

**Minutes**  
**Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission**  
**October 10, 2006 at 7:00 pm**

**Members present:**

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

**Staff present:**

Andrew W. Miller, City Planner  
Michelle R. Mayfield, Legal Specialist  
Charles M. Jones, Public Works Director

**Others present:**

Stephen H. Bensinger, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.  
Douglass J. Kramer, Synergetics Architects  
Kenneth Jones, Reading Hospital and Medical Center  
Barry E. Weaver, Blue Marsh Surveyors  
Dale C. Egan, Egan & Egan, LLC  
Thomas Egan, Egan & Egan, LLC  
Scott A. Adams, Gilbert Architects, Inc.  
Danielle V. Hoffer, Gilbert Architects, Inc.  
Timothy J. Krall, Spotts, Stevens and McCoy, Inc.  
Thomas Chapman, Jr., Reading School District  
Vern L. McKissick III, McKissick Associates PC  
Ben Crum, McKissick Associates PC  
Amy Anuszewski, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the October meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda.

Mr. Palka moved to accept the agenda. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the September agenda.

**Subdivision and Land Development:**

Review the **preliminary** land development plan for the **Reading Hospital and Medical Center**, an addition to the Reading Health Dispensary proposed for those parcels known as 812-820 Penn Street. [0:00.58]

Mr. Bensinger noted the existing Dispensary facility on Penn Street, and the Hospital's acquisition of three additional parcels to the west. He said, with the addition, the off-street parking count would be increased to 37 spaces, with two reserved for the handicapped. He explained the drive-through design for patient drop-offs. He said approximately 19,123 square feet would be added to the current 27,762, together slightly over an acre. He said he had received the review letter from the City Engineer, incorporated those comments and resubmitted the plan. He said the sewage planning module was being prepared.

Mr. Kramer, the architect who renovated the existing Dispensary, showed photographs of the existing building façade, and described the one-story clinic within. He said the structure had been a farmers' market. He described the ground-faced block, scored in an 8 inch-by-8 inch pattern, and a "high-grade stucco" material above with accent lines. He said the addition will be aligned with the footprint of the former building, but deeper to facilitate the connection to the existing Dispensary. He intended to continue the same materials and lines. Because the addition will be closer to the sidewalk, he hoped to break-up the "mass" with architectural details designed to compliment some features of the Market Square apartment buildings across Penn Street. He said the mechanical equipment will be housed in a roof-top penthouse, centered to further screen it from the public view.

Mr. Bealer asked why no additional entrance was designed for the plaza. Mr. Kramer said the existing plaza entrance will serve as the primary entrance, with reception and direction to waiting areas, separated by departments. He mentioned urgent care, pediatrics, and family care, as among the services offered. There will not

be over-night admissions. Mr. Rothermel suggested the number of doors reflected the Dispensary's need to limit the number of 'control points'. Mr. Kramer concurred, noting that they had previously considered an additional plaza entrance.

Mr. Lauter asked about the difference between urgent care and emergencies. Mr. Kramer said the Dispensary's purpose is to relieve the emergency rooms of the minor injury cases. He assured that any serious injuries would be directed to the Hospital's emergency room. He said the Hospital was planning for ambulance access at the drop-off in the rear. Mr. Lauter wondered how injured people know where they're supposed to seek treatment. Mr. Kramer mentioned a public education campaign and signage program, as with the Hospital's N-building addition at their main campus.

Mr. Rothermel questioned the large second floor window, asking if any consideration was given to designing two smaller windows. He noted that there were zoning appeals pending, wondering about the Commission's policy of considering plans prior to zoning clearance. Mr. Raffaelli noted that the practice has been to table plans until such issues are resolved. Mr. Bensinger asked about returning with a "preliminary slash final" plan. Mr. Miller asked about their intent to subdivide/annex the additional properties. Mr. Bensinger said they hadn't discussed the matter, adding that it wouldn't be a problem to do so. Mr. Rothermel supported the project, appreciating the proposal for the vacant space.

Mr. Miller recommended that the Commission table the plan, pending the resolution of the zoning issues, and recommended that the developer push ahead with the final planning requirements. He felt there was more than enough time to address all the 'planning' issues by the time the Zoning Hearing Board rules in November. He said an agreement to extend the timeline imposed by the Municipalities Planning Code would be necessary. He said the developer is appealing the height limitations for the penthouse portion, the maximum lot cover, and some screening and parking design issues to allow a design consistent with the existing Dispensary lot. When asked by Ms. Mayfield, Mr. Jones doubted there were any "municipal improvements" necessitating a security.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the preliminary plan. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Reading Hospital's plan.

Mr. Rothermel recalled the joint meeting (March 21<sup>st</sup>) with City Council and the Zoning Hearing Board about changing the meeting dates to streamline the process. Mr. Bealer noted that there was to be another meeting after six months. Mr. Rothermel felt the matter should be pursued.

Review the **final** land development plan for the **Fox Tail Subdivision**, a subdivision and two single-family detached units proposed at that parcel at the southwest corner of the intersection of High and Lowrie Streets. [0:42.28]

Mr. Weaver distributed revised plans to the members. Mr. Raffaelli asked Mr. Miller if all the required documentation had been submitted. Mr. Miller said details were still missing from the plans. He said the erosion and sedimentation controls, and the on-lot disposal system designs were approved by letters received the previous day. Mr. Raffaelli felt that if the plan was still incomplete, no action was in order. Ms. Mayfield, noting the expiration of the Municipalities Planning Code time allowance and previously arranged extensions, said an action was necessary. Mr. Weaver assured that all the required corrections were reflected in the latest update. He said the erosion and sedimentation control plan, the closure computations and legal descriptions, and every other item in the review letters was addressed. He said an improvements agreement was prepared based on estimated cost. Mr. Jones said it is under review. Ms. Mayfield said the agreement is a two-step process between the departments of Public Works and Law.

Mr. Rothermel asked if the City Engineer had reviewed the on-lot disposal system designs. Mr. Jones invoked the approvals issued by City's sewage enforcement officer.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the alley access to the off-street parking and if it would be paved. Mr. Weaver said access would be available through the alley but left in stone. Mr. Rothermel asked if that was permissible. Mr. Jones suggested the less pervious surface may be preferable as a stormwater consideration. Mr. Miller confirmed that the Land Development Ordinance requires driveways and off-street parking areas to be paved. Mr. Weaver agreed to surface them, if required.

Mr. Rothermel asked about street trees. Mr. Weaver said street trees will be provided, as well as a buffer planting between the lots. He said they are still requesting a waiver from the sidewalk installation requirement, since no other sidewalks exist in the area. Mr. Rothermel asked if there were other outstanding issues. Mr. Miller refused to comment on the latest plans. Mr. Rothermel felt the Commission should then table the plan until the staff was given the opportunity to review. Mr. Miller said they cannot, because of the timing issues. Mr. Rothermel

asked for other options. Mr. Weaver requested another extension. Ms. Mayfield said it was preferable to have the request in writing. Mr. Rothermel asked why the plan was even presented if the Land Development Ordinance requires plans to be presented for staff review ten days ahead of the meeting. Mr. Miller explained that another version had been submitted in-time. He said his review covers it.

Mr. Rothermel moved to disapprove the plan, citing the Land Development Ordinance submission requirements. Mr. Weaver said he had just received the staff review the day before, and revised the plan accordingly. Mr. Rothermel asked if that intent was communicated to the Planning Office. Mr. Weaver said not. Ms. Mayfield said the Commission should act on the request for extension, before voting on the motion for denial. Mr. Rothermel recalled the legal recommendation to have all such requests in writing. Ms. Mayfield confirmed, but recalled another instance where they had granted a verbal extension. Mr. Rothermel asked if he should withdraw his motion. Mr. Bealer, remembering the presentation at the Commission's August meeting, wondered how the applicant hadn't received the staff review until the preceding day. Mr. Miller recalled four written reviews of the plan. Mr. Bealer, citing those previous reviews, and the lack of any recent communication between the applicant and the Planning Office, moved to deny the requested extension. Ms. Mayfield suggested the other motion be withdrawn. Mr. Rothermel withdrew his motion. Mr. Bealer, again citing the lack of communication between the parties, and the failure to correct the plan per previous staff reviews, moved to deny the requested extension. Mr. Weaver said they had spent the last sixty days working to address those comments. He said that everything was complete on the latest set. He said the owner had originally planned six townhouses, then three detached units, until his zoning appeal was denied (Appeal No. 2006-16). Mr. Lauter felt it wouldn't help anyone to deny the plan at this stage. Ms. Mayfield reminded that they needed to specify the length of any time extension. Mr. Raffaelli, noting the numerous reviews prepared for the one submission, wondered if the Commission should refuse the plan and demand a new application and filing fee. Ms. Mayfield suggested that the Commission could also give an approval conditioned on a subsequent staff review.

Asked to repeat his motion, Mr. Bealer said that because of an apparent lack of communication from applicant to the Planning Office staff, of approximately sixty (60) days, and in consideration of the previous reviews, he moved to deny the Fox Tail Subdivision plan. Mr. Lauter moved instead to table the plan, and grant a sixty (60) day extension. Mr. Palka seconded. Ms. Mayfield cautioned that, in the future, all requests for extensions must be submitted ahead of the meeting, and in writing. And the Commission tabled the plan, granting the sixty (60) day extension, by a vote of 5-1, Mr. Bealer casting the dissent.

Mr. Weaver submitted a hand-written request for the extension.

Review the **final** subdivision plan for the **Snyder Subdivision**, a subdivision proposed for that parcel known as 735 Oley Street. [1:09.46]

Mr. Miller referred to an email, received earlier that day from John W. Hoffert, asking that the plan be tabled until zoning issues could be resolved.

Mr. Rothermel moved to table the plan. Mr. Reppert seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Snyder Subdivision plan.

Review the **final** land development plan for the **Egan Auto Land Development**, a subdivision and automotive service center proposed at those parcels known as 209 and 229 Lancaster Avenue. [1:10.55]

Dale Egan, together with his son Thomas, said the new structure would allow him to relocate his business from the Kenhorst Borough to the City. He described the location, and addressed the revisions made; including the provision of a full sidewalk on Brookline Street, the trench drains, included per the recommendations of the Plumbing Inspector, and the municipal improvements agreement. Mr. Jones said the agreement is currently under review. Dale Egan said the highway occupancy process has already run over the allotted time, waiting on the Department of Transportation's district office for permits. He said their erosion and sedimentation control plan is next on the Berks County Conservation District's docket. He said the sewer planning module is in-process, the Utilities Division Manager having recently requested information on employee counts. He said his engineer has projected a 350 gallon-per-day reduction. He referred to the new legal descriptions effecting the lot combination. Mr. Miller noted the different vertical data referenced on the land development and erosion and sedimentation control plans, and questioned the two month estimate on construction activity. Ms. Mayfield reminded about Law Department's role with the improvements agreement.

Dale Egan showed the lighting plan and schedule. Thomas Egan showed the landscaping plan, with seven

trees and two hedgerows. Dale Egan produced a piece of the white split-faced block intended for the exterior surface. He described something 'more granite-looking' to highlight the office entrance. Mr. Bealer recalled the previous concern with the driveway width. Mr. Jones agreed that turning radii made the extra width necessary.

Mr. Raffaelli asked if they'd consider removing the existing billboard, and designing another sign instead. Dale Egan recalled his discussion with the former Zoning Administrator, who judged it a legal non-conformity, so long as it's not moved or disturbed. He said the Zoning Ordinance would limit him to 100 square feet of signage, versus the 300 square feet on the existing billboard. Mr. Lauter asked if the 300 square feet is necessary. Dale Egan felt that it is. Mr. Rothermel felt that, being originally part of the building, as a roof sign, the free-standing sign proposed could be judged differently by the Ordinance. Mr. Miller said they were already granted the permit by the former Zoning Administrator. Mr. Bealer asked if the sign would, at least, be refurbished. Dale Egan said that was his intent.

When asked for a recommendation, Mr. Miller said there were no outstanding issues that aren't typically addressed after the Commission's approval, including any final revisions to the erosion and sedimentation control plan, issuance of highway occupancy permits, and approval of the sewer planning module. He recommended that the former two be resolved prior to endorsement and recording. Ms. Mayfield added the required municipal improvements security.

Mr. Raffaelli asked if this was their third venture in the City. Dale Egan noted one other shop on North Fifth Street, with eight shops total in Pennsylvania.

Mr. Bealer moved to accept the final plan, on the conditions that they secure approval of the highway occupancy permits, the municipal improvements agreement, the erosion and sedimentation control plan, and the sewage planning documentation. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the Egan Auto plan.

#### Resolution #42-2006

Review the **sketch** land development plan for the **Millmont Elementary School**, a proposed reconstruction of the elementary school at that parcel known as 300 Carroll Street. [1:37.30]

Mr. Krall described the two-acre project location, and the surrounding streets and neighborhood. He noted that the zoning of school projects requires a special exception hearing, scheduled for October 18<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Adams said the current Millmont Elementary School serves 175 students. He said the new facility would accommodate 375 pre-school through fifth grade students and approximately 400 sixth grade magnet students, in an "agriculture, ecology and science" program. He described a subterranean parking area, the Elementary School on the first floor, and the magnet school on the second. He described the entrance of the existing Elementary School, its brick and terra cotta façade, hoping to replicate it and salvage materials, where feasible, to carry-on the traditional look. He said they are in the process of preparing better elevations and renderings for subsequent presentations. He proposed a two-way entrance to the 64-space parking level, from Carroll Street. An elevator and two flights of stairs will access the first floor. The parking area will be secured by an overhead door, activated by a card reader. He described the floor plan, a courtyard in the building's center, and a service/loading area on Carroll Street. He said they had originally planned a three-story school, with parking on the first, but took the current direction based on neighborhood considerations for the building height.

Mr. Krall said the existing Elementary School fronts to the east, while the new building design fronts to the west, which he felt better because of the wider intersection and position of Saint Anthony's Roman Catholic Church. He proposed curb cuts to provide for drop-off/loading areas, calling the current traffic load "limited". He said traffic counts are underway, though the Reading School District wants a full traffic impact study. He said they hoped to relocate the power and telecommunication lines underground, but were not well received by Metropolitan Edison Company, who feels that burial is cost prohibitive. He said they are considering curb 'bump-outs' as an alternative, if the existing cartway widths can handle the encroachment, and because of the added benefit of the traffic calming measure.

Mr. Krall said the design exceeds the building and lot cover maximums, and the setback minimums, necessitating the zoning variances. He described the existing grades as conducive to the subterranean parking design, noting that 64 spaces were provided for 55 employees, in the current design. He said they were hoping for plan approval and bidding by January, and project completion in July of 2008. He felt their major hurdles to be the zoning and utility location issues.

Mr. Bealer questioned the excavation costs for the parking garage. Mr. Krall said the 17-foot elevation difference helps. He said they'll be relying on the results of a geotechnical investigation.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the current 'drop-off' situation. Dr. Chapman said most of the Elementary School's students are walking. Mr. Rothermel asked how many more students were anticipated. Dr. Chapman counted 125 in the current School and 775 expected, 400 of whom will be the magnet students arriving by bus.

Mr. Jones cautioned about parking on Belvedere Avenue, it having less width than other streets for the 'bump-outs' being considered. Mr. Krall agreed to consider that. Ms. Mayfield asked if they'd allow drop-offs on the Summit Avenue side. Mr. Krall answered yes.

Mr. Palka felt the Millmont location better than many others, as far as the traffic conditions. Mr. Adams added that the location made sense for the new magnet because of its proximity to Angelica Park. Mr. Jones said the Reading School District has been involved in the planning of the Park improvements.

Mr. Lauter felt the scope of the changing traffic conditions necessitated a full impact study.

Mr. Bealer questioned the Department of Education's position on housing the elementary and magnet programs together. Ms. Hoffer said a clear separation, by floor, and divisible common areas allayed that concern.

Mr. Bealer asked if any athletic facilities were planned. Mr. Krall noted the "half-mile" proximity to Angelica Park. Mr. Rothermel asked how students would access the Park. Mr. Krall admitted they'd probably have to use busses.

Mr. Raffaelli thanked the group for their presentation, looking forward to the preliminary submission.

Review the **sketch** land development plan for the **Reading Citadel/Intermediate High School**, a proposed conversion of the soon-to-be-vacated St. Joseph Medical Center campus roughly bounded by North Eleventh, North Thirteenth, Elm and Walnut Streets. [2:22.08]

Mr. Krall said the Intermediate High School will take the ninth and tenth grades from the High School, approximately 2000-2600 students. He described the location, the existing St. Joseph Medical Center campus, its accessory buildings, and parking garages. He said the campus currently covers 24 separate parcels, the School District intending to consolidate them on one deed. He noted some of the same zoning issues as with the Millmont project, to be considered at the same special exception hearing, scheduled for October 18<sup>th</sup>. He said the existing building and lot coverages already exceed the zoning limits. This proposal would reduce both. He said the differences in elevation present the biggest challenge; 75 feet vertically in the 500 horizontal feet between North 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Streets.

Mr. McKissick presented a three-dimensional model and PowerPoint presentation. He stressed the 'schematic' phase of the planning. He said the Medical Center will begin their move in early November, but continue to occupy the property until February. Demolition activities and environmental remediation will follow thereafter. The heavy construction is expected to commence next summer, with a target opening in the fall of 2009. Mr. McKissick described an academic facility intended to relieve conditions at the High School, without much redundancy in the extra-curricular programming. He said 2400 students would come from the High School, where a design capacity of 3600 has been pushed to 4600. He said the Intermediate High School would create space in the High School for programming flexibility. The new Intermediate High School will be designed for a capacity of 2951, with 77 regular classrooms, 19 for special education, 19 science laboratories, and three classrooms each for art, music and home economics. He said that, by their calculation, 325 off-street parking spaces are required, based on the 271 staff members and 50 required visitor spaces. He said 363 spaces will be provided in the remaining garage.

Mr. McKissick said the Intermediate High School will be subdivided into four magnet schools. Using the PowerPoint slides, he detailed the proposed renovation, and the opportunities for historic preservation. He said the demolition will reveal some older parts of the building, long since covered by additions "C" and "D" in the 1950s. He explained the demolitions planned, about 200,000 square feet, and the new construction, about 100,000 square feet. He described an athletic field, intended for physical education, and not interscholastic competitions. He said a central courtyard should alleviate the current student impact on the neighborhood in the mornings before the start of classes. He said an additional story is planned for the "A" building, already having been anticipated in its original design. He described the loading areas, and the bus circulation measures. They are pursuing two-way designations for their blocks of North 12<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets, and the permission to close North 12<sup>th</sup> Street during school hours. He noted the space left for a future addition. He continued with the floor-by-floor plans, and their relation to the magnet school programming. He described some elevations and façade materials. He estimated the costs at \$60 million, with about \$23 million contributed from the State.

Mr. Miller asked if this were the first time grades, other than the sixth would be served by the magnet concept. Dr. Chapman described the concept as an effort to mitigate the drop-out rate. He said the sixth and

seventh grade magnet curricula would be well established by the time the Intermediate High School opened, preparing the ninth and tenth graders-to-be for further magnet programming. He said the magnet concept is more career path-oriented, with smaller class sizes and team building benefits. He said a location for the sixth grade “international business and language” program is still sought, calling the “Goggleworks II” expansion a possibility. If able to accommodate the “arts and theater” magnet there, the “international business and language” program could be started at Glenside Elementary School. He said he is considering all other options. He said faculty positions are added on the basis of enrollment, and the District’s ability to fund them. He said the magnet programs keep the District from having to build new middle schools, and allow for programming flexibility.

Mr. Krall reiterated the District’s preference for two-way traffic designations on North 12<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets. Mr. McKissick promised traffic study presentations as part of the preliminary plan review. He said they had already studied the traffic patterns of the High School and existing Medical Center, for comparison. He said the Medical Center’s staff of 1380 would be replaced with 271, and the currently 24-hour operation limited to eight or nine hours. He said ninth and tenth graders are not typically driving. Mr. Miller asked how the District intends to enforce control over North 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Mr. Krall said that would be addressed in the traffic impact study, almost completed. Mr. McKissick suspected North 13<sup>th</sup> Street to be under the State’s jurisdiction. Mr. Jones confirmed that the Department of Transportation controls the Street north to its intersection with Hampden Boulevard.

Mr. Palka asked if the existing boiler house would remain. Mr. McKissick answered no, noting that several smaller boilers and air conditioning units would replace it, reusing the existing penthouses for screening. He said geothermal heating is possible in parts of the buildings. He said heat recovery from the exhaust system becomes practical given the building’s height.

Mr. Bealer questioned the responsibility for environmental abatements. Dr. Chapman said the Medical Center was originally prepared to sell the property for \$1, but financing and tax benefits made it more attractive for them to handle the abatements, and incorporate the costs into the selling price. Mr. McKissick noted asbestos, radiation, mercury, mold and PCB analyses being conducted.

Mr. Lauter asked that the School District consider a salvage opportunity for the Centre Park Historic District’s Artifacts Bank ahead of the planned demolitions.

Mr. McKissick said the existing buildings are fully sprinkler-ed, one of the few major systems to be reclaimed by the School District.

Mr. Jones advised special attention to the southbound traffic on North 12<sup>th</sup> Street, and where it would be directed if and when the School closes the street. He discouraged the possible traffic signal at North 13<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets, describing the winter-time ability to make left turns from Walnut Street east to North 13<sup>th</sup> Street north as “critical”. Mr. Krall agreed to take that, and all the other comments offered, into consideration for the preliminary plan submission.

Mr. Rothermel felt that, if current on-street parking opportunities will be impacted by the School’s curb cuts, the City should consider the neighborhood’s parking need. Mr. Jones suspected that most of those spaces have been occupied by Medical Center staff.

Mr. Raffaelli thanked the presenters for the sketch planning offering, and the detail provided.

**Minutes:** [3:21.37]

Mr. Raffaelli asked if there were any comments on the September 12<sup>th</sup> minutes. Mr. Rothermel asked for a revision to a reference made regarding the venue for review of municipal projects.

Mr. Rothermel moved to accept the September 12<sup>th</sup> minutes, with the requested change. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the September 12<sup>th</sup> minutes, as amended.

**Resolution #43-2006**

Mr. Raffaelli asked if there were any comments on the September 26<sup>th</sup> minutes. Mr. Rothermel moved to accept the September 26<sup>th</sup> minutes, as presented. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the September 26<sup>th</sup> minutes.

**Resolution #44-2006**

**Other business:** [3:26.30]

Mr. Raffaelli asked for an update on the 200 Penn Street trellis restoration. Ms. Mayfield said it was her

understanding that the prior Zoning Administrator had reached an agreement for the reconstruction, but without having anything in writing, was unenforceable.

Mr. Raffaelli asked for an update on the Mimmo's Pizzeria zoning appeal and enforcement. Ms. Mayfield reported that the Hearing Board had upheld its previous decision, but was unaware of any other actions taken.

Seeing no other business, Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the October meeting. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the October meeting, 6 to 0. – 10:29 pm.