

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
January 8, 2008 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

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

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office
Michelle R. Mayfield, Department of Law
Charles M. Jones, Department of Public Works

Others present:

Timothy J. Krall, Spotts Stevens & McCoy, Inc.
Carl J. Kanaskie, Jr., McKissick Associates, PC
Steven D. Buck, Stevens & Lee, PC
Seth L. Krull, Bohler Engineering, Inc.
Lori Kiedaisch, McDonald's Corporation
Stephanie Rawden, McDonald's Corporation
Christian Rawden, McDonald's Corporation
Jay W. Worrall IV, Reading-Berks Habitat for Humanity, Inc.

Chairman Raffaelli called the January 8th meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the agenda. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the January 8th agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Review the **revision to record** land development plan for the **Reading Citadel/Intermediate High School**, a proposed conversion of the vacated St. Joseph Medical Center campus roughly bounded by North Eleventh, North Thirteenth, Elm and Walnut Streets. [0:00.48]

Mr. Krall reported that the bids received totaled less than had been estimated in the design phase, allowing the District the option to include some alternates. He said the plan was revised to include another 12,000-square foot expansion (a 6000-square foot footprint), a repositioned loading dock and its servicing driveway, and a full reconstruction of North 12th Street, already heavily damaged from the demolition/construction activities. He said the changes to the (building and impervious) coverage calculations were minimal, and still within the zoning standards. He said the municipal improvements tabulation had been modified accordingly, to the satisfaction of the Department of Public Works, and likewise the stormwater management report.

Ms. Mayfield said the improvements agreement revisions need not delay the plan's recording, since an agreement is already in place.

Mr. Raffaelli restated his recommendations that the Citadel be programmed as a ninth grade "academy" with vocational programming. Mr. Kanaskie said the changes proposed would add to the District's programming flexibility.

Mr. Krall confirmed that the changes presented were the only changes to the current plan of record.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the revision plan, understanding the municipal improvements agreement addendum to be forthcoming. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the revisions to the Reading Citadel/Intermediate High School plan.

Resolution #1-2008

Review the **final** land development plan for the **McDonald's Restaurant No. 37-0036**, a demolition and reconstruction of the restaurant located on those parcels known as 400-416 Lancaster Avenue. [0:12.50]

Mr. Buck introduced the McDonald's representatives in attendance. He complimented the value of the Commission previous comments, hoping those concerns had since been addressed. Mr. Krull recalled the

architectural critique at the November meeting, and distributed color renderings of the revised elevations. He explained the enlargement of the arcade walls facing Lancaster Avenue, and the more neutral colors chosen for both the brick and stucco elements. He passed around a sample board of the materials.

Moving on to the zoning issues, Mr. Krull addressed the directional signage shown within the required clear sight triangle. He said three such signs exist, and McDonald's proposes to keep and relocate two. He said they'd remove the "golden arches" logo atop those signs to better preserve the sight triangles, reducing the height from about 5.2 feet to 3.3 feet, still above the 2.5 required, but an improvement. He added that it will reduce the surface area from 9.6 square feet to 3.9, then conforming to the 6-square foot zoning maximum. He said left turns from the site to Lancaster Avenue would be prohibited, consistent with the preliminary feedback from the Department of Transportation, effecting a reduced overall driveway width, and allowing room for an extra parking space. He said the handicapped parking stalls, previously blocked by the loading area, have been relocated along the Carroll Street frontage. He said a total of 39 spaces are now proposed, enough for their employees and peak business volume. He said they preferred to reconstruct the row of off-street parking along Carroll, as it currently exists in the setback, calling it the most convenient parking on-site. He said landscaping is proposed along the property lines to meet the screening requirements. He noted a difficulty in screening the loading area, taking the position that wasn't a typical dock design. He intended to seek a variance, if the Zoning Administrator deemed it a violation. He called the large, existing identity sign a custom design, not typical of most franchise locations. He proposed a replacement design, reducing the area from 340 square feet to approximately 156 square feet, with a 27-square foot digital reader board; a 45% reduction in total area. He said they will landscape the free-standing signage, as required. Mr. Rothermel asked if it had been approved by the Zoning Administrator. Mr. Krull said there were only informal discussions, so far. Mr. Rothermel asked if the reader board would be animated, or simply changeable. Mr. Krull said McDonald's hopes to include some "scrolling options".

Mr. Rothermel asked if the parking proposed exceeded that required by the Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Miller answered yes, by ten spaces. Mr. Buck said they'd seek a variance from the Carroll Street setback, if required. Mr. Miller noted a small encroachment on the west side, as well.

Mr. Rothermel thanked the design team for its response to the Commission's input, thinking the result a definite improvement. Mr. Bealer thought the repositioned handicapped parking another improvement. Mr. Miller said the required plan corrections were almost complete, most of his remaining comments referring to the approvals of other regulating bodies. Mr. Buck asked about a possible conditional approval. Mr. Miller said not, in light of the outstanding zoning matters. Ms. Mayfield asked if they had requested a time extension of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code-imposed deadline. Mr. Buck acknowledged.

Mr. Rothermel moved to table the final plan, agreeing to extend the time to act until the April 8th meeting. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table McDonald's final plan, and extend the deadline according to the procedure set forth under §508.3 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

Mr. Palka hoped that, in the future, the Department of Transportation would start restricting left turns *in and out* of businesses on Lancaster Avenue.

Review the **final** subdivision/land development plan for **Habitat for Humanity – 1131-1135 Luzerne Street**, a subdivision and four semi-attached dwellings proposed for those parcels known as 1131-1135 Luzerne Street.

[0:43.28]

Mr. Raffaelli suggested presenting the next three proposals concurrently, given their common theme and applicant. Mr. Worrall said there wasn't much to present, characterizing it as the same type of development, in same neighborhood, as Habitat's previous City projects. He promised neutral colors for the façades. He reported that the Zoning Hearing Board had granted parking variances, allowing one space each and within the required rear yard. Mr. Miller asked if Habitat planned on extending the alley's paving to their proposed off-street parking spaces. Mr. Worrall said if it were required, they might, but weren't intending to. He said the Zoning Hearing Board didn't ask for it. Mr. Rothermel asked about its condition. Mr. Miller thought the whole alley in poor shape. Mr. Bealer wondered about legal access. Mr. Worrall noted two access points from Schuylkill Avenue, unsure of their legal status. Mr. Bealer, having witnessed it personally, noted the usual practice of traveling from Schuylkill Avenue through the Super Clean Laundry's parking lot, it being the only practical access, as the alley doesn't extend to Blair Avenue. Mr. Worrall agreed it was a "peculiar situation". Mr. Rothermel asked about Habitat's plan for access. Mr. Worrall figured they'd similarly use the space between the Great China Chinese restaurant and the laundromat, as suggested by the Zoning Administrator. Mr. Miller asked for their surveyor's opinion. Mr. Worrall said it was never specifically determined. Mr. Bealer noted a makeshift driveway currently in use, where their northernmost home is proposed. Mr. Miller warned that if the restaurant and Laundromat ever built over their

parking lot, Habitat's off-street parking would be inaccessible and the zoning standard further violated. Mr. Worrall thought that should have been addressed by the Hearing Board. Mr. Rothermel countered that Habitat is marketing the homes, and constructing the parking pads and should confirm the access to it, legally and practically. Mr. Worrall thought it beyond his responsibility to survey. Mr. Miller argued that as a primary reason for employing a professional surveyor.

Mr. Raffaelli asked if the proposed designs provided a minimum of a 'half-bath' on each floor. Mr. Worrall said not, relying on building code minimums. Mr. Raffaelli asked about party wall construction, and provisions for noise attenuation. Mr. Worrall noted gypsum board over wood framing, as required by code. Mr. Rothermel asked about trees and sidewalks. Mr. Worrall said trees are proposed, but requested a waiver of the curb and sidewalk requirements, considering the lack of any such existing nearby. Mr. Jones noted the statement on each plan acknowledging their potential responsibility in the future.

Asked about the number of bedrooms, Mr. Worrall noted three in each unit. Mr. Rothermel suggested the possibility of children walking to school in the middle of a street. Mr. Worrall noted a dead-end street, adding that they probably wouldn't propose a project if they thought it a dangerous situation. Mr. Jones confirmed the lack of nearby sidewalk in the neighborhood, and noted the stormwater drainage implications of installing curb. He referred to the plan notes claiming the grading would promote drainage away from the homes, but in the absence of a proposed grading plan, wondered about potential impacts on neighbors. Mr. Worrall said it was never addressed in their other City projects.

Mr. Raffaelli recalling the experience with the recently-approved "Cotton Street Subdivision", thought the Commission should delay action until the legal access issues were addressed. Mr. Bealer thought Habitat had a legal responsibility if marketing the expectation of off-street parking.

Mr. Miller asked if there were any other issues with the content of his review letter. Mr. Worrall, yet to fully review it, didn't note any.

Mr. Bealer moved to waive the curb and sidewalk requirements, §§22-602.C and -602.D respectively, of the Land Development Ordinance. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted 4 to 2 to grant the waivers, Msrs. Palka and Raffaelli casting the dissents.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the final plan, pending clarification of legal access to the off-street parking proposed and redress of the drainage issues identified by the City Engineer. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the "1131-1135 Luzerne Street" plan.

Review the **final** subdivision/land development plan for **Habitat for Humanity – 1449 Monroe Street**, a subdivision and four attached dwellings proposed for that parcel known as 1449 Monroe Street. [1:18.54]

Mr. Bealer recalled the previous developers ("Monroe Townhouses", March 14, 2006) being told that curb and sidewalk would be required, since it existed on the neighboring Lackawanna Street property. Following some discussion of the surrounding conditions and unopened streets, Mr. Rothermel asked for the City Engineer's position. Mr. Jones agreed with an installation on Lackawanna, but warned curbing that block of Monroe Street without accompanying stormwater infrastructure would risk impacts on the Warren Street By-pass (PA12) downslope. He suggested limiting construction to the curb radius and the sidewalk to it. Mr. Bealer asked about the handicapped ramps. Mr. Jones thought that would make a difficult transition. Asked about the condition of the alley, Mr. Worrall intended to pave the alley to the proposed parking pads.

Mr. Rothermel commented on the perpetuating problem of granting curb and sidewalk waivers to "infill" proposals based on its absence in a less-dense existing neighborhood. Mr. Worrall said Habitat never anticipated building as many homes on Monroe Street.

Mr. Miller reported that this was the one of the three plans for which he hadn't yet received the County Planning comments.

Mr. Rothermel moved to waive the curb and sidewalk requirements for Monroe Street, while still requiring them along the Lackawanna Street frontage, to include the radius to Monroe. Mr. Jones again recognized a plan note assuming responsibility should the City ever decide to install curb and sidewalk along Monroe. Mr. Lauter seconded the motion. And the Commission voted unanimously to waive the curb and sidewalk requirements, in part, §§22-602.C and -602.D respectively, of the Land Development Ordinance.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the final plan. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the "1449 Monroe Street" plan.

Review the **final** subdivision/land development plan for **Habitat for Humanity – 1415 Montgomery Street**, a subdivision and two semi-attached dwellings proposed for that parcel known as 1415 Montgomery Street. [1:31.56]

Mr. Worrall described two single-story, wheelchair-accessible units, on lots sloping toward the Tulpehocken Creek. He said off-street parking would be accessible from the rear yards, and porches included on the fronts. He called them small homes, about 10,070 square feet [*sic*], and similar to existing styles in the neighborhood. He proposed deeper front yard setbacks, given the steeper slopes up-front. Mr. Miller noted the floodplain boundary crossing through the front yard, as another reason. Mr. Worrall said the designs have three bedrooms, though Habitat has previously modified those layouts to better fit a family of two handicapped persons. He said such a modification is possible, until that time building permits are sought. Mr. Miller asked if Habitat always had a candidate family arranged before they applied for building permits. Mr. Worrall said not, but sensed an opportunity for handicapped-accessible units at this location. He said they didn't intend to begin construction until late summer or fall, at least, depending on their progress with the Luzerne Street properties. Mr. Jones mentioned an unanswered drainage concerns, similar to the other plans. Mr. Miller noted similar comments from the County Planners. Regarding the curb and sidewalk issue, Mr. Worrall said none existed anywhere nearby.

Mr. Reppert moved to waive the curb and sidewalk requirements, §§22-602.C and -602.D respectively, of the Land Development Ordinance. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to waive the curb and sidewalk installation.

Mr. Palka moved to table the final plan. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the "1131-1135 Luzerne Street" plan.

Other business:

minutes-December 11, 2007 Planning Commission meeting [1:45.15]

Mr. Reppert moved to approve the December 11th minutes, as presented. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the December 11, 2007 meeting minutes.

Resolution #2-2008

§609 recommendation-"fire stations", defined and regulated - proposed Zoning Ordinance amendment [1:46.23]

Mr. Miller reported that City Council held the required hearing on the proposed amendment, but waited until it came to their vote in the general session to voice their objections to the use classification (i.e. "special exception" versus "conditional"), which their legal counsel deemed a substantial change, enough to require readvertisement and rehearing. He assured that the use classification was the only change, the rest copied verbatim from the Commission's proposal. He said he had previously made known the Commission's concerns, vis-à-vis capital investments. He reported that the County Planners have already reviewed it again, and without objection.

Mr. Bealer moved to restate the Commission's positions on the proposed amendment, and preferences for classification as a special exception use. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to communicate the same recommendations regarding the "fire station" amendment.

Resolution #3-2008

In response to some questions raised at the December 11th meeting about notices and invitations, Mr. Raffaelli offered meeting minutes from the City's recent "housing summit" (held December 05, 2007). Mr. Miller confirmed that it was Council staff's intent to limit the attendance to board chairs, in their attempt at a more-focused conversation. Mr. Rothermel noted that at least one other board had designated an alternate representative.

Mr. Raffaelli reminded the Commission of their yet-to-be-communicated complaint regarding the Commission's exclusion from certain decision-making affecting public parks and property. He asked what the Commission wanted to do with the letter drafted by the Planning Office. Mr. Bealer volunteered to revive the issue, and mentioned the draft by-laws as another forgotten item. Mr. Miller recalled some members preferring to leave the specific examples out of the letter.

§508.3 agreement to extension-Lands of Munzer Yacoub - final subdivision plan [1:57.58]

Mr. Miller reported that Lehigh Engineering Associates has, by email, requested additional time on behalf of their client, Munzer Yacoub. Mr. Bealer moved to extend the deadline to the April 8th meeting, 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 #4-2008

Mr. Bealer questioned the scrolling digital sign, installed the day before at the recently-rebuilt G. L. Public Services office building at 104 North Third Street. He had no personal objection, but wondered if it had been duly permitted by the Zoning Administrator. Mr. Miller doubted it, and didn't recall having issued an occupancy permit either. Mr. Bealer perceived an area exceeding that allowed, and noted the projecting angle from the building. Mr. Rothermel recalled considerable efforts made in preparing the "sign" chapter of the Zoning Ordinance, and hoped for diligence in its enforcement. Mr. Bealer recalled a conversation during the Commission's review when they had supposedly decided against an idea for a smaller scrolling sign above their front door. Mr. Raffaelli asked that the Planning Office check to see that the sign was legally approved, and if not, file an appropriate complaint.

Mr. Raffaelli commented on the lack of activity on the Berkshire Bottling Works project, and wondered about the integrity of the retaining wall along Clinton Street, and the effects of the winter.

§513.a approval reaffirmation-Evergreen Community Power - Power House Expansion - final land development plan [2:03.58]

Mr. Miller reported that United Corrstack, LLC failed to record their plan within the time required by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, and were subsequently refused by the County Planning Commission when they attempted to do so. Mr. Lauter moved to reaffirm the Commission's approval of August 14, 2007 (Resolution No. 49-2007). Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to renew their approval of the Evergreen Community Power final plan.

Resolution #5-2008

Mr. Miller reported that the Reading Eagle Company's new press addition will include a 10-foot setback on the western property line, providing room for a sidewalk and planting strip, after all. He said he requested an updated plan for the records, but not a formal revision plan.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the January meeting. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the January 8th meeting. - 9:15 pm.