

**Minutes**  
**Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission**  
**July 26, 2011 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  
Charles M. Jones, Department of Public Works

**Others present:**

Kent D. Morey, SSM Group Inc.  
David A. Wolf, Carpenter Technology Corporation  
Matthew J. Mack, Ludgate Engineering Corporation  
Michael J. Kautter, Kautter & Kelley Architects Inc.  
Robert P. Stackhouse, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.  
Douglas F. Smith, Alvernia University  
Stephen F. DeLucas, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the July meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Hearing no changes, Mr. Lauter moved to accept the July 26th agenda, as presented. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the July agenda.

**Subdivision and Land Development:**

Building 84 ESR North Addition (Carpenter Technology Corporation) – revision-to-record land development plan [0:01.12]

Mr. Morey recalled the approval at the June meeting. He said a reassessment of the dust-collection system, originally included within the building, is now proposed outside and next to the addition. He claimed to have addressed the Planning Office comments on revised and signed plans. Asked about its size, Mr. Wolf estimated 12 feet by 30 feet, and about 25 feet high. He explained that with the auxiliary equipment considered, the vendor felt it would not fit inside the building. He said it's not uncommon for Carpenter's air-pollution control equipment to be housed in separate structures, though they prefer installations within for the benefit of the recirculating air. Mr. Miller indicated his satisfaction, and noted that he assumed the waivers granted May 24th carried over.

Mr. Lauter moved to approve the Building 84 ESR North Addition revision plan. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve Carpenter's Building 84 ESR North Addition revision-to-record plan.

**Resolution #62-2011**

Reading School District Maintenance Building – final land development plan [0:05.31]

Mr. Mack said they've received a verbal approval from the Zoning Hearing Board for the requested variances. He mentioned a reduction in impervious coverage from 100 percent to 98. He felt most of the Planning Office review concerned signature blocks and general notes, intending to more-fully document the zoning relief when received in writing. He said they would consult the Shade Tree Commission, prior to recording the plan. Mr. Kautter explained the additional PVC privacy slatting in the east fence line, but none along the south side as the Planning Office understood was required by the Hearing Board's decision. He said the Hearing Board was concerned with headlights, in the winter months, penetrating the neighboring residential backyards. He added that the School District is concerned that too much screening would block law enforcement from viewing the interior of the property. Mr. Miller suggested those patrols would pass on the Tulpehocken Street (west) side, rather than through the alleys. Mr. Mack indicated a retaining wall on the south side will add some screening effect. Regarding the zoning decision, Mr. Miller explained that the scheduled June hearing was postponed at the request of the School District's solicitor, who felt the advertisement didn't sufficiently cover their request. The appeal was then heard in July, and a verbal approval given. He expected a written decision the following month, comfortable with the

assurances of the zoning staff. Mr. Jones said he was discussing the applicability of a municipal improvements agreement with the City Solicitor. Mr. Mack said a letter from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection waived any additional sewage-facilities planning requirements.

Mr. Bealer moved to grant preliminary and conditional-final land development plan approvals for the Maintenance Building, provided a municipal improvements agreement is arranged, if required, and that plan revisions comply with the terms and conditions of the zoning approval. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted 3 to 0 to 1 to approve the Reading School District's preliminary and final plans. Mr. Raffaelli, an employee of the School District, abstained.

**Resolution #63-2011**

#### **Other business:**

##### §603.c.2 conditional use review-334 McKnight Street (conversion) [0:15.22]

Ahead of the agenda time estimates, and without representatives for the next scheduled presentation, Chairman Raffaelli moved ahead. Mr. Miller, making some assumptions from the information provided, understood 334 McKnight Street to be an owner-occupied single-family home, with plans for an apartment on one of the upper floors. He acknowledged a lack of detail in his review. He added that the Zoning Office says the owners are also seeking variance (at the August 10th zoning hearing) for an 'auto repair garage' at the same property. He says it is difficult to verify the parking provided, on-site or off, and the drawing provided doesn't support the floor area claimed. Mr. Bealer noted that McKnight Street is one-way, narrow, and difficult to park. He recalled another automotive shop a couple properties to the north, in a detached three-car garage. He wasn't sure it was permitted. Mr. Miller said the Zoning Office is concerned that with one application before City Council, and another headed to the Zoning Hearing Board, neither will have a complete picture of the impact. Mr. Miller reminded that there are shortcomings in the City's application forms vis-à-vis the Zoning Ordinance itself, though it remains the applicant's burden to justify the application. He added that the Ordinance makes no provision for 'auto repair' in the residential zones. And such approval by the Hearing Board would be a "use variance".

Mr. Lauter moved to recommend City Council deny the conversion of 334 McKnight Street, based on information insufficient for verifying the prescriptions of the Zoning Office, and agreeing to review any additional information that may be provided. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward that recommendation to City Council.

**Resolution #64-2011**

#### **Subdivision and Land Development, continued:**

##### South Campus Project (Alvernia University) – revision-to-record land development plan [0:25.51]

Mr. Stackhouse, recalling the original plan approved in October 2008, described four new residence halls, two of which have since been built, fire lane improvements and a parking lot. He said they have decided to move Building No. 4 (called No. 6 in some documents); he showed plans comparing the original and revised locations. He said an existing community building will be razed, rather than expanded, and another larger building taking its place adjacent to Building No. 4. The third and fourth residence halls will be similar in architecture to the first and second. Mr. Smith said the move brings the residence halls closer to student services in the community building, including a two-storey fitness center and food. He said the new residence halls will include more masonry in the façade construction. Mr. Burket questioned the attachment of Building No. 4 to the new community building. Mr. Smith clarified that they will be separated by a common wall, leaving an option for possible connection in the future. Green space will take the place of the existing community building. Of the new residence halls, one will be constructed as apartments, and the other in a suite arrangement; groupings of twelve rooms with common areas. Mr. Stackhouse said the fire lane, a reinforced pedestrian way, will now be accessible from two directions. A radial parking lot will expand on the existing rectangular parking area. Mr. Smith said the new layout preserves space for possible future development, though the change was motivated, in part, for a buffer between the students and the (Bernardine Franciscan Sisters') St. Joseph Villa, a 65-resident nursing home. Mr. Jones concluded that the sanitary sewer demands and stormwater impacts will be virtually the same as originally planned. Mr. Miller said some other issues must be resolved prior to approval, including the Conservation District's approval; stormwater management practices were never constructed as designed. Mr. Stackhouse was unaware of the problem. Mr. Miller explained that, according to their March 24th inspection report, pervious paving was not used in the parking lot and a green roof was omitted. Mr. Stackhouse said an underground detention system will be constructed as a part of this second

phase. Mr. Miller added that he observed an erosion impact on the Angelica Creek Trail. He made the point that the project was not constructed as designed and approved, and changes to a record plan must be approved by the Planning Commission. The County Planning Commission's comments are also due prior to approval. Asked about the construction schedule, Mr. Smith preferred to begin in late September, for a target opening in August 2012. Mr. Lauter pitched the (Centre Park Historic District's) Artifacts Bank for any potential salvage from the demolition activities. Mr. Smith agreed, adding that the on-going Francis Hall renovation was a more-promising resource. Regarding demand in the two constructed buildings, he said they are fully occupied, with other students currently in a hotel waiting for the additional on-campus capacity.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the revision plan, pending the County Planning Commission's review, and other required approvals. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table Alvernia's "South Campus Project" revision plan.

#### **Other business, continued:**

##### §603.c.2 conditional use review-132 West Oley Street (group home) [0:45.06]

Asked for more specifics, Mr. Miller explained that the applicant intends an alcohol- and drug-rehabilitation program, that the Zoning Administrator understands to be limited to the ten-person maximum of a "group home" versus the "facility" classification. He thought it odd that City policies resist apartments so fervently, but provide for ten adults and additional staff in a house of the same size. Mr. Burket questioned recommending an approval with so many requirements of the Zoning Ordinance left unverified from the application. Mr. Lauter recalled a number of undocumented group homes reported by neighbors. Mr. Miller wasn't sure about the current occupancy of the building, suggesting a partner in the application may be residing there; the lessees' addresses were taken from their drivers' licenses, the address of the owner was taken from the tax records. He had no information regarding the supervision provided, or their credentials. He said most group home applications come from a few recognizable organizations. Mr. Bealer had concerns for the vehicles and parking demand. He suggested that, even if they accept claims that the residents don't have cars, they can't be sure, and that there are staff and delivery needs. Mr. Burket added that visitors, including probation officers, should also be considered. Mr. Miller suggested other impacts, to the tax- and rate-payers, such as trash and other service fees charged 'per unit'. Mr. Lauter questioned the adequacy of bathrooms and other amenities in a house converted to house those numbers. Mr. Miller said that some of the questions were outside the scope of the Zoning Ordinance specifics, though covered by its general 'impact' tests, and considerations for City Council in their decision. He felt that, if the Planning Commission is meant to serve as a check on compliance with the Ordinance, it could not recommend approval.

Mr. Lauter moved to recommend City Council deny the group home application, based on a lack of compliance with the standards of the Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to recommend denial of a group home at 132 West Oley Street.

**Resolution #65-2011**

##### §508.3 agreement to extension-Acevedo Downing St. Subdivision [0:58.12]

Mr. Miller reported the fifth such extension requested. Mr. Bealer noted that the situation was complicated by the encroachments from the neighbor (2312 Downing Street; the target of some enforcement efforts by the Zoning Office), and felt the Commission should grant as many extensions as they request.

Mr. Bealer moved to accept the 90-day extension, as requested in a July 6th letter. Mr. Burket 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 #66-2011**

##### review the draft May 24, 2011 meeting minutes [1:01.09]

Hearing no requests for edits, Mr. Lauter moved to accept the May meeting minutes. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the May 24th meeting minutes.

**Resolution #67-2011**

##### review the draft June 28, 2011 meeting minutes [1:01.35]

Mr. Bealer requested a grammatical change.

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the June meeting minutes, with the correction. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the June 28th meeting minutes.

Resolution #68-2011

Mr. Bealer reported on another certification hearing, and another ten properties certified by the Blighted Property Review Committee. He said the Committee will use August to take stock of its progress and inventory. He noted the effectiveness of the 'pre eminent-strike letters' in motivating some property owners to action. He explained that Pennsylvania law includes vacancy as "blight". Mr. Miller hoped those properties certified meet more than that one condition. Mr. Bealer said "at least three", including utility cut-offs and tax delinquencies. He said the utility companies have been cooperative in providing the information requested. He intended to provide some data at the next meeting.

Mr. Jones offered a copy of a feasibility study for the River Road extension, expecting to make a more-thorough presentation at the August meeting. He cautioned that the study shows only a "preferred concept", and that the next step is for preliminary design and environmental considerations. He mentioned a neighborhood meeting, about a month earlier, and some positive feedback. He added that sufficient funds have already been earmarked for that next step.

Mr. Bealer moved to adjourn. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the July 26th meeting. - 8:16p