Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
September 9, 2008 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, 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

Others present:

Jeffery C. Euclide, Entech Engineering, Inc.
Christopher J. Fell, United Corrstack, LLC
Eugene Orlando, Jr., Roland & Schlegel, PC
Robert P. Stackhouse, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
Douglas F. Smith, Alvernia College
John T. O'Neill, Landmark Surveying
Timothy J. Krall, Spotts Stevens & McCoy, Inc.
Victoria E. Krall
Lawrence G. Grybosky, Spotts, Stevens and McCoy, Inc.
Barry J. Suski, Reading School District
Thomas R. Chapman, Jr., Reading School District
Douglass G. Kauffman, Reading School District / 18th Ward Democratic Club of Reading
Michael Kostival, Michael Kostival Architects
Armand T. Christopher, Jr., USA Architects, Planners and Interior Designers, PC
William J. Vitale, Designworks Architects, PC
Vaughn D. Spencer, City Council
Brian Bingaman
Stephen F. DeLucas, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the September 9th meeting to order, reminded presenters to sign the attendance sheet, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the September agenda. Mr. Rothermel seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the September 9th agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Review the **preliminary** land development plan for the **CedarPak #4 Paper Mill (United Corrstack, LLC)**, a new paper mill proposed for the former Reading Tube Corporation building on that parcel known as 800 South Street [0:01.51]

Mr. Euclide alluded to the revised plan submitted August 22nd, addressing the comments previously received. He noted a few outstanding items remaining, and offered a 30-day extension of the Planning Code's established timeline for plan approval. He gave the Conservation District's review of the erosion and sedimentation control plan and Norfolk Southern Corporation's property transfer as examples, hoping to resolve them in-time for the October meeting.

Mr. Bealer empathized with their frustration in resolving issues not wholly within their control. He thanked them for their cooperation with the City on what he described as "a very technical project". Mr. Rothermel commented on the large amount of information provided, and the number of questions it raised, including Corrstack's written response to the Planning Office review. Ms. Mayfield deferred to the applicants, but understood the purpose of the presentation to be limited to a request for extension. Mr. Euclide acknowledged the complexity of the project, and recommended the Commission members tour the site, for a better appreciation. Mr. Rothermel, summarizing his concerns, noted the references to zoning issues, and Corrstack's position that they weren't applicable. He noted the appellate process available where relief of the Zoning Ordinance is necessary, countering the assertion that it was up to the discretion of City staff or the developer to determine applicability, even if he

personally might agree that there were extenuating circumstances. Mr. Orlando answered that the zoning issues were being addressed, and would be, in full, for the next presentation.

Mr. Rothermel moved to grant the requested extension of the Planning Code's timeline, through October 15th. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to agree to the time extension, as provided for under §508.3 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

Resolution #60-2008

Other business:

609.c (Planning Code) review-the "life care retirement facility and nursing home" ordinance, a proposed zoning amendment forwarded for the planning agency's review [0:11.44]

Ms. Mayfield, needing to leave the meeting, described the proposed amendment as a clarification of the related definitions and vague classifications in the Zoning Ordinance's existing language. She said this was the Planning Commission's opportunity to comment, ahead of a public hearing scheduled for October 8th. Asked for the details, she briefly described the new definitions, regulation of the residential aspects of certain facilities, and the districts affected. Questions mounted regarding sizes and densities allowed. Mr. Miller regretted that the information wasn't provided him in-time for its inclusion in the Commission's monthly mailings. He said they could discuss it further toward the end of meeting. Ms. Mayfield concluded, and departed the meeting.

Subdivision and Land Development: (continued)

Review the **preliminary** land development plan for the **South Campus Project (Alvernia College)**, four new residence halls, an athletic field, and building additions proposed for that parcel known as xxx Greenway Terrace [0:18.47]

Mr. Stackhouse reviewed the overall plan for the site, and thought the issues raised in the Planning Office review mostly resolved, namely the Zoning Administrator's review. He said they were still waiting on the Conservation District's approval of the erosion and sedimentation controls. He said Kenhorst Borough had issued a letter, acknowledging receipt of the plan and the sanitary sewer module, as the proposed sewer laterals would tie in to their interceptor line along Angelica Creek. Mr. Miller recommended the plan be granted a preliminary approval. Asked to present elevations, Mr. Stackhouse showed some perspectives prepared with Google's SketchUp software. Mr. Raffaelli asked about the construction. Mr. Smith said the floors would be poured concrete. Mr. Stackhouse said the framing of the walls and roof trusses would be wood. Mr. Raffaelli likened a fire risk to that of a recent apartment building fire in Conshohocken.

Mr. Rothermel asked about access to the large parking lot. Mr. Stackhouse indicated the stabilized emergency access lanes planned throughout site; between the buildings, and to the parking lot. Mr. Miller confirmed that the zoning review had been received.

Mr. Rothermel moved to approve the preliminary plan. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted 3 to 1 to approve the "South Campus Project" preliminary plan, Mr. Raffaelli casting the dissent.

Resolution #61-2008

Review the **final** subdivision plan for the **JPMS Minor Subdivision**, a subdivision of that parcel known as 237 Buttonwood Street into two lots [0:27.00]

Mr. O'Neill described the single lot occupied by a gas station/convenience store and the JPMS (John Paul Mitchell Systems) manufacturing building. He said JPMS would like to separate the uses, and transfer ownership of the convenience store to its operator. He proposed a subdivision meeting the zoning requirements for minimum lot area and setbacks, for the new boundary line at least. He said everything else would remain as it is, there being no new construction proposed. He indicated where an easement would allow for the shared access and travel via the existing driveways, and allow the necessary turning movements for the large trucks serving JPMS.

Mr. Rothermel asked about the report from Zoning Administrator. Mr. O'Neill understood that she intended to issue use permits once the subdivision itself was approved. Mr. Miller clarified that he was expecting a review of the plan, but was denied. He said the County Planning Commission had completed its review, and had "no adverse comments". He recommended a final approval based on the few revisions yet required.

A discussion about the traffic circulation, into and out of the site, followed.

Mr. Rothermel moved to approve the final subdivision plan, subject to provision of the information still required by the Planning Office staff. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the JPMS Minor Subdivision final plan.

Resolution #62-2008

Review the **sketch** land development plan for the **Elementary Schools at 245 West Windsor Street**, two new school buildings, of 23,350 square feet each, proposed on those parcels known as 900 Lincoln Street and 240 West Spring Street [0:42.59]

Mr. Krall alluded to a total of three Reading School District plans to be presented. He proposed two elementary schools on these two particular properties, already owned by the School District and to be combined as one lot. He described the schools as two pre-manufactured buildings, similar to those added to the Thomas Ford and Glenside elementary school campuses, each 'single-story' at about 25,700 square feet. He recognized the R3 zoning classification, which requires a special exception hearing before issuance of zoning permits. He said the proposal includes adequate off-street parking, and conforms to the maximum building and lot coverage standards. He said they aimed for a layout which would separate the cars from the busses. He explained the one-way circulation through the site; limiting the Windsor Street driveway to entrances, the Spring Street driveway to exits. He said the schools could each accommodate 300 students, with a combined faculty of 44. He said 45 off-street parking spaces are proposed. Referring to the review issued from the Department of Public Works, he acknowledged the City's recently-adopted stormwater management ordinance, its possible implications for the direct discharge planned, the new industrial collector street envisioned, and its possible effects on traffic patterns around the school. He hoped to meet with Public Works' officials on those issues.

Mr. Kostival expounded on the circulation pattern, the designated "parent drop-off" area, and described modular construction. He expected some crawl spaces beneath the buildings, due to the uneven grades, though assured that they'd balance the excavation, where possible. He showed a floor plan layout with 15 classrooms, conference rooms, a "nurse's suite", a library, and a large general purpose room, to be used alternately as a gymnasium, and cafeteria. He said the food service would be limited to the serving of meals prepared elsewhere.

Reminded of the Thomas Ford and Glenside schools, Mr. Raffaelli advised widening the hallways. Mr. Kostival said the current design calls for 8-foot widths in some places. He thought it might be possible to revise the design showing that width throughout. He said they were at the beginning of the Department of Education's review, which itself could result in modifications. He indicated a play area between the two buildings, accessible without having to cross the driveway.

A discussion ensued about the status and route of the possible collector street, and its possible effect on the School District's project.

Mr. Krall, referring to the zoning matters to be addressed, thought a variance concerning driveway separations from intersections might be necessary, depending on the interpretation of the section. Mr. Raffaelli suggested additional visitor parking near the office area, and consideration of the maneuverability within the loading areas. Mr. Krall thought there plenty of space available.

Asked about programming/curriculum issues, Dr. Chapman explained a "Pre-K through 5" facility, intended to relieve Riverside Elementary's 900-student population and Northwest Area Elementary's 700-800 students. He expected smaller class sizes to follow, with some growth room at each school. Mr. Bealer suggested that crawl spaces result in higher maintenance costs. He wondered if the abandonment of Eckert and Ritter Streets would offer alternatives to the driveways planned. Mr. Krall characterized them as "improved", and used to access the rear of the residential properties on West Windsor Street. Mr. Miller thought Ritter Street connected other alleyways, as well. Mr. Krall said the School District was trying to avoid the hassle and possible resistance to including them in the plan.

Asked about the location of the mechanical equipment, Mr. Kostival mentioned some on the roofs, some in the crawl spaces, and some in a small basement; to be distributed as efficiently as possible. Mr. Rothermel felt screening that equipment important, when considering the sight lines from the surrounding residential properties at higher elevations. He asked if retaining walls were being considered in the grading plans. Mr. Krall said not, hoping instead to leave the site "in a mow-able condition". Mr. Rothermel anticipated the school busses having to make sharp turns from West Windsor Street into the site, and wondered if the designed radius would be sufficient. Mr. Krall noted 40-foot radii at those turns. Mr. Kostival explained the size of the individual modules as a function of the dimensional regulations on over-the-road trucking. He noted the considerations for natural lighting, thermally-efficient glass, and generous insulation. He described a façade of synthetic stucco and concrete block, with some metal paneling above. Mr. Lauter asked for the reasoning behind two separate buildings. Dr. Chapman

said they were trying to be sensitive to the community, and maintain its identity. Mr. Lauter expected it would be more expensive that way. Dr. Chapman said the separate buildings allow for better scheduling of common use areas, and smaller more personal schools. He said the money comes from part of a $400 million bond issue just authorized by the School Board, reminding that the District hasn't raised its real estate levy in five years. Mr. Lauter said he was thinking of the future costs, more than the initial. He advised planning ahead, in anticipation of the possible industrial collector. He assumed that some truck-heavy operation would eventually make use of the former Dana Corporation properties. Mr. Bealer summarized a presentation he made to the Reading Area Transportation Study group on behalf of State Representative Dante Santoni, Jr. He said the Department of Transportation's District 5 representative advised a similar presentation to the Planning Commission, for a formal recommendation to be considered in the 5-year funding prioritizations. He hoped to discuss it at the October meeting. He reported having similar discussions with State Senator Michael A. O'Pake and Representative Thomas R. Caltagirone, as well, and noted their interest in truck collector roads. He said the latest cost estimates put the River Road extension at between $6-8 million. And the Department's current focus on deteriorating bridges makes funding new projects all the more difficult. Mr. Rothermel asked about projections on student population growth. Dr. Chapman expressed his skepticism of any predictions beyond 5 years. He estimated 18,000 students enrolled for the fall, the last school year having ended with 17,500. But during that year, the District had served 20,000, illustrating the transient nature of the student body. He said that, even without growth, they needed to build new facilities to enhance the education offered, and address the overcrowding. Mr. Rothermel asked how the site coverage proposed would allow for future construction needs. Dr. Chapman said that two-story construction would cost more, for the same amount of space. He said the configuration planned for the North 8th Street site would leave enough room for a fourth building. He thought the projects would help revitalize the City, suggesting that it needs a homeowner tax base, as much as it needs a commercial tax base. Mr. Raffaelli complained that the School District never consults with the Planning Commission for direction in the placement of new schools. Dr. Chapman felt that they had worked with the Commission, and acted on its "insightful" suggestions. He recalled the bus driveway at Glenside Elementary, built at the City's suggestion to mitigate the traffic problems there, costing the District an extra $300,000. He said Hershey's real estate agent had toured the North 8th Street property with them, and another party on the same day. He said they made an offer later that night.

Review the **sketch** land development plan for the **Elementary Schools at 200 North 8th Street**, three new school buildings proposed for those parcels known as 200 North 8th Street, 210, 212 and 216 Poplar Street [1:43.46]

Mr. Krall described the layout of the Hershey/Luden's confection plant, slated to close in February 2009. He drew attention to the existing oil/gas fueled power plant, which generates steam and electricity. He proposed three one-story elementary schools, at 23,000 square feet each, and similar in construction to those planned at the West Windsor Street site. He said the designs provide space for 300 students in each, and 335 in total staffing. He recognized the Manufacturing/Commercial zoning district, intending to seek a use variance, among others. He estimated the proposed building cover at 20%, and the lot cover at 60%, each within the zoning requirements. Mr. Miller questioned the use category relied on for those numbers. Mr. Krall thought they came from the manufacturing uses. Mr. Miller noted that problem with varying uses. Mr. Krall said they'd like to keep the existing 60-foot driveway on Walnut Street, and create a bus drop-off area on North 8th. He thought that area as shown may be "a little short". He said they were trying to separate the bus traffic from the cars. Mr. Christopher stated that the Walnut Street driveway would be for "entrance only", with exits to North 8th. He said they don't anticipate much bus traffic, as it is a neighborhood-oriented school. He hoped the power plant could power and heat the buildings with an excess available to 'the grid'. Mr. Rothermel asked about parent drop-offs. Mr. Christopher indicated some possible designated locations, thinking the site provided more than enough room. Mr. Rothermel warned of the traffic volumes on North 8th Street.

Dr. Chapman explained that the three proposed schools will relieve overcrowding at four elementary schools: 13th & Union, 12th & Marion, 10th & Green, and 13th & Green. He said, in addition to allowing for needed growth room, a redistricting plan would make for more efficient bussing. He assured that all drop-off activity would be kept 'off-street', as they did for Glenside Elementary. Mr. Christopher showed a floor plan, described the "z shape", and noted the entrances and security measures. Mr. Raffaelli suggested an energy lock between the front door and the reception area. Mr. Christopher said that could be incorporated. He said they increased the toilet capacity, per code changes since the construction of the previous magnet schools, and noted capacity for approximately 300 students in each building. He explained a façade combination of red brick, with some horizontal siding, possible variations in color, and small pediment treatments atop. He called the plans "very preliminary". Dr. Chapman noted the decorative fencing surrounding the Hershey plant which he not only intended

to keep, but also duplicate at other School District properties as a visual branding initiative. He said the buildings' shape would also help to protect a brick storm sewer traversing the site. Mr. Christopher affirmed that no structures would be built within its 40-foot wide easement. He mentioned the possible addition of a decorative arch, as a campus entryway. Dr. Chapman envisioned a "neighborhood area" with additional green space. He characterized this, and the District's other construction plans, as statements by the City of its commitment to, and investment in its children. He said, combined with the Millmont Elementary, "Reading Citadel", and soon-to-be converted Jewish Community Center projects, they're changing the face and the culture of the City with regard to education. Mr. Christopher explained that single-story designs are an advantage in school design, especially at the elementary grade levels, for the accessibility and administrative considerations. He said, where the land exists, they provide the better function for the young pupil. Mr. Lauter understood the technological improvements in insulation and the potential increase in fenestration, but expected an energy advantage in combining the buildings, as well as in the shared use of cafeteria, and other common use areas. Mr. Christopher explained that a square was the most efficient practical building shape. He said the joining of two squares, by the multipurpose area (and higher ceiling) between, was of structural benefit, and allowed for better day-lighting; a proven advantage in education, and a "PlanCon" (Planning and Construction Workbook) requirement. While not expecting a Green Building Council certification, he said they'd employ green building principals (e.g. light-colored roofing, better insulation, and the potential of the cogeneration plant).

Mr. Krall recognized the preliminary review of the Department of Public Works. He said most of the comments were anticipated, including a warning about the storm sewer easement. Mr. Raffaelli asked if the new stormwater management rules included requirements for oil and grease traps. Mr. Miller thought it might, yet to see an actual copy. Mr. Krall claimed to be within a "direct discharge zone". Mr. Miller said the ordinance is a regulation of water quality, as well as runoff quantity.

Mr. Miller asked what the School District planned to claim as a hardship in their request for a use variance. Mr. Krall said he'd rather not "get into that", preferring to let the District's attorneys handle it at a zoning hearing Board scheduled for the following evening. Dr. Chapman said he had a meeting scheduled the following morning "to figure that out". Mr. Miller asked if the prevailing zoning was considered in the search for a site. Dr. Chapman said not, satisfied at once with the available, and centrally-located Hershey Foods property. Mr. Miller asked if there were any peculiar circumstances about the property that prevented its development in accord with the Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Krall thought there were, but declined to elaborate. Mr. Lauter asked how the District determined attendance boundaries. Dr. Chapman named several options: "gerrymander[ing]" those boundaries, considering families with multiple children enrolled, using the lottery system used previously for the magnet schools, seeking volunteer enrollments, considering transportation routes and economies, et cetera. Asked about the theories on ideal class sizes, Dr. Chapman put the absolute cut-offs at 8 and 30. He said the ideal capacity changes; generally older students can be formed in larger groups without sacrificing the quality of the instruction. A discussion ensued about the challenges faced by public schools as compared with parochial schools. Dr. Chapman felt the "engagement of the home" trumped any resource advantage of public school systems in explaining the 'success gap'. Revisiting the hallway design issue, he posited a budgetary challenge, since the State reimbursement won't cover "non-instruction spaces".

Review the **sketch** land development plan for the **Play Lot at Grace and Pansy Streets**, a new playground proposed on that parcel known as 412 Pansy Street [2:28.43]

Mr. Krall said the property is currently owned by the 18th Ward Democratic Club of Reading, and is located about a half block from the "Millmont Elementary and Science Magnet", under reconstruction. He said the "play lot" would be used in conjunction with that School, where the building coverage precludes much of a recreational area. He characterized the project as a resurfacing, and without proposed structures, other than a possible basketball hoop. He said the location in the R2 residential district requires a special exception hearing, according to the Zoning Administrator. He guessed its present use as a parking lot preceded the current Zoning Ordinance. He hoped to further level the 3-4% grade existing. He said the lot would continue to be available as off-street parking for the Democratic Club, but reserved as a play area for the School District during school hours. He said the lot would be secured with a fence (again, like the standard at the Hershey property), with gates and card readers for access. He estimated a 20-car capacity existing, with a potential for 30 stalls on the approximately 0.4-acre lot. He said they'd also be seeking variances for parking within the required setbacks. Mr. Rothermel asked how the students would use the lot. Mr. Krall noted the basketball hoop, and a possible planting area to compliment the natural sciences curriculum at Millmont. He said the specifications call for asphalt surfacing, but they've been researching a poured rubberized surface, as used on the Millmont job for its semi-pervious characteristics. Mr.

Rothermel questioned the dual use of a parking area as a recreational area, when considering the oils and fluids associated with parked automobiles. Mr. Krall understood the concern, but noted the shared arrangement successfully used elsewhere. Mr. Raffaelli recalled the Commission's concern for the lack recreation amenities at the Millmont school, and the District's position that they were no longer required of elementary schools.

Other business: (continued)

<u>§303.a.1 (Planning Code) review-Orange and Cherry Streets Park - schematic plan</u> [2:42.50]

Amid jokes about the long road in planning a park on this site, Mr. Vitale distributed photographs and explained its location. He described a vacant lot owned, in part, by the City and by the developers (940 Penn Street, LP) of a mixed-use apartment building in the former WIN Outlet building at 940 Penn Street. He said they'd collaborated on a development plan, with the participation of St. James Chapel Church of God in Christ (Pastor Steven R. McCracken) at 11 South 9th Street. He mentioned the preferred scenario of annexing the LP's property to the City's, who would then own the whole, in exchange for the reservation of some peripheral parking to be developed. He said Community Development Block Grant funds had been allocated for the Park's development; some of the sidewalk and street lights were already installed with the last attempt at the whole, circa 2000. He said the current plan calls for faux wrought iron fencing, 6 feet in height, crushed-stone walkways, green spaces, playground equipment, benches, trees, a storage shed, and, in a second phase, a pavilion. He said St. James would take responsibility for securing the Park at night. Four of the planned 21 parking spaces would be retained for Park visitors, the rest to be used toward the requirements of the LP's apartment building project. He expected on-going maintenance (lawn mowing) would be handled by St. James, with major repairs and snow removal handled by the City. Mr. Miller indicated that the City, as owner, would be responsible for half of the alleyways bordering the site to the south and east. Mr. Lauter wondered if they'd then use the Park as a snow dump. Mr. Rothermel thought such maintenance responsibilities should be conferred on the developer, and included in the agreement. Mr. Miller said there hadn't been a final decision on that matter. Challenged about the stone surfacing labeled on the plan for the parking areas, Mr. Miller recalled clarifying the City's stabilization/surfacing requirements in a meeting the previous day. Mr. Rothermel called for something durable, and plowable. Mr. Raffaelli asked if a formal action was necessary. Mr. Miller called the Park design an opportunity for the Commission to make comments and recommendations, as provided by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. He said *approval* of parking areas was assigned by the Zoning Ordinance, and that a parcel annexation would trigger the subdivision review process. Mr. Rothermel expressed his appreciation that the project, 13 years in the making, was proceeding. Mr. Miller said they likely need the services of a professional surveyor, and/or other civil professional, for the boundary certification and the grading work/erosion sedimentation control planning.

Mr. Rothermel moved to communicate the Commission's strong support for the schematic plan, and looked forward to its further refinement. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously for the resolution supporting the Orange and Cherry Streets Park schematic plan.

Resolution #63-2008

<u>review the draft August 12, 2008 meeting minutes</u> [2:58.54]

Mr. Bealer caught an error. He then moved to adopt the August minutes, with his suggested change. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adopt the August 12th minutes, as amended.

Resolution #64-2008

<u>609.c (Planning Code) review (continued)-the "life care retirement facility and nursing home" ordinance, a proposed zoning amendment forwarded for the planning agency's review</u> [3:00.54]

Mr. Miller didn't know how to advise the body, having only received the draft the day before, and unable to review it himself. He said the hearing may be held before the Commission meets again in October. Mr. Raffaelli wondered if the Commission should just appoint the staff to represent them. Mr. Miller offered to make copies for the members, and "straw poll" them by phone.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the September meeting. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the September 9th meeting. – 10:05 pm.