

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

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
Brian Bingaman, Vice Chairman
Michael E. Lauter, Secretary
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Assistant Secretary
Brian J. Burket

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office

Others present:

Thomas B. Ludgate, Ludgate Engineering Corporation
Brandon R. Graham, RBS Development, LLC
Billy Zion, McKay, Zorn & Associates, PA
Stephen F. DeLucas, Reading Eagle Company

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

Subdivision and Land Development:

Lancaster Avenue Super Market – preliminary subdivision and land development plan [0:00.00]

Mr. Ludgate described the location of the site, formerly the Golden Isuzu dealership, and the existing buildings. He explained that it currently exists as two separate lots, with two different owners. The existing buildings will be demolished, and the lots combined. He proposed a supermarket, of roughly 20,000 square feet, comparing it to the “Oley Street Retail Center” project. He said it isn’t intended as a discount market or convenience store, but rather a scaled down market for the neighborhood. He indicated the associated off-street parking, loading areas and the landscaping and screening provided. He said the site is currently entirely covered in impervious surfacing, which will be decreased to about 85%. He said they’ll be consolidating the numerous curb cuts existing to five. He said variances have been granted, about 10 days ago, from the Zoning Ordinance’s required setbacks, and again to be more compliant than its existing condition. He said the building is one story, and with improved stormwater management. He expected they’d be able to fully comply with the November 16th Planning Office review, in time for the final plan submission.

Asked how they planned for the steep elevation change between Lancaster Avenue and Brookline Street, Mr. Ludgate mentioned re-grading the site and using retaining walls. He said the Brookline Street driveway will be steep, but improved and with a trench drain. He said sidewalks are included all around the property.

Cautioned of the state transportation department’s (PennDOT) jurisdiction on Lancaster Avenue, and their preference for left-turn restrictions, Mr. Graham called it “critical” to have full access, and related meetings with PennDOT and Public Works to air those issues. Mr. Ludgate understood that they may not approve the configuration shown. He understood the concerns, but deferred to the retailer’s wishes. Mr. Lauter noted the nearby traffic signal, advising that traffic be directed to it. The McDonalds, across the street, was cited as a recent precedent for the full-access driveway. Mr. Ludgate said PennDOT has given some verbal feedback, but no formal answers either way. Mr. Zion displayed and explained the architectural elevations; a combination of stucco and split-faced block surfacing, with orange and green paint accents to match the signage program. He proposed a series of recessed panels as a window effect, to make the Lancaster Avenue face more appealing.

Mr. Ludgate said they were still designing the signage program. Mr. Lauter suggested they plan from the perspective of the passing Lancaster Avenue traffic. Mr. Bingaman asked if they’d operate 24 hours a day. Mr. Graham said that isn’t currently the intent, but expected it would be.

Mr. Miller said Public Works must still comment on the stormwater plan, but didn’t anticipate any major complications. He complimented the progress made on the plan, but added that the driveway and traffic issues must be resolved. He expected an unrestricted driveway would cause problems, as stacking in Lancaster Avenue’s

northbound lanes extends through that block, during peak hours. He appreciated the efforts in treating the Lancaster Avenue façade, and suggested some external building lighting for accent and night-time interest. Mr. Zion said they typically do some kind of sconce between the window elements.

On Mr. Miller's recommendation, Mr. Bealer moved to approve the preliminary plan, subject to PennDOT's approval of the proposed driveways and Public Works' satisfaction with the stormwater management planning. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to conditionally approve the Lancaster Avenue Super Market preliminary plan.

Resolution #53-2010

Other business:

review the draft October 26, 2010 meeting minutes [0:33.26]

Mr. Miller referred to a few grammatical edits requested by email, and since made. Mr. Lauter moved to approve the October meeting minutes, as corrected. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the October 26th meeting minutes.

Resolution #54-2010

Mr. Bealer reported that the Blighted Property Review Committee, on November 18th, "certified" ten properties as blighted, and expected the Commission would be asked to make its recommendations at their December meeting. He said another ten properties were "determined" blighted, eight of whose owners have already signed agreements to rehabilitate them. Two more hearings, scheduled for December and January, will consider additional properties. Asked if the Planning Commission's role was limited to the same formalities as the year before, Mr. Bealer said the Review Committee prefers additional input on the terms of their 'reuse', vis-à-vis de-densification goals. He added that the Commission may have input on the on a forthcoming Ricktown neighborhood plan.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn. Mr. Bingaman made a point to formally welcome the Commission's newest member, Mr. Burket, then seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the November 23rd meeting. –
7:46p