-cut detailing, will attenuate solar gain on the southern and western aspects. He said they weren't applying for a LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) certification, but were using that 'judgment' in parts. Mr. Bealer recalled a previous question about carcass disposal. Mr. Minor said they have a private contractor, who removes them to a dedicated crematorium and mass burial, a change from the rendering-plant operation used when they were performing a 'patrol' function for the City and experienced a much higher volume. He characterized most of their euthanasia cases as at the request of pet owners who want the remains returned. He said the renovation will allow a more discrete access for that contractor.

Asked about the development of the landscaping plan, especially the boundary screening, Mr. Hartman explained the survey's revelations about the boundary. He said the corner markers apparently predate or preclude their half of a vacated alley. He proposed an arborvitae row, maturing to a four- to six-foot spread and ten-foot height. Bradley Deutschman expressed concern for that choice and its maintenance. Martin Deutschman suggested holly, and preferred a fence or wall. Mr. Minor noted the potential for vehicular damage to a fence line. He committed to maintaining whatever was planted, but preferred the species selection be left to their landscaper. Mr. Miller added that they typically allow such change orders by professionals, and cited the narrow width as a survival concern. Martin Deutschman said they had maintained the area for twenty years and noted the size of their existing trees. Mr. Miller explained that the City's requirements focus on the screening effect. Martin Deutschman complained of trespass by the Humane Society, thinking the holly would more-effectively delineate the boundary. He said they may elect to install a fence on their side either way. Mr. Miller asked if the requested stormwater documentation had been provided to the Public Works Department. Mr. Hartman thought so. Mr. Jones said the response letter noted the modest increase in impervious coverage, but did not address what appeared to be drainage to the neighboring property across the north boundary. Mr. Hartman characterized a 'shared depression', and his difficulty in designing a swale to reach North 11th Street. Mr. Jones speculated on an infiltration practice, but noted the narrow space available. Mr. Hartman said he'd reassess the grading, and look to restrict the flow. With Mr. Jones's consent, Mr. Miller suggested an approval based on that redesign and the remaining corrections specified in the Planning Office and Public Works reviews. Upon additional questions about resolution of the screening issue, Mr. Miller said they will verify the quantity and placement of the landscaping, deferring to the Humane Society's landscaping contractor for the appropriate varieties. He felt the Commission's responsibility was to assure the intended effects (*e.g.* screening, shade, urban cooling, nuisance abatement, *et cetera*). Martin Deutschman objected to the Humane Society's sole discretion in replacing mature trees. Mr. Miller repeated that the ordinances require an 'effective screen', implying a minimum quantity to achieve. Martin Deutschman objected to arborvitae. Mr. Minor insisted they rely on the recommendations of their landscaping professional, rather than a neighbor's preferences, and cited the charitable nature of the organization. Mr. Bealer noted the Zoning Hearing Board's role in varying the required setbacks. Mr. Miller identified the assumptions held prior to the boundary survey as an underlying issue. He thought the more-substantive nuisance abatement would be the rearrangement and 'internalizing' of the kennels. Mr. Olsen, with a sketch on a white board, rendered a continuous evergreen screen maturing to eight feet in height and intersecting. The massing seemed to satisfy each party, at least. There was a brief discussion about involving the City Arborist in the plant selection.

Mr. Bealer moved to grant final approval, on the conditions of an effective landscaped screen, reaching eight feet at maturity and subject to the input of a competent landscaping professional, and the satisfaction of the remaining Planning Office and Public Works review comments. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the Humane Society's final plan, on the aforementioned conditions.

**Resolution #23-2013**

**Other business:**

review the draft June 25, 2013 meeting minutes [1:16.43]

Mr. Bealer sought a couple clarifications. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the June meeting minutes, as corrected. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the June 25th meeting minutes.

**Resolution #24-2013**

The members briefly discussed the construction progress observed on some recently-approved land developments.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the July meeting. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the July 23rd meeting. – 8:27p