Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
May 24, 2011 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

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

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office
Charles M. Jones, Department of Public Works

Others present:

Dennis D. Louwerse, Berks Area Regional Transportation Authority
Robert B. Rimby, Berks Area Regional Transportation Authority
Michael D. Hartley, Michael Baker Corporation
William J. Vitale, Designworks Architects PC
Thomas B. Ludgate, Ludgate Engineering Corporation
Michael J. Kautter, Kautter & Kelley Architects Inc.
Kent D. Morey, SSM Group Inc.
David A. Wolf, Carpenter Technology Corporation
Paul A. Szewczak, Liberty Engineering Inc.
James E. Dockey, Muhlenberg Greene Architects Ltd.
Stephen F. DeLucas, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the May meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the May 24th agenda, as presented. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the May agenda.

Comprehensive Planning:

Franklin Street Station Rehabilitation Project (Berks Area Regional Transportation Authority) – §303.a.1 proposal [0:00.32]

Mr. Louwerse, 28 years and a day the Authority's Executive Director, characterized a "back-to-the-future" project. He showed historical photographs of the Station, formerly home to the Reading Bus Company and Capitol Trailways, in addition to the Reading Railroad; a multi-modal facility. He said it has been neglected and vandalized since its closure, and that the ceiling collapsed. He intended restoration of everything salvageable. He reported his involvement with the "422plus Project" (previously known as the "R6 Norristown Service Line Extension", and before that, the "Schuylkill Valley Metro"). He said the Authority is expanding its services, with as many as 40 busses an hour using the Transportation Center across Franklin Street. Referring to drawings of the interior, he specified the chandelier, benches, and wall tile still in good shape, and a floor plan basically following the original. A former 'ladies waiting area' will become a museum space. Areas outside the building will allow for some limited landscaping. He mentioned a "multitude of organizations to deal with", including the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) who have verbally committed to the project.

Mr. Vitale explained that the Station's exterior will be cleaned and restored, but otherwise unchanged. Several windows and doors will either be refurbished or replaced, as needed. Ten pole lights, of the 'bishop's-crook' style, under-canopy lights and four spot lights to 'wash' the building façade are planned. The only additional signage proposed is 'directional'. Glass vestibules will be added to the entrance, for energy and comfort considerations. Excepting the ceiling, he characterized the interior as "remarkably intact", including the terracotta walls and terrazzo floors. Some plaster repair is needed, with drywall added where they cannot. The new mechanical systems will be screened visually. He reported the highway-occupancy permit (HOP) application was submitted to PennDOT earlier that day. Mr. Miller asked if anything would prevent eastbound busses on Franklin Street from turning into the facility, and exiting to westbound Chestnut Street (*i.e.* opposite the intended circulation directed by the pavement markings), considering the encroachment on other traffic lanes in making that radius. Mr.

Louwerse said any drivers who do would be disciplined. Asked if any public traffic would be admitted, he relied on the signage planned and other "security measures", having briefly considered some kind of gate access. Mr. Vitale reported having presented the plan to the Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB), now waiting on a commitment letter from the PHMC. Mr. Jones asked if the handicapped-accessible ramps along Franklin and Chestnut Streets were included in the submission to PennDOT. Mr. Hartley confirmed. Mr. Vitale mentioned other regulatory bodies consulted: the Reading Area Water Authority (RAWA), Metropolitan Edison Company (Met-Ed), UGI Utilities, Inc., and Norfolk Southern Corporation for the canopy and platform work on their property. Mr. Louwerse said the railroad had been very cooperative, and commented on a "unique process". Mr. Vitale said he'd be meeting the following day with the Berks County Conservation District (BCCD), the City's Department of Public Works (DPW), and Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) who've said a sewer module is not required, though some City officials believe it is. Mr. Jones said he needs that in writing, and may still have some concerns with the physical connection. Mr. Vitale mentioned two meetings with the City's OneStopShop, expecting to submit for building permits in June or July. Asked if a municipal improvements agreement would be necessary, Mr. Jones said he'd discuss it with the legal staff. About a luncheonette, Mr. Louwerse said they'll preserve the existing wood and marble counter, making it ready if a vendor shows interest. Asked if the Station was strictly for the Authority's use, Mr. Louwerse discussed a few regional connection studies, dealing with ride sharing, and car pooling. He noted two in particular, assessing the US222 corridor to Lancaster and the US422 corridor to Lebanon. He estimated the project to be put out for bid in June, awarded in early August, for work beginning in September. He thought the interior work would keep the contractor busy though the winter, with outside improvements in the spring, and completion in September of 2012.

Mr. Miller thanked the team for the presentation, and offered to acknowledge the same in any correspondence necessary to satisfy the other agencies involved.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Reading School District Maintenance Building – preliminary land development plan [0:36.49]

Mr. Ludgate mentioned the existing garage, on the north side of the property, and the remnants of the former maintenance shop, destroyed in a July 2009 fire. He said the lot measures "a little over an acre", and the new building a little more than 16,000 square feet. The site plan includes a more-orderly parking arrangement, green space added via landscaped islands amid that parking, street trees and sidewalk improvements on Tulpehocken Street, and some improvements in the grading. No change in use is proposed. Asked if they were providing larger parking stalls for the District's trucks and equipment, Mr. Kautter said those vehicles are typically out during the day, indicating that their storage at night wouldn't be a concern for parking capacity. Mr. Ludgate added that the site would be secured by new fencing and access gates. Mr. Kautter said the new facility will accommodate what has been temporarily-housed at the leased 755 Hiesters Lane, since the fire. Mr. Raffaelli recalled the former occupancy by the Kreitz Morris & Sons Inc. rigging company. Mr. Kautter said all that survives from the fire is the "slab-on-grade" and, in their analysis, it didn't make sense to try and build upon what remained from the fire. He said the Hiesters Lane facility would be vacated, and their hope is to complete the reconstruction by December 31st. He displayed elevations, and explained the intended materials; ground-faced block, topped with and insulated-metal panel on the façades facing the interior of the property, and precast concrete on the alley sides. It was further described as limestone-colored block, charcoal-grey panels, aluminum lettering to identify the facility and its address, windows in the offices, an eight-foot security fence with barbed wire, video surveillance, and brand-new light-emitting diode (LED) site and building lighting, with cut-offs as required. A loading dock will permit tractor trailers to make their twice-a-month deliveries.

Mr. Ludgate said they planned 'to bid' the project shortly, even if ground breaking had to wait on other approvals. Mr. Kautter specified "next Wednesday", with replies due by July 1st. The reconstruction is largely covered by the insurer. To a question about stormwater planning, Mr. Jones said he expected to complete that review in the next week. Asked to explain the proposed tree placements, Mr. Ludgate noted shade trees along Tulpehocken Street per the Zoning Ordinance and three additional trees outside the Street right-of-way. Mr. Kautter specified a Liriope for the landscaped islands, and screening in the area of the solid-waste storage. Mr. Raffaelli opined that the School District should have consulted the Planning Commission earlier for suitable locations. Mr. Kautter offered to communicate it to the School Board, adding a brief explanation of the insurance settlement and the decision to rebuild. He said that what might have become a new home for the District's EXCEL program, changed with the funding of that program and in consideration of the purchase cost of the Hiesters Lane location.

Mr. Miller noted that, without the County Planning Commission's review and a zoning permit, the Planning Commission would have to table the plan.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the School District's Maintenance Building preliminary plan. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted 3 to 0 to 1 to table the plan. Mr. Raffaelli, an employee of the School District, abstained.

Building 84 ESR South Addition (Carpenter Technology Corporation) – final land development plan [1:05.47]

Mr. Morey recalled the presentation at the April meeting, tabled for lack of the County Planning Commission review since received. The plan was resubmitted, addressing the Planning Office's review. Consideration of the requested waivers was overlooked at the April presentation; waivers requested based on the over-300 acres owned by Carpenter on several parcels. He reminded that they had provided supplemental maps, detailing some of the required boundary information with a 2007 land development application. Mr. Miller added that they are the same waivers granted for additions proposed for Buildings 84 and 108 at that time: §22-402.4.F, regarding the labeling of adjoining properties, §22-402.4.H, regarding parts of the key map, §22-402.4.K, regarding the total tract boundaries, §22-402.4.L.1, regarding the 'area and bulk' calculations, and §22-403.1.B, regarding tract boundaries. He recommended granting those waivers. Mr. Bealer moved to grant the waivers, as recited. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant waivers of §§22-402.4.F, -402.4.H, -402.4.K, 402.4.L.1 and -403.1.B.

Resolution #52-2011

Mr. Lauter moved to approve the final land development plan for the "Building 84 ESR South Addition". Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the Building 84 final plan.

Resolution #53-2011

Building 84 ESR North Addition (Carpenter Technology Corporation) – final land development plan [1:12.06]

Mr. Morey said he would have submitted the "North" and "South" plans simultaneously, but for a perceived need for zoning variance on the North addition. He said the North addition, which extends Building 84 toward and against Building 78, is higher. But a recent change in the Zoning Ordinance allows the proposed height, and the Zoning Administrator has issued a permit. Still waiting on a review by the County Planners, he understood the plan would be tabled, but asked for the same waiver requests in the meantime. Mr. Lauter moved to grant the waivers, as enumerated for the South addition project. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to grant waivers of §§22-402.4.F, -402.4.H, -402.4.K, 402.4.L.1 and -403.1.B.

Resolution #54-2011

Mr. Bealer moved to table the final plan, pending receipt of the County Planning Commission's comments. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the "Building 84 ESR North Addition" final plan.

In other Carpenter business, Mr. Morey mentioned a planned pump station; an 8- by 20-foot housing for an industrial-water well on their 'west shore' property. He previously discussed the issue with the Planning and Zoning offices. In Mr. Miller's interpretation of the regulations (and the Commission's resolution no. 8-98), the project is exempted from full land-development planning. Mr. Jones asked that the Utilities Division be given an opportunity to review the concept, but raised no other issues.

Also, Mr. Morey explained a planned addition to Building 118, now wholly within Muhlenberg Township, which will cross into a part of the City currently zoned 'Residential 1'. Carpenter will be petitioning City Council for a map change. The City portion of that expansion was estimated at between 5000 and 7000 square feet. Mr. Wolf also wondered how Reading would interface with Muhlenberg Township in that process. Mr. Miller confirmed that the Planning Commission must consider that proposed map change as a step in the amendment process. The Commission offered verbal support for the concept. Mr. Miller preferred that some conditions be attached to any eventual deferring of the planning requirements to Muhlenberg, namely the review of the architectural plans and copies of the record land development plan. Mr. Wolf confirmed that any necessary utility connections would be through Muhlenberg's lines. Mr. Bealer suggested a City review of the stormwater planning, as well.

Sylvania Homes II – Accessible Housing (Reading Housing Authority) – preliminary subdivision and land development plan [1:30.51]

Mr. Szewczak recalled a couple of previous presentations, and suggested that the plan had been revised to address the outstanding issues. He acknowledged delays due to the process of vacating Sheridan Street, and asked for plan approval. Given the time since the last presentation (the previous August), he explained the basic concept; five units of handicapped-accessible housing, with off-street parking. Asked about requested sanitary sewer information, Mr. Jones clarified that he was only commenting on the private ownership and maintenance responsibility. About a municipal improvements agreement, he expressed the same uncertainty as with the Transportation Authority's project. Mr. Miller recommended a conditional preliminary plan approval, based on satisfaction of his last review. Mr. Jones said he has some other issues, but can wait for the final submission.

Mr. Lauter moved to approve the "Sylvania Homes II – Accessible Housing" preliminary subdivision and land development plan, conditioned on the review issues identified by the Planning Office and the City Engineer. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve the Housing Authority's preliminary plan.

Resolution #55-2011

Mr. Szewczak asked that the Commission grant final plan approval, as well, based on the Housing Authority's finances and closure on a US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) loan. He offered to "work with the staff" to address any remaining concerns. Mr. Miller insisted that he would have to review a final plan. Mr. Bealer noted that a preliminary approval vests certain rights and assurances with the applicant. Mr. Szewczak asked if they could 'break ground'. Mr. Miller said building permits will only be issued once the final plan is approved, signed by the Commission, sealed by the County Recorder and delivered back to the Planning Office. Mr. Dockey asked what was required of the final plan. Mr. Szewczak claimed the only issue is that they aren't titled 'final'. Mr. Dockey claimed the bids are 60 days old, and expiring. Mr. Bealer recalled that the Housing Authority had procrastinated on the street vacation issue, estimating six to seven months since the Planning Commission last advised them to pursue it. Mr. Miller confirmed that between August 2010 and a week before this meeting, there was no communication from the Housing Authority or Liberty Engineering, except for replies to the several Planning Office requests for authorizations to extend the Planning Code's time limits on plan review. He recalled that the design team agreed in August not to continue presenting to the Commission until the street was vacated by City Council.

Other business:

§207 election-2011 Planning Commission office holders [1:42.36]

Mr. Burket, representing the 'nominating committee', proposed to keep the current officers, except that he replace Brian Bingaman in the vice-chair position:

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

Mr. Bealer moved to accept the nominating committee's recommendation and elect the slate of officers proposed. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to elect the slate of candidates, as proposed, in accord with §207 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and its own by-laws.

Resolution #56-2011

review the draft April 26, 2011 meeting minutes [1:44.26]

Mr. Bealer noted that the record of the approving motion for the PriceRite plan suggests it was tabled.

Mr. Burket moved to accept the April meeting minutes, with the correction. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the April 26th meeting minutes.

Resolution #57-2011

Following some conversation on other miscellaneous business, Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the May 24th meeting. – 8:56p