

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
August 11, 2009 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
Brian Bingaman, Vice Chairman
Michael E. Lauter, Secretary
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Assistant Secretary
David N. Reppert

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office
Michelle R. Mayfield, Department of Law

Others present:

Deborah A. Hoag, Department of Public Works
Keith Mooney, Barley Snyder, LLC
Lawrence H. Lee, Reading Parking Authority
Douglas F. Smith, Alvernia University
K. John Gazsi, Derck & Edson Associates, LLP
David A. Kostival, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the August 11th meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Miller expected a few 'no-shows', and recommended proceeding directly to the presentation of the "Utilities Administration Building", whose design team was already present. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the August agenda, as modified. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the August 11th agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Utilities Administration Building (Department of Public Works) - final land development plan [0:01.41]

Mr. Mooney asked that the City waive its right to review the land development, as the construction proposed falls primarily within Cumru Township. He said the building will compliment the wastewater treatment processes on Fritz Island, but that the only construction in the City is one end of a bridge connecting the sites. He noted a parcel annexation intended to achieve the required yard setbacks, per Cumru's zoning ordinance. Ms. Hoag said the affected properties were entirely in Cumru. Mr. Raffaelli suggested annexing those properties to the City municipal limits. Mr. Mooney believed that unnecessary, as Cumru's zoning permits the proposed use. He cited the added time and legal expenses as additional reasons.

Answering questions about the location and construction of the bridge, Ms. Hoag said it would connect the Administration Building to Fritz Island across the "Mifflin Arm" of Schuylkill River; also the City-Township boundary. She recognized the need for Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and United States Army Corps of Engineers approvals. Mr. Mooney said the bridge would minimize turning movements on Morgantown Road (PA10), from the frequent running of samples back-and-forth from the Wastewater Treatment Plant. Ms. Hoag said the bridge, at a higher elevation than the main access to the Island, will provide a hedge against future flood events. Treatment Plant personnel were practically cut off during the June 2006 flood. Prompted by additional questions regarding construction and jurisdiction, Mr. Miller guessed that the bridge would have to conform to the PennDOT construction standards, regardless of who reviews the plan at the municipal level.

Mr. Lauter clarified that the waiver requested, if granted, applies only to the Administration Building, and not the planned upgrades to the Treatment Plant. Mr. Mooney affirmed, insisting that the Treatment Plant project would be subject to the City's review process. Mr. Miller suggested two conditions to be attached to the waiver: an approval block on the title sheet, indicating the Planning Commission's consideration, and two record copies to be returned to the Planning Office once approved by Cumru. Mr. Mooney said they had no problem with those conditions.

Mr. Bealer moved to waive the Planning Commission's right to review the land development, on the conditions that: (1) an endorsement block indicating the Planning Commission's voluntary waiver, be applied, (2) that two Recorder-certified copies of the record plan be returned to the Planning Office, and (3) the applicant's understanding that the upcoming Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrades be presented for the City Planning

Commission's review. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to waive their rights, pursuant to §502.1.b of the Municipalities Planning Code, in review of the "Utilities Administration Building" land development plan.

Resolution #41-2009

225 Penn St. Parking Lot Plan - parking lot land development plan [0:15.18]

Mr. Lee, unaware of the applicant's late cancellation, spoke on behalf of the Parking Authority's interest in downtown parking. He referred to the Zoning Ordinance's terms for parking facilities located in the Commercial Core district; allowed if operated by the Parking Authority. He explained the Authority's mission to maintain data, and fulfill the public's downtown parking needs, as established by the Parking Authority Act, and cautioned the planners against the proliferation of individual parking facilities which would undermine those efforts. He said sufficient parking is available in the Chiarelli Plaza, a half-block away at North 3rd and Court Streets. Ms. Mayfield noted that they'd be applying for variance at the Zoning Hearing Board's August 19th hearing, lamenting that the Planning Commission would have to approve the plan if the Hearing Board did.

Asked to further define the available parking nearby, Mr. Lee offered over 200 spaces available in Chiarelli Plaza. He said the Albert Boscov Plaza (formerly known as the Second and Washington Garage) is now filled. Mr. Lauter wondered if the Gateway Building's owners were approached about their future needs when the Parking Authority was planning Boscov Plaza. Mr. Lee said that Greater Berks Development Fund in fact reduced, by 100, their leased spaces (at the Front & Washington Garage before the Community College's take-over). He understood the economics of paying for spaces not currently in use, but confirmed that the Authority recommended that the building's occupancy potential be considered. Mr. Lauter feared setting a precedent, knowing that other developers have recently approached the Parking and Redevelopment authorities about taking private control of public parking lots.

Other business:

review the draft July 14, 2009 meeting minutes [0:30.53]

Mr. Bealer noted some punctuation errors, and explained that he had reversed his descriptions of the certification and the determination hearings in his report on the Blighted Property Review Committee's activity. Mr. Miller offered to add a clarifying footnote.

Mr. Bingaman moved to approve the July meeting minutes, with the requested changes. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the July 14th minutes, as modified.

Resolution #42-2009

Ms. Mayfield distributed a draft traffic-impact study ordinance, provided by Urban Research & Development Corporation. She said the Commission's input, and that of the City Engineer would be used to prepare an ordinance for City Council's consideration.

Ms. Mayfield reported that City Council passed a resolution (Resolution 92-2009), similar to the Planning Commission's, encouraging keeping the requirement for residential sprinkler systems in Pennsylvania's adopted 2009 Uniform Construction Code.

Mr. Bealer reported on the Blighted Property Review Committee's July 16th "determination hearing" He said 12 properties were reviewed, and all determined "blighted". He said they'll move on to a "certification hearing" in September. He thanked the City officials involved in the effort, and intended to meet with the Redevelopment Authority about the eminent domain process and the future custody of any properties taken.

Mr. Bealer said the Vending License Board plans to meet with the "Downtown 20/20" group August 14th, to discuss vending machines in the Commercial Core. He said he had already met with the Managing Director.

§27-1713 review-Alvernia University and City signage at Angelica Park [0:50.16]

Mr. Smith said they'd be applying to the Zoning Hearing Board for two or three possible variances. He said that Saint Bernardine Street had been "dedicated" all the way to Morgantown Road (PA10), about a year ago. He said the signage proposed would serve two purposes: to attract visitors to the Alvernia campus through the more-natural Angelica Creek Park setting, and to announce the Park itself, and its future environmental center.

Mr. Gazsi explained how the geometry of the existing intersection would be reconfigured and simplified. He described the “entry wall”, a monument sign and the identification signage applied to each. Relating a meeting with the Zoning Administrator, he said the proposal was deemed a “directional sign”, which exempts it from the standards of the Preservation zoning district. He said they’d still need variances for its size, its location within the clear-sight triangle, and the pillar elements of the wall exceeding the six-foot maximum. He said that the design will need a Highway Occupancy Permit from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, anyway.

Mr. Bealer suggested additional signs on Morgantown Road, signaling the turn at Saint Bernardine Street. Mr. Smith hoped the view of the University’s new athletic fields, on the other side of the Park, would signal the arrival. He said some additional PennDOT-standard signage might be possible.

Mr. Lauter, viewing the renderings, suggested that the Park signage seemed subordinate to the University’s share. Mr. Smith said they were waiting on some feedback from the Parks and Recreation Office about the design, intending to fully consider their suggestions. Mr. Gazsi said the design of the actual signage was not yet as developed as the design of their supporting structures. Asked about landscaping, Mr. Smith assured that there would be plantings, and committed the University to its maintenance.

Mr. Miller distributed copies of the recently-published report of the Downtown 20/20 study group.

Mr. Lauter reminded his fellow Commission members, and the public, of the rescheduling of their meetings to the ‘fourth Tuesdays’ of each month, beginning September 22nd.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the August meeting. Mr. Reppert seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the August 11th meeting.