

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
January 25, 2011 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

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

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office
Michelle R. Mayfield, Department of Law

Others present:

Edmund Palka, Planning Commission Emeritus
Mary Palka
Steven J. Haver, Department of Community Development
Bradford R. Grauel, Over The Mountain, LLC
Thomas B. Ludgate, Ludgate Engineering Corporation
Brandon R. Graham, RBS Development, LLC
Billy Zion, McKay, Zorn & Associates, PA
Patrick J. Dolan, Dolan Construction Inc.
Lawrence G. Grybosky, Spotts Stevens & McCoy, Inc.
Donald L. Spatz, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the January meeting to order, reminded presenters to sign the attendance sheet, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Miller announced additions: a presentation to a former member up front, and an extension request, a plan reaffirmation and comment on a petition for street vacation for the end of the meeting. Mr. Raffaelli noted that the members hadn't yet received their meeting materials by mail. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the January 25th agenda. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the January agenda.

Edmund Palka: in recognition of 30 years of service to the Planning Commission [0:01.52]

Mr. Raffaelli acknowledged a former member, Mr. Palka, for his 30 years of volunteer service, and presented him a plaque. Mr. Palka thanked the Commission and its staff. He recalled his first appointment and former colleagues, and noted a process made more formal and thorough over the years.

Ricktown Arts District: conceptual presentation of a proposed redevelopment area and/or zoning overlay [0:06.19]

Mr. Haver introduced himself, and said the Mayor asked him to update the Commission on some "strategic planning" in the area around the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts. He summarized the history of the area: the Rick brothers' ownership of much of the land between the Schuylkill River and North 4th Street, Washington Street and the railroad tracks, and their business as home builders and hardware merchants. He described its history as a complete neighborhood of a residential and industrial mix; a "community within a community". He said the current plan defines a smaller area bounded by North Front, North 4th Street, Washington and Buttonwood Streets; nine square blocks envisioned as an arts district, with cultural amenities and affordable housing. He said several resources have been identified: \$80 thousand from the Commonwealth's Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program for planning, mapping and inventory, \$5 million from the Neighborhood Stabilization Program 2 (NSP2) for acquisition and rehabilitation, a Brownfields Economic Development Initiative (BEDI) grant and associated Section 108 loan guarantee, and allocated HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. A National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant is also being pursued. He said the City is hoping to build on the area's existing and planned assets, considering zoning overlays and an urban renewal designation as possible tools. Other communities that have had success with similar ventures were cited as inspirations and models. He said an architect is under contract, and offered to return with more specificity at a future meeting.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Quaker Maid Parking and Trailer Storage – final subdivision and land development plan [0:11.22]

Mr. Grauel assumed the Commission was sufficiently familiar with the plan from prior presentations. He briefly explained the concept again, and the associated parcel annexations. He reported the zoning map change, and other approvals since granted. He said the last updates requested by the Planning Office have been made, and asked for final plan approval. Mr. Miller concurred with that representation of the progress. He said he'd need to verify the final corrections, and advised a conditional final approval.

Mr. Bealer moved to grant final approval to the "Quaker Maid Parking and Trailer Storage" plan, subject to a final satisfactory review by the Planning Office. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant a conditional final approval to the Quaker Maid parking plan.

Resolution #1-2011

Lancaster Avenue Super Market – final subdivision and land development plan [0:15.52]

Mr. Ludgate presented an update, the main change being the "right in-right out" limited driveway shown at the December meeting. He acknowledged the January 21st Planning Office review, intending to fully comply with the items identified. He said they are continuing to work through the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and Berks County Conservation District (BCCD) for their respective approvals. He didn't anticipate any major changes required, and asked for conditional approval of the final plan. He said Bottom Dollar Food has deadlines regarding the conveyance of the property. Mr. Miller said the Commission must wait on the PennDOT and Conservation District approvals before giving its own. He agreed that most of the other corrections requested had been made, and advised tabling the plan. Mr. Graham explained their need to take possession of the property and begin demolition. Mr. Bealer resisted the idea of preempting state agencies. Mr. Raffaelli assured that the Commission is likewise eager to approve the plan, but wanted to avoid setting a precedent of getting ahead of other authorities having a role, recalling previous advisement from legal counsel. Mr. Lauter asked if those approvals were expected before the February meeting, suggesting a special meeting could be scheduled. Mr. Miller, recognizing a January 3rd acknowledgement of receipt, wondered when the first application was made to the Conservation District. Mr. Ludgate answered "early December", and mentioned a technical review received earlier that today. He anticipated having both approvals in hand by February 10th. Mr. Miller suggested that, if everything is finalized by the February meeting, including the municipal improvements agreement, the plan might be both approved and endorsed then.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the final plan. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table Bottom Dollar Foods' "Lancaster Avenue Super Market" plan.

Family Wash Day Laundromat – final land development plan [0:28.56]

Mr. Dolan described the site of the abandoned Cingular Wireless store, and a 2100-square foot addition proposed. He included a rearrangement of the off-street parking layout, calculating the 77 washing machines required 27 off-street parking spaces according to the Zoning Ordinance. He said the circulation through the property would be otherwise unchanged. He displayed conceptual architectural elevations, and photos of an Allentown store of similar design. He said the facility would be open *and staffed* 24 hours a day. Asked about a shuttered paint store neighboring at 229 Lancaster Avenue, he indicated that it wasn't associated with the current plan¹. Mr. Bealer wondered if highway occupancy permits were required per the change in use. Mr. Dolan said he contacted the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), who indicated a permit was not required and would issue a letter documenting that position. He said all of the Planning Office's comments will be satisfied, but questioned those regarding a landscaping plan. He cited a lack of available room for plantings, but noted the owner's consideration of a four-foot solid vinyl fence along Brookline Street in order to screen headlights from the neighboring homes. Mr. Miller reminded that the Zoning Ordinance requires street trees. Mr. Dolan said the owner would prefer not to have anything blocking views of the business. Mr. Raffaelli suggested incorporating landscaping as part of the "buffer" strip. Mr. Dolan said the grade of the hillside presents a challenge. Asked about lighting of the parking area, he said only fixtures mounted on the building were proposed, and with cutoffs. He thought a couple trees might fit along the back of the property. Mr. Miller noted the trees and shrubbery in the pictures of the Allentown store, and cited the generous landscaping plan proposed with the "Lancaster Avenue Super Market" plan. He thanked the developer for settling the other zoning issues before pressing ahead. Mr. Dolan said

¹ see also: "Egan Auto Land Development" plan, approved in October 2006, but never built
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they were surprised to learn that commercial laundries weren't allowed in the Commercial-Highway (CH) zoning district, an oversight he understood was being changed. A discussion of façade materials followed. And an internal floor plan was shown, with a layout of the washers and dryers. Mr. Bealer wondered if the increased water usage would be an issue. Mr. Miller agreed, both for the Water Authority and the sewage flow allocation. Asked if an erosion control plan had been submitted to the Conservation District, Mr. Dolan said they will prepare a plan, but the total disturbance falls under the regulated 5000 square feet requiring the District's approval. On signage, he said they will comply with the Zoning Ordinance, and indicated one monument sign proposed.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the final plan. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the "Family Wash Day Laundromat" plan.

Additions and Renovations: Amanda Stout Elementary School and Benners Court – final subdivision and land development plan [0:53.02]

Mr. Grybosky said he didn't have a formal presentation, and requested final plan approval. Mr. Miller noted a few additional notes requested, but nothing which would preclude a conditional approval.

Mr. Bingaman moved to grant final approval to the Amanda Stout plan, subject to the Planning Office's review of the last revisions. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant a conditional final approval to the Reading School District's "Additions and Renovations" plan for the Amanda E. Stout Elementary School.

Resolution #2-2011

Blighted Property Review Committee, recommendations for reuse:

235 North 3rd Street (Miguel Martinez) – recommendation for reuse [0:58.33]

Ms. Mayfield joined the meeting. Mr. Haver recalled national media attention on the property (from the Mayor's "wall of shame" website). Mr. Bealer thought the structure should be demolished, given its deteriorated front façade. Asked if it was a residential property in a residential zone, Mr. Bealer confirmed.

Mr. Bealer moved to recommend demolition for 235 North 3rd Street, given the property's condition, and reuse as a qualifying principal or accessory use under the Residential 3 (R3) zoning district. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to the Blighted Property Review Committee and Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #3-2011

257 North 3rd Street (Joyce E. & McCrea Boykins) – recommendation for reuse [1:02.34]

Mr. Bealer described the location at the corner of North 3rd and Elm Streets. He recalled the pleas of its owner of "twenty-some years", and a building empty at least as long as his 24 years residing in the City. Mr. Haver said it had been a bar, described as a "nuisance" even by the owner. He said the structure seems solid, but for a leaking roof.

Mr. Bingaman moved to recommend renovation of 257 North 3rd Street, and reuse as a qualifying principal or accessory use under the prevailing zoning regulations. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to the Blighted Property Review Committee and Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #4-2011

207 North 4th Street (Vic Properties Inc./Victoria Hernandez) – recommendation for reuse [1:06.53]

The property was described as uninhabited, and covered in graffiti, but repairable. Mr. Bealer advised rehabilitation and residential reuse.

Mr. Lauter moved to recommend rehabilitation of 207 North 4th Street, and reuse as a qualifying principal or accessory use under the prevailing zoning regulations. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to the Blighted Property Review Committee and Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #5-2011

213 North 4th Street (Lobos Nine LLC/Benjamin Epstein) – recommendation for reuse [1:09.54]

Mr. Bealer called 213's situation similar to that found at 207. Asked if the blighted properties had taxes overdue, he estimated that most of them did. He and Mr. Haver said some may have even been previously offered at

sheriff's sales.

Mr. Bingaman moved to recommend rehabilitation of 213 North 4th Street, and reuse as a qualifying principal or accessory use under the prevailing zoning regulations. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to the Blighted Property Review Committee and Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #6-2011

300 North 4th Street (Yanio Garcia) – recommendation for reuse [1:11.14]

Mr. Bealer wanted to discuss 300, 302, 304 and 306 North 4th Street together, since the parcels are contiguous. He recalled, from the start of the Review Committee's meetings, a neighboring owner inquiring about the properties. He said they had discussed demolition, and a redivision of the four parcels into two for the marketing and home-building benefits. Mr. Lauter noticed some recent activity on one of the properties. Mr. Have noted permits 'pulled' for 306, but said vandalism has accelerated the deterioration. Mr. Bealer suggested their front façades may be stable enough to make rehabilitation worthwhile. Mr. Lauter preferred that the old City garage property on the 'catty corner' be the focus of new development.

Mr. Bingaman moved to recommend rehabilitation of 300 North 4th Street, if determined structurally feasible, and reuse as a qualifying principal or accessory use under the prevailing zoning regulations. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to the Blighted Property Review Committee and Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #7-2011

302 North 4th Street (Mireya Pagan) – recommendation for reuse [1:11.14]

Mr. Bingaman moved to recommend rehabilitation of 302 North 4th Street, if determined structurally feasible, and reuse as a qualifying principal or accessory use under the prevailing zoning regulations. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to the Blighted Property Review Committee and Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #8-2011

304 North 4th Street (Yanio Garcia) – recommendation for reuse [1:11.14]

Mr. Bingaman moved to recommend rehabilitation of 304 North 4th Street, if determined structurally feasible, and reuse as a qualifying principal or accessory use under the prevailing zoning regulations. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to the Blighted Property Review Committee and Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #9-2011

306 North 4th Street (Yanio Garcia) – recommendation for reuse [1:11.14]

Mr. Bingaman moved to recommend rehabilitation of 306 North 4th Street, if determined structurally feasible, and reuse as a qualifying principal or accessory use under the prevailing zoning regulations. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to the Blighted Property Review Committee and Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #10-2011

310 North 4th Street (Angel Vasquez-Gomez) – recommendation for reuse [1:20.54]

Mr. Bingaman moved to recommend rehabilitation of 310 North 4th Street, if determined structurally feasible, and reuse as a qualifying principal or accessory use under the prevailing zoning regulations. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to the Blighted Property Review Committee and Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #11-2011

1459 Fairview Street (Scott Kilpatrick) – recommendation for reuse [1:24.02]

Mr. Bealer reported that neighbors have complained of a rodent infestation. Ms. Mayfield noted that County Tax records suggest an 'owner occupancy'. Mr. Haver said the owner lives at 1455. Mr. Bealer added that the owner acknowledges the building's vacancy.

Mr. Bealer moved to recommend demolition for 1459 Fairview Street, unless deemed structurally sound and covered by a rehabilitation agreement, and reuse as a qualifying principal or accessory use under the prevailing

zoning regulations. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to the Blighted Property Review Committee and Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #12-2011

930 Penn Street (531 South 14th Street LLC/Angelo Amendolia) – recommendation for reuse [1:29.57]

Mr. Bealer reported the property already scheduled for demolition. Mr. Haver said it is covered by a private demolition contract, though issues remain with another of their projects where debris was left behind. Mr. Bealer mentioned some earlier questions regarding its occupancy.

Mr. Bealer moved to recommend demolition for 930 Penn Street, and reuse as a qualifying principal or accessory use under the prevailing zoning regulations. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to the Blighted Property Review Committee and Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #13-2011

932 Penn Street (531 South 14th Street LLC/Angelo Amendolia) – recommendation for reuse [1:33.31]

Mr. Bealer said restoration is preferred because of the historical significance of the building's architecture (namely, the Pagoda-like details of the front façade).

Mr. Lauter moved to recommend rehabilitation of 932 Penn Street, on account of its historically-significant architectural features, and reuse as a qualifying principal or accessory use under the prevailing zoning regulations. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to the Blighted Property Review Committee and Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #14-2011

Other business:

review the draft November 23, 2010 meeting minutes [1:34.37]

The agenda listed both the November and December minutes for review. Mr. Miller, noting the delay of the Commission's mail, suggested they act on November's minutes and cover December's at a subsequent meeting.

Mr. Bingaman moved to accept the November meeting minutes, subject to any typographical corrections necessary. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the November 23rd meeting minutes.

Resolution #15-2011

§508.3 agreement to extension-Acevedo Downing St. Subdivision - final subdivision plan [1:36.20]

Mr. Miller reported that Tarson LLC, on behalf of their client, requested a 90-day extension of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code's timeline for the Acevedo subdivision plan, taking the deadline to the April meeting.

Mr. Bealer moved to affirm the 90-day extension. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to extend consideration of the "Acevedo Downing St. Subdivision" by 90 days.

Resolution #16-2011

§513.a approval reaffirmation-Barley Square - final land development plan [1:37.08]

Ms. Mayfield reported having received the municipal improvements agreement for the Berks Women in Crisis portion of the project.

Mr. Bealer moved to reaffirm the "Barley Square" final plan approval. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to reaffirm its previous approval (resolution: 27-2010, of May 25, 2010) of the Barley Square final plan.

Resolution #17-2011

§303.a.1 review-petition to vacate the unopened Sheridan Street, between Liggett and Scott Streets [1:38.33]

Mr. Miller said the request is consistent with the Reading Housing Authority's land development plan, and action is needed before the Commission can act on it.

Mr. Bealer moved to recommend City Council's vacating of Sheridan Street, as detailed on the Housing Authority's "Sylvania Homes II" land development plan. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward the 'recommendation to vacate' to City Council.

Resolution #18-2011

Mr. Raffaelli reminded the members of the subdivision and land development review course offered at Albright College beginning February 16th, and continuing on the 23rd and March 2nd. He described the curriculum, and recommended that the newer members attend. Some members expressed interest, while others mentioned scheduling conflicts.

Mr. Bealer announced that he had recently been reappointed to serve another four years on the Planning Commission.

Mr. Bingaman moved to adjourn. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the January 25th meeting. – 8:53p