



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT

CITY OF READING, PENNSYLVANIA

COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DIVISION
PLANNING
815 WASHINGTON STREET
READING, PA 19601-3690
(610) 655-6326

The regular meeting of the Reading Planning Commission was held on August 11, 1998, in the Penn Room, City Hall.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Ed Palka, Vice Chairman
Ermete Raffaelli, Secretary
Mike Lauter, Assistant Secretary
Stanley Papademetriou
Charles Fairchild

STAFF PRESENT

Karl Graybill
Fritz Rothermel
John Weller

OTHERS PRESENT

Judy Guthier (HDC): Market Square Apartments
Steven Bensinger (Thomas R. Gibbons & Associates): Market Square Apartments
Ollie Cherniakavsky (OCA): Market Square Apartments
Steven Price (Common Life): Market Square Apartments
Jack Parry (J. Randolph Parry Architect): Market Square Apartments
William Vitale (Designworks): Market Square Apartments
Carol A. Sztaba (Synergetics Architects): Penn Street Clinic
Gary Fronheiser (Reading Eagle-Times)

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The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by the Vice Chairman, Ed Palka.

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

The minutes of the Planning Commission meeting held on July 14, 1998, were approved (4-0) on a motion by Stanley Papademetriou and a second by Ermete Raffaelli. Charles Fairchild abstained.

REVIEW REVISED SITE PLAN FOR MARKET SQUARE APARTMENTS, 801 PENN STREET

Steven Price explained that a revised sketch plan for Block G of the Downtown East Urban Renewal Area bounded by Eight, Court and Penn Streets and an unnamed alley was presented at the July 14, 1998 Planning Commission meeting. Mr. Price explained that the revised final plan is an annexation, subdivision and land development plan. He also explained that a tax credit allocation has been received from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency,



completing the funding for Building No. 3, which will be constructed on the southeast corner of Eighth and Court Streets.

Steven Bensinger presented the revised final plan and described the changes to the lot configurations caused by changes in the footprints of Buildings 1 and 2. Mr. Bensinger explained that in order to accommodate the modified building footprints two parcels must be annexed, with one annexation parcel being conveyed to the Reading Redevelopment Authority from Market Square Apartments Associates and the other from the Redevelopment Authority to Market Square Apartments Associates. Both parcels contain 9,748 square feet.

Mr. Bensinger described the subdivision of the reconfigured lots. Lot No.1 fronts on Penn Street in the southeast corner of the block. Lot No. 2 is on the northeast corner of Eighth and Penn Streets and is the site of the existing building. Lot No. 3 is located on the southeast corner of Eighth and Court Streets and Lot No. 4 fronts entirely on Court Street to the east of Lot No. 3. Lot Nos. 5, 6 and 7 are common areas within the block and surrounded on the north, west and south by the four building lots. The common areas will contain parking, access drives, walkways and green space.

Mr. Bensinger explained that the land development plan shows the existing Building No. 1 on Lot No. 2. Lot No. 1 will be the site of the U-shaped Building No. 2 and Building No. 3 will be constructed on Lot No. 3. A rectangular shaped building is proposed for Lot No. 4.

Mr. Bensinger described the two access points for the internal parking and open space areas. A twenty foot wide alley running between Court Street and Penn Street along the eastern boundary of Block G will be widened to 24 feet from Court Street to the complex entrance. A second access will allow cars only to enter mid-block off Court Street. All vehicles will exit via the alley. In addition to vehicular access, a pedestrian walkway will be located between Buildings 1 and 2, beginning on Penn Street and continuing across the block parallel to the Court Street entrance. The walkway will be easily recognizable through its distinctive paving pattern and color.

Ollie Cherniakavsky described the 91 unit independent living with supportive services Building No. 2 on Lot No. 1. Ninety units will be for residents and one unit will be reserved for the building manager. Each floor will have common areas for dining, a lounge and parlors. The Penn Street elevation will attempt to match the look of both the existing building at Eighth Street as well as the building farther east on Penn Street by utilizing similar building materials and colors.

Charles Fairchild inquired as to the total number of proposed units and the total number of parking spaces and asked if there will be parking for visitors and service workers. Mr. Fairchild also questioned if the concern expressed in the July 1998 Planning Commission meeting minutes regarding the Ninth Street vendors and property owners parking in the alley has been addressed.

Steven Price responded that the existing elderly independent living building is managed and partly owned by Housing Development Corporation (HDC) of Lancaster and that 19 spaces, including 2 handicap spaces, have been ensured for Building No. 1. The remaining 21 spaces are for residents, employees and guests of the three buildings to be constructed, but if deemed necessary, parking could be restricted to residents only. Mr. Price explained that the number of spaces was determined to be sufficient due to the type of housing and that the City's Zoning Ordinance, although not applicable at this site, requires 1 space for every 15 units of elderly housing. The present ratio is one space for every nine and one half units. Mr. Price explained that being an urban design nearby on-street and public surface and structural parking is available, as well as provisions for shuttle bus parking. He remarked that the alley is privately owned but that the Ninth Street property owners are allowed access. When construction on Building No. 2 begins parking restrictions will be enforced, however the alley will continue to be a thoroughfare.

Mike Lauter inquired if HDC was satisfied with the number of spaces being provided for Building No. 1. Judy Guthier responded that HDC has been assured that the number of spaces is adequate and that it has only two concerns. HDC would like the 19 parking spaces designated for Building No. 1 to be legally binding and that the legal transfer of the annexation parcels be completed.

Stanley Papademetriou inquired as to the location of loading areas for the existing and proposed buildings. Steven Price explained that the loading area for Building No. 2 will be in the rear at the east end of the building. Trucks will park in the alley to the east. Loading for Building No. 3 will be on the eastern wing and trucks will be provided with a loading area next to the auto only entrance. The loading area for Building No. 4 will be from the alley. Fritz Rothermel explained that Building Nos. 2 and 3 will have kitchen facilities but Building No. 4 will not.

William Vitale explained that Building No. 3 will be a 4 story independent living facility with supportive services. All 85 units will be one bedroom with a one-story multi-purpose/dining room in the eastern wing. Trash, maintenance and kitchen facilities will be located in the loading area near the dining room. The primary entrance will be located on the eastern end of the building off the Court Street entrance. A second entrance will be on the corner of Eighth and Court Streets. Mr. Vitale explained that the building materials will be some combination of masonry and Dryvit or stucco similar to the existing structure, but the colors may not be the same.

Fritz Rothermel questioned the departure from the original concept where Buildings 1 and 3 had a connection that allowed tenants from Building No. 1 access to dining facilities in Building No. 3. Ollie Cherniakavsky responded that a five foot wide easement must be maintained for utilities and drainage, although a connecting bridge is possible.

Karl Graybill explained that a completed grading and utility plan had been submitted late and has not been reviewed by the Department of Public Works. Fritz Rothermel explained that any

street tree plantings should take into account the grade differential between tree pits and the abutting sidewalk. Additional grading may be required prior to planting.

Mr. Rothermel explained that the Redevelopment Authority and Planning Commission reviews of the project are parallel and that the subdivision and land development plan can be approved as a final plan. Until materials, colors and plant Cultivars are known the design can only be approved as a preliminary. Steven Price requested that the Planning Commission grant sufficient approval to move forward with the preparation of the necessary legal documents. Mr. Rothermel reiterated that the plan could be approved with conditions or recommendations, but can not be signed until the Public Works review is completed. He stated that there should be two resolutions – one for the land development plan and one for the design.

On a motion by Stanley Papademetriou and a second by Mike Lauter, Resolution No. 38-98 was unanimously passed (5-0), approving the revised final annexation/subdivision/land development plan, as presented and contingent upon the receipt of and compliance to any and all Public Works comments, for Market Square Apartments residential development on the northeast corner of Eight and Penn Streets.

On a motion by Mike Lauter and a second by Ermete Raffaelli, Resolution No. 39-98 was unanimously passed (5-0), approving the preliminary design plan, for Building Nos. 2 and 3, Market Square Apartments residential development on the northeast corner of Eight and Penn Streets.

REVIEW READING HOSPITAL & MEDICAL CENTER PROPOSAL FOR BLOCK J, DOWNTOWN EAST URBAN RENEWAL AREA

Karl Graybill explained that the Reading Hospital and Medical Center has requested that the 75 foot building setback requirement from Cherry Street be waived for the proposed clinic. Mr. Graybill explained that a portion of the existing building will be demolished reducing the building coverage from 84 percent to 58 percent. The building will continue to encroach in the setback but the increase from zero feet to 65 feet is an improvement to the site.

On a motion by Stanley Papademetriou, and a second by Mike Lauter, Resolution No. 40-98 was unanimously passed (5-0), waiving the setback from Cherry Street requirements for the proposed Reading Hospital & Medical Center primary care clinic on Block J of the Downtown East Urban Renewal Area.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS AMENDMENT TO ZONING ORDINANCE

Karl Graybill explained that draft copies of the proposed amendments to the City's Zoning Ordinance covering telecommunications towers and antennas were distributed at the July 1998 meeting. Mr. Graybill discussed a few revisions to the draft and invited comments and discussion from the members.

Mike Lauter inquired as to what criteria would be used to determine if an applicant has exhausted all efforts to co-locate an antenna. Mr. Graybill explained that seven criteria have been outlined in the Ordinance. The applicant shall demonstrate that the antenna cannot be co-

located within one-quarter mile of the proposed location for one or more of the stated reasons.

Charles Fairchild asked if the City owns or operates any telecommunications towers. Fritz Rothermel explained that there are antennas on the roof of City Hall that are linked to the County Services Center. Mr. Rothermel also remarked that there are towers located on City owned property on Mt. Penn, but that these are not owned or operated by the City.

John Weller explained that the next step to amending the Ordinance is for the Planning Commission to endorse the proposed amendment and to request that City Council advertise for a public hearing. Mr. Graybill explained that the City Solicitor is reviewing the draft and that a final document should be ready for Commission action at its September 1998 meeting.

AMEND BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION FOR THE BUTTONWOOD GATEWAY URBAN RENEWAL AREA AND CERTIFY THE REDEVELOPMENT AREA PROPOSAL TO CITY COUNCIL, REQUESTING A HEARING BE ORGANIZED TO OBTAIN PUBLIC INPUT

John Weller explained that in the Redevelopment Proposal for the Buttonwood Gateway Redevelopment Area, which was developed with the assistance of the Berks County Planning Commission and Mullin and Lonergan Associates, Incorporated, certain lots were divided incorrectly. Two areas of the former Reading Gray Iron Foundry were cut off and should be included. The staff is requesting that the Planning Commission pass a resolution amending the boundary description and map for the Urban Renewal Area.

On a motion by Ermete Raffaelli, and a second by Stanley Papademetriou, Resolution No. 41-98 was unanimously passed (5-0), amending Planning Commission Resolution 31-98 to reflect changes made to the Buttonwood Gateway Redevelopment Area boundary description and map as presented.

John Weller explained that under the Pennsylvania Redevelopment Act the process of creating an urban renewal area involves the Planning Commission, the Redevelopment Authority and City Council. The Planning Commission must first declare the proposed site blighted and develop a plan. The redevelopment plan is then presented to and reviewed by the Redevelopment Authority, which forms a redevelopment proposal that is reviewed by the Planning Commission. The redevelopment plan is a very general concept of future development of the site, whereas the proposal is more definitive. Upon approval of the proposal the Planning Commission makes a recommendation to City Council to endorse the proposal and advertise for a public hearing within 45 days.

Mr. Weller explained that establishing an urban renewal area will expedite the acquisition of property because, until the parcels are acquired, the property owners can propose a use for said parcel, thereby making acquisition more difficult and expensive.

Charles Fairchild inquired that if the owner of the former American Chain and Cable site would refuse to sell or allow a Phase I environmental assessment, would condemnation proceedings begin. Stanley Papademetriou asked where the money was coming from to

acquire property. John Weller responded that no general funds would be used. Funding will come from the federal government such as CDBG and EPA Brownfields Pilot Program grants. Other state and local funding sources are available.

John Weller described the two options available to the Planning Commission for moving the project forward. The document can either be approved as a satisfactory plan or a satisfactory proposal. By approving a plan, the Redevelopment Authority must develop a proposal that must be review by the Planning Commission. To expedite the process, the Planning Commission can collapse the process and approve the document as a proposal.

On a motion by Charles Fairchild, and a second by Stanley Papademetriou, Resolution No. 42-98 was unanimously passed (5-0), approving the Redevelopment Proposal for Buttonwood Gateway Redevelopment Area, dated August 1998, as prepared on behalf of the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Reading, as meeting with the satisfaction of the Planning Commission, and that the Secretary of the Planning Commission is authorized to sign the certification portion of the Redevelopment Proposal, and that City Council is hereby requested to schedule and advertise for a public hearing to present the Redevelopment Proposal to the public in accordance with the provisions of the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law.

OTHER BUSINESS

Ermete Raffaelli presented a packet of material from the Berks County Planning Commission regarding revisions to the 1991 Berks County Comprehensive Plan. Included in the packet is a summary of public input meetings held during the months of May, June and July 1998. Also included is a Comprehensive Plan summary brochure with a land use map. Mr. Raffaelli read the cover letter which stated that the Berks County Planning Commission and it's staff will be happy to meet with the City's Planning Commission to formulate draft policies that will guide the development of the County Comprehensive Plan. Charles Fairchild remarked that he supports and encourages a meeting with the County Planning Commission.

The packet was given to the Planning staff and will be available in the Planning Library.

ADJOURNMENT

The August 11, 1998 City of Reading Planning Commission meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m. on a motion by Stanley Papademetriou and a second by Ed Palka.

NEXT MEETING

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission will be held at 7:30 p.m. on September 8, 1998, in the Penn Room, City Hall, 815 Washington Street.