Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
May 8, 2007 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

Ermete Raffaelli, Chairman
Michael Lauter, Secretary
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Assistant Secretary
Edmund Palka
Frederic dep Rothermel, Jr.

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office
Michelle R. Mayfield, Department of Law
Charles M. Jones, Department of Public Works

Others present:

Kenneth L. Pick, Berks County Community Development Office
Gregg A. Bogia, Bogia Engineering Inc.
Catharine A. Rado, Hydrojet, Incorporated
Michael R. Rado, Hydrojet, Incorporated
Timothy J. Krall, Spotts Stevens & McCoy, Inc.
Scott A. Adams, Gilbert Architects, Inc.
Roger D. Lehmann, All County and Associates, Inc.
Don P. Naughton, DMO Enterprises
Lawrence E. Lloyd, Berks County Conservancy
Richard C. Mappin, Smart Growth Alliance of Berks County
Stephen F. DeLucas, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the May meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Ms. Mayfield suggested approving the agenda without the planned executive session, no longer needed. Mr. Rothermel moved to accept the agenda. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the May agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Review the **final** subdivision plan for the **Cotton Street Subdivision**, twelve (12) subdivisions and annexations to parcels south proposed for that parcel known as 415 South 14½ Street. [0:01.19]

Mr. Pick said the Berks County Redevelopment Authority had taken the advice of the Commission and had a title company research the status of the alley between their property and the parcels south. He said it was apparently never formally conveyed to anyone from as far back as the late 1890s. He said their attorney recommended a quiet title action and preparation of new deed descriptions to join the pieces. He asked for a three-month extension to complete the work. He said they'd also found an error in the conveyance from the prior owner to the County Redevelopment Authority, to be corrected as well.

Mr. Lauter moved to grant the extension, as requested. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant a three month extension of the time limits imposed by Section 508 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

Resolution #26-2007

Review the **preliminary** 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"). [0:04.42]

Mr. Bogia called the layout identical to that presented at the April meeting. He said he addressed many of the Planning Office comments, met with the Zoning Administrator and resolved those issues. He mentioned the ground-breaking ceremony for Sun Rich Fresh Foods, Inc. (Parcel 1) held earlier that day. He said Hydrojet's building would be 34,346 square feet, with a set-aside available for a 19,812 square-foot future expansion. He briefly explained their craft; cutting and machining parts with water jets for military helicopters. He anticipated a similar façade treatment as the Sun Rich building.

Mr. Rothermel asked about their ideas for landscaping the long blank wall of the southern elevation facing

Buttonwood Street. Mr. Bogia mentioned some pachysandra plantings for the office entrance, unaware of any consideration for the factory portion. Mr. Rothermel noted its size, and suggested an 'earth tone' color palette, and/or some articulation, color changes, or design intended to reduce the monolithic appearance. Mr. Bogia admitted there was architectural work to be done, having just received the first feedback earlier that day. Mr. Miller speculated on the view from the lower vantage of Buttonwood Street, and the effect of the landscaping planned in the parking lot. Mr. Bogia added that another building may eventually occupy the residual tract between Buttonwood Street and the Hydrojet facility.

Ms. Mayfield recalled a fire protection issue. Mr. Bogia said he met with the Water Authority, its Executive Director and the Fire Marshal, and was allowed to install the water line as proposed for two years, with an agreement to loop the connection to Buttonwood Street or the spur road to its north, whether or not the residual tract is ever developed.

Mr. Miller asked if there had been any more thought on the proposed stormwater infiltration galleries, or feedback from the Berks County Conservation District. Mr. Bogia indicated that they'd be utilizing "rain gardens" to accommodate stormwater.

Mr. Rothermel asked about employment. Mr. Bogia answered 25 "to start", with possible growth toward 50, characterizing the positions as "high-tech.

Mr. Bogia said the projected traffic from Hydrojet will still fall short of the volume required to warrant (Department of Transportation) signalization of the Buttonwood Street-Gateway Drive intersection. He said they will study the counts again, if and when the residue property is developed. Mr. Bealer appreciated Hydrojet's and Sun Rich's consideration of the potential need, and the associated costs.

Mr. Miller asked if Hydrojet was, in any way, affiliated with American Polarizers, Inc. Mr. Rado identified them as their current "landlord". He said Hydrojet is out of space, energy capacity and parking. He noted the less-than-adequate security for the specialty tools, suggesting that a shutdown at Hydrojet could result in shutdowns at Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation and Boeing Rotorcraft Systems, two of their primary clients.

Mr. Bealer moved to accept Hydrojet's preliminary plan, subject to the Planning Office approval of the outstanding issues, the communication requested by the Department of Public Works, consideration of earth tone-color schemes, and architectural treatment of the empty, south-facing wall. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the preliminary land development plan of Hydrojet, Inc.

Resolution #27-2007

Ms. Mayfield informed Mr. Rado that she had been contacted by his attorney, Socrates J. Georgeadis, regarding the municipal improvements agreement. She offered to communicate with him, directly.

Mr. Rothermel asked the other members if they had any objections to his communicating with the project architect (Olsen Design Group) directly. No objections were raised.

Review the **final** land development plan for the **Millmont Elementary and Science Magnet**, a proposed reconstruction of the elementary school at that parcel known as 300 Carroll Street. [0:25.57]

Mr. Krall noted the time elapsed since the last presentation, and the additional zoning variances granted for the 24-foot driveway width and fence/retaining wall elevations of up to 15 feet above-grade. He said the Zoning Hearing Board had voted verbally, but not yet issued its written decision. He said the erosion and sedimentation control plan had been approved. He turned attention to the traffic management plan: a letter received from the Superintendent earlier that afternoon. He recognized the parent behaviors as the Commission's biggest concern. He counted three busses for the elementary school, and as many as four for the science magnet. He said a 220-foot pull-off lane (from Summit Avenue) provides stacking for four busses. He said at the afternoon dismissal, there might be seven busses arriving, in the worst-case scenario. A 250-foot pull-off lane (from Belvedere Avenue) will provide for the cars. He measured 8000 feet of available curb line within a one-block radius, for additional staging area. The District intends to notify parents of the traffic protocol through meetings, mailings, and their Global Connect School Communication System. Mr. Lauter asked about supplemental instruction and enforcement on-site. Mr. Krall wasn't sure. Mr. Bealer thought the situation difficult, expecting parents would double-park, and realizing the inability of anyone but the City police to control the streets. He appreciated the District's effort, and praised the efficiency and programmability of the Global Connect system. Mr. Krall appreciated the positive feedback, and predicted the "Reading Citadel" version of a management plan within the next week or two. He added that Millmont is already considering a single bus for magnet students, circulating to the different middle schools, as opposed to four. He noted the difference in muster/dismissal times, 35 minutes in the mornings, and 10 minutes in

the afternoons. He recognized the higher chance of traffic conflicts in the afternoons, especially since parents can idle their vehicles much longer when waiting to pick their children up, as opposed to the drop-offs in the mornings.

Mr. Palka asked about the construction schedule. Mr. Adams said construction was slated to start immediately, upon completion of the school year, and be complete the following August; a 14-15 month schedule.

Mr. Krall mentioned the planned relocation of students to Calvary Baptist Church, having relayed the Planning Office's concern to the Superintendent. Mr. Miller wondered if the Church or the School District was willing to make any modifications that may be required for code compliance. Mr. Bealer suggested that the Pennsylvania departments of Education and Labor and Industry might include their own stipulations.

Mr. Miller asked about the *Reading Eagle's* report concerning revised construction estimates. Mr. Adams said the bids came in at $6 million under their $40 million estimate, preserving the planned architectural and façade treatments.

Asked about the plan revisions, Mr. Krall said they will correct the painted stop bar dimensions, as directed by the Department of Public Works. He expected approval of the sewer module, shortly.

Mr. Raffaelli and Mr. Adams discussed the use of masonry construction in some of the higher-traffic areas, such as stair wells.

Mr. Adams showed the façade renderings, its masonry elements and brick veneer. He said the existing niches will be demolished, but other existing details, such as the gargoyles, would be salvaged and incorporated into the new design. Mr. Lauter offered the help of the Centre Park Historic District Artifacts Bank in salvaging interior elements. Mr. Adams called it a contractor's decision.

Mr. Palka moved to approve the final plan, contingent on the necessary plan revisions. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted 4-0-1 to approve the final land development plan of the Millmont Elementary and Science Magnet, Mr. Raffaelli abstaining.

Resolution #28-2007

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 – *and* – 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. [1:02.35]

Mr. Lehmann said they'd returned to discuss the issue of the required cul-de-sac at South 15½ Street. He recalled the Commission's request of Mr. Jones for the opinion of another, independent professional engineer, then referring to the correspondence received from Neal M. Kern at Barry Isett & Associates, Inc. He alluded to the packet of information he sent directly to the Commission members as requested by R. Leon Churchill, the City's Managing Director.

Mr. Raffaelli said the Commission was not inclined to hear additional and/or redundant presentations. He said the Commission understands the situation, the topography, and the implications of cul-de-sacs. He opened the floor to members having specific questions.

Mr. Lehmann reminded that the South 15th Street issue had already been waived; that they were just seeking the same for the South 15½ Street land development. Mr. Jones said the Kern review judged "the whole picture". Mr. Raffaelli interpreted the letter as advising the City against any dead-ends, due to the safety concerns for all vehicular access and egress, and recommending 'turn-around' designs at the end of each street instead, with a cost analysis suggesting one-fifth the cost of full cul-de-sacs. He felt it presented a fair compromise, noting that the letter also suggests "light duty" paving of the emergency access, forming a closed loop for the occasional snow plow, etc.

Mr. Lehmann said a "hammerhead" at South 16th Street had already been designed, because of a more conducive grade. He doubted that the Kern review took into account the designed grade of the emergency access, a grade not accessible to large vehicles, but rather for fire emergencies. He said the necessary grading work would encroach on the conservation areas.

Mr. Bealer thought the Kern study offered a workable compromise, agreeing that paving the emergency access might not be. He appreciated the Conservancy's efforts to map and plan the preservation of Neversink Mountain. He said, although he would have preferred an alternate development pattern, he supports the Kern review suggestions.

Mr. Rothermel asked the City Engineer's opinion of the Kern review. Mr. Jones said paving the emergency access was just a suggestion, with perceived advantages and disadvantages. He expressed a concern about emergency vehicles needing to cross private property to access it, and suggested a formal easement. He agreed that extending existing dead-end streets was bad practice, recalling the area's snow removal difficulties

following the "Valentine's Day Ice Storm". He noted Kern's cost estimates, thinking the "hammerheads" substantially cheaper than cul-de-sacs, whatever the exact figures.

Mr. Lauter echoed Mr. Bealer's assessment of the Conservancy's work, but doubted the "smart growth" characterizations of a proposal needing waivers from normal regulations designed for the public safety. He said he was more concerned with the provisions for daily service vehicles, identified in-part by the Kern review, than just the emergency scenarios.

Mr. Rothermel said the City had long sought to eliminate dead-end streets, noting those in the Sixth Ward interrupted by the Lebanon Valley rail line. He said the City had previously used community development funds to install connecting streets, such as Lafayette. He said studies had shown buildings deteriorated more rapidly at dead-end streets. He continued to urge a more terrain-sensitive design, with interconnecting streets, thinking the turn-around maneuver less convenient.

Mr. Jones noted that the Kern review did recognize the site's grades as prohibitive for cul-de-sacs. He said there are places where cul-de-sacs are appropriate, but that this was not among them. Mr. Rothermel agreed, but noted the ordinance maximums on street grades, also waived. He also commended the Conservancy for its efforts toward preservation. He recalled a study from the 1970s, from a consultant who had worked on Cumru Township's Flying Hills design, suggesting meandering streets and "cluster" development patterns. He felt the rigidity of the development and preservation boundaries prevented any flexibility in design, and suggested a better compromise was possible.

Mr. Palka recalled a controversial proposal in the 1960s-70s, for the area around the reservoir above South Tenth Street, an area of more modest grade. Mr. Rothermel recalled the overwhelming attendance of protesters at the City Council hearing.

Ms. Mayfield cautioned that any Commission-imposed condition on the waiver would require the formal agreement of the developer. Mr. Lehmann asked that time be allowed for the developer's consideration, rather than putting him "on the spot tonight". Ms. Mayfield said there were also zoning issues. Mr. Lehmann said they'd be submitting revised plans that resolve the zoning issues.

Mr. Rothermel offered Mr. Mappin the floor. Mr. Mappin described the Smart Growth Alliance: 15 different County organizations promoting land preservation and growth strategies, and offering its endorsement to proposals that follow those principals. He noted the Alliance had not formally reviewed the Neversink plans. He recognized the Commission's familiarity with, and advocacy for "smart growth" concepts.

Ms. Mayfield laid out the process to rescind the previous actions, and grant the conditional waivers. She suggested the Commission offer the developer ten days to signal his acceptance of the conditions. Mr. Lehmann noted that they didn't own the area west of the South 15th Street right-of-way, making the 25-foot extension suggested by Kern impossible. Mr. Rothermel said all parties involved and advocating for this development should be flexible, and do what is necessary to create a better circulation pattern.

Mr. Palka moved to rescind the motion of December 12, 2006, granting the waiver from the required cul-de-sac at South 15th Street. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to rescind the waiving of the required cul-de-sac.

Mr. Lauter moved to grant the waiver of the cul-de-sac required at South 15th Street by (§22-502.7.A) the City's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance, conditioned upon the construction of "tees or hammerheads" as recommended by the Planning Commission, in cooperation and discussion with necessary parties, including but not limited to the City, the developer and the Berks County Conservancy, and providing the developer ten (10) days to accept or deny, in writing, said condition. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant the conditional waiver.

Mr. Palka moved to rescind the motion of February 20, 2007, denying the waiver from the required cul-de-sac at South 15½ Street. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to rescind the denial of the requested waiver.

Mr. Rothermel moved to grant the waiver of the cul-de-sac required at South 15½ Street by (§22-502.7.A) the City's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance, conditioned upon the construction of "tees or hammerheads" as recommended by the Planning Commission, in cooperation and discussion with necessary parties, including but not limited to the City, the developer and the Berks County Conservancy, and providing the developer ten (10) days to accept or deny, in writing, said condition. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant the conditional waiver.

Regarding an unsolicited communication from the developer to the Commission members directly, Mr. Miller promised that his office would never divulge members' personal contact information without their direction.

He defended the Planning Office's role and responsibility to convey any information received in a timely manner. He said, whether or not an actual violation of laws or administrative policies, it was a breech of the trust between City government and its volunteer boards. Mr. Bealer agreed, regretting having even opened the package. Mr. Rothermel agreed, recalling only one other instance in 28 years where such a contact was allowed. He felt it circumvented the system and its staff. He said all material should go through the Commission staff, if only to make sure everyone has the same information and access to it. Mr. Miller mentioned the rare, but not unheard of threats made toward public officials, as another compelling reason. He also resented the developer's (cover letter) suggestion that he should have forwarded to the members documentation never provided him. He said he discussed the situation with City Council staff, and had their concurrence.

Other business:

Minutes: [2:21.11]

Mr. Bealer requested a couple of clarifications and typographical revisions.

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the April 10th minutes, with the request corrections. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the April 10th minutes.

Resolution #29-2007

Nominating Committee: [2:30.00]

Mr. Palka said he had spoken previously with the members holding current positions. He then asked for other nominations from the floor. Mr. Miller hoped the Commission would soon take action on the draft by-laws, and its implications for Commission offices.

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

Mr. Rothermel moved close the nominations as presented by the committee, and elect the slate. And the Commission voted unanimously to elect the incumbent officers to another annual term.

Resolution #30-2007

Requests for time extensions: [2:32.46]

Review the **final** land development plan for **All Green Lawn & Tree Care**, a proposed building at that parcel known as 1853 North Third Street.

Mr. Miller said the attorney for All Green, Jonathan P. Phillips, has requested an "indefinite" extension of statute-imposed approval timelines, while his client attempts to salvage the franchise deal. Several members voiced concerns about the implications of indefinite extensions. Mr. Miller said, in this particular case, the nature of business may stall the development until the following spring, anyway. Mr. Bealer moved to grant an indefinite extension to the final "All Green Lawn & Tree Care" land development plan, citing the unique situation stemming from their engineer's errors. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission unanimously agreed to the extension of the time limits imposed by Section 508 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

Resolution #31-2007

Mr. Lauter preferred that a definitive timeline accompany future requests for time extensions.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the current status of the ordinance revisions and the retention of consulting services. Mr. Miller mentioned his communications with the Department of Community & Economic Development regarding the contractual revisions. He said a draft 'request for proposals' was nearly complete. Mr. Rothermel asked who'd review the proposals. Mr. Miller indicated that the selection process had yet to be established, hoping the Commission would take charge of it, or at least host the interviews. He said interested stakeholder groups should be engaged at appropriate times during the drafting of the document.

Mr. Palka asked for an update on the Berkshire Bottling Works. Mr. Miller noticed the earth moving

equipment on-site, expecting full-scale site and foundation preparations to commence shortly. He was unsure of what construction permits were pulled, if any. Mr. Raffaelli asked about the traffic study required by the legal settlement. Ms. Mayfield believed the study to have been delivered to her office that day, not yet having the chance to review it. Mr. Bealer wondered if it would help to consider connecting Spring and Union Streets with a new road through the former Dana Corporation properties. Mr. Miller said he believed the new owner (Reading Properties, LP) to be interested in new transportation networks through the properties, anyway. He had no first-hand or recent knowledge of progress toward that end. But he noted that the budgetary earmarks for the River Road extension have been withdrawn.

Mr. Miller regretted that the members were not invited to the ground-breaking ceremony for the Sun Rich Fresh Foods facility, that morning. He said he had only been notified himself the previous afternoon. He said another ceremony was tentatively planned for the R/C Theatre, Monday afternoon.

Amidst further discussion of the 15th/15½ Street land developments, Mr. Miller continued to dispute the misinformation spread about possible development under the prevailing R1-A zoning. Ms. Mayfield defended the "one-stop shop" process, the disclaimers made, and most recently, signing statements and attendance registers. She realized the name may need changing. Mr. Miller believed some have been referring to meetings as "one-stops" that are not. Mr. Lauter wondered if the City officials hosting these other meetings had learned any lessons from this experience. Mr. Rothermel agreed that the name itself was contributing to the problems.

Mr. Rothermel moved to adjourn the May meeting. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission agreed unanimously to adjourn the May meeting, 5 to 0. – 10:07 pm.