

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
March 11, 2008 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

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

Staff present:

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

Others present:

Peter C. Eisenbrown, Ludgate Engineering Corporation
Jay W. Worrall IV, Reading-Berks Habitat for Humanity, Inc.
David Lear, Lehigh Engineering Associates, Inc.
John T. O'Neill, Landmark Surveying
Kent D. Morey, Spotts Stevens & McCoy, Inc.
David A. Wolf, Carpenter Technology Corporation
Robert P. Stackhouse, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
Douglas F. Smith, Alvernia College
Lawrence E. Lloyd, Berks County Conservancy
Lee C. Olsen, Olsen Design Group Architects
Scott T. Miller, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
Albert R. Boscov, Reading Hospitality, LLC
Lawrence H. Lee, Reading Parking Authority
David A. Kostival, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the March 11th meeting to order. He welcomed Ms. Mazurkiewicz, as the Commission's newest member, and introduced the rest. He asked for acceptance of the agenda. Ms. Mayfield requested an executive session be included at the end of the meeting, for the purpose of discussing litigation. Mr. Rothermel moved to accept the agenda, as modified. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the modified March agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

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. [0:04.23]

Mr. Eisenbrown noted the three similar plans, and their presentations postponed from the February meeting. He claimed to have addressed the staff comments, those of the County Planning Commission, and the stormwater runoff concerns of the City Engineer. He said roof-top runoff will be directed toward the streets, intending to add a plan note to that effect. He said access concerns for the Luzerne Street subdivision, from Schuylkill Avenue, were addressed in a previously-submitted "access plan". He requested conditional approval.

Mr. Raffaelli asked if they had reconsidered masonry party walls, instead of the minimal gypsum board/wood stud design. Mr. Worrall reported there were no architectural changes since the January presentation. Mr. Raffaelli asked if half-bathrooms would be included on the first floors. Mr. Worrall said not. Asked about outstanding plan issues, Mr. Miller referred to his review letter, summarizing the deficiencies (site features, parcel boundaries, required notes, adjoining improvements, zoning measures, notes on waivers, deed references, details on access/alleyway improvements, etc.). Mr. Bealer noted that the sidewalk required along Lackawanna Street had yet to be included. Mr. Worrall said he didn't realize the Commission expected to see that change on the February submission. Mr. Eisenbrown noted there was no formal review of their last revision, assuming a "backlog" in the Planning Office was to explain. Mr. Miller argued that he should not be expected to prepare redundant review letters, resenting the implication that the Planning Office was unresponsive. He said the deficiencies were clearly

communicated, with six weeks having passed since anything was submitted. Mr. Palka considered the benefits of an additional half-bath to easily outweigh its costs, especially when considering the family sizes typical of Habitat's clients. Mr. Worrall noted Habitat's mission of providing modest housing, citing other modern amenities left out (air conditioning, dishwashers, etc.). He said they provide what local codes require. Ms. Mayfield noted that an improvements agreement would be required of the Lackawanna Street project.

Asked about the zoning variances granted, Mr. Eisenbrown answered that the parking standard had been reduced to one off-street space per dwelling unit, and its placement allowed within rear yard setback. Regarding the condition of alley, Mr. Worrall consented to its improvement on Monroe Street site. Asked how they intended to satisfy the staff review, Mr. Eisenbrown was under the impression he already had, and if not, said he easily could. He said he'd discuss an improvements agreement with the Department of Public Works. He indicated one shade tree proposed, per lot. When asked if the Shade Tree Commission was amenable to placements outside the right-of-way, he cited their previous projects.

Asked again about access to the Luzerne Street parking pads, Mr. Eisenbrown said they could pave the alley to the parking spaces, if required by City Engineer. He said the boundary survey showed sufficient width in the "alleys of record" referenced on the deeds.

Mr. Miller confirmed the Planning Code's §508 deadline to be expiring. Ms. Mayfield called the only options approval or denial without a (preferably written) agreement to extend that deadline. She offered the possibility of a verbal agreement. Mr. Eisenbrown offered to follow it with the written formality. Amid further discussion of the Planning Office reviews, and the developer's response to them, Mr. Miller again resisted the expectation that he prepare an unlimited number of formal letters as revisions are made piecemeal. He mentioned the special waiver of review fees for Habitat, and suggested the Planning Office reviews hadn't been taken seriously.

Mr. Worrall recalled photographs previously sent to the Planning Office, showing the access to the rear of the Luzerne Street properties, which he thought sufficiently addressed the Commission's concern. Mr. Rothermel believed all the information/detail requested should be shown before the Commission's approval. Mr. Bealer agreed, citing the Lackawanna Street sidewalk as a requirement made clear at the January meeting, yet not shown. Mr. Worrall asked if the delay was about the sidewalk issue. Mr. Miller called for everything detailed in the review letters, and anything else agreed to since. Mr. Worrall called it his oversight, but hoped to start the Luzerne Street project as soon as possible, for funding reasons. Mr. Raffaelli recalled negative experiences with conditional approvals.

Mr. Reppert asked for a review of the deficiencies on the Luzerne Street plan. Mr. Miller noted the alley improvements, drainage notes, existing features, existing and proposed boundaries, bearing directions, adjoining improvements, and waiver notes, characterizing most as mundane, parcel-related details, thinking they could easily have been addressed, and frustrated that they hadn't already been.

Mr. Worrall requested an extension of the "1449 Monroe Street" plan's consideration to the Commission's April 2008 meeting, in accord with §508.3 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. Mr. Rothermel moved to grant the extension. Mr. Reppert seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously in agreement to extension of the Code's §508-prescribed time limit.

Resolution #21-2008

Mr. Reppert moved to table the final plan. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the "Habitat for Humanity – 1449 Monroe Street" plan.

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. [0:46.20]

Mr. Raffaelli asked about the outstanding issues. Mr. Miller called the deficiencies similar among the three plans. Mr. Worrall restated his hardship in delaying the Luzerne Street project, adding that City funds were involved.

Mr. Worrall requested an extension of the "1131-1135 Luzerne Street" plan's consideration to the Commission's April 2008 meeting, in accord with §508.3 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. Mr. Bealer moved to grant the extension. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously in agreement to extension of the Code's §508-prescribed time limit.

Resolution #22-2008

Mr. Rothermel moved to table the final plan. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted

unanimously to table the “Habitat for Humanity – 1131-1135 Luzerne 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. [0:49.58]

Mr. Worrall requested an extension of the “1415 Montgomery Street” plan’s consideration to the Commission’s April 2008 meeting, in accord with §508.3 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. Mr. Reppert moved to grant the extension. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously in agreement to extension of the Code’s §508-prescribed time limit.

Resolution #23-2008

Mr. Palka moved to table the final plan. Ms. Mazurkiewicz seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the “Habitat for Humanity – 1415 Montgomery Street” plan.

Review the **final** subdivision plan for **Lands of Munzer Yacoub**, a proposed three-lot subdivision from his parcel in the 600 block of Linden Street. [0:52.12]

Mr. Lear recalled the original submission, its presentation at the Commission’s December 11, 2007 meeting, and the request for architectural detail. He acknowledged the latest Planning Office review, characterizing most of the line items as drafting-related. He presented building elevations, describing two-story homes fronting Linden Street on topography sloping westward. He expected a minor earth disturbance, noting the basement exits designed, with decks provided above. He described façades in earth-toned vinyl siding, mixed with vinyl shake-imitating siding for contrast. He also anticipated some color variation between units. Mr. Rothermel felt the downspouts would help with the visual separation between units.

Mr. Raffaelli asked about first-floor bathrooms. Mr. Lear mentioned a full bath on the second floors, with a half-bath for the firsts. Mr. Raffaelli asked if the basements could be set-up for eventual facilities. Mr. Lear wasn’t sure, noting that the laundry hook-ups would be on the first floors. Mr. Bealer thanked them for providing the requested information, and designing some visual contrast. Asked about required corrections, Mr. Miller said they dealt mainly with completing the certification statements. Mr. Raffaelli asked about the party walls. Mr. Lear knew only of the two-hour rating specified, guessing they’d opt for the gypsum board/wood stud option.

Regarding the improvements agreement, Mr. Lear figured the utility connections and sidewalk reconstruction would require a small escrow.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the final plan, conditioned upon the satisfaction of the remaining Planning Office review comments, and receipt of the municipal improvements agreement. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to conditionally-approve the “Lands of Munzer Yacoub” final plan.

Resolution #24-2008

Review the **final** land development plan for **Slovak Catholic Sokol – Addition and Alterations**, a proposed expansion of the Home Association’s building at those parcels known as 411-427 Crestmont Street. [1:04.40]

Mr. O’Neill recalled the previous presentation (at the September 11, 2007 meeting), and the Commission’s concerns about the design of the parking lot, its entrance since relocated from the alley toward the middle of the lot, and with direct access to the street. He said the required buffering and landscaping had been added to the plan. Mr. Miller noted that the agenda cited an earlier revision date, calling the February 11th revision complete. Mr. Bealer thanked the Sokol for reconsidering the parking lot access, and noted a smaller design generally. Mr. O’Neill affirmed, briefly describing the previous “L-shape”, rearranged to minimize the impervious surfacing, while still maintaining a 21-space capacity. He estimated 2700 square feet in the existing social club, increasing to about 7600 square feet following the approximately 55- by 85-foot gymnasium addition.

Mr. Miller called the improvements agreement the only outstanding item required, awaiting the City Engineer’s approval of the estimate.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the final plan, pending finalization of the municipal improvements agreement. Mr. Reppert seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to conditionally-approve the “Slovak Catholic Sokol – Addition and Alterations” final plan.

Resolution #25-2008

Review the **sketch** land development plan for the **Proposed Building 144 – Area Maintenance (Carpenter Technology Corporation)**, a new maintenance operations building proposed for that parcel known as 100 Bern Street. [1:11.28]

Mr. Morey explained that the original expansion for Building 108 was planned to the north only, but *went south* with the internal configuration of the equipment, and planning for the underground utilities and Bernharts Creek. He said that resulted in the razing of their existing area maintenance building. He described its proposed replacement site as mostly paved, with an existing shed and carport, to be removed. He estimated the proposed Building 144 at 15,000 square feet, about 75 feet in width and 200 feet in length, with a sheltered port for Carpenter's golf cart-like service vehicles. He mentioned discussing landscaping possibilities with the Planning Office, tentatively offering shade trees along North Front Street. He noted a building pad situate at about 12 to 13 feet below the parking level, resulting in sight lines across the top of the building. He recognized the residential dwellings across North Front Street, and liked the idea of street trees, if compatible with overhead utilities in the area. He requested an on-site visit with the staff.

Turning his attention to the other bounding streets, he noted that block of Exeter Street was vacated around 1917, considering a request to vacate McKnight Street, between Bern and Union. Mr. Miller mentioned having already discussed it with the Department of Public Works, whose concerns focused on utility reservations and access.

Mr. Morey requested waivers of the required boundary and adjoiner details, the same as those previously-granted the buildings 108, 84 and 143 projects. He said they had not yet decided on building materials or colors. Mr. Rothermel thanked Carpenter for considering the street trees, recognizing the North Front Street traffic, vehicular and pedestrian, generated by the Reading Phillies' games. He wondered if the Commission was still involved in the street vacation process. Mr. Miller confirmed, wondering if their comments were more-appropriately reserved for an actual petition. He intended to continue consulting with the Public Works Department, in the meantime. Asked about their lighting plans, Mr. Morey said they hadn't yet assessed the existing lighting or the need for more.

Mr. Miller recommended action on the waivers for the benefit of the final plan preparation. Ms. Mayfield resisted such action in the sketch stage. Mr. Morey recalled the buildings 108, 84 and 143 proceeding from "sketch" directly to "final". He requested the same understanding of the Proposed Building 144, considering the on-site utility connections, and the unchanging stormwater condition. Mr. Miller recommended waiving the preliminary submission and granting the others formally requested, given the sketch plan offered and the scope of the project. He summarized the waivers requested, due to the overall breadth of Carpenter's property, and noted their cooperative provision of other real estate plans and information. Ms. Mayfield repeated her objection to action on waivers for a plan "technically" not under consideration, suggesting Carpenter rely on the Commission's pattern. Mr. Morey indicated his comfort in moving forward with the final plan.

Review the **sketch** land development plan for the **Lower Campus – Stadium and Housing (Alvernia College)**, four new residence halls, an athletic field, and building additions proposed for that parcel known as xxx Greenway Terrace. [1:32.56]

Mr. Stackhouse introduced the "next phase" of Alvernia's campus development, recalling the Student Center Addition presented at the November 13th and December 11th meetings, and now under construction, as the "first phase". He described the existing physical education building, the softball, soccer, and baseball fields currently occupying the lower campus, and offered a proposal showing a circulation system and parking relocated away from the campus center. The plan included four new residence halls, at an estimated 320-bed capacity, and an expansion of physical education building. A new athletic field with synthetic turf and a track was also shown, with measures to address increasing stormwater impacts. He mentioned the priority of the pedestrian experience, and noted the new campus entrance being considered from Saint Bernardine Street. He recalled a recent meeting with City staff, all-too-aware of the stormwater-caused erosion downslope of the Saint Joseph Villa retirement facility. Mr. Smith said that easements would be established for those areas where the planned access drives cross the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters' property. He counted 240 spaces planned for the large parking lot shown. Mr. Stackhouse put the overall parking capacity at 1108, when including the spaces leased from the Ken-Grill Recreation Center. He calculated the net increase proposed at 236, for a built-out total of 1334 spaces. He described the drop-off/loading/emergency access reservations closer to the buildings. Mr. Smith said the College doesn't anticipate much traffic ever entering from Saint Bernardine Street, intending it for prospective students and other visitors. Mr. Rothermel suggested a second access to the large lot might prove valuable, in the event something blocked the primary drive. Ms. Mazurkiewicz observed long distances between the planned dormitories and their parking. Mr. Smith estimated that about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the resident students own cars, and that the new lot would be reserved for them, by card access. He said the College hopes to minimize trips, in and out, being sensitive to

relations with the neighboring Sisters. Mr. Stackhouse added that commuting students prefer the upper lot for its proximity to the academic buildings.

Mr. Miller asked about the arrangement with Ken-Grill. Mr. Smith described the College's school-year lease of the 100-130 parking spaces, and the lighting and call box they've installed. He said the lease will provide the "flex space" needed during the on-going construction activity, with a shuttle service available to those parking there. He noted the College's 2006 purchase of the former Maier's Bakery corporate offices at 540 Upland Avenue, also available to commuting students. He estimated a student population of over 1300 undergraduates each fall semester, and a residential capacity of 630, hoping to change that ratio in the residential favor, citing the more 'complete' college experience. He estimated 500-600 part-time/night-time students, and 500-600 graduate students, though some attend campus extensions in Philadelphia and Pottsville. He said the College hopes to grow incrementally, but assured that the new housing would not equate to added students. Ms. Mayfield questioned the College's policy regarding off-campus living. Mr. Smith said they require a one-year on-campus residency, except for students already living within a 10-mile radius or proving a medical exception. He said the current limitation of beds, and as many as 340 new freshmen and 120 transfers yearly, prevent any further commitment. He said few commuting students live in the immediate neighborhood, anyway.

Mr. Rothermel wondered about the architecture of the residence halls, and the availability of additional detail with the final plan. Mr. Smith envisioned a "village" of apartment-style housing, appealing to upper-class students. Asked about zoning parameters, Mr. Stackhouse thought building height might be at issue. Mr. Rothermel felt height standards to be motivated by construction with minimal setbacks, and supported variance, given the proposed placements of the new buildings. Mr. Stackhouse noted the challenge of the campus topography, with regard to handicapped-accessibility standards. He expected to make those grade transitions through the buildings themselves.

Mr. Miller asked about planning for a future pedestrian/bike trail along the Angelica Creek, which would connect its eponymous Park with the Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center. Mr. Stackhouse described the theoretical location, coincident with an existing sanitary sewer easement, and mentioned the College's support of the effort. Mr. Smith said he fully supports the trail system, already an area popular with his students.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the City-College agreement regarding the ball fields and tennis courts in Angelica Park. Mr. Smith described a lease, beginning July 1, formalizing the shared use. He said there is no rent paid, but the College intends improvements to the baseball and softball fields to the collegiate standards. He said they will remain a part of the City's park/recreation system, and available to residents. He said the lease also allows the College to construct two additional tennis courts, as funds become available. He said the College had been using the facilities for decades, without the formality, already resurfaced the tennis courts, and planned to repair the lighting.

Mr. Miller wondered if the arrangement with Ken-Grill wielded any influence in gaining access to the potential trail section through their property. Mr. Smith said the lease gives the College rights of first refusal in a sale, but expected they'd be receptive to the initiative, anyway. Mr. Lloyd mentioned funding already provided by Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for a feasibility study, and with the possibility of more, hoped to initiate some trail construction in 2008. He said the Conservancy would also be finishing the stream bank remediation underway in the Park.

Review the **sketch** land development plan for the **DoubleTree Hotel**, a convention-style hotel, and accessory uses proposed for that parcel known as 701 Penn Street. [2:00.53]

Mr. Olsen introduced his team, and referred to their recent meeting in Memphis with DoubleTree/Hilton representatives, who gave their consent to proceed with the land development planning. He called it a "work in progress", and mentioned concurrent discussions with the Reading Parking Authority about the design of the associated parking garage component, stressing that the garage design must be simultaneous and coordinated with the Hotel. Mr. Boscov, alluding to lessons learned with the Goggleworks Apartments experience, hoped to avoid budget surprises, and estimated a total cost of \$56 million. He admitted that some early design preferences were sacrificed, but not in the interior, naming Daroff Design Inc./DDI Architects PC in-charge of that effort, and with prior Hilton experience. He briefly described the layout, including a main entrance facing the North 7th Street/railroad corridor. He said it allows a larger capacity, as opposed to a more-shallow design if forced on the Penn Street frontage. He expected anyone familiar with Reading to opt for the Court Street access, looking to push it as far toward its intersection with North 8th Street (east), as possible, to mitigate traffic stacking on the bridge itself. He mentioned a porte-cochère for the main entrance, noting its proximity to the Sovereign Center's entrance. He mentioned a lounge, a restaurant, break-out rooms, a swimming pool and exercise room, and a possible "green

roof” for the better views it could provide. He described the building as 8 floors, and suggested color-changing exterior LED lighting as an architectural accent, likening it to the Cira Centre (connected to Amtrak's 30th Street Station) in Philadelphia.

Mr. Olsen presented rendered views from the perspective of the four surrounding intersections, intended to demonstrate the masses of the proposed Hotel and garage, and in relation to other nearby buildings. He said the parking garage, per discussion with the Parking Authority, needs to be 118 by 348 feet, the maximum dimensions for the precast, prestressed double-tee construction preferred. He estimated its height at 70 feet, the Hotel's at 107.

Mr. Boscov said the room windows would be sealed, as they are in airport terminals, for noise reduction. He characterized a design balancing site constraints, while still meeting Hilton's standards. He assured that the primary entrance would be closed during any Sovereign Center events. He hoped to secure the necessary space and tenancy for a second restaurant.

Asked about the Hotel's construction, Mr. Olsen considered four different structural scenarios: (1) a traditional CMU/precast plank combination, (2) steel framing, (3) precast concrete, or (4) the “tunnel-form” construction, already emerging as the preferred option for its speed, as estimates on custom precast delivery range between 6 and 8 months. Mr. Boscov hoped to have the Hotel open by October 2009. He said lot of work lies ahead with the franchise, but hoped to be under construction by the end of July. He called the Hotel a “catalyst”, like the R/C Theatres under construction at North Second and Washington Streets. He called for more restaurants and increased lighting downtown. He reported having secured funding for lighting schemes along Penn Street and in “entertainment square”. He thought restaurants the most critical element, hoping to realize 18 new openings over the next three years. He said he'd have to complete the Goggleworks Apartments alone, but boasted 8 local million-dollar investors for the Hotel. Speaking of landscaping, he thought there limited opportunities, but promised to work it in where possible, and possibly on the roof.

Mr. Palka wondered about the displaced parking. Mr. Lee counted 460 spaces in the Penn Court Lot, directing 150 to the South Penn garage, with another 350 available in the Berks Area Reading Transportation Authority's Park-N-Transit facility. He allowed that everyone displaced may not be relocated as conveniently as they'd prefer, but that space is available. Mr. Boscov suggested the Park-N-Transit facility was kept sparse for this anticipated need, noting that it is possible to add another level to it. He admitted the need for additional parking, aiming for an 800-space capacity in the Hotel annex. He estimated its cost at \$14 million. He expected usage by the Hotel's guests and downtown employees would differ with the times of day. Mr. Lee named Timothy Haahs & Associates, Inc. (TimHaahs), the same designers used for the vertical expansion at the 4th and Cherry Streets facility.

Asked about Norfolk Southern's involvement, Mr. Olsen said they've yet to consult them.

Mr. Raffaelli questioned the lengths of the hallways on the room levels. Mr. Boscov thought them shorter than most. Mr. Reppert challenged the placement of the kitchen in relation to ballroom, noting a path through the pre-function area. Mr. Boscov agreed that was a potential problem, but felt the design of that particular layout, still in play.

Mr. Rothermel recalled previous proposals for hotels on the site, most designs better engaging Penn Street itself, with arrival areas at or near mid-block. He questioned the design toward the North 7th Street/railroad corridor, terming it a “bizarre intersection” of service lanes. Mr. Boscov himself preferred a layout facing Penn Street, and a second level for the convention/assembly areas. He invoked the budget realities as explanation for that and other sacrifices. He said there won't be anymore state funding available, and alluded to the difference in room rates expected in Reading compared with other markets, but similar construction costs. Mr. Rothermel observed the lack of a mid-block pedestrian connection, specified in the designs of the former Downtown East Urban Renewal Area, and noted the tendency of Sovereign Center patrons to cross the existing lot from the Poplar and Walnut garage. Mr. Lee promised that the sidewalk along the North 7th Street/railroad corridor would remain. Asked about potential enhancements, Mr. Boscov welcomed suggestions. Asked about the Department of Transportation's input, Scott Miller called it unnecessary, unless alterations to existing traffic patterns are proposed. Mr. Boscov was more concerned with train whistles, and again mentioned special treatment of the fenestration to mitigate the nuisance. Mr. Rothermel asked about the previously-rumored overhead connection to the Sovereign Center. Mr. Boscov said it disappeared with the possible second level.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the fate of Wyndham's Abraham Lincoln Hotel at 100 North 5th Street. Mr. Boscov reported having approached them with “an offer”. He said they declined, determined to offer the price point alternative to the DoubleTree. He said the Greater Reading Convention & Visitors Bureau reports high demand on the local hotels, and room for more.

Mr. Raffaelli pitched the need for coordinated downtown way-finding signage, noting visitors' confusion over local designations, such as the 'Sovereign Center' and the 'Sovereign Performing Arts Center'.

Mr. Boscov announced expected visits the following Monday from Senator Arlen Specter and Representative Jim Gerlach, in-town to announce grants.

Other business:

minutes-February 20, 2008 Planning Commission meeting [3:18.07]

Mr. Bealer requested a clarification and a few typographical corrections. Mr. Rothermel moved to approve the February 20th minutes. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the February 20, 2008 meeting minutes.

Resolution #26-2008

waiver request-Berks County Community Foundation – Headquarters and Community Conference Center [3:21.15]

Mr. Miller recommended action on the on the Community Foundation's request for waiver of the sidewalk required on Thorn Street. He reported the City Engineer's favorable response, contingent on an ADA-compliant ramp at the Court and Thorn Streets corner, which the Foundation already promised. He reminded that the otherwise-compliant preliminary plan was tabled (February 20th) for zoning questions.

Mr. Bealer moved to waive the sidewalk requirement, with the limits and conditions previously attached. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to waive §22-602.D, in-part, from the Thorn Street frontage only, and on the condition that a handicapped-accessible transition ramp be provided on their side of the Court and Thorn Streets intersection.

Resolution #27-2008

zoning map change-Shuman Development Group – Buildings #8 and #9

Discussion turned to Alan Shuman's need for zoning redress in the neighborhood of the former Reading Outlet Center. Mr. Miller preferred rezoning the entire Residential Outlet district to the Commercial Neighborhood designation, rather than attempting to apportion commercial and residential sections. He felt the need to protect commercial expectations on properties zoned Residential Outlet. He said the Commercial Neighborhood district includes the residential uses associated with the Residential 3 district, while allowing for neighborhood-scaled commercial uses. He suggested the off-street parking relief be sought for Shuman's properties collectively, based on potential tenant fit-outs and the aggregate count of off-street parking spaces available, and hopefully on the condition that the owner agree to the continued management and maintenance of the properties. He called the Commercial Neighborhood the "most urban" district offered, in encouraging mixed uses. Mr. Rothermel felt the intent of the district was to serve the commercial demands of adjoining residential areas, and resisted its dramatic expansion, preferring to limit it to prominent intersections. Ms. Mayfield suggested addressing the parking standards, and leaving the rest to the comprehensive rewriting of the land use ordinances.

executive session-to 'consult with its attorney... regarding information or strategy in connection with litigation ...' [3:36.30]

zoning appeal-G. L. Public Services-animated signage at 100 North Third Street (Zoning Permit Control No. 2008-02) [4:04.12]

(... reaffirming the Commission's Resolution #6-2008.) Ms. Mazurkiewicz moved to continue the Commission's appeal to the Zoning Hearing Board, short of absolute compliance with the Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to continue its appeal of Zoning Permit Control No. 2008-02

Resolution #28-2008

Mr. Palka moved to adjourn the March meeting. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the March 11th meeting. – 11:20 pm.