Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
November 13, 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
Michelle R. Mayfield, Department of Law
Charles M. Jones, Department of Public Works
Ryan P. Hottenstein, Department of Finance

Others present:

M. Brad King, Trammell Crow Services, Inc.
Steven D. Buck, Stevens & Lee P.C.
Seth L. Krull, Bohler Engineering, Inc.
Lori Kiedaisch, McDonald's Corporation
Stephanie Rawden, McDonald's Corporation
Christian Rawden, McDonald's Corporation
Robert P. Stackhouse, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
David A. Reppert, Alvernia College

Chairman Raffaelli called the November 13th meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Rothermel moved to accept the agenda. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously (4 to 0, ahead of Mr. Bealer's arrival) to approve the November 13th agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Review the **signage** plan for the **School of Health Sciences** (Reading Hospital and Medical Center), at that parcel known as 1025 Old Wyomissing Road. [0:00.34]

Mr. King presented the plan, showing back-lit lettering across the front of the building, and monument signage located roughly at the three corners of the property. He recalled having met with the Planning Office, and believed the proposal to be compliant with the Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Miller felt the amount proposed to be allowed, per his calculations. He said it is ultimately the Zoning Administrator's decision, but noted the role of the Planning Commission in approving "monument" signage (§27-1713.2). Mr. King said that signage would be appropriately landscaped, seasonally, but was also intended to extend the appearance of the greater campus. Mr. Miller asked if the trellis structure proposed for the entryway would inhibit views of the wall signage. Mr. King said it would be low enough to preserve sight lines from the streets. Mr. Rothermel asked if ground-mounted signage is permitted in the setback yards. Mr. Miller said it wasn't specifically addressed, but deferred to the Zoning Administrator.[1] He asked if there had been any such feedback. Mr. King said not, understanding the procedure to approach the Commission first.

Mr. Lauter asked about the clock tower graphic, shown in original renderings distributed to the Commission members. Mr. King said that had since been deleted from the plan. Mr. Rothermel asked if the lettering type was consistent with signage on the rest of the Medical Center's campus. Mr. King noted slight changes, in order to comply with the City's Ordinance, but generally in keeping with a uniform look, for "branding purposes".

Mr. Raffaelli suggested the location at the intersection of Old Wyomissing Road and Parkside Drive South could interfere with traffic sight lines. Mr. King called the locations shown, "approximate". He said their grading plans had taken it into consideration, and agreed that those sight lines needed to be preserved.

Mr. Lauter moved to approve the plan as presented, conditioned on the Zoning Administrator's satisfaction. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the School of Health Sciences'

[1] This was an error: §27-1401, and its subsections, does specifically prohibit signs from the required "buffer strip", and §27-1715 further requires signage to comply with required setbacks.

signage plan.

Resolution #69-2007

Review the **preliminary** land development plan for the **McDonald's Restaurant No. 37-0036**, a demolition and reconstruction of the restaurant located on those parcels known as 400-416 Lancaster Avenue. [0:12.12]

Mr. Buck introduced McDonald's representatives, and described the project as a complete rebuild of one of the franchise's older buildings. Mr. Krull acknowledged receipt of the City Planning, County Planning and City Engineering review letters. He had no major concerns with the "majority" of the comments. He displayed an existing conditions plan. He said the restaurant dates from "the late 60s, early 70s", and cannot be upgraded any further than is has already been. He noted the second "parking field" added about 25 years ago, and some challenging topography across the site. He estimated the existing building at 3200 square feet, with an 800-square foot basement, for storage. He indicated the outdoor "PlayPlace", the one-way traffic circulation, and the drive-thru stacking lane wrapped around the building with capacity for eight cars. He said that design and the basement-level storage have hurt operating efficiency. He mentioned the additional landscaping proposed, and the stormwater handling upgrade. He recognized several existing zoning non-conformities, with regard to setbacks and impervious surfacing. He said the 49 existing, off-street parking spaces, are more than are necessary, estimating the business to be about 70% 'drive-thru'. He said a larger "trash corral" was needed to reduce the too frequent visits from their hauler. Turning to the land development plan, he noted the proposed rotation of the building's rectangular footprint, a better fit for the parcel's orientation. He explained the consolidated access points on Lancaster Avenue, from three driveways to one, and the ability to fully circulate the building, rather than having to exit the site first. He indicated the two, separate ordering cue lanes in the redesigned drive-thru, promising reduced wait times. A franchise-standard kitchen and storage design, sans basement level, with further aid efficiency. He said patrons can still exit the site to either Carroll Street or Lancaster Avenue. He said a more efficient loading area, with restaurant employees assisting in the receiving, and traffic cones marking the temporary parking restrictions, would keep deliveries to two/three times per week, and at more normal business hours. He said the plan would increase green space from 4000 square feet to 5000, with additional landscaping material. He estimated a doubling of capacity in the solid waste storage "corral", with two metal dumpsters. He said a complete re-grading will smooth out some of the awkward topography, with a structural engineer employed to design the necessary retaining walls. He said that, and additional stormwater inlets, a trench drain, and underground detention will improve run-off conditions. He presented the proposed architectural scheme, without the "PlayPlace" and red mansard roof typical of their traditional design standard, and opting for a more modern reconstruction, with a brick façade and synthetic stucco on arcade wall "bump-outs", in a "muted white color", centered around the windows, with red- and yellow-striped metal awnings. He indicated some roof-top elements, and their prototypical signage program, to be coordinated through the Zoning Office. He said the interior design revisions would be more sensitive to its adult customers.

Mr. Lauter questioned orientation of the building's apparent front toward Carroll Street. Mr. Krull suggested the building had two fronts (sides without the drive-thru infrastructure) facing the public streets. Mr. Rothermel agreed that the façade should better address Lancaster Avenue. He asked if the parking requirements would be met. Mr. Miller said the proposal exceeded the required standard, suggesting they further reduce the count if it's not needed.

Mr. Bealer noted that the loading area would block reserved handicapped parking spaces, when in use, and suggested rearranging their placement to keep at least one open at all times. Mr. Miller, recalling the estimated 70% drive-thru business, asked if any other data was available on traffic volume or turning movements. Mr. Krull answered that there was no study, beyond that needed for the Department of Transportation permit application, but didn't anticipate any significant increase in business resulting from the reconstruction.

Mr. Miller asked about the estimated construction time. Mr. Krull said similar projects typically take 120 days of business shut down. Mr. Lauter noted the placement of parking around the perimeter of the property, rather than the perimeter of the building, and suspected possible pedestrian/vehicle conflicts. Mr. Krull said the drive-thru design prevents more than the six spaces already proposed adjacent to the building. He thought it a typical arrangement for McDonald's and the fast food industry, generally. Mr. Miller asked about the use of the secondary drive-thru, and potential conflicts at the merge point. Ms. Rawden said the new register system takes pictures of each car, and noted the placement of the menu boards to ensure visibility between drivers. Mr. Bealer asked if the Zoning Administrator would assess the setback issues. Ms. Mayfield said, once demolished, the legal non-conforming status for the property is lost.

Mr. Miller wondered about the sightlines between drive-thru's exit and the path of pedestrians entering the restaurant from the east. Mr. Krull admitted a potential blind spot, but called it a standard design, and suggested the

cars are moving more slowly at that point. Mr. Miller suggested they'd be less attentive, having just received their food.

Mr. Miller noted some newer McDonald's façades having used more earthly color palettes, including greens. Mr. Krull said it was discussed, but that the owners were trying to maintain the McDonald's identity. Mr. Miller thought those alternate prototypes attractive. Mr. Lauter asked if the large, existing sign would remain. Mr. Krull said yes. Mr. Raffaelli recommended smaller alternatives, feeling the current sign "ostentatious" and unnecessary. He called it classic in 1955 terms, but inappropriate for the modern renewal and other aesthetic improvements proposed. Mr. Krull offered to further examine it and the façade colors.

Mr. Miller noted their application for a final plan review, suggesting the Planning Commission could waive the preliminary submission requirement. He offered his support, given the level of preparation evident in the plan, but recommended withholding any approving action until the zoning matters were resolved.

Mr. Rothermel asked about their plans for site lighting. Mr. Krull described the existing 1000-watt fixtures, and the proposed 400-watt replacements; metal halide luminaries at a 24-foot mounting height, with better placement and shielding.

Mr. Rothermel had no objections to accepting the plan as "final", as long as approval was reserved in light of the zoning and façade/signage questions. Mr. Bealer moved to waive §22-304.1, and accept the plan submission as "final". Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to waive the preliminary submission stage.

Resolution #70-2007

Mr. Lauter moved table final plan, recommending better architectural treatment for the Lancaster Avenue elevation. Mr. Rothermel seconded, agreeing it to be the front, and the face the building that would project to the majority of passers-by. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the final plan.

Review the **sketch** land development plan for the **Alvernia College – Student Center Addition**, an addition to the College's student center and related improvements at that parcel known as ??? Greenway Terrace. [1.23.19]

Mr. Stackhouse introduced Alvernia College's representatives in attendance, and described a building addition and a new "quad area", currently lacking on the campus. He showed a schematic plan for future expansion and construction, per recent master planning efforts. He then showed an existing conditions overview, and highlighted its circulation routes. He said the Student Center Addition includes a 3000-square foot expansion of the bookstore, with a dedicated loading area, a reconfiguration of the dining hall's seating, and a pedestrian walkway to replace the adjacent parking area, doubling as an emergency access and also available for resident students' move-in/out days.

Mr. Miller regretted that he had not yet been able to meet with the Fire Marshal regarding the adequacy of the access design. Mr. Stackhouse said it would be 14 feet in width, constructed in pavers with a concrete base. He said the stabilized area would be even wider, with a buried plastic reinforcing grid, hoping to avoid the appearance of a road.

Asked about the balance of off-street parking, Mr. Stackhouse estimated 140 spaces to be lost, with 110 recently gained in an arrangement with the Ken-Grill Recreation Center on High Boulevard in Kenhorst Borough. He said a shuttle bus service would carry students to campus. He said the College provides over 1200 spaces between Ken-Grill and its campus, with future parking areas identified in the master plan.

Turning to the architecture, Mr. Stackhouse showed the designed elevations for the one-story addition, highlighting the complimentary features, and the similar brick, aluminum and glass treatments. He estimated a March 2008 start, with the heaviest construction taking place over the College's summer break.

Mr. Raffaelli mentioned the possibility of waiving the land development review. Mr. Rothermel mentioned a previous Commission resolution setting 800-square feet as a cut-off for building additions, in response to a recommendation of the County Planning Commission to either review everything, or set a formal limit. He commended the College for developing a campus-wide master plan, rather than allowing the piecemeal development of its campus. Mr. Miller thanked the College for accommodating and involving the Planning Office in those efforts.

§303.a.3 (Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code) review:

Review the **FY 2008-2012 Capital Improvement Program**, the multi-year public improvements budget currently under consideration by City Council. [1:43.39]

Mr. Hottenstein, recalling a similar review the year before, apprised the Commission of the changes already approved by City Council. Focusing on the budget summary, he pointed out the differences from the last year's schedule, including a "downtown [security] camera network", the Pagoda renovations, and the City Park pond remediation. The 2008 projects include: $2,500,000 for a "Penn Street fire station consolidation, although no site has been selected, City Hall security upgrades, a "green roof" for City Hall, and "multimedia upgrades" for Council Chambers and the Penn Room. In 2009-10, the "Hampden/Marion fire station", the First Energy stadium repairs, and the African-American Museum site preparation were named.

Asked about the estimates for fire engine replacement, Mr. Hottenstein said the normal yearly allocations for new trucks have been removed, to be funded instead by other means, primarily the City's Community Development Block Grant funds.

Asked when Council would be considering a vote on its adoption, Mr. Hottenstein answered November 26th, after a public hearing scheduled for November 15th.

Mr. Lauter expressed the concern that the Commission would be left out the actual planning of those projects named in the budget. Mr. Miller suggested a possible special meeting, to focus more specifically on the budget and its line items. He regretted not having provided the information earlier, recognizing the Commission's difficulty in forming a verbal resolution that conveys all of their concerns and recommendations. He said, for the next year, he would try to involve the Commission before prioritizations are made by the "Task Team".

Mr. Raffaelli asked the members if they wanted an additional meeting. He felt that many of the items proposed are above debate, and "perfunctory" responsibilities of municipal government. With the Commission uncertain of how to proceed toward a recommendation, Ms. Mayfield asked that the minutes reflect that the required review opportunity was given. Mr. Rothermel asked that they also reflect the limited time given to the review, and the limited explanation of the line items. He questioned the long-term strategy. Asked if the Commission's input could be considered earlier, Mr. Hottenstein agreed to work toward that with the Planning Office. Mr. Rothermel suggested a more thorough draft copy be made available in the Planning Office, for view. He expressed a frustration that their opportunities to comment, when granted at all, are usually too late to be of any influence. Mr. Hottenstein agreed to seek refinements in the procedure for 2009, noting that a recent referendum question will mandate earlier budget deadlines all-around. Mr. Rothermel agreed that a dedicated workshop might help the Commission focus on the merits of specific line items. He added that the "6th and Penn Courtyard Upgrade" should be reviewed by the Commission, recalling the City's extensive planning efforts in its initial design.

Mr. Miller assured the minutes would reflect that the review opportunity was given, and as well the suggested change in review procedures.

continued - Subdivision and Land Development:

Review the **sketch** land development plan for the **Reading Fire Department – Southwest Station**, a new fire house proposed at that parcel known as 101 Lancaster Avenue. [2:33.48]

Mr. Miller displayed a rough sketch prepared by the City's Engineering Office, showing suggested alterations to the street topography. Ms. Mayfield noted that a request for architectural service proposals had been recently issued. Mr. Miller guessed the alterations to the surrounding curblines are being considered in an effort to increase the useable building area. Mr. Jones indicated that the new curb line would connect the (mountable curb) triangular island to the northeast, at the turnout of East Wyomissing Boulevard. He said that intersection would be re-designated as a "one-way in", with no exits. He said fire trucks would exit, from the fire station's garage bays, to Lancaster Avenue. Ms. Mayfield noted that fire officials have already attempted the required turning movements. Mr. Miller wondered if the geometry will be adequate for (north)eastbound exits through the (south)westbound lanes, if traffic is backed-up in Lancaster Avenue's eastbound lanes. Mr. Bealer wondered if it would be better to exit fire trucks to Brookline Street. Mr. Raffaelli suggested there were better building orientations to consider, and disputed the space allowed for the turning movements described. Ms. Mayfield said the sketch was informational, expecting formal land development plans in January or February. She said an ordinance altering East Wyomissing Boulevard's topography will be introduced to City Council at the end of November. Mr. Rothermel noted that street alterations are also reviewed by the Planning Commission. Ms. Mayfield said that was up to Council and the Administration. She said she would recuse herself from the plan's consideration, in case the Commission felt it needed to appoint alternate legal counsel in the matter.

Other business:

minutes-October 9, 2007 Planning Commission meeting [2:52.08]

Mr. Rothermel moved to approve the October 9th minutes, as presented. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the October 9, 2007 meeting minutes.

Resolution #71-2007

§303 notification-Legal Status of Comprehensive Plan 2000 [2:53.10]

Mr. Raffaelli felt the original draft, prepared by the Planning Office, accurately reflected the Commission's concerns and position, and that the Commission had already authorized the communication by a previous resolution (#41-2007, July 10, 2007). Mr. Lauter wasn't sure it needed the list of examples. He was hoping for a standardized letter that could be issued to those involved in such projects, and new employees, making them aware of the Commission's role, similar to those previously given to new residents of the City's historic districts. He added that he didn't have a problem with the list, as it was written. Mr. Miller offered to rewrite the letter in a more general form. Mr. Rothermel noted the differing opinions on the applicability of those examples listed, wanting resolution before it was communicated to anyone, to be sure of its accuracy. Mr. Raffaelli thought the Commission was voicing its concerns over certain projects it felt had by-passed the Commission's consideration. Mr. Miller cautioned that, without expanding on those categories with examples, the letter was little more than a reprinting of the statute, and therefore subject to individual interpretation. He said he was trying to frame the conversation by drawing the lines where he thought they should be.

Mr. Rothermel felt the Commission was viewed as a necessary evil, required by law, and that the governing body didn't want to share anymore authority than was required. Mr. Miller countered that some members of City Council were looking to the Commission for some initiative. Mr. Rothermel recalled the KVP Falcon land development, when the Commission, taking initiative, nearly lost all review authority in a political maneuver.

Mr. Lauter felt some form of the letter still needed to be passed on, and to all those parties already identified, intimating that the letter could be less focused on examples. Mr. Bealer suggested the specific examples might still be presented to the Mayor and Council President. Mr. Miller offered to attempt another, more general letter, with attachments for select recipients.

Reading Auto Spring Company, Inc., 148 South 4th Street [3:08.53]

Mr. Bealer noted the building demolition, and subsequent parking lot at Reading Auto Spring's property. Recalling that an apartment building across the street had recently presented a parking lot development plan (115-117 South Fourth Street, August 14th), he wondered why this property did not, and was allowed to use an unfinished lot as off-street parking. He also questioned the signage. Mr. Miller said he'd look into it, noting frequent challenges when buildings are demolished and slowly turned into parking areas, without being developed to the Zoning Ordinance standard. Mr. Bealer thought it a benefit to get trucks off the street, but suspected it might cause other problems and effects on the neighbors.

Mimmo's Restaurant & Pizzeria, 290 Morgantown Road and 15 Prospect Avenue [3:12.26]

Mr. Raffaelli asked about the status of the City's complaint against Domenico Brutto. Ms. Mayfield reported that the Court of Common Pleas has granted the City's request for intervention. She said the Municipalities Planning Code normally allows 30 days to so intervene, unless it's proven that sufficient notice was not given. She said the City concurs with the position of the Zoning Hearing Board, and that the case is presently pending before Court of Common Pleas.

Mr. Miller reported that the request for land use service proposals was advertised in the Reading Eagle newspaper, beginning November 9th, and would also be advertised on the American Planning Association website, courtesy of the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development.

Mr. Miller reported that the Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area is holding a ribbon-cutting ceremony, November 14th at 2:00p, for the recently completed gap in the Thun Trail section of the Schuylkill River Trail.

Mr. Miller reported that the U.S. Senate has recently passed the "Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2007" (S. 294) by a veto-proof margin. He mentioned it for the Commission's interest, and its potential bearing on the mothballed "Schuylkill Valley Metro" project, as the bill mentions possible funding for rail services beyond Amtrak.

proposed Zoning Ordinance amendment-fire stations, defined and regulated [3:18.06]

Mr. Miller reported that a hearing on the proposed amendment has been scheduled for December 13th at 5:00p. He said the legislation is the verbatim language forwarded by the Commission. Ms. Mayfield called for a resolution with the Commission's recommendation. Mr. Miller disputed the need, per the terms of §609.c of the Municipalities Planning Code ("an amendment… prepared by the planning agency"). Ms. Mayfield preferred a recommendation. Mr. Bealer moved to reaffirm support of the Commission-drafted amendment. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to reaffirm its support.

Resolution #72-2007

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the November meeting. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the November 13th meeting. – 10:22 pm.