

**Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
April 11, 2006 at 7:00 pm**

Members present:

Ermete Raffaelli, Chairman
David Reppert, Vice Chairman
Michael Lauter, Secretary
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Assistant Secretary
Edmund Palka
Frederic dep Rothermel

Staff present:

Andrew Miller, City Planner
Michelle Mayfield, Legal Specialist
Charles Jones, City Engineer
Amy Johnson, Historic Preservation Specialist

Others present:

Craig M. Bonenberger, McCarthy Engineering Associates PC
Jason Belovich, The Belovich Group Inc.
Daniel Lucky, Reading Housing Authority
F. Lynn Christy
Thomas W. Nein
William Vitale
Daniel P. Becker, Kozloff Stoudt, PC
Alex J. Morrison, The Arro Group
Bradley D. Smith, The Arro Group
David E. Wisser, Joint Municipal Authority of Wyomissing Valley
Don Miller, Joint Municipal Authority of Wyomissing Valley
Lee C. Olsen, Olsen deTurck Architects
Scott W. Weber, Olsen deTurck Architects
John C. Woodward, Foundation for the Reading Public Museum
Anthony M. Maize, Great Valley Consultants
Stephen H. Bensinger, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
Timothy J. Krall, Spotts Stevens & McCoy
Larry Prescott, Architectural Resources, LLC
Amy Anuszewski, Reading Eagle

Minutes:

Chairman Raffaelli called the April meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Rothermel motioned to approve the agenda. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the April agenda.

Review the preliminary land development plan for the Penn Street Commons, 16 two-family attached dwelling units at those parcels known as 1016 Penn Street and 1015 Cherry Street.

Mr. Bonenberger briefly described the Reading Hosing Authority's venture into market-rate construction, and the arrangement of the "duplex condominium units", which he claimed most closely resembled mid-rise apartments under the City's zoning. He described the one-way internal drive, the attempts to match the neighboring streetscape, the garages provided, the landscaping and screened trash collection. He mentioned the review letter, received from the Planning Office, and their attempts to address the comments. He said the utility information is incomplete due to the limited information available from the City and Pennsylvania's One-Call system.

Mr. Belovich stated the buildings were to be wood-framed with brick façades.

Mr. Bealer asked about State jurisdiction over Penn Street. Mr. Bonenberger said the US 422 Business route applies only to Washington and Franklin Streets. He indicated that the driveway gate would be setback from the street such that a car could approach it without obstructing traffic. Mr. Rothermel recalled a City ordinance prohibiting driveways on Penn Street. Ms. Mayfield said she would research the issue.

Mr. Belovich stated the condominiums, between 1500-1800 square feet each, would be marketed in the \$120-140 thousand-dollar range. Mr. Rothermel questioned expecting the same prices for Cherry Street frontage, as

for Penn Street.

Mr. Raffaelli suggested a strobe light at the driveway outlet to warn on-coming traffic, given the restrictive sight lines of the driveway. Mr. Rothermel recalled the City's occasional plans for the widening of Cherry Street, suggesting it be taken into account in regard to the setback. Mr. Bonenberger stated the sidewalk proposed was six feet-wide on the Cherry Street frontage. He said the conversations between the Belovich Group and the Penn's Common Neighbors resulted in the proposed layout, adding that it meets the zoning requirements. He said he'd look into the possibility of increasing the setback by one or two feet.

Mr. Raffaelli recalled the history of the site and expressed his appreciation for the interesting façades. He suggested a more decorative cornice treatment than was suggested by the artist's rendering. He encouraged the use of a locally-produced foam product covered with acrylic cement that mimics the more traditional corbelling materials, at a reduced cost. Mr. Reppert also recognized the effort made to develop a product consistent with the neighborhood character, and noting the effect the internal green space will have on the sight lines from the street. He wondered if additional buffers could be included at the rears of the buildings and about additional features for the provision of daylight. Mr. Bonenberger replied that the garages provided would preclude the additional greening in back.

Questioning about façade materials continued. Ms. Johnson indicated that the City's Historic Architecture Review Board (HARB) would be meeting the following Tuesday to consider the appropriateness of the proposal for the Penn's Common Historic District. The HARB's executive committee would be meeting beforehand, to discuss materials with the builder. She said the sides and rears of the buildings may be a cementitious siding, similar to that used on the rehabilitation of the Penn's Common Court.

Mr. Christie mentioned his properties on the block, and his appreciation of the architectural effort made. He recalled a contest c.1890 between the homebuilders trying to out-do one another in the architectural treatments of the rooflines. He complained of the proposed fence, noting that the idea of a gated community in Reading was without precedent and an insult to the neighborhood. He felt the block was relatively safe, suggesting alarm systems be considered as an alternative. He questioned the legality of closing an access enjoyed by the neighborhood for an estimated forty years, and the liability associated with kids playing on the fence.

Mr. Nein questioned the sufficiency of the off-street parking provided, and asked about the possibility of adding balconies or other private outdoor spaces. Mr. Lucky answered that balconies would be available as an option. Mr. Nein asked about the location of the gas metering equipment. Mr. Vitale added that the gas company had been responsive in previous experiences, when asked to move their meter locations for aesthetic reasons.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the comments from Public Works and County Planning. Mr. Miller mentioned some stormwater management concerns from Public Works, and stated that the County's comments had not yet been received. He advised the developer to consult with the City's Plumbing Inspector regarding the compliance of the planned stormwater infrastructure.

Mr. Raffaelli anticipated challenges in screening and servicing the proposed rooftop air conditioning condensers.

On a motion by Mr. Bealer, and a second by Mr. Rothermel, the Commission voted unanimously to table the preliminary plan pending the receipt of the County Planning recommendations. Mr. Bonenberger thanked the Commission for its consideration and mentioned a ceremonial ground-breaking scheduled for April 27. He assured that no real work would commence without the necessary approvals and permits.

Review the final land development plan for the Sewage Treatment Plant – Solids Handling Modifications, a sludge-drying operation and other improvements proposed at those parcels known as 601-701 Old Wyomissing Road.

Atty. Becker introduced himself as counsel to the Joint Municipal Authority. He described the intent to add sludge drying technology to the existing wastewater treatment plant. He introduced the representatives of the Authority and their engineers. He stated that the upgrades would result in a reduction in the volume of waste and the truck traffic needed to haul it.

Mr. Morrison described the anaerobic digestion process, the centrifugal de-watering and steam-drying that would result in a finished product of 95% solids. The daily truck currently required to haul the waste would be reduced to about one truck load per week. He explained that the process would kill enough pathogens to allow the finished product to be spread on land with less restriction than the wetter, belt-pressed product that is currently landfilled.

Atty. Becker expected that the Zoning Hearing Board would render its decision regarding some requested setback variances at their next meeting. Mr. Morrison described the landscaping and fencing used to screen the

plant from the surrounding streets. He noted Don Miller's experience in landscaping and his efforts with the Authority's property. He explained that odors would be controlled by routing the gasses back through the aerated sludge.

Atty. Becker reviewed the Planning Office comments. He asked that waivers be granted to the requirements related to boundary surveys, the sidewalk, curb, and street lighting requirements. Mr. Miller asked for some compromise by relating information from the deeds to the plan. He supported the other waiver requests as consistent with the neighboring properties, the Preservation zoning, and the Authority's cooperation with efforts to improve the pedestrian/bike trail past the property. Mr. Jones indicated that an improvements agreement would not be necessary in this case.

Atty. Becker noted that the Authority was following a trend in wastewater treatment, citing the communities of Derry Township, Chalfont and Pottstown Boroughs. Mr. Jones indicated that the City itself is considering similar upgrades for its plant at Fritz Island. Mr. Morrison stated that the new technologies help to address the stigma associated with application of bio-solids to the land. He said landfill acceptance is also becoming scarce, driving an increase in hauling costs.

Mr. Raffaelli stated that the Authority has always been a good neighbor, envying their grounds-keeping efforts.

When asked about the County Planning comments, Mr. Miller indicated that they had not been received. He mentioned the interpretational issues in classifying the project as a land development, adding that he wanted to keep the Commission apprised of new construction and sewage planning issues. He reminded that the proposal was for upgrades to the existing operation, and wasn't expected to have an effect on treatment capacity or additional connections. Atty. Becker mentioned the Ordinance's definition of land development, agreeing that a presentation should be made in the "spirit of intergovernmental cooperation". He asked that the Commission approve the project conditionally, to "keep it moving". Several Commission members expressed a reluctance to treat projects differently, fearing a precedent. Mr. Bealer mentioned April 25th as another possible date for consideration. Mr. Smith asked if action could be taken on the waivers in the meantime, that he might be able to correct the plans accordingly.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the plan while zoning issues were resolved, and until the County Planners have submitted their review. He added a waiving of the requirements, as discussed, and offered April 25th for a reconsideration. Mr. Rothermel seconded the motion. And the Commission voted unanimously, to grant the waivers and table the final plan until April 25.

Review the preliminary land development plan for the New Collection Preservation Center, proposed renovations, additions and a new building at the Reading Public Museum property known as 1201 Parkside Drive South.

Mr. Olsen described the renovated Collection Preservation Center, the proposed maintenance building, and the new equipment for the Planetarium. He said the motivation for the project was the need for a consolidated and climate-controlled storage space, consistent with the American Association of Museums' standards. He described the intended layouts of the buildings, noting that expansion of the Museum itself was still part of a long-range plan. He said the maintenance building, ultimately for the storage of the grounds and arboretum maintenance equipment, would be built first. Upon its completion, the stored exhibits would be temporarily housed in it, while work on the Preservation Center was completed. He said the interior renovations to the Planetarium could commence, in the meantime. He described the construction of the buildings, the façade materials, and the ventilation system. He said Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC had been retained for landscape architecture services, and the Museum is awaiting their input.

Mr. Maize stated that the pad for the proposed maintenance building would be graded a foot-and-a-half above the 100-year flood elevation. He reviewed to proposed site lighting, the reconfigured sanitary sewage collection, and the public water service from Parkside Drive South. He asked for waivers from certain requirements of the Planning Office review, namely those relating to boundary surveys. Ms. Mayfield advised the Museum to submit copies of their plan to the adjacent municipalities, as a courtesy.

Mr. Jones mentioned the sewer easement granted for the City's sanitary line, reconstructed in 2002. He said the maintenance building appears to be encroaching. Mr. Maize stated that the footprint could be shifted enough to satisfy the concern.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the intended colors, hoping that those chosen would allow the white of the Planetarium to continue to accent the group. Mr. Raffaelli suggested that the maintenance building be located further to the west, removed from the "program area". Mr. Maize mentioned the memorial garden and the property

line as obstacles, feeling that the grouping would function best for the Museum's operation and public utility connections. He said the 'Shillington Interceptor', an iron sanitary sewer line exposed to the surface on the Museum's property, was to be replaced.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the County Planning comments. Mr. Miller paraphrased their floodplain and stream encroachment concerns. He asked if the Museum was still intending to apply for a revision of the floodplain boundaries. Mr. Maize stated that the project could be designed in a way sensitive to the floodplain, as currently established. He said encroachment permits will be sought from the Department of Environmental Protection and the Army Corps of Engineers. Mr. Miller asked about the discharge of the roof run-off and the hydrologic effect on the small dams forming the wetland exhibit. Mr. Maize referred to a Hydrologic Engineering Centers River Analysis System (HEC-RAS) study that concluded the flood elevations would not change as a result of the project.

When asked for an opinion on the requested waivers, Mr. Miller advised waiting until the final plan submission to decide, indicating the sidewalk and street lighting requirements weren't crucial.

Mr. Raffaelli moved to approve the Museum's preliminary plan. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted to approve the preliminary plan, unanimously.

Resolution #11-2006

Review the parking lot plan for the Sacred Heart Convent Parking Lot at their property on St. Bernardine Street.

Mr. Bensinger reviewed the changes to the project, the reduction to 30 spaces from 35 and the resulting decrease in the design height of the retaining wall. He said the cost of the previous design wasn't worth the five additional spaces. He indicated where landscaping had been added, and stated that the rest of the Planning Office comments could be satisfied. He asked for approval conditioned on the corrections being made.

Mr. Bealer appreciated the reduction in height and impact of the retaining wall. He moved to accept the parking plan, contingent on the provision of the Ordinance-required drafting items before the plan is endorsed. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted to approve the parking plan, unanimously.

Resolution #12-2006

Review the final land development plan for Saab of Reading, a replacement of the existing car dealership showroom proposed at those parcels known as 1133-1137 Lancaster Avenue.

Mr. Krall reviewed the changes made to the plan since its preliminary submission and introduced the project architect. He noted the modifications made to the adjoiner information, the stormwater outlet, the parking spaces, and the landscaping provided. He described the sorbent boom, proposed as a stormwater filter, to be anchored to the pavement at the top of the rock outlet.

Mr. Raffaelli asked about the security/vandalism concerns of the rip-rap used in the outlet. Mr. Krall stated that the average diameter of the rock would be ten inches. He said the rock works better than paving a swale, which has a tendency to "bridge" over the topography rather than form to it.

Mr. Bealer asked about curbing at the back of the lot. Mr. Krall answered that the grading itself would sufficiently direct the majority of the stormwater to the outlet, the rest sheet-flowing over a stable, vegetated slope to the public stormwater swale.

Mr. Prescott reviewed the floor plans and exterior materials proposed.

Mr. Rothermel moved to approve the final plan, contingent on the revisions requested by the Planning Office review. Mr. Reppert seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the final plan.

Resolution #13-2006

Other business

Mr. Raffaelli raised the issue of development on Neversink Mountain, in response to an update provided by Mr. Miller. Mr. Rothermel recalled the Commission's issues with the conceptual plans at time of the re-zoning hearings, thinking that they may need to be reasserted. Mr. Bealer wondered if the Commission should take a clear stand before the Zoning Hearing Board considers any variances. Mr. Rothermel recalled the research and recommendations that were incorporated into the Zoning Ordinance at its last revision. He believed the Ordinance to be basically acceptable and relevant, in need of some modifications, but not wholesale change. Mr. Miller agreed, voicing his concern over characterizations made at the recent joint meeting of the Commission and the Hearing Board. He believed the burden of demonstrating the hardship in zoning appeals belongs with the appellant, rather than the burden of defending the merit of the Ordinance being transferred to the Planning staff, as was suggested.

He referred to the State planning law, as evidence. He said some of the regulations found in the Zoning and Land Development Ordinances are found in every municipality.

Mr. Raffaelli suggested another joint meeting, noticing that none of the issues scheduled for discussion at the last had been resolved. Mr. Rothermel suggested that some time be intentionally left between the regular meetings of each body to allow for more staff communication on the issues. Mr. Miller stated that he has communicated his concerns to both the Zoning Administrator and the Hearing Board, adding that without their support there is no incentive for developers to provide more compliant designs. He doubted the value of another joint meeting without City Council taking a firm position on its ordinances. He reported that an application for assistance in revising land use codes is being prepared for submission to the State Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). He speculated that a consultant hired to review land use codes would ultimately recommend controls similar to those already codified, wondering if it was worth the trouble without more emphasis on enforcement.

Minutes

Mr. Raffaelli asked if there were questions or concerns about the March 14, 2006 meeting minutes.

Mr. Rothermel moved to accept the March minutes, as presented. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the March minutes.

Resolution #14-2006

Mr. Bealer reported his continued attempt to bring the Commission and the Reading School District together to discuss the future land development plans of the District pursuant to Mr. Raffaelli's request at the February meeting. Mr. Rothermel resisted the idea of the Commission trying to influence the long-range plans of the District. He felt the professionals retained by the District had the practical needs of the educators in mind. Mr. Raffaelli had hoped to have the opportunity to comment on their intentions before too much money was invested in the design of land developments that may have an adverse impact on the community. He recalled recent projects that met with some resistance from the Commission and City Council alike. It was agreed that Mr. Raffaelli, Mr. Bealer and Mr. Miller would meet with the District following the continuation of the meeting on April 25th.

Mr. Miller suggested the meeting be recessed and continued to April 25th at 7:00p, for the purpose of reconsidering the Joint Municipal Authority's plan once the County Planning comments were in-hand. Mr. Rothermel motioned to recess the April meeting. Mr. Reppert seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to recess the April meeting, 6 to 0. – 11:00 pm.