

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
December 11, 2007 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
David N. Reppert, Vice Chairman
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Assistant Secretary
Edmund Palka
Frederic dep Rothermel, Jr.

Staff present:

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

Others present:

Kenneth L. Pick, Berks County Community Development Office
Michael C. DiPaolo, Michael C. DiPaolo, PLS
Wallace S. Scott
Reimundo Encarnacion
Sarah R. Leeper, Simone Collins Landscape Architecture
Larry S. Turoscy, Lehigh Engineering Associates, Inc.
Bradford R. Grauel, David Erb Contractors, Inc.
Sergei Szortyka, Quaker Maid Meats, Inc.
Stephen Hoffman, Quaker Maid Meats, Inc.
R. Andrew McCarney, Perley-Halladay Associates, Inc.
Raymond V. DeVine, II
Robert P. Stackhouse, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
David A. Reppert, Alvernia College
Patrick J. Dolan, Dolan Construction Inc.

Chairman Raffaelli called the December 11th meeting to order, reminded presenters to sign-in, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Palka moved to accept the agenda. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the December 11th agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Review the **final** subdivision plan for the **Cotton Street Subdivision**, a division of that parcel known as 415 South 14½ Street into twelve (12) parcels to be annexed to the neighboring parcels south. [0:00.46]

Mr. Pick recalled the previous presentation (February 20th), and the Commission's request that they clear the title to the five-foot wide alleyway between the annexation parcels and their intended lots. He reported on the recent "quiet title" action from the Court of Common Pleas, intending to proceed with the subdivision.

Mr. Miller confirmed that the plans had been satisfactorily revised, and included a note referencing the Court's decision. Mr. Pick thanked the Commission for its patience.

Mr. Rothermel moved to approve the final plan, as presented. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the Cotton Street Subdivision

Resolution #73-2007

Review the **final** subdivision plan for the **Cabrera Subdivision**, a subdivision of that parcel known as 41 North Ninth Street. [0:03.29]

Mr. DiPaolo recalled the previous presentation (September 11th), and believed all the required revisions to have been made. Mr. Miller affirmed, but noted the requested waiver from the required 800 scale on the location map, given instead at 400 scale.

Mr. Bealer moved to grant the waiver of scale requirements of §22-402.4.H. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously grant a waiver from §22-402.4.H.

Mr. Reppert moved to approve the final plan, as presented. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the Cabrera Subdivision.

Resolution #74-2007

Mr. Scott thanked the Commission for its courtesy and smooth process.

§303.a.3 (Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code) review:

Review the **final** master plan for **City Park**, a guiding document for the future use and development of City Park/Penn's Common. [0:08.14]

Ms. Leeper called it the "final plan", noting the error on the meeting agenda. She recalled the presentation at the October 9th meeting, and said the time since had been spent incorporating the comments received there, and from several other presentations.

Mr. Bealer asked about the decisions on traffic circulation. Ms. Leeper described a one-way circulation, intended, in-part, to stem conflicts at the Constitution Boulevard/Hill Road intersection.

Mr. Rothermel noted the display of the "Dove" statue, on axis with the Reading Police Memorial. He suspected the open field was used by Reading Central Catholic High School gym classes¹. Ms. Leeper said they were never informed of any organized uses beyond occasional soccer games. She said they were recommending a more formal display, nestled in its own setting, and lower, with a cast-iron/picket fence to discourage would-be climbers. Asked why a new rose garden was proposed in a different location than the original, Ms. Leeper avoided the name, proposing a lower-maintenance landscaping scheme as an alternate to the roses.

Mr. Rothermel asked about additional memorial locations proposed. Ms. Leeper noted potential at the intersection of Perkiomen Avenue and Hill Road, and around the Berks County Vietnam Memorial, should the need arise. She felt the intersection most appropriately reserved for public art or a fountain. Mr. Rothermel preferred the memorials be kept closer together, and avoid leaving an impression of the Park as a cemetery. Ms. Leeper agreed, thinking the Park already at its capacity.

Mr. Miller asked about the design of the area labeled "Dog Park". Ms. Leeper said it was suggested in a public meeting, the actual design contingent on its estimated frequency of use. She said some off-street parking would fit nearby, and double for the greenhouse's needs.

Asked about maintenance arrangements, Ms. Leeper named the Department of Public Works, and mentioned a full-time arborist position having been considered.

Mr. Bealer asked about the current thinking on the restoration of the Bandshell's pond. Ms. Leeper referred to a rehabilitation analysis, prepared by F. X. Browne, Inc. and included as an appendix. She said Simone Collins coordinated with them.

Mr. Miller said the Commission was being asked for its endorsement, and a favorable recommendation to City Council. He suggested the members might want more time to formulate a more-thorough response.

Mr. Bealer moved to recommend that City Council support the City Park master plan, with special consideration of that area at the intersection of Perkiomen Avenue and Hill Road, which, in the opinion of the Planning Commission, should be reserved for a public artwork, if not a re-location of the Reading Police Memorial, and further, that the Commission review any specific projects being implemented. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward the recommendation.

Resolution #75-2007

continued - Subdivision and Land Development:

Review the **final** subdivision plan for **Lands of Munzer Yacoub**, a proposed three-lot subdivision from his parcel in the 600 block of Linden Street. [0:29.59]

Mr. Turoscy recalled the sketch presentation (April 10th), and described an 80- by 100-foot lot to be subdivided for three proposed townhouses. He said the lot slopes steeply, from front to back, with three stepped "levels". He said the design attempts to preserve some usable space in the back yards. He reported that they were granted a variance from the five required off-street parking spaces, justified in-part by the lack of on-street demand on the singly-loaded Linden Street. He acknowledged receipt of the Planning Office review, which he characterized as editing issues. Regarding stormwater management, he referred to the proposed underground seepage pits. He

¹ A call to Thomas P. Mirabella, the High School's Principal (12-13-2007), indicated that they use City Park for occasional, and less-organized physical education activities, opting instead for Egelman's Park, where more defined spaces are available.

said direct drainage to the Street is another possibility, given the concerns about the local soil capacity. He said it was his first project in the City, and considering its size, asked for a conditional approval.

Mr. Miller mentioned having several conversations regarding the needed revisions. He said he is confident the issues can be resolved. Ms. Mayfield asked if the homes were to be “owner occupied”. Mr. Turoscy answered that they’d be offered for fee simple sales.

Mr. Reppert asked about architectural elevations. Mr. Turoscy had none, but assured that the homes would match the neighboring style, and price range. He said they may reach higher, but noted the better use of the terrain, with rear walkouts at-grade, and decks. Mr. Bealer asked about the rear alley. Mr. Turoscy pointed it out, noting its narrow width and limited use.

Asked about a requirement to present architectural details, Mr. Miller mentioned the standard request, albeit without any ordinance requiring it. He asked if there had been any consideration of façade materials and colors. Mr. Turoscy called them “stick built”. He said the owners are professional builders, most of their product being in the Lehigh Valley. He said they don’t normally employ architects, relying instead on standard floor plans. He offered to provide a materials list. Mr. Rothermel suggested photographs of their previous, and typical projects. Mr. Turoscy said he wasn’t aware of the need, and cited the small size of the project. Mr. Miller said the Commission could wait for additional architectural information.

Mr. Reppert moved to table the final plan, pending a presentation of architectural elevations, or representative photographs. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Lands of Munzer Yacoub subdivision plan.

Review the **revision to record** plan for **Quaker Maid Meats - Plant No. 3**, a proposed expansion of the cold storage at that parcel known as 620 Morgantown Road. [0:50.42]

Mr. Grauel introduced himself as the head of the survey department at David Erb Contractors; formerly with Light-Heigel & Associates, Inc., the engineers of record for the original construction. He called the proposal an 8881-square foot expansion of Quaker Maid’s freezer capacity, an attempt at increased market share, in the wake of a beef recall (the second-largest in history), and subsequent closure at Topps Meat Company, LLC of New Jersey. He cited “time constraints” as the reason for the hurried planning. Showing pictures of the existing plant, he described the relocation of parking stalls to be lost within the expansion’s footprint. He measured two tracts; 3.673 acres on the west side of Morgantown Road, and 0.375 acres on the east. He calculated 27% open space existing, and 25% following the expansion. He said, as an “Act 2” environmentally-regulated site, certain areas must be maintained as impervious surface. He said the added cold storage would also allow for an additional production line, with new employees anticipated. He named C & G Landscaping of Shillington as the landscaping contractor, recognizing the area as an “entrance to the City”.

Mr. Miller asked why the northwest corner’s proposed landscaping wouldn’t extend to the property corner. Mr. Grauel cited cross-access easements shared with Brentwood Industries, Inc. for truck maneuvers. Asked about their intentions for the triangular parcel on the east side of Morgantown Road, Mr. Grauel welcomed suggestions. Mr. Rothermel preferred that aesthetic improvements be focused on Morgantown Road, and less so in the northwest corner, for the increased visibility to the public. Mr. Grauel mentioned the possibility of additional street trees.

Mr. Miller questioned the application of the sidewalk requirement in the original planning. Mr. Grauel didn’t remember the issue having been raised. He mentioned a stabilized, emergency access in front of the building. Recognizing the lack of any other sidewalk in the several blocks north, Mr. Miller asked that the requirement be formally waived, at least. Mr. Bealer moved to waive the sidewalk requirement of §22-602.D. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously grant the waiver from §§22-602.D.

Mr. Palka moved to approve the revision plan, conditioned on the corrections identified in the Planning Office review, and provision of additional landscaping detail, when available. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the Quaker Maid Meats revision plan.

Resolution #76-2007

Review the **sketch** subdivision plan for the **DeVine Property**, a subdivision and two semi-detached dwellings on that parcel known as 1321 Logan Street. [1:20.18]

Mr. DeVine wasn’t aware of the need to present the plan. And absent the design professionals, he was unprepared to do so. Mr. Miller, noting the sketch submission, said the scope of the plan allows a final submission, with or without a sketch. He wasn’t sure who was acting as the project manager, but offered to communicate directly with anyone so designated. Mr. DeVine appreciated the direction, and mentioned the possibility of returning for the January meeting.

Review the **final** land development plan for the **Alvernia College – Student Center Addition**, an addition to the College’s student center and related improvements at that parcel known as ??? Greenway Terrace. [1:27.56]

Mr. Stackhouse, recalling the sketch presentation at the November meeting, offered the final plan. He acknowledged the Planning Office review. After explaining the site in relation to the campus, he described a small expansion of the Student Center, to include reconfigurations of the bookstore and the dining hall seating. He called it a “first step” in the recently-adopted campus master plan, and drew attention to the “pedestrian area” proposed to replace the existing parking lot behind the Center. He said the addition will be a one-story construction, with matching brick, aluminum and glass elements. The “pedestrian area” will double as an emergency access, wide and strong enough (a 20-foot wide surface, stabilized with concrete pavers on a concrete base) to support fire apparatus. He mentioned the AASHTO H-25 loading standard, and confirmed their intention to keep it accessible throughout the winter. He said “rain gardens” are proposed to satisfy the stormwater quality requirements, even as the quantity of run-off should decrease with the removal of the impervious parking lot.

Mr. Rothermel asked if the City Engineer was satisfied with the grading and stormwater planning. Mr. Miller said he hadn’t yet issued a formal review, but recognized the reduced coverage.

Mr. Rothermel moved to approve the final plan, subject to the resolution of any outstanding requirements identified in the technical reviews. Mr. Reppert seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the Alvernia College - Student Center Addition plan.

Resolution #77-2007

Review the **parking lot** plan for **Gary Mengel – Proposed Parking Lot**, off-site parking proposed on that parcel known as 301 Washington Street. [1:41.18]

Mr. Dolan called the presentation an “informal introduction”. He mentioned the recently-rebuilt G. L. Public Services office building at 104 North Third Street, and an “underutilized lot” at 301 Washington (formerly the Ziegler Dairy Company). He said a formal agreement, regarding the rights of access and use, has yet to be established. He said they are exploring layouts, and wanted feedback from the Planning Commission. He mentioned a 10-foot alleyway, to the east, that they will be petitioning the courts to abandon.

Asked why the aisles circulate counter-clockwise, Mr. Dolan assumed that it provided an easier entry from Washington Street. Mr. Rothermel recognized a 180-degree turn into the lot, and suggested an alternate driveway location. Mr. Bealer noted the Department of Transportation’s jurisdiction on Washington Street.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the zoning implications. Mr. Miller said leasing the available parking would be detrimental to the potential reuse and development of the host building, and recalled numerous existing code violations. He said G. L. Public Services was granted a parking variance based on the available off-street parking in nearby public facilities. Mr. Dolan guessed the owner would want to reserve some of the 24 spaces designed for his own use. He said the Zoning Administrator is considering the full potential of the existing building, for the purposes of applying the regulation. Mr. Raffaelli recalled Gary Mengel stating that the public garages were sufficient for the parking needs of G. L. Mr. Dolan said he was trying to provide something “more inviting”. Mr. Rothermel felt that the availability and proximity of the public garages is an argument against the proposal. He said, regardless of the Zoning Administrator’s findings, his biggest concern is the safe ingress from, and egress to the busy Washington Street.

Other business:

minutes-November 13, 2007 Planning Commission meeting [1:58.46]

Mr. Bealer requested a clarification on the fifth page. Mr. Rothermel moved to approve the November 13th minutes, as amended. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the November 13, 2007 meeting minutes.

Resolution #78-2007

§303 notification-Reading Fire Department – Southwest Station (East Wyomissing Boulevard) street topography [2:00.46]

Ms. Mayfield, clarifying an earlier statement, said no ladder truck is currently planned for the new firehouse, though one of the three bays will be designed to accommodate it, should the need arise. She said the City is in the process of awarding the architectural services contract. Mr. Miller presented an updated, and more accurate map showing the proposed closing of the southbound turning lane from East Wyomissing Boulevard to Lancaster

Avenue. Ms. Mayfield said the ordinance had been introduced to City Council, with a vote expected in January. She said a hearing regarding the proposed zoning amendment was scheduled for December 13th. Mr. Miller reported positive feedback from the County Planners on the draft amendment. Asked about the Commission's opportunity to comment on the street modifications, Ms. Mayfield answered that this was that opportunity, noting the time between ordinance introduction and vote. Mr. Miller wondered whether the fire trucks would access the Lancaster Avenue/Morgantown Road corridors from East Wyomissing Boulevard, or from one of the other intersections south.

Pursuant to §303.a.1 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, Mr. Bealer moved to recommend City Council approve the proposed change to the City's Topographical Survey, as shown on the "Plan to Vacate Portion of Wyomissing Blvd...", prepared by the Bureau of Engineering, November 8, 2007, finding no inconsistency between it and the objectives of Comprehensive Plan 2000. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward the recommendation.

Resolution #79-2007

2008 meeting calendar [2:10.46]

Ms. Mayfield offered three issues for the Commission's consideration: 1) changing the date of the November 2008 meeting, because of Veteran's Day falling on the 11th; 2) changing the scheduled day of the month, altogether; and, 3) changing the scheduled starting time.

Following discussion, Mr. Rothermel moved to advertise the Commission's regular monthly meetings on the second Tuesdays of 2008, to begin at 7:00p, prevailing time, with the exception of November's meeting, to be scheduled for Thursday, the 13th, in observance of Veteran's Day. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to advertise the 2008 schedule.

Resolution #80-2007

Mr. Bealer suggested special meetings to review the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program and the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budgets. Mr. Miller preferred to wait until those budget processes and calendars are established, and advertise special meetings then.

Mr. Rothermel opined that decisions on sidewalk installation were more appropriately fielded by the Department of Public Works, the language of the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance notwithstanding. Addressing the applicability to Quaker Maid Meats specifically, Mr. Miller noted that it simply hadn't been addressed in the original land development plan, and needed clarification.

agreement to extension-Slovak Catholic Sokol – Addition and Alterations - final land development plan [2:20.51]

Mr. Miller referred to the Sokol's request to extend the deadline for action on their plat to March 11, 2008, submitted on their behalf by Landmark Surveying. He said he was only recently made aware that they have been awaiting feedback from other City officials. Mr. Bealer moved to extend the deadline to March 11, as requested. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously their agreement to the extension, satisfying the procedure established under §508.3 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

Resolution #81-2007

Mr. Rothermel asked about the "housing summit" recently hosted by City Council. He noted inconsistencies in the way the notices and invitations were communicated. Mr. Miller said he was copied on a letter he understood to have been addressed to the various board memberships. Apparently, the Chairman was the only recipient. Mr. Rothermel requested better coordination between the City Clerk's Office and the boards' supporting staff. Alternately, he suggested a possible action authorizing the Chairman to represent the body at such assemblies. Mr. Miller intended to research the Clerk's intent and expectations for attendance. Mr. Rothermel wondered about the relevance of the Mayor's Housing Task Force plan to current housing policies. Having attended the "summit", Mr. Miller suggested that those who participated most were those least familiar with the City. He noted several inaccurate and unfair representations of specific neighborhoods. Ms. Mayfield said the conditions survey was expected in January. Asked what that meant, Mr. Bealer explained that Great Valley Consultants was hired to conduct a visual condition survey of every City property, and map them. Mr. Rothermel noted that such inventories and mapping resources already exist, and suggested that additional surveys should follow similar rating procedures for the sake of continuity and comparison. Mr. Miller questioned the adequacy of the procurement procedure.

Mr. Bealer reported that the Blighted Property Review Committee heard a presentation by Jeri E. Stumpf, a consultant to the Statewide Blight Task Force, explaining recent legislative efforts by the General Assembly aimed at expediting local clearance efforts. Mr. Palka expected a strong resistance from the real estate lobby.

Mr. Rothermel moved to adjourn the December meeting. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the December 11th meeting. – 9:50 pm.