

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
October 26, 2010 at 7:49 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
Brian Bingaman, 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

Others present:

Daniel H. Laudenslayer, Tarson, LLC
Norberto Acevedo
Alicia A. Acevedo
Aida L. Acevedo
Donna Reed, City Council-District 5
Glenn C. Buchman
Sharon L. Sensenig
... and about 40 other residents of the Riverdale neighborhood
Gregg A. Bogia, Bogia Engineering Inc.
Lee C. Olsen, Olsen Design Group Architects
Albert R. Boscov, Reading Hospitality LLC
Adam Mukerji, Reading Redevelopment Authority
Bradford R. Grauel, Over The Mountain LLC
Stephen Hoffman, Quaker Maid Meats, Inc.
Lawrence G. Grybosky, Spotts Stevens & McCoy Inc.
Timothy J. Krall, Spotts Stevens & McCoy Inc.
Randy J. Dautrich, Dautrich Engineering & Inspection

Initially short a quorum, Chairman Raffaelli called the October meeting to order at 7:49p. He apologized for the delay, and explained his 'walk-out' in protest of a meeting space he deemed inadequate for the Commission's needs, and those of their guests. He asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the October 26th agenda. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the October agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Acevedo Downing St. Subdivision - final subdivision plan [0:02.37]

Noting the sizable attendance, Mr. Raffaelli directed all those wishing to speak to sign an attendance sheet. Mr. Laudenslayer described a subdivision intended for the Acevedo's daughter. He said it was tested for on-lot sewage disposal, and deemed adequate. He noted a number of comments in the Planning Office review reserving landscaping input for the Planning Commission. He indicated one shade tree proposed, and a driveway of compliant width through the Downing Street right-of-way, then flared wider in order to serve a two-car garage. He described "stick construction" for a one-story ranch house. Mr. Acevedo added that it would have a full basement, similar to his own, and likely vinyl siding. Asked for clarification on the requirement for a *shade tree* versus a *street tree*, Mr. Miller noted that the Zoning Ordinance dictates a "shade tree", which is further defined as one within the public way. He noted other sections of Land Development Ordinance that allow the Planning Commission to direct additional landscaping as it deems appropriate. Asked about the rest of the block, Mr. Miller didn't think street trees had been planted on any regular interval. Mr. Laudenslayer mentioned the Conservation District's recent approval, and requested a waiver of the sidewalk requirement since none existed in the area. Asked about the neighbor's encroachment, Mr. Laudenslayer said the sheds will be moved. Mr. Acevedo mentioned that he had previously reported to zoning when he saw additional (porch) construction on the neighbor's home, which went without resolution. Mr. Rothermel suggested negotiating a sale of enough land to remedy the encroachment, so as not to

cloud a future transaction. Mr. Miller intended to research the zoning complaint, and asked for an update on the sewage disposal design. Mr. Laudenslayer said that Ludgate Engineering had approved the soil test. Mr. Jones said no permit was issued, and that the Sewage Enforcement Officer (Ludgate) determined it wouldn't qualify for a sewage planning exemption. Mr. Miller said it needs to be settled prior to recording the plan. He said the trespass is the neighbor's, but should be resolved now to save the time and expense of another lot-line revision. Ms. Mayfield noted that the Planning Commission didn't have to act until the following meeting. Mr. Bingaman asked that building elevations be prepared for that meeting.

Alicia Acevedo complained of the mobile homes filling in the neighborhood. There ensued a discussion of the agenda, the proper venue for discussing land-use policy generally, and the preemption of state laws on locally-enacted land-use regulations. Ms. Mayfield recalled that the issue was discussed at a community meeting, and that the City is looking at possible solutions. Mr. Raffaelli offered the floor to anyone wishing to comment on the subdivision application. Councilwoman Reed said there was some misunderstanding on the part of Council staff, and asked the "indulgence" of the Planning Commission in hearing the residents' concerns. Mr. Raffaelli suggested they close the present issue first. The residents continued speaking about the objectionable construction.

Mr. Bealer moved to grant a waiver of the sidewalk requirement (§22-602.D). Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to waive the required sidewalk for the Acevedo subdivision frontage on Downing Street.

Resolution #45-2010

Mr. Lauter moved to table the plan. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Acevedo Downing St. Subdivision plan.

Mr. Raffaelli, again referring to the long agenda, suggested limiting the comments to a representation of the neighborhood. Mr. Rothermel, upon confirming that the Zoning Ordinance allows the types of houses described, questioned the value of discussing an issue beyond the Planning Commission's influence. Mr. Buchman rose to question the Commission's evaluation of new structures in established neighborhoods. He referred to his own participation in a design effort for Penn Street, and the focus on façade compatibility. He complained of a trend adversely affecting the character of the neighborhood and its property values. Mr. Bealer noted that the State planning law limits the Commission's ability to regulate aesthetic matters. Mr. Raffaelli noted that modular construction does not necessarily equate with 'mobile home'.

DoubleTree Hotel & Garage Project - revision to record land development plan [0:50.40]

Mr. Bogia said the last presentation focused on the Parking Authority's garage project, which has since been constructed and opened. He called the current plan a "second phase", and updated to show an extended dock area. He said they've received additional building coverage allowances from the Zoning Hearing Board, and are seeking plan approval. He said the terms of the "Build America Bonds" financing the project require that they commence construction by the end of the year.

Mr. Olsen reported on-going meetings with Hilton's Doubletree brand in Memphis and with Hilton Worldwide's design team Washington D.C. He said the mechanical/electrical/plumbing documentation is at 50 percent completion. He described a 214-room capacity, 25,000-square feet of meeting space, and a driveway entrance from Penn Street under a porte-cochère to the new garage. He described the façade materials, including: vision glass, brick and synthetic stucco, and a graphic design intended to compliment the LED lighting of the garage. He indicated drop-off lanes at the entrance for valet accommodation. He described a 4-inch-deep 'green roof' of sedum, per the Conservation District's stormwater mandates. He said they've engaged a Hilton-approved interior-design firm from Baltimore. He mentioned additional meeting rooms on the second floor, in order to make up for limitations on the first, and a ratio of 60% king-sized rooms to 40% "double-queen". He noted a full physical fitness facility, including a pool, to be located in the basement level. He said Hilton requires a sundeck, which has been provided, though he questioned its utility.

Mr. Boscov said the hotel patrons will always have access to free parking. He said 2010 has been a better year than the last for hotel performance in Reading. He said the project has been delayed due to financing obstacles, but is able to move forward with the Build America Bonds if "in the ground" by the end of December. He mentioned support from Governor Rendell and Senator Specter in obtaining other grants, estimating the project at "roughly \$52 million". He said the garage has 923 spaces, and is a good income opportunity for the Parking Authority as the hotel will rarely need more than 150 spaces. He said they'd return and update the Commission on the interior-design progress, and estimated "roughly 18 months" in construction.

Touching on the “Entertainment Square” progress, Mr. Boscov mentioned a soon-to-be-announced Italian restaurant, and hoped to secure other restaurants for the ‘2nd and Washington’ garage. He said the hotel will be built to the Hilton standard, suggesting that ‘flagship’ name remained a possibility. He said they’d come back with additional details on the design, when finalized.

Asked for his opinion, Mr. Miller declined further comment. Mr. Bingaman moved to approve the ‘revision to record’ plan. Mr. Lauter seconded, then asked about the required corrections referenced in the Planning Office’s comments. Mr. Miller said the plan he reviewed had not shown the details identified. Mr. Boscov offered to do whatever was necessary, so as not to make anyone “uncomfortable”. Mr. Bogia offered a roll of plans he claimed had been corrected, signed and sealed. Mr. Raffaelli asked about the materials used in constructing the handicapped ramps. A discussion followed, before returning to the motion forwarded. Ms. Mayfield suggested amending the motion per the Planning Office concerns. Mr. Lauter amended his second, conditioning the approval on the “staff’s satisfaction”. Mr. Mukerji insisted that a conditional approval “at this stage” would complicate the funding. Ms. Mayfield clarified that it just provides an opportunity to review and verify the corrections.

Resolution #46-2010

The scheduled presentation of the “Lancaster Avenue Super Market” preliminary plan was withdrawn by (emailed) request of the owner’s representatives, who were preparing for a November appearance.

Quaker Maid Parking and Trailer Storage - final subdivision and land development plan [1:30.49]

Mr. Grauel described a plan for the 1.1-acre tract between Crestmont and Arlington Streets, originally submitted in January. It required a map change for the zoning on part of that tract, subsequently enacted by City Council in August. He said the plan proposes a parking lot for employees and truck staging. He acknowledged a review from the Planning Office, comments he now thought to be satisfied, save three requested waivers. He said the Conservation District has approved the erosion controls, and that the County Planning Commission and City Engineer have each issued reviews. Mr. Miller asked about intentions to formally vacate an alley in the middle of the development. Mr. Grauel preferred that Quaker Maid’s attorneys answer, believing they had initiated that process. He said the portion of the alley affected was limited to that bounded by Quaker Maid only. Mr. Bealer asked about the permissibility of gravel parking areas. Mr. Miller called it a matter for the Zoning Administrator’s determination. Mr. Grauel indicated that the employee parking would be paved. Mr. Miller noted that the County Planners recommended a power source for hook-up by otherwise idling trucks. Mr. Hoffman felt it wasn’t applicable, as the intent is the storage of unused trailers. Mr. Bealer noted the County Planners’ recommendation for curbing on all street frontage. Mr. Grauel said there was none in that block of Crestmont. Mr. Jones agreed that it wouldn’t ‘make sense’. Asked about required interior landscaping, per the number of parking spaces, Mr. Grauel alluded to a proposed landscaping buffer on the perimeter. Mr. Miller felt the zoning review the biggest outstanding issue, suggesting the waiver requests could be resolved in the meantime. Mr. Hoffman explained trees would impede truck movements, and a sidewalk on Crestmont Street would encourage foot traffic where Quaker Maid preferred to divert it toward Arlington. Asked his opinion on the Crestmont situation, Mr. Jones said he had no issue with the way it currently functioned.

Mr. Rothermel moved to grant waivers of §22-509.3, regarding tree planting, §22-602.C requiring curbing and §22-602.D requiring sidewalk. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to waive §§22-509.3, -602.C and -602.D, as requested.

Resolution #47-2010

Mr. Bealer moved to table the final plan pending a zoning permit. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the “Quaker Maid Parking and Trailer Storage” plan.

The scheduled presentation of the “Sylvania Homes II – Accessible Housing” preliminary plan (Reading Housing Authority) was withdrawn by (emailed) request of the project architect, pending actions necessary to vacate Sheridan Street.

Additions and Renovations: Amanda Stout Elementary School and Benners Court - preliminary subdivision and land development plan [1:46.57]

Mr. Grybosky called the design essentially the same as that previously presented, hoping for a preliminary plan approval. He noted they were still waiting on the Conservation District and sewage planning approvals. He asked a few questions on the Planning Office comments. Mr. Miller supported a preliminary approval,

characterizing the outstanding issues as typically being resolved between the preliminary and final plan stages. He expressed a concern that some traffic and curb topography changes may require additional actions of City Council, and recommended that be made a condition of any approving motion. He cited traffic patterns mentioned for South 10th Street and modified curb lines on South 10th, Spruce and Muhlenberg Streets as possible examples. Msrs. Grybosky and Miller discussed a few more clarifications of the review letter.

Mr. Bingaman moved to approve the preliminary plan, conditioned on City Council's review and approval of proposed traffic and street modifications. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant conditional approval to the Amanda Stout Elementary School 'addition and renovation' preliminary plan.

Resolution #48-2010

Play Lot at Grace and Pansy Streets - final land development plan [1:56.12]

Mr. Krall reminded the Commission of the May 2009 approval, adding that the changes since are limited to ownership; the School District now intends to purchase the land, as the project costs were deemed several times the value of the property. The Democrat Club agreed, and will lease back the parking necessary for its functions. He said they've also since resolved encroachments from the neighboring residential properties; their fence and screening will now be placed along that northern boundary. On Ms. Mayfield's inquiry, Mr. Krall confirmed that all required handicapped ramps were shown on the plan.

Mr. Lauter moved to approve the revised final plan, conditioned on a municipal improvements agreement. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the final plan for the "Play Lot at Grace and Pansy Streets".

Resolution #49-2010

Victor Emmanuel Parking & Banquet Hall Addition - parcel annexation and final land development plan [2:02.02]

Mr. Dautrich reported that all issues involving the Schuylkill River Greenway Association (*i.e.* encroachments on the trail easement and stormwater impacts) had been resolved, and to their satisfaction. He said other drainage concerns had similarly been addressed, including the provision of trench drains at the proposed driveway openings. He confirmed that trailers, long providing for storage needs, will be removed. He mentioned their efforts to compliment the façade of the existing buildings, and said the 'down spouts' are now tied in to the storm sewers. He repeated that the shared parking arrangement with UGI Utilities will not be renewed, and that area instead will observe the setbacks and be replanted with grass.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the final plan, conditioned on the latest Planning Office review and an improvements agreement. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted 4 to 0 to approve the final plan for the Victor Emmanuel parking and pavilion plan, with Mr. Raffaelli abstaining.

Resolution #50-2010

Other business:

review the draft August 31, 2010 meeting minutes [2:11.36]

Mr. Bealer requested a spelling correction. Mr. Bingaman moved to approve the August meeting minutes. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the August 31st meeting minutes.

Resolution #51-2010

Mr. Miller apprised the Commission of minor changes to the landscaping plan for Water Authority's "18th Ward Water Booster Station" project.

Mr. Raffaelli read aloud a letter received from Fritz Rothermel, resigning his seat on the Commission with regrets. His term had officially lapsed in April 2009. The letter mentioned other obligations making difficult his continued attendance at meetings. It went on to cite objections to the planned renovations of City Hall, and the diminishing role of the Planning Commission in affairs that had historically included its input.

executive session-regarding information or strategy in connection with litigation... [2:22.24]

The Commission entered an executive session "to consult with its attorney regarding... information or strategy in connection with litigation..."

settlement agreement-Big Spring, Inc. vs. City of Reading Planning Commission [2:26.49]

Following the executive session and on Ms. Mayfield's recommendation, Mr. Bingaman moved to approve the first amendment to the settlement agreement and release regarding the bottling plant construction. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the first amendment to the settlement agreement with Big Spring, Inc., its successors and assigns.

Resolution #52-2010

Mr. Bingaman moved to adjourn. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the October 26th meeting. – 10:18p