

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
June 12, 2007 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
Charles M. Jones, Department of Public Works

Others present:

Robert M. Behling, RiverPlace Development Corporation
Lee C. Olsen, Olsen Design Group Architects
Roger D. Lehmann, All County and Associates, Inc.
Scott T. Miller, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
Gary L. Koch, Colonial Electric Supply Co., Inc.
Todd A. Fucci, Construction Associates, LLC
Timothy J. Krall, Spotts Stevens & McCoy, Inc.
Carl J. Kanaskie, Jr., McKissick Associates PC
Gregg A. Borgia, Borgia Engineering Inc.
Mark H. Koch, Koch & Koch
Timothy S. Howe, Birchcraft Kitchens, Inc.
Michael R. Rado, Hydrojet, Incorporated
Richard B. Keffer, Olsen Design Group Architects
Stephen F. DeLucas, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the June 12th meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the agenda. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the June agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Review the **concept** land development plan for the **RiverPlace Amphitheater at Philosopher's Landing**, a recreational and performance venue proposed for that parcel known as 2 North Front Street. [0:01.05]

Mr. Behling said the project team was looking for design input, and would return later with land development plans. He said "hundreds" had been involved in preliminary design meetings, from which a preferred option has emerged. He said Sasaki Associates, Inc. is leading the project design, with the assistance of Buchart Horn, Inc. and Olsen Design Group Architects.

Mr. Olsen named the "River of Trees" option. He said Sasaki has turned its focus toward project cost estimations. He said Reading Area Community College and RiverPlace are in the process of negotiating land transactions and access easements. He said the Community College's Board of Trustees has been supportive of the concept.

Mr. Olsen described the site, its existing conditions and pedestrian connections, area landmarks, and the solar orientation. He indicated the approximate limits of lands owned by the Community College and Norfolk Southern Corporation, and the approximate underground location of the City's large Court Street storm sewer and the (UGI Utilities, Inc.) gas main traversing the site. He said the proposed amphitheater will be oriented on north/south axis, with 500 fixed seats and 1000 "lawn" seats, an interactive water feature, and a 500-square foot concession building with public restrooms. He said the street stub connecting Riverfront Drive to Washington Street would be closed for a "vest-pocket park". For the amphitheater, he envisioned a tensile roofing structure over a permanent foundation. He said the working design will not compromise the underground utilities or the Thun Trail. He proposed enhancing the tree planting along the River, but in a way that would preserve views of the River. He said preliminary thoughts of an amphitheater placed closer to the waterline were scrapped due to the degree of

fluctuations between high-water and drought River levels. He suggested a continuation of the recent cherry tree plantings, interactive water features, a labyrinth feature in the lawn, and a series of formed boulders for the seating, preferring a curved pattern, with room between the steps to spread a blanket. He expected initial cost estimates by the end of June or beginning of July.

Mr. Behling assured that handicapped access would be designed at each end of the seating areas. He mentioned sound control considerations for the nearby residential neighborhoods and high-rises, and the Community College's Yocum Library, looking to orient the sound toward blank walls and the Penn Street Bridge, adding that the tensile structure itself could attenuate sound. He said the seating count designed would not support large concerts, either way. He said the facility would generally be left open as a public park. When ticketed events were planned, he expected the use of portable fencing. He said the Community College's forthcoming Master Plan indicates their intent to replace the faculty parking with a "campus green", and the remainder of the student lot (Lot E) would follow as the Community College pursues other structured parking arrangements. He green spaces would then greet travelers entering the City from the Bridge.

Mr. Raffaelli asked if any railings would be part of the terraces. Mr. Behling hoped not, unsure if required by other regulatory agencies. Mr. Olsen thought such a requirement would mandate hard surfacing throughout the facility, hoping it wouldn't be required, and recognizing a number of similar designs in other communities.

Mr. Lauter asked about off-street parking arrangements. Mr. Behling mentioned the existing public structures and the Community College's lots, if and when available. Mr. Olsen asked if the Commission had been presented the Community College's Master Plan, and its parking strategies. Andrew Miller said no.

Mr. Lauter asked about the permanence of the stage structure. Mr. Behling mentioned a building pad "of some sort", with flood proofing in-mind. He called it a challenge to manipulate the existing terrain for a functional performance space, without creating an adverse effect on the local hydrology. He said the repair and maintenance burden following a flood event must be limited to a power washing of the hard surfaces. Mr. Olsen expected a flat, finished surface, most likely with a crawl space for utilities.

Mr. Bealer asked if maintenance would be handled by RiverPlace. Mr. Behling said they were working on the ownership, operating and programming agreements. He felt the ticketed events, at least, should figure event cleanups into their overhead.

Mr. Bealer expressed some concern for safety around the water features, recalling Philadelphia's annual statistics on drownings in urban fountains.

Mr. Bealer wondered about removing the street stub connecting Riverfront Drive and Washington Street amid increasing usage, and a current configuration with some problems. Mr. Behling noted some conflicts between turning movements, prompting Sasaki's recommendation to eliminate it. He said they were consulting a traffic engineer. Mr. Rothermel said the intersection was designed by traffic experts, but that its original function had been compromised by the construction of the Front & Washington Garage. He advised the project team to calculate the cost of the "pocket park" separately, and consider it as an alternate. He wondered how it would contribute to the project as-a-whole, suggesting a lower-maintenance green might allow the budget to focus on other improvements.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the landscaping strategy for the Riverbank. He felt one problem south of the Bridge was excessive landscaping material placed over the years, some according to plan and some not, blocking scenic views of River. He suggested landscaping "clusters", used to frame the views of the River and interesting features within it.

Mr. Rothermel asked about plans to connect the "missing link" of the Reading Greenway trail between the Washington and Elm Street extensions. Mr. Behling said its completion was complicated the Railroad's share of the land, and their aversion to encouraging increased public access. He said they've approached Norfolk Southern about a possible acquisition. Mr. Rothermel asked if the Reading Greenway was becoming part of the Thun Trail. Mr. Behling called it the "Thun Section" of the Schuylkill River Greenway Association's Schuylkill River Trail. He said the Greenway Association is working on an "alignment study", that will show the route as the Schuylkill River Trail.

Andrew Miller raised a concern about eliminating rail service to willing customers. Mr. Behling insisted they weren't intending to acquire the rail line, but rather the excess land between the rails and the River. He saw a potential for passenger excursions, and short line operators in the future. Mr. Rothermel said the land wasn't part of the original lease from Conrail because of the limited space between the tracks and the top of the Riverbank, and further complicated by the large storm sewer outfall.

Review the **preliminary** land development plan for the **15th Street Land Development**, a subdivision and six single-family attached dwellings proposed at those parcels known as 615 and 633 South 15th Street. [0:45.35]

Mr. Lehmann said, since the Commission's May meeting, he and Mr. Jones had worked a solution to the dead-ended streets, offering a "back-around" for delivery trucks, et alia. He said he resolved the outstanding zoning issues; the parking standard and maneuvering requirements. He asked for preliminary approval, characterizing most of the remaining issues as being in the hands of "outside agencies".

Mr. Rothermel asked for a plan better distinguishing the asphalt and green surfaces. Mr. Lehmann, coloring the plan as he spoke, explained that every unit had a parking space in a garage, while half the units were provided with wider driveways, in order to meet the required 1½ off-street spaces per unit. Mr. Rothermel asked where visitors would park. Mr. Lehmann answered "Fairview Street".

Mr. Rothermel asked Mr. Jones if the current turn-around configuration met the intent of Neal Kern's (Barry Isett & Associates, Inc.) 'second opinion'. Mr. Lehmann interjected that the location of a proposed drainage swale conflicted with a turn-around location any closer toward the (south) end of the Street. Mr. Jones said the Kern review didn't get into the specific details of design. He said the location chosen is a comparatively flatter area, close enough to the end of the Street to satisfy his concerns.

Andrew Miller asked if the Berks County Conservancy would arrange the vacating of the remainder of the (unopened) streets to the south. Mr. Lehmann said he understood the Conservancy's intentions to remove the rest of the unopened streets of Neversink Mountain.

Mr. Raffaelli recommended that parking restrictions be posted at the turn-around. Andrew Miller asked if the developer had arranged an easement from the (City's) Neversink Playground, and any other necessary construction easements. Mr. Lehmann thought an easement for the waterline (Reading Area Water Authority) the only one in addition to the turn-around. He said he'd address it, and everything else in the Planning Office review, by the final plan submission.

Andrew Miller asked what maintenance had been arranged for the underground stormwater detention basin. Mr. Lehmann said a homeowner's association agreement would be established.

Mr. Lauter asked about phasing of the construction. Mr. Lehmann said the 15th Street units would be built first. He said the grading plans dictate that earthworks at 15½ Street commence simultaneously, as the sites balance one another; cuts from 15th Street become fills for 15½ Street. He said home construction on 15½ Street would wait until the 15th Street units were underway and selling. He pegged the starting price at \$155,000. He said the erosion and sedimentation control plan had been approved for 15½ Street, but will be amended because of the repositioning of the units for the larger driveways. Andrew Miller asked if the Conservation District was aware of the intended sequencing, and the need for permanent stabilization.

Mr. Lauter asked if the street and turn-around would be installed before other improvements. Mr. Jones said they'd have to be, for the utilities. Mr. Lehmann said a sub-grade and binder course would be in-place before any home construction. Andrew Miller asked about provisions for construction entrances and tire cleaning. Mr. Lehmann answered "about fifty feet of R4s" (rocks, mainly 6" to 12" in diameter).

Mr. Lauter asked when the detention system is installed. Mr. Lehmann said concurrent with the road construction. Mr. Lauter asked if it would handle the Mountain's stormwater runoff. Mr. Jones said it will bypass the detention, for the 15" storm sewer.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve preliminary plan for 15th Street, with the provision of all changes required by the Planning Office review, the City Engineer's review, and all other required permits. Mr. Reppert seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant preliminary approval.

Resolution #32-2007

Mr. Rothermel, though recognizing the support from the administration, the Conservancy and the Berks County Planning Commission, regretted what he termed "missed opportunities" for a better design. Mr. Bealer agreed, adding that he moved his resolution with reluctance. He noted the developer's cooperation and suggested it was "time to move on". Mr. Raffaelli criticized the street orientation, in-line with the slope, thinking there probably were better solutions.

Review the **preliminary** land development plan for the **15½ Street Land Development**, a subdivision and eight single-family attached dwellings proposed at those parcels known as 614, 631 and 632 South 15½ Street. [1:09.30]

Mr. Lehmann noted the similar issues between this and the 15th Street plan. He indicated the turn-around provided, this time closer to the (south) end of the Street. He said the off-street parking standard was again met by proposing wider driveways with half of the units. He asked for preliminary approval.

Mr. Rothermel wondered if the geometry of the turn-around allowed for garbage and recycling truck maneuvers. Mr. Lehmann answered "yes". Mr. Jones explained that large fire apparatus and tractor trailers could

not make the turn, to which Mr. Lauter added large moving vans. Mr. Jones said the turn-around couldn't possibly be designed to accommodate them.

Mr. Bealer asked if the "fire lane" required an easement over private property. Mr. Lehmann said it did, encroaching on the corner of Lot #6. He said the access is only for emergency vehicles. Mr. Lauter wondered about what would happen if the driveway were full of vehicles. Mr. Lehmann recalled the Zoning Ordinance prohibition on parking in setbacks.

Mr. Rothermel moved to approve the preliminary plan for 15½ Street, subject to compliance with comments from the Planning Office and Department of Public Works. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant preliminary approval.

Resolution #33-2007

Review the **final** subdivision and land development plan for **Colonial Electric Supply**, a proposed lot annexation and addition to the building at 1900 Centre Avenue. [1:17.24]

Scott Miller described the site at the northwest corner of Centre Avenue and the former Richmond Street, the existing stone and stucco building next to the City-owned First Energy Stadium property, the proposed 4000 square-foot addition, an existing one-story building "to be removed", and the planned reconfiguration of the off-street parking and circulation. He said the overall parking count would increase by 11 spaces. He described a wholesale lighting business, with a retail showroom. He said the required highway occupancy permit application was already under review. He offered the architectural elevations, describing a series of steel panels with a stucco finish (CecoRoc panels). He said existing building would be repainted to match the new addition. He said no additional fenestration was proposed, but for the new loading dock. He mentioned the June 4th Planning Office review, not anticipating any problems in addressing the outstanding issues.

Mr. Raffaelli asked how much land was being transferred. Scott Miller indicated the 'existing and proposed' boundaries on the plan, and the shared access to off-street parking. He said a resolution passed City Council the night before, authorizing the plan submission and indicating the City's agreement to the annexation and a revised agreement.

Mr. Lauter asked about colors. Gary Koch said they'd paint it grey, and replace the rotting wood trim with a blue (Fypon®) urethane product.

Mr. Rothermel asked if the plan had made appeals to the Zoning Hearing Board. Andrew Miller said not. Scott Miller said the Zoning Administrator intended to issue a permit, once the agreements were finalized.

Mr. Raffaelli asked where the showroom would be located. Gary Koch said the existing second floor. Mr. Raffaelli suggested additional fenestration, for the retail benefits.

Mr. Rothermel requested a letter from the Zoning Administrator explaining why the plan had not been submitted to the Zoning Hearing Board, recognizing zoning violations on a property being enlarged. Andrew Miller said a permit had been issued by a previous Zoning Administrator. He said all zoning nonconformities would either be reduced or eliminated, by land acquisition or the construction itself. He said the subdivision proposed was dictated by the intended design and the zoning requirements.

Mr. Rothermel asked about new signage and lighting in the parking lot. Gary Koch mentioned backlit, revealed lettering on the side of the building. Scott Miller said the lot had adequate illumination, and some wall-mounted architectural lighting would provide additional security. Gary Koch said bollard lights would be installed along the sidewalks.

Mr. Raffaelli asked about the condition of the curbing. Scott Miller said he'd address the issue with the Department of Public Works.

Mr. Bealer asked about the building's entrance. Gary Koch mentioned separate access for the counter service and warehouse on the first floor, and a front entrance to the second-floor showroom. Mr. Raffaelli recalled the glassworks (J. M. Kase, Inc.) that formerly occupied the property. Gary Koch said some of their stained glass remains.

Andrew Miller echoed the suggestion that they highlight their wares through the improvements to the property. He said the proposal has, so far, been received positively at every level. He said shared parking arrangements, between uses peaking at different times, ought to be further encouraged.

Mr. Bealer asked about delivery vehicle circulation. Scott Miller said the business sees few tractor trailers, most of their shipments coming in box trucks that could access the loading dock from either side.

Mr. Bealer asked about parking conflicts during day-time baseball games. Gary Koch said he already settled the matter with the Reading Phillies President; Colonial Electric reserves the use of the newly created spaces

only, the rest left available for Phillies patrons. He said what few deliveries they receive would be scheduled around game days.

Mr. Lauter moved to approve the final plan for Colonial Electric Supply, subject to compliance with comments from the Planning Office and Department of Public Works. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant a conditional, final approval.

Resolution #34-2007

Review the **final** 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. [1:42.39]

Mr. Krall reported that demolition activities continue on-site. He said a recently-completed (closed-circuit) television inspection of all the storm and sanitary sewer structures will yield additional detail for the next plan submission. He said they weren't seeking any approvals this month, but wanted to provide an update and answers to the Commission's traffic management concerns. He offered copies of the Superintendent's letter, delivered earlier to the Planning Office, explaining the planned bus circulation, and the traffic signal changes. He said they'd like to designate the south side of Elm Street, between North 12th and North 13th Streets, and the west side of North 13th, between Elm and Walnut, as pick-up/drop-off zones, and communicate the same to the parents. He stated that North 12th Street will be reserved for the use of busses, exclusively. Mr. Kanaskie said they intend to install guardrails between the building columns on the west side of North 12th Street, in order to discourage private drop-offs and pedestrian conflicts with the busses. Mr. Rothermel asked how many spaces were really available for staging on the designated curblane, questioning the Superintendent's estimation of 38. Mr. Krall admitted that anywhere from a third to a half of that block of North 13th Street would be reserved for the right turn lane. Mr. Rothermel asked if an entrance on Walnut was still planned, and if so, how the District planned to control it. Mr. Krall called it a "pedestrian entrance", to be marked/signed. Mr. Rothermel understood the nickname, but wondered about enforcement and contingencies. Mr. Kanaskie explained key cards controlling the gated access to the parking garage, and security cameras "everywhere". Andrew Miller asked that the security measures be included in the next plan submission or in a subsequent presentation. Mr. Kanaskie said that plan is "about 90% complete", boasting the resolution capabilities of the cameras.

Mr. Raffaelli disputed the claims that the same busses ferrying everyone to the High School will be rerouted to the Reading Citadel. He said that may be the case now, but expected the District would prefer separating the age groups with dedicated busses. He criticized the planned capacity, and a "vertical articulation" he felt had built-in discipline and logistical problems.

Mr. Lauter asked if the proposed directional change to Walnut Street included eliminating the existing parking on its northern side. Mr. Krall answered yes, having already discussed that intention with the Department of Public Works. He said restrictions would be posted along that length. Mr. Lauter said he shares the concerns about controlling pick-ups/drop-offs. Mr. Jones said two ordinances were introduced to City Council, the night before, covering the direction changes.

Andrew Miller said two things were necessary; authorizing the requested time extension and communication to City Council any comments and recommendations on the proposed traffic changes. He said Council was asking for the input. He asked that the project managers or City Engineer detail those requests so the Commission can respond accordingly, among them: resolutions for modifying the existing and installing the new traffic signals, and ordinances for street direction changes.

Mr. Rothermel expressed his discomfort with the management plan for drop-offs, the District's ability to control the behavior of parents, and the additional burden on the City Police Department. He noted the lack of enforcement at other school locations, notably Glenside Elementary. He felt the entrance on Walnut Street too tempting for drop-offs. Mr. Kanaskie defended the entrance, for the existing crosswalks nearby, the District's breakfast program before normal school hours, the convenience during inclement weather, and the relief from crowding at other entrances.

Andrew Miller insisted on the need to communicate these concerns to City Council. He suggested that, without endorsing or rejecting the proposed traffic modifications, the Planning Commission might defer to the Department of Public Works and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, and instead voice its reservations about the parental drop-off/school bus circulation conflicts, and the ability of School District to control it. He offered to review the adopted minutes of previous meeting, and prepare a memorandum, rather than struggling to find specific language for a resolution. Mr. Rothermel moved to authorize such a communication from the Planning Office. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to authorize the communication on its

behalf.

Resolution #35-2007

Andrew Miller expected Council to act upon the legislation within two weeks, qualifying the plan for action at the Commission's July meeting. Mr. Krall agreed and noted two other minor modifications; a return to the City-standard 8" curb reveal on the east side of North 12th Street where a depression exists, and the removal of an "access lane" on west side of North 12th, to be replaced with sidewalk. Mr. Jones confirmed that neither required the action of the governing body. Mr. Krall said he had recently received a "will serve" letter from the Reading Area Water Authority, and was continuing sewer planning discussions with the Utilities Division Manager.

Andrew Miller requested a second resolution, tabling the final plan and authorizing the 60-day time extension requested in writing by letter dated June 7th. Mr. Lauter moved to table the Reading Citadel final plan and authorize the 60-day time extension. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant the extension.

Resolution #36-2007

Review the **final** land development plan for **Birchcraft Kitchens Land Development Plans**, a proposed expansion of the furnishing assembly business at that parcel listed as 1900 Madison Avenue. [2:32.48]

Mr. Bogia described the location at the northwest corner of Richmond Street and the former Madison Avenue, next to the United States Postal Service facility. He said the existing building is 18,760 square feet, with proposed additions of 1,960 and 10,000 square feet. He said the Zoning Hearing Board granted relief from the setback requirements of the Zoning Ordinance for the placement of off-street parking. Andrew Miller asked if the current layout was as shown the Board. Mr. Bogia said the encroachment distances are similar, the layout having been slightly modified for better truck maneuvering.

Andrew Miller compared the plan to that for Colonial Electric Supply, an addition to an existing building and business, and further complicated by land annexation and street vacation issues. Mr. Bealer wondered if the similar issues raised by the County Planners could be addressed. Andrew Miller thought so, but requested proof, especially the arrangement with the Postal Service allowing Birchcraft Kitchens to claim the entire width of the vacated Madison Avenue right-of-way.

Mr. Raffaelli asked about architectural elevations. Mr. Howe described an addition of concrete block painted to match the existing building, and an office area in split-faced block, for a more decorative look. He anticipated a light tan color scheme, much like their other facility on Thorn Street.

Mr. Jones satisfied with the stormwater management report, said a small public improvements escrow would probably be required, for the new storm sewer infrastructure.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the uses of the building. Mr. Bogia said Birchcraft was consolidating its milling and finishing activities at one location. Mr. Rothermel asked about the addition's height, its fenestration and landscaping. Mr. Bogia said the architectural drawings weren't complete. He said the addition would be the same height as the existing building, with some new doors and stairwells. He showed the landscaping plan, indicating some low shrubs intended to partially screen parked vehicles, the required number of trees in the parking lot, and a probable flower bed for the office area. He expected a "nice looking building" for the location. He said the architect just got started, offering to provide building elevations at later date.

Mr. Jones asked if they expected any change in employment. Mr. Bogia expected not, for the time being, but with several employees being relocated from the Thorn Street facility. Mr. Howe mentioned another wood-working company eyeing the Thorn Street site. Mr. Jones advised communication with the Utilities Division Manager regarding potential industrial waste discharges.

Mr. Rothermel, noting the Commission's usual practice of reviewing architectural renderings, moved to table the plan until they could be provided. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Birchcraft Kitchens plan. Mr. Bealer voiced his appreciation of the developer's consideration of the Commission's comments and suggestions.

Review the **final** land development plan for **Hydrojet, Inc. Subdivision and Land Development Plans**, a proposed subdivision and an industrial building for precision machining services at that parcel known as 466 Tulpehocken Street (Parcel 2 of the "Buttonwood Gateway"). [2:45.27]

Mr. Bogia, assuming the Commission was familiar with the plan and the area, described the 34,346-square foot building proposed, and the area reserved for a 19,812-square foot addition. He mentioned some additional landscaping added to the front.

In their efforts to downplay the mass of the “shop area”, Mr. Keffer said they decided to change the color from a light grey to a darker. He produced renderings showing translucent panels, probably to be eliminated due to foundation preparations impacting the project budget. He described as a “breaking point”. He hoped the color changes would satisfy the Commission’s aesthetic concerns, and minimize the perception of a massive box. He said if the translucent panels are eliminated, they’ll continue with the metal paneling. He estimated 8 to 20 feet of unsuitably-compacted soils, and at least \$200,000 in remediation costs.

Mr. Rothermel suggested they consider a segmenting of different colors, as an alternate treatment. Mr. Keffer said they were thinking identification signage, but may be able to add colors. He said he’d rather not treat it in anyway that would draw additional focus. Mr. Rothermel felt a shop area at the twice at twice the height of the office portion would inevitably draw the focus. He thought they should break the visual into smaller sections, acknowledging the effect of the grey color in helping to highlight the white of the office area. He called Buttonwood Street Bridge the second most important entrance to the City, after Penn, and thought the developer would be more conscious of the public’s perception. Mr. Keffer called the site conditions “unfortunate”, but again cited the budget. He thought the earthen berm, landscaping, and articulations in the office portion would make the built appearance look better than the architectural renderings suggest. Mr. Rothermel asked for the vertical difference between the Bridge and finished floor elevation. Mr. Bogia measured 35 to 40 feet. He said 160 linear feet faces Buttonwood Street, characterizing it as a “small box” when compared with other commercial/industrial buildings he’s developed. Mr. Keffer said whatever occupies the residual Buttonwood Gateway parcel would have a bigger visual impact. Mr. Rothermel disputed that building’s screening value if only one-story. Mr. Bogia said studies have estimated the average driver’s visual acuity at only 10% off centerline.

Mr. Lauter asked what materials were proposed for the office. Mr. Keffer mentioned a combination of split-faced block and Dryvit®. Mr. Lauter wondered why the translucent panels were more expensive. Mr. Keffer said the plastic material, intended to “daylight” the interior, costs more than preformed metal. He said he personally doesn’t like the “yellowing” effect as it ages, preferring the metal siding instead.

Andrew Miller thought the renderings deceptive, when compared with the true perspective from Buttonwood Street. He felt landscaping, arranged in a more irregular pattern, could effectively screen the shop area. Mr. Lauter asked if the metal panels spanned the full height of the building. Mr. Keffer said not in one continuous piece. Mr. Raffaelli suggested some “banding”, in a complimentary color, that might be more economical.

Asked more about the soils, Mr. Keffer explained that a soils engineer estimated the 8- to 20-foot depths, and the costs associated with replacement and/or dynamic compaction. He said pile foundations were not financially realistic. He said the existing grades are exactly what they need, but the bearing capacity is not. Mr. Rothermel wondered about specifications in the contract, and liable parties. Mr. Keffer mentioned the similar problems encountered at the Sun Rich Fresh Foods site.

Andrew Miller asked about the water line installation. Mr. Bogia mentioned a meeting with the Water Authority, and the investigation by its Executive Director and the Fire Marshal. He said they had been waiting for an escrow to proceed with the volume and pressure calculations. Andrew Miller understood that to be the responsibility of the developer, recalling his own conversation with the Executive Director the previous week. Mr. Bogia said not, and offered to settle it by conference call. Andrew Miller asked about the rumored two-year installation deferment. Mr. Bogia believed the proposed installation could serve the site adequately (with necessary pressure), in perpetuity. Andrew Miller reminded that there were, so far, no data to support that position. Mr. Bogia said, while he hadn’t performed calculations for the entire run, the Water Authority had previously indicated that the 12-inch main and its connections to the 10-inch and 20-inch lines, in Buttonwood and Tulpehocken Streets respectively, to be installed with the Sun Rich construction, would provide sufficient service for the entire site. He said anyone performing hydraulic calculations understands there’s no measurable loss in head pressure for the first couple hundred feet in straight line pipes. He said the hydrant at its end wouldn’t function any differently from the other two being installed closer to the main. He said there’d be no domestic use from that line, and no changes in pipe direction. He said the Executive Director had the latest plan, and the money to perform the calculations. Andrew Miller hoped to see the plan approved, expecting the engineer could probably address the remaining issues in his review, but hesitated, wanting to make sure the Fire Marshal was satisfied. He asked if there had been any feed back from the Conservation District, especially with regard to the proposed “rain gardens”. Mr. Bogia mentioned a modification to the erosion and sedimentation control plan, submitted and under review. He said they advised proper design of the rain gardens, which he felt wouldn’t cause heavy stormwater infiltration.

Asked about formal access agreements for the shared driveway, Mr. Bogia said none were proposed beyond the same notes as appeared on the Sun Rich plan.

Andrew Miller recommended the Commission table the final plan. He wasn't sure why the City wasn't pursuing the contractor responsible for the site preparations.

Mr. Rothermel asked who'd take responsibility for the driveway. Mr. Bogia said the three parcel owners would share the maintenance. Mr. Rothermel asked about possible public dedication. Mr. Jones called those talks "very informal". Mr. Rothermel noted the ordinance standards for public streets. Mr. Jones said the 'street' would require a number of waivers. Andrew Miller said the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code gives planning agencies the privilege of commenting on the opening of public streets before action by the governing body, admitting it rarely happens in the City.

Mr. Bogia said he'd make an honest effort to resolve water line issues. Andrew Miller said it wasn't a new issue, alarmed at the continuing disagreement over responsibility for the calculations.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the final plan, pending the resolution of water line and fire hydrant issues. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Hydrojet plan. Andrew Miller recommended that a decision on Gateway Drive's dedication be finalized in the meantime, so that requests for waivers could be dealt with before the road was constructed.

After some additional discussion on architecture, the members encouraged some creativity in the shop façade, agreeing that the translucent plastic was probably not the preferred treatment. Mr. Rothermel acknowledged the architect's responsibility to his client, but asserted the Commission's responsibility to the public and the character of its neighborhoods. He lamented the usual aversions to the Commission's suggestions, suspecting that further study might yield 'budget neutral' options.

Other business:

Minutes: [3:35.58]

Mr. Rothermel moved to accept the May 8th minutes, as presented. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the May 8th minutes.

Resolution #37-2007

Mr. Raffaelli referred to the extensive staff comments included in the June mailing.

Carpenter's Building 108 alteration

Andrew Miller, with a revised plat in-hand, briefed the Commission on two minor revisions to Carpenter's recently-recorded plan (plan book volume 304, page 392). The Commission expressed no objections to the change, approximately 1,705 square feet of additional 'knock-out' space at the Building's northern end.

Tom Masano Auto Group – Mercedes-Benz Renovation

Andrew Miller showed a proposed landscaping scheme for the Masano property at 855 Lancaster Avenue. Mr. Raffaelli noted deteriorating curbs, and an unused curb cut that he thought needed replacement in the City standard. Andrew Miller said they weren't proposing to replace the showroom building lost in a fire, May 29, 2006. He said the owner agreed to the landscaping, and may also be planning some additional raised pedestal displays. He said he intended to speak with the Shade Tree Administrator regarding appropriate varieties. Mr. Rothermel advised consultation with the Zoning Administrator regarding the construction of raised displays in the required setbacks.

Second and Washington Streets Parking Structure – curb alterations

Andrew Miller deferred to the City Engineer for an explanation. Mr. Jones said that when the Reading Eagle Company begins its planned expansion, WFMZ-TV will lose its place on Penn Street. He said they're planning a move into one of the new storefronts in the Parking Structure. He said most of their vehicles fit within the parking deck, but two will not, resulting in the proposed 'cut-outs'. When asked about the usable sidewalk, he admitted little would remain. Mr. Raffaelli recalled the retail intentions of those spaces. Mr. Rothermel agreed, wondering if other service uses would follow. Andrew Miller mentioned other design opportunities for Thorn Street, namely, with the anticipated plans for the Berks County Community Foundation's headquarters. He expected new green spaces and pedestrian amenities would follow. Mr. Raffaelli suggested parking the news vans in the gated alley area between the Goggleworks buildings. Mr. Jones reported that section of Thorn to be officially abandoned, and that the Department of Transportation was requiring its physical closure (to include curbing).

Sun Rich lighting alterations

Andrew Miller said Sun Rich Fresh Foods was looking to change the site lighting plan portion of its record plan, in favor of cheaper options. Mr. Rothermel recognized potential complications in any Commission attempt to enforce the record plan, and advised a conversation with the Solicitor.

City Park Master Plan

Andrew Miller said the dates of design meetings were provided for the Commission's information. Mr. Raffaelli wondered why the playground renovations (replacing the play castle) weren't reviewed by the Commission. Mr. Rothermel recalled a time when such projects were reviewed by the Commission. Andrew Miller reminded that §303 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code grants the Commission purview over all sorts of things they never see. He said it was much more than just a tradition. Mr. Rothermel felt the Commission's staff or legal counsel should be better protecting the Commission's interests.

Mr. Rothermel moved to adjourn the June meeting. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission agreed unanimously to adjourn the June meeting, 5 to 0. - 11:01 pm.