Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
May 10, 2005 at 7:30 pm

Members present:

Fritz Rothermel, Chairman
Michael Lauter, Assistant Secretary
Edmund Palka
Irvin Cohen
Ermete Raffaelli
David Reppert
Wayne Jonas Bealer

Staff present:

Andrew Miller, City Planner

Others present:

Kevin Kuzio, E. R. Felty, Inc.
Earl Felty, PLS, E. R. Felty, Inc.
Keith Zielaskowski, Pair of Aces, LLC.
James McCarthy, PE, McCarthy Engineering Assoc.
Jim Bates, Advanced Building Systems

Minutes:

Chairman Rothermel called the May meeting to order, had the Commissioners and staff introduce themselves for the benefit of the audience, and reviewed the agenda. Mr. Lauter made a motion to approve the May agenda, and Mr. Cohen seconded. The Planning Commission approved the agenda, unanimously.

Review of the Final Plan, "St. Nicholas Street Commons", a 6-unit townhouse proposal for 323 St. Nicholas Street.

Kevin Kuzio introduced himself, indicated that all revisions have been made to the plan consistent with the staff reviews, and asked the Commission for final plan approval.

Mr. Raffaelli asked if the construction details of the firewalls have been clarified/resolved. He asked if they might be eight-inch masonry. Mr. Zielaskowski referred to the Belovich Group's construction of townhouses on Gregg Avenue as typical of the units he proposes. Mr. Rothermel asked about the fire rating (two hours?) of said construction. Mr. Zielaskowski answered that it is "out of his scope". Mr. Bealer added that the two-hour fire rating is required when constructing three or more units. Mr. Kuzio added that the plans presented are civil in nature and that construction concerns would be addressed at the Codes Department level prior to the issuance of building permits.

Mr. Bealer recommended that the Commission grant the requested waiver of the sidewalk requirement based on the lack of sidewalks in the vicinity. Mr. Rothermel, acknowledging the section referring the sidewalk decision to the Planning Commission, cited the age of the City's land development ordinance and the fact that it was modeled after the ordinance of a more "sub-urban" municipality. He said the practice in the past has been to seek a recommendation from the City Engineer on the need for sidewalks. He added that this protocol should be clarified in any revisions to the land development ordinance.

Mr. Rothermel questioned the landscaping intended. Mr. Kuzio said he submitted a landscaping plan to the staff for review. Mr. Miller indicated that the landscaping proposed was found acceptable. Mr. Kuzio revealed to plan to the Commission.

Mr. Kuzio confirmed that the alley will be paved, with the extra five feet in width, and that there will be 37 feet (24 feet to the deck?) of parking pad provided between the widened alley and the garages.

Mr. Rothermel asked the Commission if there are any more questions or a motion for acceptance of the plan. Mr. Raffaelli motioned for a withholding of approval until more information is provided on the construction of the party/fire wall, not only to address the safety concerns, but also the "social" concern of sound traveling between units. Mr. Palka seconded the motion.

Mr. Reppert questioned whether firewall construction was within the Planning Commission's purview to rule upon. Mr. Kuzio says that it is up to the Codes Office, that nothing can be constructed before their architectural

review and endorsement.

With no further discussion, a vote is taken on Mr. Raffaelli's motion to table the plan. The motion is defeated, 3 yeas to 4 nays, with Mr. Rothermel, Mr. Lauter, Mr. Reppert and Mr. Bealer voting in dissent.

Resolution #16-2005

Mr. Bealer motioned to approve the Final Plan contingent on all applicable permits being received. Mr. Reppert seconded the motion. The Final Plan is adopted 5-2. Mr. Raffaelli and Mr. Palka cast the dissenting votes.

Resolution #17-2005

Review of the Revised Plan of Record, "Albright College - Shirk Stadium", proposal for the northwest corner of North 13th and Exeter Streets.

Mr. Rothermel reminded those in attendance of the sign-in sheet for record keeping purposes.

James McCarthy, PE, McCarthy Engineering introduced himself and Jim Bates, from Advanced Building Systems. He gave an overview of the now paved parking area in the southeast corner of the tract, including the driveway supposedly moved eastward, away from the intersection of North 13th and Exeter Streets. He explained that the parking area has a one-way circular circulation with 92 angled parking spaces. Entrances/exits are provided from Exeter and Bern Streets. He assured the Commission that planning staff comments have been addressed and that no other changes have been made.

Regarding the landscaping to be provided, Mr. McCarthy said that they will be reviewing possibilities with a landscape architect and suggested a meeting with planning staff to discuss it, when complete.

Mr. Miller asked if this plan is the same as that submitted to the planning office for review, noting some new labels provided. Mr. McCarthy pointed out the labels identifying the number of spaces provided, 92, and the angle of those spaces, 44 degrees. He said that the 14-feet wide aisles proposed are actually 2 feet wider than the 12 feet required by the Zoning Ordinance.

Mr. Miller pointed out the sliding gate on the south side of the Lifesports Building and the sign on the southwest corner of the tract, as additional changes made since approval of the Final Plan. Mr. Bates said the sign will say something about the "home of the Albright Lions" and Reading High School. Mr. Rothermel reminded that a sign permit from the Zoning Administrator is still required. Mr. Bates said the College wants to do the sign in the near future, as fund raising permits. At this time, no one is sure what the sign would look like. But they are aware of the need for the additional permit.

Mr. Raffaelli asked for clarification on the screening fencing proposed. Mr. McCarthy referred to the plan note (#11) that promises a landscaping plan to be reviewed by staff prior to installation.

Mr. Miller reminded that the Revision Plan shows the driveway in the same position as had the Final Plan. Though the Commission had asked for added distance between the driveway and North 13th Street, at the meeting on the Final Plan, the only change made was a widening of the driveway, effectively lessening the distance to North 13th Street.

Mr. Miller asked if the sign barring left turns from said driveway is being proposed. Mr. McCarthy said it can be added.

Mr. McCarthy assured the Commission that the vendors will still have priority access to the loading area at the southwest area of the parking lot. He anticipates that vendors will normally arrive earlier and leave later than other patrons attending an event. The lot will only permit 70 additional vehicles before being closed.

Mr. Rothermel inquired on the width of the driveway and suggested that the width, as required by the particular zoning district, be researched by staff. An additional zoning variance may be required. Mr. McCarthy indicated that the driveway is 25 feet wide.

Mr. Reppert asked if an occupancy permit has been obtained for the project's proximity to a PennDOT right-of-way. Mr. Lauter said that a permit is required when a new intersection is created within 25 feet of a PennDOT right-of-way. It is not clear from the plan whether or not North 13th Street is a state road.

Mr. Miller asked why the positions of the light standards and the associated dimension lines have changed from the Final Plan. Mr. McCarthy said the lights were not in their final positions as shown on the Final Plan. Mr. Raffaelli asked if any additional lighting is proposed along North 12th Street. Mr. Bates mentioned lamps associated with the building façade ("of an antique nature") to help illuminate the sidewalk.

Mr. McCarthy confirmed that the stadium lights will have "cut-offs" to minimize spillage onto adjoining properties, adding that most models are now manufactured that way.

Mr. Raffaelli questioned the effect of the newly paved surfaces on the impervious coverage and plan for drainage. Mr. McCarthy responded that the drainage facilities were originally sized to accommodate the increased run-off, since they knew that Albright would want to pave the lot, eventually. Mr. Miller noted that he has not

calculated the percentage of impervious surfaces, personally. But with the amended numbers provided, he can recheck them against the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.

Hearing no further discussion, Mr. Rothermel asked for a motion. Mr. Reppert motioned to approve the Revision Plan subject to review by, and compliance with Zoning and Public Works requirements, the requested signage provided at the driveway, a landscaping plan satisfactory to planning staff, and receipt of any other required approvals and permits. Mr. Lauter seconded the motion. And the Commission voted to approve the Revision Plan, unanimously. Resolution #18-2005

Other business

Mr. Rothermel addressed the minutes from the March and April meetings. After complimenting Mr. Miller for the improved format of the minutes, he pointed out a typo on the second page of the March minutes, where North 13th Street was incorrectly identified as 18th Street, and requested it be changed. He asked if any other members have comments or changes for the March minutes. Hearing none, Mr. Raffaelli motions to approve the March 16 minutes. Mr. Bealer seconded the motion adding the condition that the change be made, as requested. The Commission voted to approve the March minutes unanimously.

Mr. Rothermel shifted attention to the April minutes, specifically the last sentence on page three. He doesn't think he made the specific comment about seeing land development plans for the Kurtz House. Mr. Miller indicated that he has a follow-up report on that issue.

Mr. Lauter motions to approve the April 12 minutes. Mr. Palka seconded, and the Commission approved the April minutes, unanimously.

Mr. Rothermel asked for the update on the reconstruction of the Kurtz House on the south side of Penn Street, in the 200 block. Mr. Miller reported that he talked to Jon Krueger, Berks County Planning Commission, and Mike Stauffer, Masano Fries Architects. Mr. Stauffer, with floor plans, had met with David Janiszewski, the former Fire Marshal, and Steve Franco, the building inspector. Because the building was only partially destroyed by the fire, and the reconstruction was limited to the existing footprint and slab, they were given approval to rebuild without going through the whole land development review process. Conversations with Mr. Franco corroborate this recollection. Mr. Miller then gave positive remarks about the new and improved façade. Mr. Rothermel confirmed that there is a precedent for suspending the normal land development review requirements when less than half of the previous building is destroyed, even in the cases of non-conforming use.

Mr. Rothermel raised the issue of the review process, specifically the order and timing of the Planning Commission's review in relation to the Zoning Hearing Board's rulings on zoning issues. Projects don't always follow the same path through the two bodies. And increasingly, the Commission is being asked to grant approval to projects while zoning relief is still pending. He is concerned that approvals contingent on zoning relief will influence the decision of the Board, which should be making its decisions independently. He thinks that projects should follow a consistent order through the review process, with zoning issues preferably settled first. He recalled a conversation with Mr. Miller and Joyce Pressley, Zoning Administrator, about a concerted effort to clarify the process, suggesting a possible workshop between the two bodies.

Mr. Miller indicated that the discussion continues at the staff level. He felt that applicants should at least obtain variances that they know they need, recognizing that additional issues often arise in the course of his plan reviews. He mentioned the complications of (1) the Zoning Hearing Board usually holding its meeting the day after the Planning Commission, and (2) their practice of waiting until the following month to deliver their rulings.

Mr. Raffaelli said that the State regulations require zoning hearing boards the 30 days between the testimony and the decision, for adequate research. Mr. Rothermel remembered instances when plans were "fast-tracked" and decisions were rendered at the same meeting.

Mr. Rothermel agreed that it may require one of the bodies to change their meeting time. Mr. Bealer felt that the zoning issues should be resolved before action on the Final Plan, at least. He recalled his father's experiences as a developer in Chester County, where plans were delayed because of confusion by planning staffs on their own procedures. He felt that, as a courtesy, the Commission could agree to review preliminary plans while zoning issues are still being resolved. Mr. Rothermel hoped the planning staff would continue the discussion.

Mr. Raffaelli added that the Shade Tree Commission is often "side-stepped" when they shouldn't be. He wondered if the Albright plan will ever make it to a Shade Tree Commission review simply because the Planning Commission attached that condition to its approval. Mr. Rothermel recalled a Planning Commission resolution,

about eight to ten years ago, that requires any project proposing five shade trees or more be reviewed by the Shade Tree Commission. He recommended that Mr. Miller try to locate this resolution. Mr. Lauter thought the City should sit down and consider the most efficient flow for plan reviews. Maybe it is simply a matter of changing meeting dates. He wondered why the second Tuesday of the month was picked. No one is sure, but Mr. Rothermel says it has been that way for 32 years. Mr. Lauter has heard the negative sentiment of developers and hopes the City can streamline its processes. Mr. Palka made a motion directing staff to meet to discuss recommendations and meeting changes. Mr. Bealer seconded, and the Commission agreed unanimously.

Mr. Rothermel moved on to the election of Commission officers, as required in the May meeting by the Commission by-laws. At the April meeting, Mr. Lauter was asked to chair a nominating committee, with Mr. Palka as vice chairman. Mr. Lauter reported their recommendations as follows:

- Chairman - Ermete Raffaelli
- Vice Chairman - David Reppert
- Secretary - Mike Lauter
- Assistant Secretary - Wayne Jonas Bealer

Mr. Lauter asked if there were any other nominations. Hearing none, Mr. Rothermel asked for a motion to close the nominations and elect the slate of officers as recommended by the committee. Mr. Cohen made the motion, Mr. Bealer made a second and the Commission elected its officers, unanimously. Resolution #19-2005

Mr. Rothermel asked if there was any other business to be heard by the Commission. Mr. Miller briefly reported that the demolition was nearing completion on the former Stelwagon and Diversified Mechanical buildings behind the Goggleworks Art Center. He reported that Our City Reading, Inc. had paid for it in lieu of some federal funding that was supposed to.

Mr. Miller addressed Mr. Raffaelli's sewer planning questions from the April meeting regarding the Wyomissing and Mohnton express lines. He said he is still researching the matter. He also reminded the Commission of their consideration of designating a redevelopment area around the Goggleworks, adding that a presentation was being prepared for the June meeting, with representation from the County and Our City Reading, Inc.

Mr. Bealer wondered whether Final Plans for the proposed Second and Washington Streets garage had been submitted for the Commission's consideration. He is concerned with the lack of pedestrian signals on the traffic light at that intersection. He doesn't think that the Reading Parking Authority should be made to pay for the upgrade of the light. He referred to the Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS), wondering whether that intersection, and upgrades to it, were to be included. If not, the only other course may be to compel Goggleworks, Reading Area Community College, and the Parking Authority to provide for it as part of their projects in the vicinity. Mr. Palka thought that once the new garage was built, changes to the traffic signaling would follow.

Mr. Rothermel doubted the Parking Authority's responsibility for the matter, noting that the garage is being proposed to serve the needs of the Gateway building, primarily. He noted that the entrance to the Miller Theater will be on the southern façade (facing Penn Street) and that pedestrians from the garage should therefore be encouraged to cross Second Street at its intersection with Penn. He added that Goggleworks patrons would likely cross Washington Street closer to its intersection with Thorn, rather than at Second Street, given the entrances of the Goggleworks and the proposed garage. He thought Alan Piper, County Transportation Planner, and the RATS study should be addressing the issue.

Mr. Rothermel asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Palka made the motion, Mr. Raffaelli seconded, and the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the May meeting. – 8:55 pm.

AWM / awm

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