Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
February 28, 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
Craig D. Peiffer, Zoning Administrator

Others present:

Henriette Alban, Entrepreneurs' Connection
Chuck Holder, Entrepreneurs' Connection
JoAnne Gehret, Entrepreneurs' Connection
Adam Mukerji, Reading Redevelopment Authority
David M. Settle, Aurora Architecture
Aristides I. Otero, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
William W. Wood, Albright College
Gregory A. Shantz, Roland Stock LLC
Justin Brewer, Ludgate Engineering Corporation
Robert B. Ludgate Sr., Ludgate Engineering Corporation
Ryan K. Gehris
Randy E. Corcoran, City Council District 1
Carole Duran, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the February meeting to order. Mr. Bealer moved to accept the February 28th agenda. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the February agenda.

Comprehensive Planning:

South 2nd and Franklin Street "Reading Rising" park project – §303.a.1 review [0:00.00]

Ms. Alban called the existing 'pocket park' at the northeast corner at South 2nd and Franklin Streets a "relatively ugly corner" and, as a "gateway into the City", deserving of some attention. She explained that Entrepreneurs' Connection has a memorandum of understanding with the City for the improvement and continued maintenance, and a five-year lease (with two-year increments thereafter) with the two owners: the Reading Redevelopment Authority (201 Franklin Street) and ATV Bakery Inc (203, 205 and 207 Franklin Street). She named the project "Reading Rising", with an original art sculpture, meditation benches, concrete chess tables, new brick walking paths, and a more-open setting generally. She reported that they have already trimmed the lower branches from the existing trees, and are planning a kickoff event at Reading Area Community College on March 29th. A Pennsylvania OneCall was made; no conflicts were noted in the limited grading proposed. She said some concrete work will be donated by Burkey Construction, and three solar-powered lights will be installed. Answering some questions regarding the accessibility to and safety of the artwork, Ms. Alban said that it is designed in steel with those concerns in-mind; to discourage climbing, and with flower beds beneath. Ms. Gehret and Mr. Holder agreed that the rendering shown was misleading. It was estimated to be about ten feet in height, and eight feet wide at its top. She said they had consulted the Shade Tree Commission at the outset of the planning and would again with a final landscaping schedule. She acknowledged the maintenance realities of fruiting specimens, though proposed a few (*e.g.* persimmon, a plum/apricot hybrid and hazelnut). She offered several documents covering the necessary permissions and agreements.

Asked about the history of Entrepreneurs' Connection, Mr. Holder described a four-year-old group of entrepreneurs meeting to address common business issues and with a goal of community involvement. He said there are about 18 active members, and have been as many as 35 or 40. He committed to maintaining and repairing any damages to their work as they have at their previous project behind the Reading Public Library. He recognized Joe and Brad Albert of ATV Bakery for their cooperation.

Following more discussion of the property lines, topography and landscaping, Mr. Raffaelli called it an exciting project, and thanked the group for their efforts.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Renovations to the Dining Services (Albright College) – sketch land development plan [0:23.12]

Mr. Settle described the planned renovation, which the College hopes to begin in the spring and finish over the summer, in time for the fall semester. He said most of the work would be within the existing building. Two additions are proposed, for kitchen and other operational storage areas; one of 675-square feet and parallel to Palm Street, and another of 530 square feet on the north side, adjacent to the existing loading dock. The loading dock itself will be improved and better oriented for deliveries to the campus center and book store. The driveways serving the area are to be widened to better accommodate the delivery trucks, and avoid their blocking Bern Street. They will be appealing to the Zoning Hearing Board for a variance from the frontyard setback minimum; the addition will match the encroachment of the existing building. In all, the additions amount to just over five percent of the existing building area. An existing and aging refrigeration section will be demolished and replaced. He offered photos to better explain the project, and to illustrate how an existing berm will continue to effectively screen the building on the Palm Street side. The building will rise to just under twelve feet, but include a six-foot, metal-panel, mechanical-equipment screen along the roof edge. Mr. Otero, further explaining the traffic movements within the loading area, said the idea is to better connect the existing driveways for a drive-through pattern. He reported meeting with Public Works' officials, who had no objections to the widening or the deviation from the standard driveway apron design. Mr. Miller noted that Public Works did question the close proximity of the driveway to the Bern Street/Palm Street intersection, though it conformed to the separation required by the Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Wood added that they were concerned for student safety, as they tend to walk between the unloading trucks and in their blind spots. Mr. Settle said that landscaping would be added to the island between the driveway openings. He said a dumpster/compactor and additional recycling facilities were needed, but would be screened behind fencing near the existing cooling tower. Mr. Wood assured that the plan was not intended to increase enrollment, as the College's master plan calls for maintaining current numbers. He said they were equally concerned with visual impacts, and challenged by the architectural 'back' of the dining hall facing the street. Mr. Raffaelli thank the presenters, and noted the staff comments suggesting a possible waiver of a 'final plan' review, based on the sketch presentation provided and the slight exceedance of the Commission's own threshold for land development reviews.

Mr. Bealer expressed his amenability, on the condition of an engineering review of the driveway and loading changes, and that the Planning Office receives any revisions necessary for a record plan. Mr. Miller explained that driveway plans are reviewed by an internal administrative process, and that recording would not be required if waived with the remaining land development process. He added that he would seek a copy of the final plan for the Planning Office files. Mr. Bealer moved to waive further land development review, on that condition. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to waive further review of Albright College's dining hall renovations.

Resolution #6-2012

Gehris Self Storage – preliminary land development plan [0:57.06]

Mr. Brewer described 16 storage units and 12 parking spaces to be accessed via the alley on the south side of the parcel. He said the site is currently a mix of gravel and macadam. He referred to a comment in the Planning Office's review letter questioning the difference between the plan submitted to the Zoning Hearing Board and the current one. Mr. Gehris explained that it included the same number of units, with the new layout offering the angles necessary for solar panel installations on the roofs and making for easier snow removal at the surface (shorter plowing/pushing distances). Asked if the units were sized sufficiently for automobiles, he countered that vehicle parking would be the only authorized use. While tenants may install automatic door openers, the doors must maintain windows to assist in lease- and law-enforcement efforts. He said they'd be either 15 by 20 feet or, in one row, 15 by 25 feet. For landscaping, he specified White Vinca as a ground cover in the buffer yards, and two shade trees proposed on the McKnight Street frontage. He said a fence would secure the property and be located *inside* the property line. Mr. Miller, referring to the plan's construction details, advised that barbed-wire fencing is not permitted in a residential zone. Asked how vehicles would exit the western-most spaces without backing into the buffer area, Mr. Gehris said the 24-foot-wide aisles would be sufficient. He clarified that the surface parking spaces themselves would be available for rent. Mr. Bealer wondered why they wouldn't provide for direct access from McKnight Street, noting the alley only provided a one-vehicle width. Mr. Gehris stated that the Zoning Hearing Board wanted to preserve the two on-street spaces available. Addressing a question about excavation and grading, Mr. Brewer said the site will slope toward a swale on the west side, intended to handle the stormwater runoff, and a raised berm will screen the Street side. Mr. Miller asked about a stormwater filter product shown in the construction details. Mr. Brewer said they'd be installed on the downspouts, but wasn't sure how many were proposed. He said the only lighting planned was that within the garages. He wasn't aware of any existing street lights. Mr. Lauter

suggested providing an exit on the opposite end of the property to facilitate better circulation. Mr. Gehris said access and security will be provided by an automatic gate, too expensive to duplicate. Mr. Bealer asked if oil separators would be included in the garage floors. Mr. Gehris said not, insisting that vehicle servicing would be prohibited. Mr. Miller asked about screening from the backyards of the neighboring residential properties. Mr. Brewer said the perimeter fence would include privacy slats. Mr. Gehris said the garages would be of steel construction, and in colors intended to blend with the surrounding neighborhood.

Mr. Lauter imagined tenants combining automobile storage and other storage. Mr. Gehris said that storage must be primarily vehicular, with little room left over for much else. He said license plates must face the door and be visible through the required windows. Mr. Raffaelli doubted the sight line would allow a view of the plates. Mr. Miller suggested the City could only go so far in enforcing the Hearing Board's conditions, either legally or practically, doubting the City had the resources to regularly 'patrol' the business. Mr. Gehris said he was considering longer-term leases, because he expected demand to rise in the winter for the guaranteed snow removal.

Mr. Raffaelli doubted the aisle widths would accommodate the turning movements envisioned. Mr. Gehris mentioned having tested the movements with a full-sized Dodge Ram. Mr. Miller advised they reconsider it, keeping the door frames in-mind. When asked about signage, Mr. Gehris supposed one, with a "customer service number".

Mr. Miller said the plan must be tabled, pending the County comments, adding that it needed a proof-reading in the meantime. He said the drastic change from the zoning hearing exhibit was unacceptable. He acknowledged their two appearances, and the similar 'area and bulk' measures in either plan, suggesting it was the province of the zoning officials to enforce their terms.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the preliminary plan for "Gehris Self Storage", pending receipt of the County Planning Commission's review. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the preliminary plan.

Other business:

<u>§603.c.2 conditional use review-Mary's Shelter, 615 Kenhorst Boulevard (group care home)</u> [1:28.49]

Mr. Miller explained that, instead of judging the application on the specific requirements of the Zoning Ordinance, he relied on the on-going work of the special authority established to arrange the reuse of the property and the federal rules involved. He characterized the conditional-use application as a formality. Mr. Raffaelli, who had participated on that ad hoc authority for the previous two years, felt the current plan the best alternative to some earlier interest shown by the Reading Hospital and Reading School District. He said the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process doesn't establish any minimum percentages, nor clearly define 'homeless'. He recalled another possibility of Mary's Shelter and Berks Women in Crisis (BWIC) partnering, until BWIC settled on the South 3rd and Chestnut Street location currently under construction. He felt the Reading Redevelopment Authority should have been involved earlier in the process, as it will be tasked with marketing the balance of the property for a market-rate residential development. Mr. Miller clarified that Mary's Shelter will take about 2½ acres, as the plan is drawn, rather than one acre, as has been widely reported (a reality of subdividing the main building from the rest). Mr. Raffaelli mentioned the public hearing scheduled, prior to the final approval of City Council. He felt that an outlet for the currently-dead-ending Margaret Street should be a condition of any further development. Mr. Miller preferred the residents of that block weigh in on any proposed change.

Mr. Bealer moved to recommend City Council's approval of the conditional-use application of Mary's Shelter for the former Marine Corps Reserve Center, and conveyance of the residual land to the Reading Redevelopment Authority. Mr. Miller noted that a subdivision-plan review would follow, if the use application is approved. Mr. Lauter seconded the motion. And the Commission agreed unanimously to the recommendation.

Resolution #7-2012

<u>§508.3 agreement to extension-Acevedo Downing St. Subdivision</u> [1:41.00]

Mr. Bealer moved to accept the 90-day extension, as requested in a February 27th letter, and the seventh such extension. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to extend its review of the "Acevedo Downing St. Subdivision" plan by 90 days, per the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code's time limits (§508.3) for plan review.

Resolution #8-2012

<u>review the draft 2011 Planning Commission Annual Report</u> [1:41.38]

Mr. Bealer referred to his requested edits, submitted by email earlier that day. Mr. Miller admitted to forgetting a 'spell check'. He asked for any other changes or additions.

Hearing none, Mr. Burket moved to accept the 2011 Planning Commission Annual Report. Mr. Bealer

seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the annual report.

Resolution #9-2012

review the draft January 24, 2012 meeting minutes [1:43.49]

As Mr. Corcoran was departing, Mr. Bealer announced that he had replaced Councilwoman Donna Reed as City Council's representative to the Blighted Property Review Committee. He requested a few grammatical and *stylistic* corrections to the minutes.

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the January meeting minutes, as revised. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the January 24th meeting minutes.

Resolution #10-2012

The Commission had some follow-up conversation on other current business. And Mr. Bealer gave some other updates on the Blighted Property Review Committee activities. Mr. Miller reported that the Reading Redevelopment Authority had finally taken title to the 'Penn Optical' building at 212 South 8th Street. Mr. Bealer said the City purchased everything on the County's 'repository list' (about 24 properties) for blighted property review.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the February 28th meeting. – 9:05p