

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
September 26, 2006 at 5:30 pm

Members present:

Ermete Raffaelli, 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
Adam Mukerji, Redevelopment Authority Director
Charles M. Jones, Public Works Director

Others present:

Albert R. Boscov, Our City Reading, Inc.
Lee C. Olsen, Olsen Design Group Architects
Scott T. Miller, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
Michael D. Hartman, McCarthy Engineering Associates PC
Scott M. Henry, Olsen deTurck Architects

Chairman Raffaelli called the September meeting back to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Bealer moved to approve the September 26th agenda. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the September 26th agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Review the **preliminary** land development plan for the **Goggleworks Apartments**, fifty-nine (59) high-rise apartments proposed for those parcels known as 100 and 110 North Second Street and 101 Pear Street. [0:00.39]

Mr. Olsen referred to the updated plans and the three dimensional model. He said they were seeking a final approval. He brought samples of the proposed façade materials. He noted the competitive bidding process, expecting those bids by October 16th. He deferred to Scott Miller to address the “civil/site” issues. Mr. Raffaelli asked that the project team focus on new issues, in the interest of time.

Scott Miller said that not much had changed in the site planning since their last presentation. He recalled the Department of Transportation’s agreement with the proposed driveway and drop-off locations. He said they have plans ready to be filed with the Department. He said revised plans were submitted to the Planning Office earlier in the day. He intended to address any additional issues raised. Ms. Mayfield noted the ordinance introduced at the last night’s City Council meeting to change the 100 block of North Second Street from one-way to two. Scott Miller said it wouldn’t affect the project, noting that the developer and the Department of Transportation were fully aware of the change.

Mr. Bealer asked if the proposed traffic control signage would be addressed as part of the highway occupancy permitting process. Scott Miller answered that it would be, and with the Department of Public Works having input, as well. Andrew Miller asked if the Department of Transportation regulated construction entrances from its streets. Scott Miller said they’d be utilizing an existing curb cut for that entrance. Mr. Jones didn’t think such permits were necessary. He reminded them to file plans with the Departments of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. Olsen said there were no significant changes to the architecture. He said the renderings were updated to reflect the intended colors and materials. Mr. Boscov noted the lighter colors chosen. Mr. Olsen said 84 off-street parking spaces would be provided in a secure area beneath the apartment structure’s “saw tooth” footprint. He said the building would house twelve residential units per floor, with the exception of the first for the proposed fitness center. Mr. Olsen showed samples of the split-faced concrete block intended for the stair and elevator towers, and the at-grade walls around the parking structure. He said the northern and southern walls would be finished with a synthetic stucco product. Green-tinted glass and aluminum framing were proposed for the fenestration, with sunscreens on the southern-facing windows. He noted the horizontal striping effect of the different-colored Dryvit® panels, adding “a little more character”. He pointed out the gull-wing shape atop the stair

towers, the proposed fencing around the plaza areas, and the decorative light fixtures. He referred to more ambitious plans for lighting the developing “entertainment square”. Mr. Boscov said they intended to light the face of the building from its top down, noting the effect on the Sovereign Plaza at the intersection of South Fifth and Penn Streets. Mr. Olsen confirmed that the concrete block would measure a standard 8x16 inches. He said the window glass is faceted.

Mr. Rothermel noted that the model showed no fenestration on the eastern façade, thinking it strange that the Goggleworks Apartments wouldn’t exhibit any “dialogue” with the Goggleworks Center for the Arts. He said he liked the design, but wished the building could better reveal itself to traffic approaching from the east on Washington Street. Mr. Olsen agreed, but felt the only way to engage the intersection was by reversing the footprint. Mr. Lauter asked about the possibility of more windows on the eastern façade. Mr. Boscov briefly explained the apartment layouts, the most likely positions for beds, and the reluctance to put windows there. Mr. Olsen felt the mass of the Arts Center would prevent most views from such windows anyway.

Amid discussion of the neighboring housing stock and the remaining ‘manufacturing/commercial’ uses, Mr. Rothermel suggested that a master plan be created for the area to guide development. Mr. Boscov promised the new development would be attractive. He referred to the Second and Washington Streets Parking Structure, currently under construction, and the shops planned for the first level. Mr. Rothermel agreed, crediting Synergetics Architects for their other attractive parking structure designs.

Mr. Rothermel asked if the Department of Public Works was satisfied with the design of the proposed driveway and drop-off point. Mr. Jones said he was yielding to the Department of Transportation on those issues, but reminded the developer of the required sewer planning module. Scott Miller said it would be filed the following day.

Mr. Rothermel asked if there were any other outstanding issues. Andrew Miller noted some required Land Development Ordinance corrections, the Department of Transportation highway occupancy permits, the Berks County Conservation District’s review and approval of the erosion and sedimentation control plan, and the Department of Environmental Protection approval of the sewage plan. He recommended the Commission consider the plan as final, based on the numerous presentations made and associated Planning Office reviews. He said it may be a couple of months before some of the documents mentioned are issued. He said, if approved as final, recording of the plan should be delayed until the erosion and sedimentation control plan and highway occupancy permits are approved, so the plan may be updated accordingly. Mr. Jones said a municipal improvements agreement was also required. Scott Miller said he’d work with the Department of Public Works on that agreement.

Mr. Rothermel moved to approve the plan as final, on the conditions that the required Land Development Ordinance corrections are made, the highway occupancy permits are granted, the erosion and sedimentation control plan is approved, the sewage plan is approved, and the municipal improvements agreement is secured. Mr. Bealer seconded the motion. Andrew Miller asked if the developer anticipated any problems making the required corrections. Scott Miller said not. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant final approval to the plan for the Goggleworks Apartments.

Resolution #39-2006

Review the **preliminary** land development plan for **R/C Theatres**, an eleven (11) screen cinema proposed for that parcel at the southwest corner of North Second and Washington Streets. [0:35.20]

Mr. Olsen said Olsen Design Group Architects and Stackhouse Bensinger Inc. were under contract to represent TK Architects, Inc. and R/C Theatres Management Corp. Scott Miller said there were no changes made to the site plan. He described the relocation of the utilities as the critical issue remaining.

Mr. Bealer asked about the dumpster location issue. Mr. Olsen said it is still being considered with the lead architect.

Scott Miller indicated the sanitary sewer, the water line, and storm sewer located in the “Pear Street” pedestrian/utility easement. He said they determined that the sanitary sewer only serves the Front and Washington Parking Deck. He said their original assumption, that flows from the north continue through the easement, was incorrect. At the intersection of Pear and Washington Streets, the flow diverts west toward Front Street. He said the site’s storm drainage, in this case all roof run-off, will enter an upgraded connection to the 7x9 storm culvert to the south. He said the water (fire) line will be capped and reconnected to water lines in North Second Street. He realized the utility plans still needed the approval of the Department of Public Works, but added that the work proposed is not as complicated as first thought. He discussed the electric services with the Metropolitan Edison Company, securing their acceptance with the proposed relocation. He said there are no natural gas or cable services

in the easement.

Mr. Boscov said they approached the Department of Transportation about delaying the repaving of the 100 block of Washington Streets until the utility work was completed. Scott Miller said the Department directed them to contact Windsor Service, Inc., the paving contractor. Andrew Miller and Mr. Jones questioned the directive to deal directly with the Department's contractor. Mr. Jones asked about the projected schedule. Mr. Boscov expected complete plans by October 15th, with the formal bidding to follow immediately thereafter. Mr. Jones doubted the utility work and repaving could be completed this season, sensing a snow removal issue if manhole and valve covers remained above the grade of the asphalt.

Andrew Miller asked about their intentions with the boundary. Mr. Boscov said he didn't anticipate any problem annexing the walkway from the Parking Authority, having already addressed the matter with them. Andrew Miller asked for a clear statement of the intent to subdivide, on both this and the Goggleworks Apartments plan.

Mr. Lauter recalled the County Planners' concerns for integrity of the Front and Washington Parking Deck foundation. Andrew Miller said the issue depends on the type of foundation chosen for the Theatre. Mr. Olsen said that TK Architects has retained their own structural engineers. He said the Parking Authority's Director referred them to Carl Walker, Inc., the structural consultant, for information on the Parking Deck's construction, since its architect, Synergetics Architects, had no information left to share.

Mr. Jones reminded the developer to file sewer planning modules. Scott Miller said they'd be sent the next day. Mr. Bealer asked if the revised utility plans should be reviewed prior to the Commission's approval. Mr. Jones said it probably wasn't necessary. He voiced some concern of suspected conflicts with other utilities in the area, but felt they could be resolved.

Mr. Rothermel asked about signage proposed to prevent vehicles stopping and standing on North Second Street. Scott Miller said they'd work with the Departments of Transportation and Public Works on those designs. Mr. Boscov said the Department of Transportation agreed to the drop-off area on Washington Street because of the Street's width. Mr. Lauter asked about the possibility of an additional drop-off area on North Second Street in front of the Miller Center. Mr. Jones suspected that location to be too close to the Penn Street intersection, doubting the Department of Transportation would approve it. Mr. Boscov said they had hoped to find a place where parents could drop-off, and watch their children enter the Theatre. He said the Parking Authority has agreed to keep the garages open on evenings and weekends, so patrons can enter and exit garages without paying. He said R/C Theatres will lease spaces at the Second and Washington Streets Parking Structure for matinees.

Mr. Olsen said a 500-square foot retail space shown will be eliminated to provide for a trash collection/storage space. He indicated the main entrance under a marquee, mezzanine connections between the individual theaters, office space and an apartment unit for management. He showed the building renderings and elevations prepared by TK Architects, noting the architectural "wings" projecting from the sides. He described a combination of synthetic stucco and concrete block for the exterior materials.

Mr. Rothermel asked if they approved of the Theatre's roof treatment, since the view would be visible from the proposed Apartments. Mr. Olsen answered yes.

Andrew Miller asked if R/C Theatres still intends to include a residential unit, and what the view might be like, of and from it. Mr. Olsen said the windows will look out onto the roof of the marquee.

Mr. Rothermel asked if there were any other outstanding issues. Andrew Miller mentioned most of the same issues as with the Apartments plan, except the requirement for highway occupancy permits. He said the Zoning Administrator must review any signage proposed, with special attention to the marquee. He said the biggest issues are with the utilities. Mr. Boscov said the Theatre wants the marquee to show what's currently playing.

Andrew Miller felt the plan could be considered for action, with the appropriate conditions specified. He said the Theatre could address the signage issues at anytime before installation. Mr. Rothermel suggested the development team talk to the Theatre's people about the traffic hazards of the intersection and the actual visibility of the marquee to traffic passing it.

Andrew Miller asked about the trash accommodations. Mr. Olsen said the final decision on that room, and the retail trade-offs for it haven't been finalized. He said the footprint of the Theatre is final. Mr. Boscov mentioned the possibility of a Cold Stone Creamery®, or something like it, to occupy the retail space. He said that franchise might also be interested in the retail space at the Second and Washington Streets Parking Structure. Mr. Rothermel questioned the logic of allowing ice cream in a movie theater.

Mr. Rothermel recommended that a site-specific pedestrian circulation and drop-off plan be developed and reviewed by the Department of Public Works.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the plan as final, on the conditions that the subdivisions/annexations be clarified, any applicable Department of Transportation permits be secured, the required Land Development Ordinance corrections are made, the sewage plan is approved, the municipal improvements agreement is approved, the utility connection and relocation plans are approved, approval of any proposed signage and marquee is granted, the erosion and sedimentation control plan is approved, and a pedestrian and traffic circulation plan is provided to the Department of Public Works. Mr. Palka seconded the motion. Andrew Miller recommended that the erosion and sedimentation control plan be approved prior to the Commission's endorsement and recording. And the Commission voted 4-0, Mr. Lauter having since left the meeting, to grant final approval to the plan for R/C Theatres – Reading Movies 11.

Resolution #40-2006

Review the **preliminary** land development plan for the **GL Public Services Land Development**, a two-story office building proposed at those parcels known as 100-106 North Third Street. [1:36.10]

Mr. Olsen introduced Mr. Hartman to review the land development plan, and recalled the zoning hearing and the issues since raised with the architectural style and parking issues. Mr. Hartman said he received the Planning Office review, and felt the required corrections to be "pretty minor" in nature and fixable. He said he is in the process of following-up with the Department of Environmental Protection regarding the sewage planning requirements. He said he discussed the driveway/curb cut issues with the City Engineer and Traffic Planner, without objections. Mr. Miller noted the Traffic Planner's memorandum recommending that the proposed driveway be removed from the plan.

Mr. Olsen said the plan was nearly identical to the first submission. He described a financial services company in need of a new facility, it not being financially feasible to retrofit the existing building. He noted the variance granted from the off-street parking requirements, intending to rely on spaces on-street, and in the public garages. He said that the owner, Gary Mengel, forgot to mention the four off-street parking spaces he rents at 301 Washington Street, having only four employees that drive to work. He said the proposed driveway was designed to provide for the armored car service. He speculated that Mr. Mengel would probably be willing to concede the driveway, but assumed the pull-off would become necessary at some point in business's future.

Mr. Olsen described the existing building as "gray/white" in color. He said the owner preferred a building on a plinth of dark concrete masonry, with gray Dryvit® above, gray-smoked glass fenestration, and a "galvalum" roof. He described the location as a prominent corner, and showed some elevations designed to "contemporize" the property. He said the owner is investing "close to a million dollars" in the project, noting that they may elect to use a vinyl siding product on the rear façade to moderate the costs. He said the owner would like a scrolling marquee display, realizing the Zoning Administrator must review and approve the proposed signage. He said GL Public Services is in the process of redesigning their logo, to more accurately reflect the additional services being offered. He described the business as "booming". He expressed the owner's commitment to the City, but noted that relocation had also been considered. He said the project team has reassessed the original schedule, and are now looking to start in the spring, sometime after April 15th.

Mr. Bealer asked about the buildings between GL and the Goggleworks Center for the Arts, wondering if Our City Reading, Inc. is still trying to acquire and renovate them. Mr. Boscov said Our City Reading already owns one of the four, hoping to continue the redevelopment of anything empty in the area. Mr. Olsen said the owner had already indicated his preference to expand north on North Third Street, when feasible, rather than west on Washington Street. Mr. Bealer felt they ought to look to the former dairy building across Washington Street, for architectural direction, especially in its horizontal elements. He said the Commission was hoping GL would make some contact with the Parking Authority regarding availability in the Chiarelli Plaza. Mr. Rothermel preferred that the building attempt to follow the vertical delineations of the residential properties in the block. He supported the Traffic Planner's recommendation on the driveway issue, suggesting the owner pursue additional property to the north for a private lot, and consider a loading zone in the meantime. He said he is against the scrolling sign, citing traffic safety concerns. He wondered about the long-term value in salvaging the houses between GL and the Goggleworks Center, thinking the area would be better planned for the transition it is beginning to experience.

Mr. Bealer recognized that the parking standard was varied, but hoped to see some effort in determining the Parking Authority's ability to service the business's need. Mr. Boscov said the spaces currently leased to the Gateway Building tenants at 201 Penn Street will be moved into the Second and Washington Streets Parking Structure, when finished. Mr. Bealer felt that was another good reason to start the project next year. Mr. Olsen said the majority of GL's business is "walk-in".

Mr. Rothermel, reading the written findings of the Zoning Hearing Board, noted their mention of the Chiarelli Plaza, a supposed rationale in granting the off-street parking variance. Mr. Miller said a downside of dividing zoning districts by the centerline of streets, is the different standards applied to properties on opposite sides, but with similar circumstances (in this case, the parking standards in the Residential 3 district versus those in the Commercial Core).

Mr. Olsen appreciated the Commission's input, intending to consider those comments as he prepares the final plan.

Mr. Bealer asked Mr. Miller for his recommendation. Mr. Miller felt action on the preliminary plan was in order, noting a concern about the driveway still being shown. He asked for the agreement of the developer to make the change by the final submission. Mr. Rothermel moved to accept the preliminary plan, on the conditions of additional architectural study, the elimination of the proposed driveway, the required Land Development Ordinance corrections, and the approvals of any other reviewing agencies having jurisdiction. Mr. Palka seconded. And the Commission approved the preliminary land development plan for GL Public Services, 3-1, Mr. Raffaelli casting the dissent.

Resolution #41-2006

With no other business, Mr. Rothermel moved to adjourn the September meeting. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the September meeting, 4 to 0. – 7:46 pm.