



ALLENTOWN CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
435 HAMILTON STREET
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ALLENTOWN CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

PUBLIC MEETING MARCH 13, 2018

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Oldrich Foucek, III, Esquire, Chairman
Mark Buchvalt, Vice-Chairman
Richard Button, Secretary
Christian Brown
Jeff Glazier
Damien Brown

CITY STAFF PRESENT:

R. Douglas Stewart, Planning Director
David Kimmerly, Chief Planner
Craig Messinger, Interim Director of Public Works
Mark Geosits, P.E. Senior Civil Engineer/Assistant City Engineer
Richard Rasch, Utility Engineer
Nelson Varughese, Traffic Controls Superintendent
Hannah Clark, Senior Planner
Jesse Sadiua, Senior Planner
Kelly McElroy, Redevelopment Authority
Tawanna Whitehead, Deputy City Clerk
Jeanne Marsteller, Recording Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT:

See attached sign in sheet

MINUTES:

The minutes of February 13, 2018 were approved as written.

STREET VACATIONS:

Wye Street from South 4th Street to vacated South Jordan Street, 18-2 (v) requested by Kenneth A. Simons, Smart Living Barber St. LLC. (Rescheduled from February 13, 2018 meeting)

Phil Malitsch, Hanover Engineering represented the applicant.

Mr. Malitsch explained this was reviewed at prior meetings. Atty. Foucek stated an objection letter was received from a neighbor. Christian Brown pointed out the objection is to the proposed development. Atty. Foucek questioned the structure at the corner with a driveway. Mr. Malitsch pointed out two-thirds of the driveway is part of the Wye Street vacation and is the only way in and out of the property. Mr. Buchvalt suggested a condition should be to protect the property owner on the corner (345 Market Street). Mr. Malitsch stressed no part of Wye Street behind 345 & 337 Market Street are needed for the development and are willing to convey their half to those property owners and if they do not want it, it could be absorbed into the development. Atty. Foucek stated there are two alternatives. One is to have the applicant talk to the neighbors to see if they are willing to accept the property. Second is to approve the street vacation and each property owner gets their half. Damien Brown asked if they spoke to PPL. Mr. Malitsch said no.

The Planning Commission agreed to TABLE this matter until the next meeting to allow the applicant to speak to the neighbors and submit something in writing if they are willing to accept the twenty-foot paper street.

Watson Street from S. 10th Street to the western property line of 1014 W. Emaus Avenue, 18-3 (v) requested by Justin K. Emery.

Atty. Foucek summarized the request is to vacate to a point that is midway between Howard Street and S. 10th Street and the staff report references utility easements. Mr. Emery stated he spoke to PPL and signed a letter allowing them easement to their poles and will allow Verizon easement to their pole as well. Damien Brown pointed out if vacated, he will only get half of the right of way. Mr. Emery answered that is correct. Mr. Emery said he was hoping to vacate to the end of his property and no intent to take away his neighbor's parking. Christian Brown pointed out the utility poles are mostly located on the neighbors half of the right of way. Atty. Foucek said the utility companies might need more than half of the alley to access their poles and this must be worked out with the utility companies. Mr. Emery stated there are no poles between the properties and just want the property vacated to keep cars from driving through.

Mr. Buchvalt made a motion to GRANT conditional approval to vacate Watson Street from South 10th Street to the rear property line of 2332 South 10th Street subject upon the petitioner granting easement to the utility companies to maintain the existing facilities. Second by Mr. Glazier. Motion passed unanimously.

LAND DEVELOPMENTS:

New Elementary School, 1223 W. Gordon Street, LMA-2017-00009 & LDC-2017-00008, preliminary/final plan approval requested by Allentown School District. (Tabled at January 9, 2018 meeting) The application proposes to construct an elementary school.

Robin Breslin, AIA of Breslin Ridyard Fadero Architects, Adam Smith of Barry Isett & Associates and Thomas Smith, Director of Facilities for the Allentown School District were present.

Mr. Breslin said changes were made to the plan after meeting with staff. The brick is now red in color, vertical elements were added to the elevation with vertical sunscreens and city street light fixtures were added. Adam Smith added all comments received from city staff will be complied and happy to work with city staff. Adam Smith asked about the Shade Tree comment about distributing the trees evenly along Gordon Street. He stated there is a break in the trees in the middle of the block for the drop off area and to see the school. Mr. Stewart stated that is a good point to make the entrance of the school visible. Christian Brown pointed out the latest plan did not show any trees to the right of the entry. Adam Smith stated they were removed from the right side as that is the bus drop off area.

Christian Brown mentioned the Shade Tree Commission sees this as a missed opportunity to plant trees along a street frontage, as there are no overhead wires and a three-story building facing south. Mr. Breslin said they are willing to add the trees back in, except at the entrance. Christian Brown said that makes sense.

The size of the school busses was discussed. Thomas Smith reiterated this is a walking school district and the busses that will drop off at the school support the handicapped or charter school children and are typically the smaller buses.

Damien Brown was concerned about the vertical elements going away if the bids are too high. Mr. Breslin said every effort is being made to get them into the construction of the building, but they are close to the budget and/or ahead of it and wanted the flexibility of the bid. Mr. Stewart stated the staff endorsed the changes but will not endorse the plan if the vertical elements are pulled from the façade and there needs to be a commitment that the vertical elements will be in place. Mr. Breslin said they would agree to put them in the base bid of the project.

Damien Brown made a motion to grant CONDITIONAL PRELIMINARY/FINAL approval subject to addressing the comments contained in the staff's letters of March 12, 2018 and March 13, 2018, to the satisfaction of City staff and maintain the vertical elements in the plan and include into the base bid of the project. Mr. Glazier seconded. Motion passed. Mr. Buchvalt abstained.

Executive Education Academy Charter School FDN, 555 Union Boulevard, LMA-2018-00003, preliminary/final approval requested by Executive Education Academy Charter School FDN. The application proposes the addition of 16,060 square foot, 1,600-seat gymnasium building at the former Agere Systems, Inc. facility at the above address

Steve Pany, Pany & Lentz Engineering Company, Robert Lysek, CEO of the Charter School and Mike Metzger, Alloy5: Architecture and Graphic Design.

Mr. Pany stated it is proposed to build on 33 acres, a 16,000 sq. ft., 1600-seat gymnasium that fronts Union Boulevard. Parking is shared with the stadium and is subject to a shared parking agreement. The staff comments have been reviewed and there are no concerns. Storm drainage will be handled by submitting documentation regarding the drainage patterns. Atty. Foucek asked if the applicant considered building the gym in the rear of the building. Mr. Pany said one of the problems it will eliminate parking. Mr. Stewart asked if they could add parking elsewhere. Mr. Pany said they could not substantially alter parking as stated in the shared parking agreement. There are 2800 parking spaces, 1200 for this building, 1600 for the Ironpigs.

Discussion continued on the parking situation if there are events planned simultaneous. Mr. Pany stated the agreement states the parking is "first come first serve". The school will have peak events in the winter months when no ball games are scheduled. Mr. Lysek added discussions were held with the Iron Pigs and events are scheduled around their games. Mr. Stewart asked for the future plans for the school. Mr. Lysek answered this is the last component to the school's plans for the next 5-10 years. Nothing externally, only internally. Atty. Foucek would like to have something in writing from the Iron Pigs in regards to the parking arrangements.

Mr. Buchvalt commented based on what he sees, if the building was built in the rear, it would affect 15 parking spaces. Mr. Pany said it would affect more than that. Mr. Lysek said building in the rear was looked at, but the Iron Pigs agree for building in the front.

Mr. Glazier asked if this would have a stage. Mr. Lysek said no, it is strictly a gymnasium. There is an auditorium elsewhere in the building.

Atty. Foucek asked what would the building look like and integrate with the neighborhood. Mr. Metzger explained it represents two materials that already exists the building. The buff colored brick, which is the main field of the existing building and the existing metal panels on the north side. The building will be a masonry building clad in brick and metal panels with polycarbonate translucent "glass" on the east & west facades. Discussion continued on the vertical elements in the commercial setting. Mr. Stewart asked if the new building could mimic and blend more into the horizontal elements of the existing building. Mr. Metzger said it could be studied and continued by saying where the building is going to be seen in direct view, along the east and west side, more horizontal panels are being offered.

Mr. Glazier pointed out this building is iconic to the City and believes this addition should honor that and look more as an organic outgrowth as proposed to just putting it there. Mr. Buchvalt suggested working with staff on addressing these concerns. Atty. Foucek concurred and the goal for everyone is to try to get the best result possible. Mr. Stewart agreed to work with the applicant.

Motion was made by Mr. Glazier to TABLE to a future meeting. Second by Damien Brown. Motion passed.

Atty. Foucek recused himself. Mr. Buchvalt assumed the chair.

Five City Center 8th & Walnut, 8th & Walnut Streets, LMA-2018-00004 & LDC-2018-00003, preliminary/final approval requested by City Center Investment Corporation. The application proposes to construct a 98-unit residential apartment building with five floors wrapped around an 801-space parking deck with nine levels.

J.B. Reilly, CEO of City Center Investment Corp., Jane Heft, Director of Design, Robert DiLorenzo, Project Manager, David Miller of Rettew Engineering, and KaMan Skinner of JDavis Architects, represented the applicant.

Mr. Reilly explained the project is a mixed-use project with the idea of creating a residential wrap around parking facilities so parking structures do not dominate the landscape and blend in with the residents across the street. All comments contained in the review letter are accepted and there are no issues with them. This parking deck will serve the Five City Center Office Tower during the day and the off peak hours will serve the residential and entertainment purposes.

Damien Brown asked what comments did Goody Clancy's have. Mr. Reilly said they had extensive comments on the material being used, how the wrap works in the neighborhood, and residential streetscape. Discussion continued on the neighborhood and the building design.

Mr. Glazier questioned the apartments proposed along Hall Street being at ground level and not as desirable because of traffic. Mr. Reilly agreed with that observation. The intention is to develop this as a campus and a park is planned to be developed across Hall Street and believe residential will be fine there. Mr. Glazier asked if there are any plans to close Hall Street. Mr. Reilly said he is not sure if it is possible to close Hall Street because it contains many utilities that would be very expensive to relocate. Christian Brown concurred and his main comment is he is losing sight of the campus and would prefer seeing the whole picture and not bits and pieces. Mr. Reilly said the plans are being reviewed in the context that it is a revolving campus and do not want to submit anything that may change.

Damien Brown questioned the roofline and would like to see a horizontal line as the building will be seen from a distance. Mr. Reilly said the screening is the same around the entire top. Ms. Skinner explained it is a metal-mesh fabric and would have to build a separate structure to support this fabric. Mr. Stewart agreed the stepping down of the metal-mesh fabric is awkward visually and are looking for creating a unique skyline for the City. Mr. Reilly said it might be seen from Lehigh Street, but not from Walnut Street or coming across the Eighth Street Bridge as the parking deck will be set back forty feet back from the end of the building but agreed to look at the roofline.

Mr. Reilly explained the entrances, retail, residents' parking spaces and other amenities the residential building will offer. Ms. Skinner explained the refuse procedure. Mr. Reilly explained public parking would be available on nights and weekends in the parking structure, but will be monitored.

Mr. Buchvalt suggested looking at some of the horizontal elements and possibly turn Hall Street into a pedestrian way that would still allow utility access, garbage trucks and other amenities. Christian Brown asked if a master plan could be submitted with each future submissions. Mr. Buchvalt concurred.

Mr. Kimmerly addressed the Commission in regards to the letter submitted by the Allentown Preservation League and PA State Historic Preservation Office. These letters reference the Elks building was demolished that was triggered by the City of Allentown selling a property that was H.U.D. funded and that prompted Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act to review. There was a Memorandum of Understanding that resulted in these two office to be able to comment in what the new building will look like that will replace the Elks

building. Mr. Reilly stated there is a detailed response to these letters included in the packet each member received.

Mr. Glazier made a motion to grant conditional PRELIMINARY/FINAL APPROVAL subject to addressing the comments contained in the staff letter of March 12, 2018, to the satisfaction of City staff, work with City Staff on the vertical elements and additional treatments on Hall Street and all future submissions to include a master plan for all future projects. Second by Damien Brown. Atty. Foucek abstained. Motion passed.

Atty. Foucek assumed the chair.

HAMILTON STREET OVERLAY DISTRICT REVIEW:

Urban Yoga, 542-544 Hamilton Street, design review to apply a vinyl lettering sign (3 ft. x 10.27 ft.) to 2nd floor front window requested by Stephanie MoDavis.

Stephanie MoDavis was present and explained her reason for the location and her logo. Christian Brown commented on the use of white, as it would look cheap. Ms. MoDavis said she would prefer a pearl white but the designer stated white would be more visible. Christian Brown said maybe a color that would blend in with the surrounding such as mortar colors or other queues to be classier instead of flashier. Ms. MoDavis said once she is established she hopes to find a way to have something classier, possibly a vertical sign. Christian Brown said in addition to the window decal a vertically projecting sign next to the doorway would be a nice way to go. Christian Brown said it is a strong suggestion to not use white but should do what she feels she wants to do.

Mr. Button made a MOTION to recommend approval for the sign at 542-544 Hamilton Street as submitted. Christian Brown seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Stewart introduced Hannah Clark as the new Senior Planner who will be helping with the drafting of the Comprehensive Plan.

Informational discussion regarding the Comprehensive Plan – First Step (Rescheduled from February 13, 2018 meeting)

Mr. Stewart explained the prior comprehensive plan was adopted in 2009 before the NIZ was in place. The Municipality Planning Code states every ten years the comprehensive plan needs to be redrafted or updated. The Planning Office drafted a purpose of the study and scope of various elements of the plan. A RFP will be going out within the next few weeks and will be in conjunction with the consultants that will be working on the H.U.D. grant five-year program. Housing programs are vital to the comprehensive plan. The plan is vitally important to the City and will be the guide that will be used for decision making in the future.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,


Jeanne Marsteller, Recording Secretary

A video recording of this meeting is available at:

http://allentownpa.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=1&clip_id=446