

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
October 27, 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:

Bradford R. Grauel, Over the Mountain LLC
Nilson Assis, Emmanuel Institute of Leadership
Kenneth V. Farrall, CMC Engineering
Thomas J. Schlegel, Fitzpatrick Lentz & Bubba PC
Edward J. DiMarcantonio, Axis Realty Partners LLC
Thomas B. Ludgate, Ludgate Engineering Corporation
George A. Hutchinson, Hutchinson Realty Development LLC
Dee Anderson, Hutchinson Realty Development LLC
Stephen F. DeLucas, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the October meeting to order, reminded presenters to sign the attendance sheet, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the October 27th agenda, as presented. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the October agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Parking Lot Expansion Emmanuel's House Property – parking lot land development plan [0:01.22]

Mr. Grauel recalled the August presentation, and the proposed 19-space parking lot at 1224 Carbon Street in support of the adjacent use at 1216 Carbon Street, a condition of the latter's approval by a zoning appeal. He acknowledged the multiple reviews issued from the Planning Office and Public Works Department, and said he'd have no problem resolving any of the issues raised, intending to submit a revised plan by October 30th. He requested the Commission's approval contingent on those revisions. Mr. Miller asked which, if any, of the neighbors responded to the mailed notifications regarding the proposed alley paving. Mr. Grauel answered that just two replied, both supporting the project. He said the longer-term intention is to pave the whole segment between the parking lot and Columbia Street. Recognizing that he might be misinterpreting, he recounted his experience, earlier that day in a Montgomery County court, at a hearing on a similar situation in Conshohocken. He explained that, as the Borough doesn't claim any ownership or jurisdiction over the alley, the court upheld the right of any property owner to improve an adjacent alley or passage without municipal approval or the permission of neighbors. He said he was just offering information, unsure whether the case was in a common pleas or Commonwealth setting, and affirmed that all of the deeds neighboring the Emmanuel's House property reference the 15-foot-wide alley. He said there couldn't be any restrictions on the construction or its type, and agreed to the mailings at the City's request at the August meeting. Mr. Miller countered that the Commission was clear that the alley was not on the municipal topographic map, and was advising the developer to consult the neighbors in case of any unanticipated problems like interrupted or blocked access. Ms. Hoag mentioned the potential impacts of stormwater runoff from the new impervious surfacing. Asked his recommendation, Mr. Miller said his position hadn't changed, and only added the latest review letters as a contingency. He asked if the existing shed was to be removed altogether or relocated elsewhere on the property. Mr. Grauel said they'd figure that out. Mr. Assis confirmed it would be removed. Asked about the stormwater issues, Ms. Hoag mentioned some details regarding the proposed management practices. Mr. Cinfici added that the question of the legal setting in the Conshohocken matter was an important detail in assessing the reach of the decision. Mr. Lauter wondered if he was to understand that neighbors weren't due any notification. Mr. Grauel said that Borough takes a similar position as the City regarding alleys, and that no adjoining holds any title to this particular alley in fee. Mr. Cinfici cautioned that impacted owners may yet have a cause of action from unintended consequences of the change. Mr. Lauter noted that 'improvement' can be a subjective interpretation. Mr. Raffaelli mentioned a lot of gray areas in the classification of the alleys throughout the City. Mr. Grauel identified himself as a councilman in the nearby Mohnton Borough where, about fifty years

earlier, they'd designated all their alleys as streets and since collected liquid-fuels funds based on their measure. Mr. Raffaelli thanked the presenter, calling it the most-detailed plan he'd ever seen regarding a parking lot.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the Emmanuel's House parking lot plan, with a waiver of the location-map scale and the condition of revisions satisfying the latest Planning Office and Public Works Department reviews. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the 'Parking Lot Expansion Emmanuel's House Property' parking lot plan.

Resolution #51-2015

RDG Warren Street Cell Site (Verizon Wireless) – final land development plan [0:21.12]

Mr. Farrall introduced himself and the other project representatives in attendance. He described the site, between Blair Avenue and the Schuylkill River, and the existing self-storage facility. He said the cellular compound proposed for the eastern corner of the property measures approximately 50-by-20 feet, with a 122-foot monopole tower. He called it a permitted use in the zoning district, since granted some dimensional variances. He said the facility would utilize the existing driveway and infrastructure, and wouldn't add additional impervious surfacing or stormwater impacts. He mentioned receiving both the County and City planning agency reviews, still waiting on that of the Public Works Department. He described accessory equipment cabinets mounted on a concrete pad, and leaving sufficient maneuverability for the closest storage units. He claimed to have Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) approval, and characterized the facility as 'typical' of Verizon's installations. He added that a natural-gas service and generator will be included for back-up power. Asked about provisions protecting neighboring properties from a wind-driven collapse, he referenced the current design standard – EIA/TIA 222, Revision G – as similar to those covering stadium lighting and light poles at highway interchanges, and accounting for regional wind- and ice-loading expectations. He added that such a tower wouldn't fall straight over, in any case, as there are designed fail points. Asked if there were any concerns or complications with its proximity to the River, he said the area disturbed will be less than would require the Conservation District's formal review and permitting, though they'll be installing the appropriate management practices anyway. He said there wouldn't be any stockpiling of the limited spoil, and the grading required would quickly be covered in new asphalt paving. Mr. Lauter noted another, existing tower nearby. Mr. Farrall said there may be, but that Verizon had determined the need for another. He said there are often reasons that seemingly obvious sites are unworkable – *e.g.* they may be outside the 'search ring', structurally unable to handle additional co-location, *et cetera* – a determination made by a radio-frequency engineer, whose testimony was provided to the Zoning Hearing Board. He insisted that Verizon wouldn't commit to the expense of a new tower were another alternative already available.

Mr. Lauter recalled Verizon's last project, a tower at 601 Spring Street constructed in 2014, and a missing landscaping element. Mr. Farrall believed it had been installed, considering the certificate of occupancy issued, though unaware of its present condition. The members agreed that it was never added. Mr. Farrall agreed to follow up with Verizon the following day. Asked about security measures, he described a fenced and locked facility within the existing fencing around the host property. Asked how they settled on this location and what more may be coming, he explained that, at 122 feet high, it was a relatively small tower, in part due to the nearby airport and because of its ability to cover capacity shortfalls and allow faster 'hand-offs' between towers. He noted that the taller towers provide the coverage, while the shorter facilities add capacity. He said there were no plans for additional towers just now, but might be depending on the developments in technology. Mr. Cinfici noted that, though we call them 'cellular phones', they are essentially hand-held radios, requiring radio towers. Mr. Farrall showed renderings from the perspectives of several locations in the surrounding neighborhood, prepared from a 'balloon test' floated to the height of the proposed tower. Mr. Raffaelli noted another, existing pole on the same street and considered the technology out-of-date and unnecessary. Ms. Hoag expressed some concern for the City's existing subsurface utilities, seeking some clarification on the existing-versus-proposed features. She said they've used closed-circuit televised inspection to verify some locations. Mr. Farrall asked that she provide that data, thinking the only issue to be the proposed natural gas lateral. He said everything else is already in-place; the electric and telephone services to be connected from existing installations and easements. Asked about the source of the floodplain mapping, he answered the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) website. Mr. Miller asked if Aramark had already agreed to easements depicted on their side of the common boundary. Mr. Farrall clarified that it showed an existing utility-company easement. Mr. Miller asked if they'd yet received a zoning permit. Mr. Farrall produced a copy of a permit dated July 15th as well as some April correspondence from the FAA. He said he could comply with other comments in the Planning Office review. Asked about potential interference from or to other facilities, he said that each carrier has its own frequency, allowing for multiple carriers on the same tower. He added that the government sells and assigns that spectrum, and co-location is always preferred to constructing new facilities. Regarding the issues of interference with streetlights, he said he'd never heard of such an experience, but intended to discuss it with the radio-frequency engineer. He thought a possible explanation was someone working outside their assigned bandwidth. Ms. Hoag noted 'holes' in the City's own

communications system. Mr. Farrall assumed Verizon would be willing assist the City in resolving its issues. Ms. Hoag intended to provide a formal Public Works review in the near future. Mr. Miller preferred they do so before the Commission's action. He thought they might resolve the remaining issues in-time to develop a record set for the November meeting. The upcoming meetings and their deadlines were discussed.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the final plan for a new telecommunications tower at 364 Blair Avenue. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the 'RDG Warren Street Cell Site' plan.

S. 6th Street Family Dollar – preliminary land development plan [0:55.09]

Mr. Ludgate, picking up from the month before, called the plan similar to that previous version but for some changes to the South 6th Street loading area. It now preserves two on-street parking spaces. A slight redesign to the service area at the rear of the building was also noted. He then revealed a set of building elevations that he understood had been presented to the Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB). Asked for clarification, Ms. Anderson said they had been forwarded to HARB staff earlier that day. Mr. Ludgate said they reflect the HARB's direction from their October 20th review. He acknowledged receipt of the Planning Office and Public Works Department review memoranda, confident that he could satisfy each of the points made. Mr. Bealer asked if they'd received a zoning permit. Mr. Ludgate said he hadn't seen one, but did have the County Planning Commission's review. Mr. Bealer noted that they couldn't offer an approval without it and asked about a 'certificate of appropriateness' from the HARB. Ms. Anderson recalled that the Board asked that they provide the renderings in-time for this night's meeting. Mr. Hutchinson described some of the specific changes made since the HARB presentation, including its style, materials, lights, windows and pavers. He said they committed to making a 'good-faith effort' with the corporate entity, adding that the project was already way over budget. Ms. Anderson said HARB approved it, and wanted an update but weren't requiring another presentation. Mr. Bealer complimented the look and the effort at what would likely be unique among the brand's stores. Asked to describe the faux windows indicated for the South 6th Street elevation, Ms. Anderson said they'd be glass but with display racks on their insides. Mr. Hutchinson said an applied film would block light transmission and the view of the unfinished masonry wall behind the glass, and confirmed the HARB's satisfaction with that element. Mr. Raffaelli noted that the depiction of the awnings appeared to be reversed in the side elevations, when compared with the front elevations. Mr. Hutchinson asked for an approval contingent on whatever additional changes were required. He said he was ready to close on the property and begin construction immediately. Mr. Miller asked about the awnings depicted at the rear door. Mr. Ludgate said it might be a metal canopy or another error in the renderings. Asked about a note regarding the dates of the field survey, including one in 2009, he said that prior work was performed in preparation for an earlier proposal for the same site. Mr. Miller asked about a statement in the written response to his first review, regarding the southern property line not having a physical boundary. Mr. Ludgate explained that the (party) walls of the adjacent houses are coincident with the boundary. Mr. Miller asked about the trees intended, but not yet shown, on the South 6th Street elevation. Ms. Anderson said they'd be placed between every window, but figured they didn't get around to plotting it. Mr. Ludgate mentioned that the Shade Tree Commission had asked for additional trees on South 6th Street. Ms. Anderson said they agreed to 'stagger' the plantings between windows, and possibly more adjacent to the street. Mr. Miller doubted the survivability of a couple others shown on the west side of the building. Mr. Ludgate thought they'd be relocated. Asked about natural gas service, as is shown on the companion Lancaster Avenue plan, he assumed it would be connected and simply a mistake that it didn't yet appear. Ms. Hoag asked about the stormwater inlet in the middle of the driveway, and the extension of its piping crossing a sanitary sewer on its way to a proposed junction box right next to an existing manhole. She said, without elevation information on the sanitary line, she couldn't verify the fit and the reasoning. Mr. Ludgate said the route was intended to avoid the sanitary manhole. Ms. Hoag suggested relocating the inlet or installing two, one on either side of the driveway. Mr. Ludgate agreed, explaining he was trying to avoid a diagonal connection to the junction box. Mr. Raffaelli suggested placement of the natural gas lateral apart from the loading area, for its protection. Mr. Lauter double checked that the renderings presented had not yet been seen by the HARB. Mr. Ludgate said they were presented a similar version, while the latest reflects the changes they requested. He said it was delivered to the HARB's staff earlier in the day. Mr. Hutchinson characterized the changes as minor, when compared with the version they'd presented. Ms. Anderson said that, though the HARB had originally preferred the rounded (arched) roofline, they were presented a rendering showing the revised, flatter style. Mr. Hutchinson said he asked that they expedite their approval on his promise to make the changes. Mr. Lauter noted that they would still need to issue their certificate. Ms. Anderson agreed, but said they weren't required to make another presentation. Mr. Miller acknowledged that the HARB had voted on a resolution, but wasn't sure how, and in what venue, the conditions were to be verified in advance of the certification. Mr. Lauter hesitated to make any decisions based on understandings or second-hand representations of the HARB's direction. Mr. Miller said he'd confer with the HARB's staff regarding the latest information delivered. Mr. Bealer summarized that neither a zoning permit or HARB certificate was available or in-hand. Mr. Hutchinson countered that the Zoning Hearing Board 'gave an

absolute go ahead', based upon the HARB's agreement. Mr. Ludgate recognized the need for the actual zoning permit. Ms. Anderson said that the Zoning Administrator was present for the HARB meeting. Asked his recommendation, Mr. Miller advised tabling the plan, if for no other reason but the required zoning permit. Mr. Bealer suggested the possibility of considering a final plan at the November meeting, even without the formal 'preliminary' action in advance. Mr. Miller preferred to first clarify the Zoning and Historic Preservation Office positions. Mr. Raffaelli suggested a motion conditioned on the receipt of those other approvals. Mr. Miller advised the plan be tabled. Mr. Hutchinson said he impressed upon the HARB the budget realities and the need to begin construction, fearing the consequences of any further delay. Mr. Miller clarified that they'd still have a final plan phase following the preliminary plan's approval. Mr. Hutchinson suggested that could delay the construction start until the spring. Mr. Miller wasn't sure, but said the zoning permit was an absolute requirement for any approval. He said he was troubled that the HARB didn't have an opportunity to review the customized rendering, following that clear expectation expressed at the Commission's September meeting. He expressed his own frustration at the delays and the additional reviews that he'd have to prepare. Ms. Anderson wondered why they didn't have the zoning permit. Mr. Miller wasn't sure why, and wasn't even sure that they didn't, except for possible conditions attached by the Hearing Board to be fulfilled prior to its issuance. Mr. Cinfici asked about the setting of the faux windows, compared with the surrounding brick. Mr. Hutchinson thought it preferable to mount them flush 'for safety's sake'. Asked about the column (pilaster) elements in the façade, he explained that they would protrude at points, but were not structural components. Mr. Cinfici complimented that effort and the window spacing that enhances the pattern. Mr. Raffaelli lamented a 'convoluted process' between the reviewing bodies.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the 'S. 6th Street Family Dollar' plan. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Family Dollar preliminary plan.

LGN: Lancaster Ave. Family Dollar – preliminary land development plan [1:29.51]

Mr. Ludgate continued with the revisions to the plan for a similar store on Lancaster Avenue, also first presented at the September meeting. He mentioned new reviews from the Planning Office and Public Works Department, expecting he'd be able to resolve the issues identified. He added that he hadn't seen a zoning permit for this project, either. Asked about the status with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) review, he deferred, thinking the necessary next step was a 'concurrence letter' from the City. Ms. Hoag said she'd received some information regarding the 'scoping application', but wasn't aware of such a requirement on any of the other projects where 'highway occupancy' was at issue. Asked his recommendation, Mr. Miller cited the same need for a zoning permit. Mr. Raffaelli asked about the façade materials intended for this store. Mr. Hutchinson said the rendering shown was taken from a recent project in Tamaqua, and described what seemed to be a synthetic stucco or paneling product in addition to the masonry units. Asked if they could provide contact information for the record owners, Ms. Anderson agreed. Mr. Raffaelli observed a similar 'predicament' to the South 6th Street plan. Mr. Cinfici, having now served a full year on the Commission, recognized a pattern of plans being tabled for lack of their zoning permitting.

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

Other business:

§303.a.1 review-transportation improvements, 100 block of North 2nd Street (Wyomissing Foundation) [1:40.47]

Mr. Miller, picking up from the September presentation, distributed some more-focused and -detailed drawings (Bogia) than those enclosed with the Commission's meeting packets (McTish, Kunkel & Associates), the latter sent in advance and showing its fit within other nearby projects being considered. He said it was an opportunity for the Commission to provide comments and recommendations, though maybe not the last opportunity as it had yet to be formally introduced to City Council. He interpreted its scope as a 'topographic change', likely requiring approval via ordinance. Mr. Raffaelli commented on the confusing and at-times hazardous situation involving traffic islands. Mr. Lauter expressed some confusion in the rendering presented and the limits of the work presently being reviewed. Mr. Miller noted that it included depictions of other, adjacent and potentially simultaneous projects, related but under different contracts. He said the big picture is confusing and involves the Wyomissing Foundation's focus to the north of the 2nd and Penn intersection, the Reading Area Community College's (RACC) project to the south, the City's own plans in the middle, and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) on the bridge over the Schuylkill River. He explained that it was at once an opportunity to coordinate and plan on a larger scale, and a complication in doing so for contracts at differing stages of design and funding readiness. He said he didn't want to hurry the Commission's input at the September meeting if it wasn't immediately necessary, and thought they might still have time if it is determined to require City Council's approval. Ms. Hoag agreed that it would likely require an ordinance, and offered to seek a more focused plan from

Bogia. Mr. Miller thought that, if anything, the Commission should limit its comment to the Wyomissing Foundation's project specifically, which is further developed than the other pieces. He apologized for the confusion the 'big picture' may have caused, but thought the context important. Asked what triggers the Commission's participation, he referenced the relevant section of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. Mr. Lauter considered the location critical to traffic circulation, in addition to being a 'gateway' to the City, and hesitated in offering formal support for any modifications with so many apparent contingencies. He thought a comprehensive presentation in order, and from the City staff coordinating the efforts. Mr. Miller agreed, though skeptical that all the relevant questions for each project would be answerable before one or more move ahead, noting that some parties already seemed to be getting frustrated by the delays in others. Ms. Hoag mentioned an uncertainty in the reach of the demolition and disturbance from the Penn Street Bridge project. Mr. Miller considered that project to represent an actual deadline for the others. Mr. Cinfici again questioned the funding sources, and the legal implications for contracting and bidding requirements. Mr. Miller wasn't sure whether the Wyomissing Foundation was pursuing other 'matching' grants. Given the unease, he recommended the Commission wait and rely, for now, on the record of the meeting minutes.

Ms. Hoag briefly addressed a parking lot reconstruction by Reading Truck Body, at 316 Hancock Boulevard, and adjacent on-street parking being arranged with the cooperation of the Reading Housing Authority. Mr. Miller mentioned additional changes being planned for the Reading Truck Body's entrance and gatehouse, across the street, and amid the neighboring activity of the Masano Auto Group.

§603.c.2 conditional use review-922A Franklin Street (conversion) [2:17.38]

Mr. Raffaelli recalled a previous application, considered at the Commission's December 2014 meeting, ultimately denied by City Council in January. He recognized a plan revised to reduce the total number of units. Mr. Bealer supported the present concept, with its off-street parking and dumpster screening. He thought the design of the addition over the existing garage might present a structural complication. Mr. Cinfici expressed some confusion in comparing the new spaces with those being modified. Mr. Raffaelli commented on the required construction of a stair tower and that of the separation between the addition and the garage. Mr. Lauter thought a ventilation system may be required, should the garage space actually be used for vehicles. Mr. Miller thought the plan an appropriate 'middle ground' following the last application, and supported by the added parking.

Mr. Bealer moved to recommend City Council's approval for the conversion of 922A Franklin Street, as presented. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to City Council for its conditional-use hearing scheduled for November 4th.

Resolution #52-2015

review the draft September 22, 2015 meeting minutes [2:25.28]

Mr. Bealer asked for clarification on a conversation at the September meeting.

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the September minutes, as presented. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the September 22nd meeting minutes.

Resolution #53-2015

Mr. Bealer noted the progress on the 'Homes at Riverside' site, including the drilling of the geothermal wells the previous week.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the October meeting. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission adjourned the October 27th meeting. - 9:34p