

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
March 22, 2011 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
Brian D. 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
Charles M. Jones, Department of Public Works

Others present:

Patrick J. Dolan, Dolan Construction Inc.
Lawrence G. Grybosky, Spotts Stevens & McCoy, Inc.
Thomas B. Ludgate, Ludgate Engineering Corporation
Modesto D. Fiume, Opportunity House (Reading-Berks Emergency Shelter)
Suzanne Bloom, Alvernia University student
Christopher Bloom
Carole Duran, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the March meeting to order, asked presenters to sign the attendance sheet, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the March 22nd agenda. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the March agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Family Wash Day Laundromat – final land development plan [0:00.42]

Mr. Dolan offered a sample of the split-faced block proposed for the façade material. He said the two different fence details will be added to the plan; a four-foot solid-vinyl fence along the Brookline Street frontage intended to screen headlights in the parking area, and a six-foot vinyl fence around the dumpster. He indicated that one of the three trees proposed along the Lancaster Avenue frontage has been removed in consideration of the sight triangle. He said he was still waiting on sewage planning documentation and the highway occupancy permit. He clarified the building *would not* be sprinklered. He offered a copy of the Conservation District's approval; a letter dated March 17th, but not yet received by the Planning Office. Regarding the Planning Office's comment on sidewalks, he misunderstood it as referring to Lancaster Avenue, and noted the difficulty in meeting the design specification due to gradient. Clarified as referring to Brookline Street, Mr. Bealer noted the lack of continuity and reminded that they had required it of the "Egan Auto Land Development" plan for the same property presented in 2006. Mr. Dolan intended to update the plan, and asked for a conditional final approval. Asked if the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) had issued any preliminary reviews, Mr. Dolan said not. Mr. Bealer explained that the Planning Commission withholds its approval, due to potential topographic and signage changes. Mr. Raffaelli asked if a request had been received. Mr. Miller recalled such a request by email, but couldn't locate a copy in the paper file. Mr. Dolan similarly remembered a request, though neither could remember the term proposed. He offered 60 days, if not otherwise specified in the letter.

Mr. Lauter moved to approve the extension, as requested. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to extend its review of the "Family Wash Day Laundromat" plan as requested, in accord with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code's time limits (§508.3) for plan review.

Resolution #23-2011

PriceRite Expansion – final land development plan [0:14.35]

Mr. Grybosky mentioned the other members of the design team, not attending. He described the layout of the existing grocery store within the "Reading Station Outlet Center", and the planned expansion. A currently-paved area will be planted in grass to offset the slight increase in impervious cover, while other paved areas must remain as a 'cap' on subsurface environmental conditions. Upon presenting architectural elevations, the Planning

Commission objected to the blank wall which would cover the existing, fenestrated store fronts. Mr. Miller, while acknowledging their challenge in filling the vacant spaces, wondered if the owner had any concerns for longer-term marketing viability in blocking the existing architectural detail. Mr. Grybosky intended to communicate that to the owner. He mentioned that those fronts had already been blocked from the inside. The members noted the courtyard, the other storefronts engaging it, and the money put into the original design. Ms. Mayfield mentioned the graffiti risk in large, blank surfaces. Suggestions for treatment included faux windows, plantings and color accents. Mr. Miller stated that without County Planning Commission and Conservation District feedback, they'd have to postpone action. Referring to the Planning Office review, Mr. Grybosky said no utility changes were necessary, and no new sewer connections were proposed. He said the erosion and sedimentation control plan was submitted March 10th, and that the Department of Public Works had approved the stormwater management plan. He said they received zoning approval and a permit, and hoped to break ground once the Conservation District approved its part. Mr. Miller explained that demolition and some site preparation might be permitted prior to plan recording, but no more.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the final plan for the "PriceRite Expansion", pending the County's Planning Commission and Conservation District inputs. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the PriceRite plan.

Blighted Property Review Committee, certifications of blight: [0:39.16]

Ms. Mayfield explained that the Reading Redevelopment Authority and its counsel believe the statute (Urban Redevelopment Law), and the local ordinance, require that the Planning Commission twice consider the blighted properties; once to corroborate the Blighted Property Review Committee's findings and certify blight, then again, if and only when the Redevelopment Authority requests it, to recommend an appropriate reuse. She noted the agenda characterizing a review of potential reuses, but clarified that they need a certification of blight. Mr. Miller wondered if the term *certification* was appropriate, given the Review Committee's role. Ms. Mayfield thought the language of the statute required both bodies to *certify* blight.

363 North 2nd Street (Martin Jermaine) – certification of blight

Mr. Bealer described this property, across from the former Argo Furniture Co. warehouse lost to a fire the previous weekend. He said rehabilitation was underway, but stalled. He hoped the blight designation would motivate new progress.

Mr. Lauter moved to certify 363 North 2nd Street as 'blighted', per the representation of the Blighted Property Review Committee. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that finding to the Blighted Property Review Committee.

Resolution #24-2011

104 North 4th Street (Three Brothers Corporation) – certification of blight

Mr. Bealer said the owner promised improvements in-time for the certification hearing, but didn't show.

Mr. Lauter moved to certify 104 North 4th Street as 'blighted', per the representation of the Blighted Property Review Committee. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that finding to the Blighted Property Review Committee.

Resolution #25-2011

239 South 6th Street (Keith Jackson) – certification of blight

Mr. Bealer wasn't sure why this property was a part of the current batch, thinking that four other neighboring properties should be designated with it.

Mr. Lauter moved to certify 239 South 6th Street as 'blighted', per the representation of the Blighted Property Review Committee. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that finding to the Blighted Property Review Committee.

Resolution #26-2011

1158 Buttonwood Street (Dwight Amole, Rose Torres) – certification of blight

Mr. Lauter moved to certify 1158 Buttonwood Street as 'blighted', per the representation of the Blighted Property Review Committee. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that finding to the Blighted Property Review Committee.

Resolution #27-2011

644 North Front Street (Walter Barerra) – certification of blight

Mr. Bealer said the property was being rehabilitated, but progress stopped. He added that kids have since broken the windows, making conditions worse than when the Review Committee had first considered a blight designation.

Mr. Bingaman moved to certify 644 North Front Street as ‘blighted’, per the representation of the Blighted Property Review Committee. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that finding to the Blighted Property Review Committee.

Resolution #28-2011

158 West Green Street (Amin Farouk Ghorah) – certification of blight

Mr. Bealer said this property had since been torn down. Ms. Mayfield wondered if the Planning Commission should act on a vacant lot. Mr. Bealer said that can still be considered ‘blighted’, adding that taxes are two years in arrears and that it had been on the Sherriff’s sale list. He said that, at only 12 feet wide, the Review Committee hopes to convey it to a neighbor.

Mr. Bealer moved to certify 158 West Green Street as ‘blighted’, per the representation of the Blighted Property Review Committee. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that finding to the Blighted Property Review Committee.

Resolution #29-2011

1121 Birch Street (Joseph and Ruth Matter) – certification of blight

Mr. Burket moved to certify 1121 Birch Street as ‘blighted’, per the representation of the Blighted Property Review Committee. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that finding to the Blighted Property Review Committee.

Resolution #30-2011

127 North Front Street (Jose Santiago-Rivas) – certification of blight

Mr. Bealer said this property is one bad, in an otherwise stable block.

Mr. Burket moved to certify 127 North Front Street as ‘blighted’, per the representation of the Blighted Property Review Committee. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that finding to the Blighted Property Review Committee.

Resolution #31-2011

121 North 3rd Street (Herbert Mixon) – certification of blight

Mr. Bealer reported that the owner has indicated his willingness to “sign over” ownership to the City.

Mr. Bealer moved to certify 121 North 3rd Street as ‘blighted’, per the representation of the Blighted Property Review Committee. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that finding to the Blighted Property Review Committee.

Resolution #32-2011

431 Buttonwood Street (Scott Stephany Napolean) – certification of blight

Mr. Burket moved to certify 431 Buttonwood Street as ‘blighted’, per the representation of the Blighted Property Review Committee. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that finding to the Blighted Property Review Committee.

Resolution #33-2011

Blighted Property Review Committee, recommendations for reuse: [0:52.24]

Ms. Mayfield reminded the members of their previous consideration, and explained the Reading Redevelopment Authority’s position that they should formally request a recommendation before the Planning Commission makes one.

343 McKnight Street (Lissette Chevalier) – recommendation for reuse

Mr. Miller asked if there was any reason to modify the earlier resolution. Mr. Bealer said not.

Mr. Lauter moved to reaffirm the Commission's resolution 51-2009 from the November 24, 2009 meeting, recommending a residential reuse of 343 McKnight Street. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to recommend a residential reuse of 343 McKnight Street to the Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #34-2011

360 McKnight Street (Sheila Perez) – recommendation for reuse

Mr. Bealer noted that rehabilitation would result in an attractive single-family home.

Mr. Burket moved to reaffirm the Commission's resolution 52-2009 from the November 24, 2009 meeting, recommending residential reuse for 360 McKnight Street. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to recommend a residential reuse of 360 McKnight Street to the Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #35-2011

127 Walnut Street (Sandra I. Greer) – recommendation for reuse

Mr. Bealer characterized the building as “really long”, and appropriate for apartments.

Mr. Burket moved to reaffirm the Commission's resolution 53-2009 from the November 24, 2009 meeting, recommending residential uses for 127 Walnut Street. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to recommend a residential reuse of 127 Walnut Street to the Reading Redevelopment Authority.

Resolution #36-2011

Mr. Bealer said the Reading Housing Authority is currently researching the ways that federal funds, under their and other agencies' control, can be used in rehabilitating condemned properties.

Other business:

§303.a.1 review-petition to rename Avenue A, Glenside Homes [0:58.50]

Mr. Miller confirmed that the proposal comes from the Reading Housing Authority to rename Avenue A for the late-State Senator Michael A. O'Pake, who was raised in the area. Mr. Lauter understood the question to be whether renaming a single street went far enough, or if the entire Glenside housing project should be so designated. He added that the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) would have to approve a renaming of the homes, whereas the street name is entirely the City's decision. Mr. Miller recalled that O'Pake's name was also intended for the Goggleworks Apartments project, now under construction at North 2nd and Washington Streets. Mr. Jones noted that the Housing Authority is the only property owner affected.

Mr. Lauter moved to remain neutral, expressing neither opposition nor specific direction for the renaming petition. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to communicate that position.

Resolution #37-2011

§513.a approval reaffirmation-Victor Emmanuel Parking & Banquet Hall Addition [1:05.23]

Mr. Miller said they missed the 90-day deadline to record the land development plan, but seem ready to move forward.

Mr. Lauter moved to reaffirm the “Victor Emmanuel Parking” final plan approval. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to reaffirm its previous approval (resolution: 50-2010, of October 26, 2010) of Victor Emmanuel's final plan.

Resolution #38-2011

§513.a approval reaffirmation-2nd Street Learning Center (Opportunity House) [1:06.15]

Mr. Fiume apologized for the plan recording oversight, reported the progress on the construction, and said if not for a grant application requiring a copy of the approved plan he would never have been aware of the issue. Mr. Raffaelli suggested that such issues were the responsibility of the professionals hired to handle them. Ms. Mayfield asked that the Commission make the municipal improvements agreement a condition of their approval.

Mr. Bealer moved to reaffirm the “2nd Street Learning Center” final plan approval, on the condition that the municipal improvements agreement is finalized. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to reaffirm its previous approval (resolution: 16-2010, of March 23, 2010) of Opportunity House's final plan.

Resolution #39-2011

Discussion continued about the development process generally, and the breakdowns within City Hall that allow construction to begin without a recorded plan.

§508.3 agreement to extension-Sylvania Homes II – Accessible Housing [1:12.45]

Mr. Miller said the vacating of the unopened 1300 block of Sheridan Street has yet to be finalized, hence the continuing delay.

Mr. Bealer moved to accept the 90-day extension, as requested. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to extend its review of the “Sylvania Homes II” plan by 90 days, per the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code’s time limits (§508.3) for plan review.

Resolution #40-2011

appointments to the City Council redistricting commission [1:14.14]

Mr. Raffaelli suggested the Commission’s newest members for the role. Mr. Miller apologized for the lack of detail. Mr. Lauter said he participated the last time, reviewing a map for logical boundaries and an equitable distribution. Mr. Miller said it concerns only the City’s Council districts, expecting “a meeting or two” commitment. He said the numbers from the Census Bureau are just beginning to come out, unsure when they’ll be available by tract and block group.

Mr. Bealer moved to submit Brian Bingaman and Brian Burket as the Planning Commission’s representatives to the ad hoc redistricting commission. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously its consent to the representation.

Resolution #41-2011

review the draft February 22, 2011 meeting minutes [1:18.32]

Mr. Burket pointed out that the agenda and staff commentary both list January 25th as the meeting minutes for consideration, while those included for review are February’s. Mr. Miller confirmed the error.

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the February meeting minutes. Mr. Bingaman seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the February 22nd meeting minutes.

Resolution #42-2011

Mr. Lauter noted that parking in the driveway at G. L. Public Services is often stacked ‘two deep’, such that it blocks the sidewalk (104 North 3rd Street). He recalled the Planning Commission’s opposition to a driveway when the plan for the office building was presented. Mr. Bealer added that the plan was approved without the driveway, only to be approved by City staff sometime later. He thought there might be a zoning enforcement issue. Ms. Mayfield thought the driveway was represented as an access for armored car pick-ups. Mr. Lauter wondered if there was any recourse, short of the police. Mr. Miller alluded to some potential zoning issues, but subordinate to the sidewalk obstruction issue.

Mr. Lauter suggested some kind of parting recognition for Fritz Rothermel, who resigned from the Commission in October of 2010. He recalled the plaque presented to Edmund Palka in January, and noted Rothermel’s length of service both as staff and a Commission member. Mr. Raffaelli estimated 37 years combined. Mr. Lauter moved to commemorate Fritz Rothermel’s years of service to the Planning Office and the Planning Commission, with a suitable plaque. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission agreed unanimously to the recognition.

Resolution #43-2011

Mr. Miller reminded that the Comprehensive Plan was due for its ten-year review, and suggested some formal communication of that need to the Administration and City Council. He assumed limited assistance available from the same State agencies that had contributed to the recent Zoning and Land Development ordinance revisions. Mr. Bealer moved to request the Administration and City Council provide for a review of the City’s Comprehensive Plan, per the requirements of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (§301.c). Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that request to the elected officials.

Resolution #44-2011

Mr. Miller expected that Berks Area *Regional* Transportation Authority (BARTA) would present its intentions for the Franklin Street Station (100 South 7th Street) within the next couple of months. He reported that, after originally considering the project a ‘land development’, he reclassified it for the less formal review provided for in the

Planning Code (§303.a.1 and .2). He explained that the scope of work is limited to a rehabilitation of the shuttered train station, with some improvements to the grounds to facilitate the bus services. He anticipated an overview of the architectural plans. Mr. Jones mentioned some “Public Works issues”. Mr. Miller agreed, adding that the Department of Transportation and Norfolk Southern Corporation would also be involved.

Mr. Bingaman moved to adjourn. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the March 22nd meeting. – 8:40p