

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
March 23, 2010 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, 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:

Thomas B. Ludgate, Ludgate Engineering Corporation
Bernardo Carbajal, II
Carole Duran, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the March 23rd meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Bealer moved to accept the March agenda, as presented. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the March 23rd agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

2nd Street Learning Center (Opportunity House) - final subdivision/land development plan [0:00.34]

Mr. Ludgate described the plan as being essentially identical to that presented at the January meeting; an approximately 12,000-square foot learning center and a parking lot to service it. He reported that the Berks County Conservation District had approved the erosion and sedimentation controls, and requested that the Commission grant final approval. Asked about a pedestrian crosswalk, he indicated its location, crossing Pear Street. Mr. Miller characterized the remaining issues as “administrative”. Mr. Jones said the municipal improvements estimate was under review. Mr. Ludgate reported the hauling arrangements to have been documented with the Solid Waste Office, and sewage planning requirements to have been exempted from the Department of Environmental Protection. Asked about on-street parking demand in the neighborhood, he felt it would be lessened as a result of the Beech Street widening, the new parking lot, and the homes removed. Mr. Bealer knew that the owner of the block’s one remaining house was reluctant to sell. Mr. Rothermel noted the requirement to have the Shade Tree Commission review the street trees proposed.

Mr. Bealer moved to grant final plan approval, on the conditions that the developer submit the plan to the Shade Tree Commission, complete the municipal improvements agreement, and correct the plan per the remaining Planning Office review comments. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to a conditional final approval to Opportunity House’s 2nd Street Learning Center plan.

Resolution #16-2010

Oley Street Retail Center (Shuman Development Group) - final subdivision/land development plan [0:12.49]

Mr. Ludgate reminded the Commission of the previous presentation, and described the current condition of the site as a totally paved parking lot. He said the plan proposes two adjoining buildings, and their associated parking, while reducing the current impervious cover by about 16 percent, through additional landscaping, including 31 deciduous trees, 9 evergreens and about 115 shrubs. He noted a shared access with a neighboring property, from Oley Street, and another driveway from North 8th Street. He reported the Conservation District had issued its approval, and noted some additions per the review letters: a bicycle rack, designated recycling areas, and some revisions to the grading and stormwater facilities. Asking for final plan approval, he conceded the plan wasn’t as developed as the Opportunity House plan, but felt it sufficient. Mr. Miller noted items still missing from the plan. Mr. Bealer asked about the County Planners recommending a shopping cart storage area. Mr. Ludgate responded that his client didn’t feel it necessary, citing an added maintenance issue and the neighborhood scale of the store, which they felt would preclude large crowds. Pressed on the need for a designated area, he offered to reiterate the Commission’s position to his client. He thought the parking lot could spare a couple of stalls for the purpose. Mr. Bealer noted the practical necessity in other similarly-sized stores. Asked for clarification on another County

Planning comment regarding 'turning movements', Mr. Miller noted that the County doesn't see every plan revision following their reviews. Mr. Jones affirmed that the truck movement plan provided was satisfactory. Mr. Miller said more information was required on the access easement between this, and the neighboring property. Mr. Ludgate said the owner was willing to establish the easement, but felt the plan had to be recorded first. Mr. Miller asked that they provide a draft of the easement language to the Law Department. Mr. Jones asked for a brief stormwater management report detailing the reduction in cover. Mr. Ludgate thought one had been submitted, and offered to email a .pdf format directly. Mr. Jones noted the sewage planning was still under review. Asked if tractor trailers entering from Oley Street would return the same way, or cross through parking area to North 8th Street, Mr. Ludgate concluded the aisle width makes that possible, expecting that smaller "box trucks" probably would.

Asked for his recommendation, Mr. Miller advised tabling the plan. Mr. Ludgate expressed confidence that the cart storage could be added, but felt the technical aspects of the plan to have been satisfied. Mr. Miller noted the required sidewalk, still missing from the plat. Mr. Ludgate referred to notes printed on the plan. Mr. Miller insisted that it be *drawn* and referred to a number of review letters so directing, since January. Mr. Ludgate thought notes were preferable, suggesting the plan might otherwise give the impression that it is already in place. Mr. Miller called that the point of separate "land development" and "existing conditions" sheets. Mr. Miller went on with other requirements stipulated by the review letters: draft legal descriptions, ownership information, names of representatives signing ownership and development agreements, and zoning data. He said the letter explicitly defines those deficiencies and how to cure them. He disputed the reliance on intent statements and plan notes promising later what must be shown on the plan before its approval.

Because of deficiencies identified by the Planning Office staff, Mr. Rothermel moved to table the Oley Street Retail Center plan. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the final subdivision and land development plan of the "Oley Street Retail Center".

Other business:

§603.c.2 conditional use review-549 North 10th Street (conversion) [0:34.32]

Mr. Rothermel noted an error in the address given on the staff comment memorandum. He wondered if the 570 square feet proposed for the smallest unit complies with the regulation. Mr. Miller confirmed that a minimum of 550 square feet qualifies a one-bedroom unit. He suggested the Commission recommend Council's approval, and distributed a written summary of the Zoning Ordinance requisites. Mr. Bealer recalled the former "Effie's Place", sold following her husband's murder. Mr. Miller noted the 'completeness' of the application, which seems to meet most of the Ordinance requirements. He said the off-street parking standard will be met for the residential portion, though none are provided for the existing, permitted businesses. He recalled a meeting with the City's "One Stop" code consultation forum, unsure if they left it fully understanding the level of modifications necessary to meet the 'life/safety' standards of the building codes. Amid questions on the existing tenancies, he interpreted the floor plans to indicate an existing machine shop space would be converted, and that other space is currently vacant. Mr. Rothermel asked about the on-street parking demand in neighborhood, and wondered about the practicality of the interior parking. Mr. Miller confirmed that the plan shows direct access to residences, via two stair wells to a common hallway. He said the operation of the garage doors wasn't detailed with the floor plan. When asked how they'd ensure that parking was used by the residents, Mr. Miller guessed that it would be treated as an enforcement matter.

Considering that an adequate number of off-street parking spaces are to be provided for the existing and proposed residential use, and as the Commission has been informed that the use of those spaces will be enforced, Mr. Rothermel moved to recommend that City Council approve the conditional use application of 549 North 10th Street. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward the conditional use recommendation.

Resolution #17-2010

review the draft February 23, 2010 meeting minutes [0:51.23]

Hearing no requests for corrections, Mr. Lauter moved to approve the February meeting minutes, as issued. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the February 23rd meeting minutes.

Resolution #18-2010

Mr. Bealer reported that the next steps in the Blighted Property Review Committee's process have been delayed due to staffing levels in the Codes Office. He said the Vending Licensing Board approved three vendor permits earlier

that day, and hoped to make some updates to the regulating ordinance. On to the subject of the Planning Commission's membership needs, he introduced Bernardo Carbajal, who intends to apply for a seat. Mr. Carbajal currently serves as chair of the housing committee of the "Rebuilding Reading" commission. Discussion continued on the currently-occupied, but expired seats and attendance challenges.

Mr. Lauter announced an April 15th workshop, at 4:00p in Council Chambers, to review again the draft zoning ordinance. He said the consultant felt changes requested by Commission members substantial enough to warrant another workshop before scheduling the public meetings. He mentioned the interest in 'overlay districts' by the local colleges as another matter to be settled before fully engaging the adoption process. Mr. Miller mentioned meeting with the college representatives, the week before (on March 18th).

Mr. Rothermel reported a conversation with the Mayor regarding two National Football League players with local connections (John Gilmore of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Chad Henne of the Miami Dolphins; and both graduates of Wilson High School) who have proposed investing in the rehabilitation of the 2nd and Oley Playground. He said he explained the Commission's involvement in reviewing plans for public property and infrastructure, and recommended they work through the Planning Office staff.

Mr. Rothermel moved to adjourn the March meeting. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the March 23rd meeting. – 8:09 pm.