

**Minutes**  
**Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission**  
**January 24, 2012 at 7:00 pm**

**Members present:**

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

**Staff present:**

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office  
Frederick T. Lachat III, Department of Law

**Others present:**

Lee C. Olsen, Olsen Design Group Architects  
Sylvia B. Deyé, Dimensional Architecture PC  
Elsayed F. Elmarzouky, Queen City Family Restaurant  
Carole Duran, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the January meeting to order. Mr. Burket moved to accept the January 24th agenda. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the January agenda.

**Comprehensive Planning:**

Penn Corridor Initiative – Way Finding Signage Study – §303.a.2 review [0:00.29]

Mr. Olsen, having worked on the project for about seven months, said the funding came as part of “the (Representative Jim) Gerlach grant” for signage, lighting in the 600 block of Penn Street, and a possible upgrade to the pedestrian crossing at 2nd Street. He reported having already met with the City’s Planning Office and Historic Preservation Specialist about a month earlier, and sought to inform the respective boards of the progress made. He said the intent is pedestrian-oriented directional signage to the “major venues of assembly” between the three Penn Avenue/Penn Street-corridor municipalities. He had previously presented to the Borough of Wyomissing, the Borough of West Reading’s Planning Commission, and the City’s Historical Architecture Review Board. Following this presentation, he intended to engage the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) for their recommendations and any applicable permitting process. He displayed the latest design for the signs and their intended locations at several intersections (as follows, from west to east): Park Road (in Wyomissing), 6th Avenue and 5th Avenue (in West Reading), and 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th streets (in the City). He said some existing directional signage has been effectively lost in the overgrowth of landscaping or other signage. Where possible, they intend to mount the signs to existing poles and standards; West Reading forbade the installation of any new poles. No additional lighting is planned. They may include planting baskets on light poles where none already exist. They are still contemplating the use of either “blade signs” or something more “monolithic”. Mr. Olsen himself seemed to favor the blades for their easier modification and better profile under wind loads. He recalled one official recommending that they plan further, to assist people leaving the Corridor back toward the arterial highways. He said the steering committee opted against identifying private business, given the limited space and public funding involved. He said the final design and placement will follow PennDOT’s input, and be communicated to the Planning Commission then.

Mr. Bealer stressed the need to guide visitors to the public-parking garages directly, and from there to the venues they serve. Mr. Raffaelli recommended using internationally-adopted symbols for parking areas, and felt the Reading Parking Authority should bear that responsibility. Mr. Olsen reminded that the parking fees are tiered, based on the distance from the venue, and that some opt for the lower price over the shorter walk. Mr. Burket hoped the final design would include the Library’s main branch at South 5th and Franklin Streets. Mr. Olsen agreed that it met the criteria for inclusion. Mr. Raffaelli pondered the use of color-coded signage for different categories. Mr. Olsen recalled some similar suggestions from West Reading. Mr. Bealer noted the absence of City Hall from the sites listed. Mr. Miller considered the limited space, and some necessary omissions. He suggested they remove some of the existing, and even obsolete signage that clutters the view and distracts the visitor. Mr. Olsen said there were no such plans or commitments, admitting that they were hesitant to risk offending any cooperating interests. Mr. Miller noted that some of the existing signage is faded, and ineffective. He felt a certain ‘massing’ in a style or theme was necessary to catch the visitor’s eye and be immediately recognized as directional signage. Other locations, currently missing from the renderings presented, were suggested for inclusion (e.g. the Scottish Rite Cathedral, First Energy Stadium, the Pagoda, the Postal Service’s processing facility on North 13th Street, et cetera).

Mr. Olsen mentioned the added challenge of some one-way streets in giving direct-path directions with arrows. Mr. Miller mentioned an earlier Parking Authority-led effort, and wondered what became of it. Mr. Olsen intended to consult them before finalizing the design. Mr. Raffaelli cautioned them against placements which would inadvertently block out existing signage, especially that serving a traffic-control purpose. Mr. Lauter offered his support of the effort generically, feeling that anything assisting visitors to the Reading area showed good initiative. Mr. Olsen thanked the Commission for the opportunity, intending to approach PennDOT with the claim of a positive local reception.

### **Subdivision and Land Development:**

#### Queen City Diner – Proposed Building Addition – final land development plan [0:28.56]

Ms. Deyé acknowledged the Planning Office review, and presented a written response. She explained the orientation of the existing diner, and the planned expansion; filling in the areas of the existing roof overhang, a new larger and rounded atrium/vestibule, and an addition in the rear which will cover the cooler. She added that the existing bathrooms will be renovated for code compliance. Some grading is necessary, though less than would trigger the Conservation District's review. She assured there were no changes proposed within the public rights-of-way, save the closing of an opening from the alley on the eastern property line into the parking lot. It will be effectively blocked with juniper bushes, wheel stops and three additional spaces. Mr. Bealer suggested trees or landscaping along the Lancaster Avenue frontage. Ms. Deyé responded with concerns about exceeding the earth disturbance limit, and/or blocking required sight lines. In any case, such details would be included with the construction documents. She indicated that several mature trees and other vegetation exists along the south and east boundaries, and will remain. Turning to the floor plans, she declared that they would not increase the available seating; the space gained would instead accommodate a salad bar/buffet. Likewise, the fixture counts in the bathroom will not change, precluding the need for sewage planning. She showed renderings of the elevations following the renovation, and explained the color palette and finishes. Mr. Miller, considering the limited scope of the project, recommended a conditional approval, based on the resolution of items identified by the staff reviews. He said the County Planning comments were received, and identified some of the same issues. Mr. Raffaelli mentioned that a recent upgrade of a concrete driveway apron extends into the cartway of Morgantown Road, and should be corrected. Ms. Deyé said no zoning variances were required. She explained that the existing flagpole in the front of the restaurant would likely be relocated adjacent to the sign, and perhaps with a planter bed. Mr. Miller clarified that, as proposed, the plan would not require a formal erosion and sedimentation control plan, highway-occupancy permitting, or an improvements agreement. He offered to follow up on the necessary corrections, and hopefully present a plan for endorsement at the February meeting.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the final land development plan for the Queen City Diner, on the condition of satisfactory staff reviews of a revised plan. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to conditionally approve the Queen City Diner final land development plan.

**Resolution #1-2012**

#### 930-942 Pike Street Subdivision (Pike Café Inc.) – final subdivision plan [0:44.35]

Having agreed the day before to present the plan on the applicant's behalf, at his request and those of his surveyor and attorney, Mr. Miller explained the changes from a version presented and approved in September 2009. That plan proposed an identical subdivision, essentially the back yards of 936, 938, 940 and 942 Pike Street (homes) being subdivided and joined to 930, 932 and 934 (the Pike Café restaurant), and closure of the alley between them and 1351 Moss Street, also under the same ownership. What had been planned as an outdoor dining area for the restaurant was abandoned, due to building-code complications. Now, a garden/green space is proposed for that rear-yard area. Mr. Miller noted that the application, from the Planning Commission's perspective is now limited to 'subdivision', and no longer 'land development'. Recalling the Commission's unease with the previously-approved version, he judged the revision to be a better quality-of-life arrangement for the tenants in the residential properties as well as an aesthetic improvement. He said the applicant's attorney has agreed to pursue the 'action to quiet title', which would settle their claim to the alley. Permitting the subdivision relies, in part, on the previous zoning relief (Appeal No. 2009-36). The 2009 plan was never recorded following its approval. Mr. Miller recommended a conditional approval, based on the revisions stipulated in his letter, and the attorney's pursuit of a formal resolution for the alley, which will be fenced in with the rest of the area.

Mr. Lauter moved to approve the revised final subdivision plan for 930-942 Pike Street, on the condition that the applicant revises the plan as directed by City staff and pursues the necessary legal actions to clear title to the alley. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to conditionally approve the "930-942 Pike Street Subdivision" plan.

**Resolution #2-2012**

**Other business:**

§508.3 agreement to extension-Jet Set Restaurant Parking Area [0:56.03]

Mr. Burket moved to accept the 90-day extension, as requested in a December 16th letter from the applicant's attorney. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to extend its review of the "Jet Set Restaurant Parking Area" plan by 90 days, per the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code's time limits (§508.3) for plan review.

**Resolution #3-2012**

§508.3 agreement to extension-9th & Green Streets Apartments [0:57.28]

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the 90-day extension, as requested in a January 24th letter from the design firm. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to extend its review of the "9th & Green Streets Apartments" plan by 90 days, per the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code's time limits (§508.3) for plan review.

**Resolution #4-2012**

review the draft November 22, 2011 meeting minutes [1:00.13]

Mr. Bealer requested one correction.

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the November meeting minutes, as revised. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the November 22nd meeting minutes.

**Resolution #5-2012**

Mr. Raffaelli cited what he felt were sign deficiencies at two intersections: for northbound traffic on South 3rd Street turning left (to west) on Penn Street; a recent change in the turning-lane assignments, and for westbound traffic on Washington Street turning left (to south) on North 2nd Street; the lane alignments for vehicles approaching the Penn Street Bridge, where two turning lanes on Washington become four travel lanes on North 2nd. Other members agreed, and other intersections were discussed.

Mr. Bealer moved to adjourn. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the January 24th meeting. – 8:19p