

**Minutes**  
**Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission**  
**January 13, 2009 at 7:00 pm**

**Members present:**

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman  
David N. Reppert, Vice Chairman  
Michael E. Lauter, Secretary  
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Assistant Secretary  
Frederic dep Rothermel, Jr.

**Staff present:**

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

**Others present:**

Albert R. Boscov, Reading Hospitality, LLC  
Adam Mukerji, Reading Redevelopment Authority  
Lawrence H. Lee, Reading Parking Authority  
Gregg A. Bogia, Bogia Engineering Inc.  
Lee C. Olsen, Olsen Design Group Architects  
Sun-Hee Hwang, Timothy Haahs & Associates, Inc.  
Janet L. Drayer, Sierra Club Kittatinny Group  
Stephen F. DeLucas, Reading Eagle Company

Following a delay while waiting for a quorum, Chairman Raffaelli called the January 13th meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the January agenda. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the January 13th agenda.

**Subdivision and Land Development:**

Review the **preliminary** land development plan for the **DoubleTree Hotel & Garage Project**, a subdivision, a convention-center hotel, its accessory uses, and a municipal parking structure proposed for that parcel known as 701 Penn Street [0:00.41]

Mr. Bogia said he had reviewed and addressed the Planning Office comments, and resubmitted the preliminary plan in late December. He recalled the presentation at the December meeting, and noted the design team in attendance. Ms. Mayfield advised seeking mailing addresses for the two, new properties prior to the final plan submission.

Mr. Hwang presented architectural elevations of the proposed Garage, as requested. He described the architectural 'precast' concrete, in a two-tone color scheme with two different finishes; a medium and a heavier sandblasting. He said the color palette would be finalized after the Hotel's, in an attempt to match the buildings. He described the metal screen elements, projecting and with lighting, also attached to the Garage. He indicated the location of a retaining wall, between the Garage's north façade and the Court Street sidewalk.

Ms. Drayer asked if any "green energy" systems were planned for the project. Mr. Bogia suggested that she wait for the Hotel presentation. Mr. Hwang mentioned energy-efficient lighting fixtures designed for the Garage.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the total length of the Garage's façade. Mr. Hwang answered 348 feet. Mr. Rothermel suggested exploring opportunities to break-up the visual impact of that length, especially on the Court Street side. He predicted the sandblasted textures would be too subtle, when viewed from any distance. He thought it better to contrast the colors of the Hotel and Garage, to further disrupt the perceived mass. Mr. Boscov promised better renderings with the Hotel presentation, on deck. He said the Hotel would dominate views from Penn Street.

Mr. Lauter asked about segregation between spaces reserved for the Hotel's guests and other users of the Garage. Mr. Bogia noted the main entrance, from Court Street, for the general public. Mr. Boscov said the Hotel's guests would be issued a special pass for access to the Garage from Penn Street. He said those not affiliated with the Hotel will not be able to use it. Mr. Lee said the Garage would be opened 4 to 6 months ahead of the Hotel, giving the public a chance to get used to the circulation. Mr. Rothermel wondered about those using the Garage for the first

time, for an event. Mr. Lee anticipated an agreement, like the Parking Authority has with Wyndham's Abraham Lincoln Hotel, ensuring capacity, even if the Hotel sells out its rooms.

Turning to the Hotel, Mr. Olsen mentioned the issues related to subdivision and building code-compliance between the Hotel and Garage, and between the Hotel and Evangelical Church. He recalled a January 8th meeting between City and project officials. He understood the subdivision to be a required part of the development and ownership, per the language of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. He said the design issue stems from the I-Code's apparent prohibition on connections between buildings separated by 5 feet or less. He said the Fire Marshal has since reached out to the Code Council, and determined that 3-hour rated separations on both the Garage and Hotel, and an "A-rated", 2½-hour connecting door would be an acceptable alternative. He said the Fire Marshal and Chief Building Inspector intend to issue their findings in writing. He said this saved the direct access to the Hotel lobby, required by DoubleTree standards. He said the Church property is not considered a part of the project, at this time.

Mr. Olsen expected they'd be moving on to material selections in their future design meetings, and fine tuning the elevations. Regarding the colors, he was personally undecided whether the Hotel and Garage should compliment or contrast one another. He felt the buildings so integrated that their appearance should reflect it. He said the vegetated roof area has increased to 27,000 square feet. He said a "cost-benefit analysis" will determine the feasibility of including a photovoltaic system. He noted that compliance with Pennsylvania's Act 167 stormwater management regulations will depend on the depth of the rooftop planting bed, which adds weight to the structure. He said the façade, from grade level to the first floor roofline, will be either brick, cast stone or glass. He said the ballroom would be 12,000 square feet, and column-free, with a 20 foot high ceiling. He reported that DoubleTree officials were satisfied with their progress, and looking forward to a detailed plan.

Asked about the timing of the subdivision, Mr. Boscov said it would be finalized before any construction begins. Mr. Rothermel questioned the application for zoning variances vis-à-vis the number of parcels. Mr. Bogia said they had covered that contingency in their presentation to the Zoning Hearing Board, and that relief was given for either circumstance. Mr. Rothermel noted the specific sidewalk design along Penn Street, wondering if the Hotel would respect that continuity. Mr. Bogia said the sidewalk would be wholly removed during construction, and rebuilt with new trees and lighting. He said he'd look at the other blocks for cues. Mr. Olsen asked for any construction details available. Asked about changes to the cartway or curbline, Mr. Bogia said none, having eliminated the "bus pull-off" previously proposed.

Ms. Mayfield advised that the public improvements agreement be addressed prior to the final plan submission. Mr. Bogia noted a draft estimate, already submitted.

Mr. Olsen promised sample materials with the final plan presentation, if not a building model. Answering more questions about the design and façade treatments, he said the "green roof" would be 27,000 square feet of "stage 1 sedum", in about 4 to 6 inches of soil, taking and detaining stormwater until saturated.

Mr. Miller asked about the placements of street lights and street trees. Mr. Bogia showed a plan depicting the lighting along the pedestrian corridor between Washington and Penn Streets, as suggested by the Planning Commission in order to identify the link between the Poplar and Walnut Garage and Penn Street. He said those, and the other lights around the project, will match the existing "bishop's crook" style, but with an illumination power matching those in "Entertainment Square".

Asked for some clarification on the status of the plan, Mr. Miller said it had been submitted as a subdivision and two land developments in one. Mr. Lauter asked if the Garage construction was contingent on the Hotel's. Mr. Lee said the Parking Authority was moving forward with its bid process, a 'prebid' conference scheduled for the 16th and bids due February 9th. He repeated the need to start the Garage ahead of the Hotel, because of the limited working space on-site, and the need to be open and operating ahead of the Hotel. He said the Parking Authority had already closed on the loan. He said it was time sensitive, and projected the Garage's completion by December 2009. Mr. Lauter explained his concern that the Redevelopment Authority had previously rejected a proposal for a garage-only project on the site. Mr. Mukerji noted the limited footprint, instead of the whole site. Mr. Boscov said they aim to begin the Hotel construction four months behind the Garage, assuring the Commission that the funding was already secure. He mentioned that the Goggleworks Apartment project was also looking more realistic with the lower mortgage rates. He said that project was being "re-bid".

Mr. Raffaelli asked about action on the plan. Mr. Miller asked the legal opinion on the zoning matters. Ms. Mayfield indicated that the Zoning Hearing Board had given a verbal approval, and a formal decision was forthcoming. Mr. Lauter asked for an update on the traffic situation. Mr. Bogia noted the traffic study performed. He said no signal was necessary for the North 8th and Court Streets intersection. He said left turns from Penn Street

into the Hotel, while typically only one car at any time, would be facilitated by a modification in the centerline taper to provide more stacking room.

Mr. Lauter moved to approve the preliminary land development plan, provided the Planning Office's review letter is satisfactorily addressed, and the necessary zoning relief granted. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the preliminary plan of the DoubleTree Hotel & Garage Project.

**Resolution #1-2009**

Review the **preliminary** land development plan for **King Taco Land Development**, a restaurant proposed at that parcel known as 501 North 9th Street [1:16.41]

As it appeared that no one was in attendance to present the King Taco plan, Mr. Miller confirmed that a copy of the agenda was provided. He said he still hadn't seen a decision from the Zoning Hearing Board, precluding action anyway. Ms. Mayfield said the plan could be tabled, and requested the record reflect the provision of the agenda, and the outstanding zoning issues.

Mr. Bealer noted a Shuman Development Group sign, for a taco restaurant, on a building in the 800 block of Oley Street, noting its close proximity to the proposed land development.

**Other business:**

439 South 9th Street-§603.c.2 conditional use review (conversion) [1:20.28]

Mr. Miller noted the application and a public hearing held January 8th. He explained that the new owners had invested in a property appearing to be three units, though only two were legitimate according to the housing permits paid. He said no off-street parking was available, and the applicant proposed one unit at 977 square feet, and the other two at 507 square feet. He wasn't sure if there were local agents managing the property. Ms. Mayfield called this conditional-use application the result of the City's new housing-permit process flagging the property. Mr. Raffaelli recalled Comprehensive Plan's policies aimed at the de-densification of residential areas. Mr. Rothermel wondered about the on-street parking situation in an area dominated by an old cotton mill building. He thought the single-side of housing might mitigate the on-street demand. Mr. Bealer noted apartments under construction in the 300 block. Mr. Miller thought that might be a structural stabilization project. Mr. Bealer also noted the narrow width of houses in the area. Mr. Miller thought the houses on the west side of South 9th Street might have access to rear yard parking areas from an alley. Mr. Bealer felt 500-square foot apartments were too small. Mr. Rothermel asked about code standards on floor area. Mr. Miller said the Zoning Ordinance requires minimums of 400 square feet for an "efficiency", and 550 for a "one-bedroom". He said the third unit had no individual electric service, unsure of when it was first converted. He said the lack of off-street parking would still require a zoning variance.

Mr. Bealer moved to recommend City Council's denial of the third unit, based on the Comprehensive Plan's policies on density and the Zoning Ordinance's parking standard. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission agreed unanimously to forward a recommendation against the proposed conversion of 439 South 9th Street.

**Resolution #2-2009**

review the draft December 9, 2008 meeting minutes [1:32.34]

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the December minutes, as presented. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the December 9th meeting minutes.

**Resolution #3-2009**

Asked for an update, Ms. Mayfield said that she and the City Engineer have been looking into the possibility of a traffic impact fee ordinance, and may be ready to approach City Council sometime in February.

Mr. Miller explained the situation of the parking lot constructed at 520-524 South 7th Street, sans permits. He said St. John's Missionary Baptist Church is now seeking its approvals retroactively, since having been stopped by a codes inspector following up on a complaint. He asked if the Commission wanted to review the plan, after the fact, for an 18-space lot. Mr. Rothermel wondered about the Historical Architecture Review Board's role in the matter. Mr. Miller verified the site within the historic district, uncertain of where it stood with the Review Board. He believed the design was in violation of certain design guidelines within the Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Rothermel felt the Commission should review the plan, if only to support the Planning Office. He asked that the findings of the

Review Board be made available.

Ms. Mayfield reported that additional research had validated the Planning Commission and Law Department resistance (at the November 13th meeting) to the rental prohibition ordinance proposed by City Council. She said City Council's position was based on a misinterpreted case study from another jurisdiction. She offered the information simply as an update.

Mr. Miller summarized a January 7th meeting held to discuss a monument to the Revolutionary War proposed by the local chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution. He reminded the Commission that it had previously deferred to the City Park Master Plan in its recommendation. He said the group is suggesting a placement within "Veterans' Grove", already a collection of memorials to armed, American campaigns. He still hoped to find plans for the Grove's original design. Mr. Raffaelli cautioned against crowding the area. Mr. Miller noted some disappointment from the Penn's Common Neighbors about the design and proposed placement. He clarified that no one is against the recognition of the American patriots; just concerned with the effect of the monuments in the Park. Mr. Rothermel thought the Grove probably the location most appropriate, but preferred that Simone Collins Landscape Architecture, having developed the Master Plan, make a suggestion. He thought a formal review process most important, to prevent the haphazard placement of new memorials in *new areas* of the Park. Mr. Miller said the President of the organization offered to attend the February meeting, and make a direct presentation. Mr. Lauter thought the Grove location important for the context, when reflecting on the whole of military history. Mr. Miller said the 10-foot-high obelisk proposed is meant to evoke the image of the 555-foot Washington Monument in the District of Columbia. He said the Master Plan recommends developing a review process, but not specific physical locations for new monuments. Mr. Lauter thought it best to hear their presentation, agreeing that the Grove area was the appropriate location. He suggested City Park's proximity to the site of the 1781 Hessian prison camp as another factor supporting its placement.

Mr. Rothermel questioned the work in the old Burlington Coat Factory building at 1920 Kutztown Road, and the status of the property's zoning. Mr. Miller recalled something having been permitted about 2 to 3½ years ago, around the time an underground-storage tank was removed<sup>1</sup>.

Mr. Miller, referring to a January 8th public hearing on the proposed Riverfront Redevelopment Overlay District ordinance, lamented what he felt were personal politics interfering with the fair assessment of the legislation. Regarding the newspaper coverage, he clarified that it was not for the Zoning or Planning offices to take responsibility for legal notifications required for the governing body's legislative affairs.

On Mr. Lauter's motion, the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the January 13th meeting.

---

<sup>1</sup> A subsequent check of the zoning records revealed nothing in permits for the property.