

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
July 27, 2010 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

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

Staff present:

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

Others present:

Paul A. Szewczak, Liberty Engineering, Inc.
Howard Quaintance, Muhlenberg Greene Architects, Ltd.
Lawrence G. Grybosky, Spotts Stevens & McCoy, Inc.
Michael J. Kautter, Kautter & Kelley Architects
Aaron D. Booth, Kautter & Kelley Architects
Barry J. Suski, Reading School District
Scott T. Miller, Stackhouse Bensinger, Inc.
Scott M. Hunsicker, Reading Baseball, LP (Reading Phillies)
Carole Duran, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the July 27th meeting to order, the first to be moved to Council Chambers in an attempt to employ the recently-installed Granicus, Inc. 'webcasting' equipment. He asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the July agenda, as presented. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the July 27th agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Sylvania Homes II – Accessible Housing (Reading Housing Authority) - preliminary subdivision / land development plan [0:01.28]

Andrew Miller announced that the video part of the 'webcast' did not appear to be 'streaming'.

Mr. Szewczak explained that the plan involves a subdivision from two existing parcels, to be re-divided as three; separating the existing apartment housing, from the proposed, from the residual land. He proposed five handicapped-accessible units, designed for ADA compliance inside and out. Mr. Quaintance described a wood-frame construction, consistent in appearance with the Housing Authority's other Oakbrook-area buildings, namely the brick lowers and sided uppers. He said sprinklers were not required under the 2006 building codes. Mr. Raffaelli reminded presenters to sign the attendance sheet. Mr. Quaintance continued: two bedrooms in each of the two units fronting Liggett Avenue, and three bedrooms in the others set further back. He mentioned shingle roofing. Asked about the use of "green" construction techniques, he said the Authority had explored it, even applying for a related grant which wasn't awarded. Mr. Raffaelli asked if they'd connect to the Authority's steam plant. Mr. Quaintance said no. Asked about the off-street parking standard, Mr. Quaintance explained that public housing ventures require one space per unit. Mr. Lauter asked about Sheridan Street. Mr. Szewczak said it was unopened, and that they'd be petitioning to have it vacated. Mr. Quaintance added that the (Reading Kenhorst Boulevard) Seventh Day Adventist Church and SDA Junior Academy sit on the opposite 'side' of that street, to the west. The Commission discussed the possibility of occupancy by other than handicapped residents, and parking implications. Mr. Quaintance thought the parking design had flexibility, given the width designed for the handicapped-accessible spaces. He suggested such occupancy was unlikely, given the number of units the Authority operates and their need for such accessible units.

Mr. Szewczak didn't think the Authority had yet petitioned City Council for Sheridan Street. Andrew Miller said it would have to be settled before any Commission approval of the land development.

Upon the recommendation, Mr. Lauter moved to table the preliminary plan. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the "Sylvania Homes II" preliminary plan. Mr. Raffaelli asked that

architectural details be part of the next presentation, and reminded that a 'tabling' action is not a negative judgment of the plan but a procedural necessity until the plan is further developed.

Additions and Renovations: Amanda Stout Elementary School and Benners Court - preliminary subdivision / land development plan [0:18.12]

Mr. Grybosky introduced the plan to renovate the existing Elementary School on South 10th Street, and add a new wing to the east over a vacated Maple Street and Benners Court. The new construction would include a second-floor roof-top play deck. Emergency access, and access to the rears of the Spruce and Muhlenberg Street residential properties, would continue and improve. Pull-off areas along South 10th Street will improve the current drop-off/pick-up congestion. And stormwater planning includes both water *quality* and *quantity* management practices.

Mr. Kautter explained the plan's depiction of the existing Elementary School and the proposed additions. He said they intend to match the brick façade exactly, and have already presented the same to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. He said the existing Elementary School is in good shape structurally, and with architectural merit. He said major utility and communication systems are to be replaced. The addition will cover Benners Court and the sites of its demolished homes, though the alleys behind those sites would remain and be widened to 20 feet, meeting the needs of emergency responders. He noted a "bituminous playground", displaced for faculty parking, explaining that the off-street parking areas will be made compliant with the Zoning Ordinance, and an elevated roof-top deck will provide for a new 14,000-square foot outdoor play area, in part rubberized surfacing designed for "vigorous outdoor recreation" and a "green roof" garden area that might also serve academic purposes. He described a Maple Street "overpass" connecting the original building to the new, reconfigured primary entrances and bus loading areas, and 12 new classrooms to relieve overcrowding. He characterized four project phases: (1) the Benners Court and Muhlenberg Street additions, (2) moving half of the occupants into the Benners Court annex while their original spaces are renovated, (3) returning those students, and moving the other half while the remainder of the existing space is renovated, and (4) finishing the linking corridor. He expected the project to 'go to bid' in January or February of 2011, the first phase to be completed by March 2012, and the rest by March 2013. He estimated the construction costs at \$25 million.

Turning to solid waste planning, Mr. Kautter explained that trash is currently collected from the Spruce Street curb, in bags, twice daily. The amount of trash, notably from both breakfast and lunch programs, and planned cafeteria renovations, have spurred a proposed contained and fenced area for the Maple Street side, which should allow for a once daily collection in conjunction with a new recycling plan. He said handicapped-accessibility will meet current standards. He expected the current 820-student population will rise over 1000 with the addition. He said bus loading will continue to be organized by grade level, but through the Maple Street doors. He mentioned that with the Reading Police's bomb squad use of the former Washington Fire Company's firehouse, the Spruce Street restrictions on on-street parking may not be as relevant as they were under a fully-functioning firehouse. He hoped they might gain the use of that curb-line parking, having already approached the Fire and Police departments. He counted 61 existing off-street parking spaces, and an average need for about 72 cars. He said the design achieves 84 spaces, 11 short of the 95 total needed. He mentioned that the new second-floor deck and library could be accessed for special events, while isolating and securing other areas of the school. The double and triple parking by parents on South 10th Street, and the emergency response hazards made evident by a fire alarm prank during one such dismissal event, motivated the design of the pull-off spaces. He said that the wide existing sidewalk can handle the eight feet to be taken from it, and bump-outs will result at the corners maintaining safe crossing distances. Mr. Lauter asked how restricting Maple Street to School use would still provide access for the residential neighbors to the rear of their properties. Mr. Kautter said there weren't any garages there, and expected there wouldn't be a regular need. Time-of-day restrictions were mentioned. Mr. Lauter wondered what residents might do if they cannot find parking on-street, suggesting they might use those alleyways. Mr. Suski suggested Police enforcement. Mr. Kautter added that 20 perimeter security cameras are planned for the property. Mr. Bealer expected that some of those neighbors would want to establish parking areas. Ms. Mayfield noted the application of zoning standards on setback and lot coverage. Mr. Kautter repeated that the alleys will be wider. Mr. Suski recalled restricting signage being discussed. Mr. Kautter said many of the concerns had been aired at a 'OneStopShop' meeting, another being scheduled for September, and that he had met with the Fire Marshal several times. Mr. Suski suggested an onsite meeting with the OneStopShop representatives. Mr. Kautter said that, if granted some dedicated parking on-street, even if only for the duration of the school day, they could eliminate the 11 off-site spaces to be leased at Cotton Street (501 South 9th Street). Mr. Suski mentioned some concerns about the walk between that parking and the Elementary School. Mr. Raffaelli criticized parts of the floor plan, specifically the cafeteria and

kitchen areas and the elevator transport between them. Mr. Bingaman asked about the design of the garage lighting and the screening from the rear yards of the neighboring homes. Mr. Kautter indicated a light-emitting diode (LED) design and briefly explained the measures protecting the neighbors. He reminded that most of the faculty using the garage would be gone before dusk. Asked about the accessibility upgrades to the surrounding sidewalk ramps, Mr. Grybosky noted all four corners of the South 10th and Spruce, and South 10th and Muhlenberg intersections, the northern corners of the Muhlenberg and Maple intersection, and the southern corners at the Spruce and Maple intersection. Ms. Mayfield asked why only half of the latter two intersections were included. Mr. Grybosky said he met with the City Engineer, and together determined the other crossings to be sufficient, and noted some design challenges in upgrading the other crossings. Asked if the parking garage design was ‘open enough’ to forego any supplemental mechanical ventilation, Mr. Kautter confirmed, and indicated other crescent-shaped daylight wells. Asked if the green roof-play deck area was designed with the added loading of special events in mind, Mr. Kautter answered “absolutely”. Andrew Miller noted that he was still waiting on the City Engineer’s review, submission of the erosion and sedimentation control plan, and a resolution of the application fees paid.

Mr. Bingaman moved to table the preliminary plan. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted 3 to 0 to table the Amanda Stout preliminary plan, with Mr. Raffaelli, an employee of the School District, abstaining.

First Energy Stadium Parking Lot - parking lot land development plan [1:11.37]

Scott Miller reminded that the plan for this property was previously mentioned during the Stadium renovation presentations. He said the original design had been “scaled back” to 192 spaces, for budget reasons. Among the ‘existing conditions’, he described a section of Front Street, long-since vacated, and remnants of macadam basketball and volleyball courts and the (Northwest Swimming Association’s) pool. He said the Reading Phillies will lease the property from Carpenter Technology Corporation, who has asked that it be connected to their (Building 104) property at 2100 Centre Avenue. He noted that the Muhlenberg Township-City of Reading boundary divides the property, and that they have already obtained dimensional relief on the design from Muhlenberg’s zoning hearing board. He mentioned the landscaping and buffering provided, and a review letter received from the Conservation District. He was still waiting on a County Planning Commission review, and needed a special exception permit from the City’s Zoning Hearing Board for parking *as a principal use*. He hoped to have that resolved by the August meeting. Andrew Miller asked about the possibility of the proposed shade trees impeding on the function of the underground stormwater detention. Scott Miller briefly described the detention basin and its outflow through a nearby trench drain. He thought the separation of the trees, and planned soil amendments, would adequately protect the basin. Asked if there was any reason to keep left-over paving from the ball courts and interior sidewalks, he said some of those decisions have yet to be made. Mr. Raffaelli asked about the lighting plan. Scott Miller described a “shoebox” style of fixture. Mr. Bealer noted that Carpenter is the only real ‘neighbor’. Scott Miller thought the illumination would appear “pretty tame” when compared with the adjacent Stadium lighting. Questioned on the open space remaining on the west side of the property, and its possible use for stormwater infiltration, he said percolation tests were discouraging, and that an open basin would preclude any potential future expansion of the parking. He again noted the other approvals and reviews required before the Commission’s action. Andrew Miller agreed, but complimented the detail already given, and the landscaping proposed.

Mr. Bingaman moved to table the parking lot plan. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the First Energy Stadium parking plan.

Other business:

§609.c review-petition to rezone 513-523 Crestmont and 512-524 Arlington Streets, Residential 2 (R2) to Manufacturing Commercial (MC) [1:33.37]

Andrew Miller, recalling that the issue had already been considered by the Commission, wondered why another review had been requested. Ms. Mayfield mentioned two different public hearings, and separate steps to forward and enact the zoning change. She said the Commission could repeat the same recommendation. Andrew Miller reminded that Quaker Maid Meats is looking to develop a parking are on those parcels, and presented such a plan at the January 26th meeting. He said the Commission previously made its recommendation on the rezoning petition May 25th, recommending that City Council “look favorably” on the application.

Mr. Lauter moved to reaffirm the Commission’s Resolution No. 29-2010, supporting Quaker Maid’s rezoning petition. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to recommended City Council support the rezoning of 513-523 Crestmont and 512-524 Arlington Streets, from Residential 2 (R2) to Manufacturing Commercial (MC) status.

Resolution #36-2010

§603.c.2 conditional use review-501 South 19th Street (public utility) [1:37.07]

Mr. Raffaelli summarized that Pennsylvania-American Water Company is looking to expand its water service in the Mount Penn-Saint Lawrence area (from their "Woodvale Pump Station"). Andrew Miller recalled from an April 29th 'OneStopShop' meeting that the property was never permitted for the pump station use. He said the outward appearance has been maintained as a residence, and that the primary concern of the code officials is the chemical storage. He said the Comprehensive Plan doesn't offer much direction on the matter. Ms. Mayfield added that the last permitted use was a church. She said their application to install larger chlorine tanks led to the discovery of the zoning lapse. Andrew Miller read from the supporting statements in the conditional use application, paraphrasing that the Water Company first purchases water from the Reading Area Water Authority, and needs increased chlorine storage to meet an increasing demand.

Mr. Bealer moved to recommend approval of the conditional use, subject to the resolution of any outstanding zoning issues, their meeting the access needs of the City Fire Marshal and County 'hazmat' responders, and that they preserve the facility's outwardly-residential appearance. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to recommend City Council approve the conditional use application for the utility at 501 South 19th Street.

Resolution #37-2010

§303.a.1 review-petition to vacate Benners Court and the 300 block of Maple Street [1:45.33]

The planned expansion of the Amanda Stout Elementary School requires that the City first vacate those sections of Benners Court and Maple Street. Andrew Miller said he never received any formal communication from City Council, and didn't believe the departments of Law and Public Works had either. Ms. Mayfield said she understood, from the School District's solicitor, that they had satisfied the notification procedures, despite some initial difficulty in doing so. She said they determined that some neighbors didn't technically have frontage on Maple Street, and so didn't require notification. Andrew Miller recognized the need to move forward, but declined to suggest any resolution language without a formal petition. He said the opportunity for comment has been given, it up to the Commission if it wanted to offer any.

Mr. Bingaman moved to recommend that City Council vacate Benners Court and the 300 block of Maple Street. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted 3 to 0 to recommend vacating Benners Court and the 300 block of Maple Street, Mr. Raffaelli again abstaining.

Resolution #38-2010

review the draft June 22, 2010 meeting minutes [1:50.42]

Andrew Miller noted a dating error in the header, already corrected. Mr. Bealer wanted to clarify his (page 5) comment regarding the renovation of City Hall's first floor for a planned single-source permitting center, and his preference to maintain the Penn Room for public meetings. Other members repeated their own preferences to return to their former meeting space. Andrew Miller announced that the new camera equipment didn't seem to 'stream' the meeting, though the cameras did respond to the controls.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the June meeting minutes, as amended. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the June 22nd meeting minutes.

Resolution #39-2010

Mr. Bealer noted that the former Garden State Tanning plant demolition is progressing steadily, and that the Community Development Office is trying to help Tripoint Properties in renegotiating its mortgage on the 525 Lancaster Avenue property. He said the Blighted Property Review Committee has 65 properties in its sights for 2010, and plans to deal with ten cases each month. He said they'll begin the first determination hearings in September, and follow with certification hearings in October. He said, of the 2009 list, the City and Redevelopment Authority have finally resolved terms for the maintenance responsibility of acquired properties, and can move ahead with eminent domain proceedings. He added that three demolition contracts have already been awarded on properties voluntarily transferred.

Mr. Raffaelli insisted that the Commission return to the Penn Room, believing it a more conducive setting to its business and presentation needs. Andrew Miller suggested that he approach a higher authority on that matter. He said there were two plans for the Commission endorsement, following adjournment.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the July 27th meeting.