

**Minutes**  
**Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission**  
**March 22, 2016 at 7:03 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:**

Robert E. Korp, Barry Isett & Associates Inc.  
Kimberly J. Murphy, Berks Nature  
Charles M. Rubendall, Witman Engineers & Consultants LLC  
Dale C. Egan, Egan & Egan LLC  
Thomas P. Egan, Egan & Egan LLC  
Michelle N. Lynch, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the March meeting to order and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Miller said there were no formal changes, but didn't expect a presentation of the 'Family Dollar' plan. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the March 22nd agenda, as presented. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the March agenda.

**Subdivision and Land Development:**

Nature Place at Angelica Creek Park – preliminary land development plan [0:01.03]

Ms. Murphy introduced herself, recalled Berks Nature's former identity as the Berks County Conservancy, and distributed the organization's information packet describing, among its other missions, the programming in Angelica Park. She offered an apology for their absence from the February 23rd meeting, described as a miscommunication with the City administration. She said she was very excited by the project, mentioned the 99-year lease from the City, and their stewardship in the Park for the last five years, including that of the former 'boathouse' already functioning as an environmental-education center. Mr. Korp distributed copies of a written point-by-point response to the Planning Office and Public Works Department reviews, as well as a couple requested waivers. He described the site as a small portion of a larger City-owned property, adjoining the existing boathouse, with an approximately 4700-square-foot footprint. He mentioned the existing network of pedestrian pathways, to be improved and widened. Some grade changes are required and a small retaining wall would be constructed from boulders, either reclaimed from the excavation or imported as necessary. He noted the trees to be removed, while attempting to minimize their disturbance, given the 'environmental' mission and location in a rural setting. He said the existing on-lot septic system and its 'secondary absorption area' will be protected and maintained throughout the construction activity. An underground stormwater collection system will route approximately half the drainage to the wetland areas, while the other half will be intercepted by a proposed 'raingarden' feature. He said they'd submitted to Berks County Conservation District, and expected that approval once the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and United States Fish and Wildlife Service clear a turtle-habitat investigation being conducted by a 'subconsultant'. He described proposed lighting in the parking lot, and bollard lighting along the paths between it and the building. He mentioned some additional landscaping along those paths, also serving a water-quality function and to be explained by interpretive signage. He showed the building elevations, depicting the application of a stone veneer on the lower portion and reclaimed mushroom wood in a shiplap-formed siding above it. Glazing will take advantage of the wetlands overlook and be etched to deter bird strikes. Turning to the review correspondence, he focused on a couple points. He intended to provide the requested information on the October 2013 'triparty lease' agreement. He said the project is distinct and unrelated to Alvernia University's designs on Saint Bernardine Street. The existing septic system has been determined to provide sufficient capacity for the expansion. A 'play area' depicted is intended for natural materials – logs, boulders, et cetera – 'harvested' from the construction. Recent consultation with the City's Fire Marshal, and a decision to include a sprinkler system, will result in a design placing the fire-department connection along Saint Bernardine Street, as it was considered too disruptive to undertake the required stabilization and turning dimensions any closer to the building. An existing fire hydrant will remain. Addressing the typically-required curb and sidewalk, he again referred to the rural, park

setting, the existing walking paths, and requested waivers thinking it inappropriate in that context. He said the rest of the review comments would be addressed with the final submission, and requested preliminary approval. Mr. Miller appreciated the detailed response to the staff reviews, clarifying that the same should be reflected in additional features and notes on the plan. He offered his own support for the requested waivers. Asked if the proposed lighting would be hardwired or rely on photovoltaic charging, Mr. Korp answered 'wired', due in part to the tree cover, and equipped with daylight sensors. Ms. Hoag asked about the pedestrian trail's width vis-à-vis accessibility minimums. Mr. Korp said 'ten feet', and tied in to the existing gravel paths. Cautioned on the potential intrusion by motorized vehicles, he suggested bollards might be used to restrict the entrances. Mr. Miller recalled a nearby experience where such a constricted entry proved at odds with the accessibility minimum. Ms. Murphy related her organization's experience in managing the trails on Neversink Mountain, but yet to notice that problem in their time at Angelica Park. Ms. Hoag said she had personally witnessed it. Asked to clarify some of the areas intended for asphalt paving, Mr. Korp mentioned the possibility of pervious paving, while noting the limited benefit and increased cost. Mr. Miller noted a 'diminishing return' where its maintenance is neglected.

Mr. Lauter asked for more explanation of the intended occupancy and use of the building. Ms. Murphy said that, once finished, the building will serve as Berks Nature's headquarters and offices, with some educational programming and events extending into the weekends, as they've used the boathouse portion since its conversion. She said the new construction will include two conference rooms, available for public meetings and school field trips. She added that 3000 students had attended programs in May 2015. Questioned on the meaning and use of the mushroom wood intended for the siding, Mr. Korp described its use in the bedding bins for mushroom farming, reclaimed and cleaned for other applications. Ms. Murphy added that it is typically cypress or hemlock. She found a supplier that cleans and offers it as a cladding material and, while the architect had originally specified a wood with a stain, she preferred the mushroom wood's unique look and reported maintenance benefits. The discussion continued regarding the wood's dimensional availability, its resistance to the elements and longevity, and even the potential for woodpecker damage. Ms. Murphy counted 'about 80 species' of birds having been identified in the Park, naming the red-winged blackbird as a particular nuisance. She said an oil-based finish was recommended. Concerning the insect vectors often associated with wetlands, she remarked that a functioning wetland is itself an ecosystem, and distinct from the ordinary hazards of stagnant water. She said they hoped to begin construction in May, estimating ten to twelve months for completion. In terms of overlap or complications with Alvernia University's own designs on the Park, and Saint Bernardine Street in particular, she believed they were hoping to start 'this spring' as well, and, given Burkey Construction Company's involvement in both projects, some basic coordination was possible. Asked about the anticipated disruption to the Park, during construction, she said they were still planning to continue using the existing building for the duration. Mr. Korp indicated that six-foot chain-link construction fencing would surround the disturbance, but be moved as the construction focus moves. A split-rail-type fence is proposed in other areas identified for permanent fencing. Ms. Hoag noticed a proposed building corner in close proximity to the primary septic absorption area. Mr. Korp intended to 'fence off' both it and the secondary area. Discussion turned to the location of the regulated floodplain, and the 2015 rate-map revision finally reflecting the effects of the 2001 dam breach and draining of the lake. Mr. Korp said his firm performed additional field surveying to verify those elevations. Ms. Murphy highlighted an end of the building that will face the wetland, with a classroom and large sliding doors, in an attempt to enhance the learning environment. Mr. Korp explained that a fence atop the proposed boulder wall is merely decorative, the height of the wall nowhere exceeding three feet. He said the shown location of a 10-by-20-foot tool shed may not be its ultimate placement, but is depicted for the purposes of the footprint and measure of impervious cover. Ms. Murphy said it is meant for garden tools and in a look complementing the main building. Mr. Miller asked about the provisions for landscaping, including any offsets for the removed trees, well aware of Berks Nature's ongoing efforts at cultivation elsewhere within the Park, but noting the size of those targeted for removal. He said he'd prefer additional removals where the impact of the construction is in doubt, with a plan of appropriate locations for their replacements. Ms. Murphy said some are hazardous and need to come down anyway. She hoped to confer with the City arborists, for assessments, namely those around the play area. For now, the landscaping plan is limited to the needs of the rain garden and that along the pathways. Ms. Hoag suggested a possible 'on-site' meeting with the City officials involved, recalling the understandings it provided for another recent project on City-owned land. Mr. Korp indicated a couple additional trees proposed in the parking lot, and cited sunlight availability as a consideration in the limitation. Ms. Murphy committed to the use of native species, being an appropriate reflection on the organization's commitment. Mr. Raffaelli asked about the intention for their present offices in the former 'water works superintendent' building at 25 North 11th Street. Ms. Murphy said, having itself been occupied by a long-term lease, it would revert to the City. She'd heard rumors of its possible use by the Reading Recreation Commission, and hoped that their own approximately \$550,000 investment wouldn't be lost in a vacant building.

Mr. Cinfici asked about the legal question, stemming from a recent finding of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources that the City has violated the recreational-use limitations of the Park

imposed as a condition of some grant funding in the 1960s and 1970s. Ms. Hoag said it had not yet been resolved. Ms. Murphy thought that resolution likely to take years, adding that her organization is working closely with the City to identify replacement lands acceptable to the National Park Service. She said they had a lease with the City and were 'entitled to proceed'. Mr. Miller said he was waiting for further direction, and wasn't advising approval. He said time remains in the Planning Code's allowance, thinking that deadline further complicated by the City's ownership. Ms. Murphy understood the current City position to treat the entire park as having been 'converted', and suggested possible 'repercussions' for violations of the lease. Mr. Korp requested that the plan be considered on its own merits. Mr. Raffaelli thought the Commission receptive to the project, but preferred they heed the recommendation to table the plan. As the conversation turned toward speculation on other possible shortcuts to its approval, Mr. Miller resisted, noting work to be done in the meantime. Ms. Murphy stressed their need to 'move forward' on this \$4 million project, expecting bid documents by April 1st. Mr. Miller countered that their deadlines, and their decision to submit building plans and issue bid documents concurrently, were not reasons to preempt the Commission's role. Ms. Murphy noted that the project had been evolving 'for over five years', and with the City's participation. She characterized the issues as 'administrative' and outside Berks Nature's control and fault. Mr. Bealer cautioned that the authority for that resolution lies elsewhere and, if ruled in a way different than they anticipate, there could be even costlier consequences. Mr. Miller acknowledged having had the opportunity to participate in some of the early design discussions, while comparing the relatively limited time he'd had the actual plan and intending to give it its due attention. He expressed his personal support of the project, while resisting any hurrying of the plan review and the potential oversights that result in changes coming later. He didn't sense any objection to the requested waivers and, while preferring action on them wait until that on the plan itself, advised that they proceed with the plan revisions accordingly. He said the following month's meeting would represent the Planning Code's deadline, under normal circumstances, and would necessitate an extension if the Commission is still unable to act on the preliminary plan.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the 'Nature Place at Angelica Creek Park' preliminary plan. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table Berks Nature's plan for Angelica Park.

#### Egan Storage – final land development plan [1:12.49]

Dale Egan believed they'd made all the required corrections and changes. Asked for clarification, Thomas Egan mentioned the street trees added and the driveway sight triangles observed. He indicated that the fencing had been pushed out to the property line and extended for the full perimeter. Dale Egan said its style hadn't yet been decided, but would be something nicer than the chain-link fencing originally suggested. Mr. Miller said he'd need to verify the revisions, but appreciated the communication with the engineer since the February presentation. Thomas Egan described the bollards added where the Commission raised concerns about vehicle travel and circulation. Asked if anything else about the placement of the units or aisle dimensions had changed, Mr. Rubendall explained that the southernmost row of units was shifted slightly on account of the clear-sight triangle restriction. Mr. Miller noted that, in some cases relative to the street and right-of-way dimensions, the measure of driveway triangles may prove more restrictive than those applied to street intersections, though they were intended to be more lenient. Ms. Hoag said the stormwater management documentation didn't adequately address each individual criterion required by the City's Watershed Stormwater Management Ordinance. She cited drainage-area mapping and existing utility conditions as needing additional information. She mentioned the drainage structures from the carwash bays, assumed to be connected to the sanitary sewer system, and the need to prevent infiltration of stormwater. Dale Egan said they'd be sealed and/or disconnected, as the proposed use doesn't require sanitary sewer service. He said those bays sit at a higher elevation than the rest of the site. Ms. Hoag clarified that the plan must show the intent and address each point of the Stormwater Ordinance, beyond merely declaring a decrease between the pre- and post-construction conditions. She also noted the dead ends and narrow aisle widths complicating the turnarounds of departing vehicles, and a lack of access around the ends of the unit rows. She called for additional site lighting details, including photometric measures, and a consideration of 'dead spots'. Dale Egan thought there sufficient existing lighting between that remaining on site and the street lighting. Mr. Cinfici wondered if an alternate configuration would provide for better circulation, and if the 77 units was a 'minimum number'. Dale Egan said they had considered other options, recognizing the challenging fit on a small site. He said he'd prefer more units, from the profitability consideration, but was moving ahead 'out of desperation' with the car wash experience. Mr. Miller noted the wash bay remaining as a drive-through aisle, wondering about the access to the units within that space and the probability of someone blocking through traffic by occupying it. Thomas Egan suggested additional 'no parking' signage. Ms. Hoag recalled observing businesses being operated from other storage facilities, and the additional traffic it caused. Dale Egan insisted such activity wouldn't be permitted, would be revealed by the visitation logs, and that the gates would never be left open to admit anyone other than the storage customers. Regarding an 'office' space identified on the plan, he described it as more of a utility and storage room, rather than a regularly-occupied office. He said almost everything about the business, including the background

checks and payments, is conducted through a third party's website (SiteLink Software LLC), though they will patrol the site daily and be available to meet with customers by appointment. He mentioned his other facilities in Exeter Township and Kenhorst Borough. Asked about the fire protection considerations, Mr. Miller recalled a discussion with the Fire Marshal at a November 5, 2015 OneStopShop meeting. As the discussion drifted back toward the stormwater management issues, Dale Egan asked that the direction be given with adequate time for their response. Ms. Hoag suggested a face-to-face meeting.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the 'Egan Storage' final plan. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the proposed self-storage project at 245 West Greenwich Street.

LGN: Lancaster Ave. Family Dollar – final land development plan [1:53.40]

With no one attending on behalf of Hutchinson Realty Development LLC, Mr. Raffaelli expressed his objection to the excavation observed at the Lancaster Avenue site, ahead of plan approval, as well as the continuing development of the South 6th Street site, ahead of plan recording and well beyond their stated 'public safety' considerations in filling a basement (as they described it at the February 2nd meeting). He wondered who gave them the permission to work ahead of the planning requirements. Ms. Hoag recognized that demolition and site preparation occasionally precede design approval, and at the developer's risk. Mr. Miller insisted that his position on either project had been constant, and advised that the Commission members trust the representations of its staff over those of the landowner.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the 'LGN: Lancaster Ave. Family Dollar' final plan. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Family Dollar final plan.

**Other business:**

§508.3 agreement to extension-3150 S.F. Building Addition at 1001 Lancaster Avenue [1:59.13]

Mr. Miller shared a plan showing yet more changes to a plan first presented at the June 23, 2015 meeting. The members recalled the lingering questions and concerns.

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 March 15th 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 #11-2016**

review the draft February 23, 2016 meeting minutes [2:03.48]

Mr. Cinfici moved to accept the February 23rd minutes, with one minor grammatical correction. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the February 23rd meeting minutes.

**Resolution #12-2016**

Mr. Bealer reported on the March 17th Blighted Property Review Committee determination hearing, and the 19 residential properties reviewed. He said two would likely be demolished.

Mr. Raffaelli noticed the record sets of the 'Russell Plywood Building Addition' plan, available for endorsement.

Mr. Miller described a recent inquiry about required permitting for a temporary 60-by-100-foot framed and anchored 'fabric building' at Brentwood Industries' property at 825 Morgantown Road. He entertained the possibility of a land development waiver, but also wanted to confer with the building-code officials. Amid questions on its use, its duration and the necessary utility connections, the Commission decided to wait for further explanation.

Mr. Raffaelli observed the expired or expiring terms of several members, encouraging them to take the necessary steps with City Council toward renewal.

Mr. Bealer moved to adjourn the March meeting. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission adjourned the March 22nd meeting. – 9:28p