

**Monthly Meeting of the
Allentown City Planning Commission**

March 11, 2025

DRAFT Minutes

Attendance:

- **ACPC Board Members:** Chris Brown (Chair), Craig Beavers (Vice Chair), Jeff Glazier (Secretary), Kelli Holzman, Erich Hornung
 - **City Staff Members:** Jennifer Gomez, David Petrik, Michael Handzo, Lillian Bernstein, Jesus Sadiua, Brandon Jones, Melissa Velez
 - **Others present:** Drew Nyman (Extension Request); Naomi Centrella, Abby Goldfarb, Sherri Binder (Zoning Amendment); Michael Houston (Waiver Request); Erich Hornung, David Hornung (213-215 N Fountain St); Ron Corkery, Manny Makhoul (701 N 8th St and East Side Land Development); Joe Rentko (East Side Land Development); Elizabeth Hickman, Brian R. Engler Sr., Bonnie Wachter, Troy Shorter, James Molchany, Patricia M. Engler, Tom Yuracka, Jeff Wetherhold, Haitham Samaan, Pauline Hutt, Merrily Starkey, Ibolya Balog, Kevin Ketchen
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Meeting called to Order at 12:17 PM

Announcements/Revision of Agenda: Craig Beavers made a motion to amend the agenda to include the extension request for 902 Union Blvd. Christian Brown seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes from February 11th, 2025

Item #1 - Approval of minutes – No comments, corrections. Unanimously approved as written.

Extension Request

Item #2. Project: Dunkin Donuts
 Applicant: Base Engineering, Inc
 Location: 902 Union Blvd.
 Description: Request to extend conditional approval to April 2026.
 File: LMA-2020-00010

Presentation/Discussion:

Jennifer Gomez presented an overview of the project, originally a Wooshoo Burger approved in November 2020. The project has since changed ownership to Dunkin Donuts. This would be the fourth extension of the approval. Staff does not object to request.

Drew Nyman presented on behalf of the applicant, explaining that their most recent submission in January will be reviewed by April 2025, which is when their current approval will expire. The project received PennDot HOP Permit in January, which will expire December 2025. The applicant is hoping to have the Dunkin Donuts constructed by the end of 2025.

Chris Brown stated that he has no problem granting the request knowing the progress that has been made and considering the ownership change.

Public Comment: None

Action:

Jeff Glazier made a motion to grant the 12-month extension until April 12, 2026. Kelli Holzman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Zoning Amendment

Item #3.

Description: Amending Chapter 660 (ZONING) of the City of Allentown Zoning Ordinance by amending Section 660-6 to remove the limitation on preparation and provision of meals for only senior citizens within the community center definition.

File: Bill 16-2025

Presentation/Discussion:

Michael Handzo provided an overview and analysis of the proposed zoning amendment, which would strike the second sentence within the definition of a Community Center in the zoning ordinance 660-6. Mr. Handzo explained that the term "Senior Citizens" is ambiguous within the zoning ordinance, and it is always beneficial to clean up ambiguities.

Naomi Centrella spoke on behalf of the petitioners, stating that while the meal service limitation will be left out of the new zoning ordinance anyway, in the interim, there could be enforcement issues relating to the current language.

Chris Brown inquired about the zoning special exception application that triggered this petition. Ms. Centrella explained that one of the petitioners, RCI Village Properties, had submitted a special exception relating to a Community Center, which was denied. The applicant appealed to the Court of Common Pleas and the judge affirmed the denial of the special exception on the basis that the applicant did not affirmatively state on record that they would not serve meals to non-senior citizens. Ms. Centrella stated that they seek to avoid this ambiguity not just for the applicant but for other community centers in the city.

Chris Brown and Michael Handzo discussed that RCI Village Properties' special exception application could be resubmitted to the Zoning Hearing Board for review under the new definition, if the amendment is passed.

Jeff Glazier inquired about the timeline for the ZONEAllentown rewrite, as well as the timeline of RCI Village Properties' project. Jennifer Gomez explained that the Planning Staff hopes to submit a final new zoning code in May, which would then trigger a multi-step review process that would be completed several months after May. Sherri Binder, Executive Director of RCI Village Properties, explained that the zoning approval process is the first step in a longer process for their project, but reiterated that the petition is not specifically tied to their special exception application.

Kelli Holzman asked about the impact of the existing language on existing community centers. Naomi Centrella explained that one of the petitioners, Lehigh Conference of Churches, serves meals three times a day to people who visit the center, including ambulance drivers and firefighters.

Public Comment:

Ibolya Balog, 1522.5 Chew St, spoke on behalf of the West Park Civic Association. Ms. Balog stated that residents of the West Park neighborhood oppose RCI Village Properties' planned use of the site at Emmanuel Church.

James Molchaney, 121 N 15th St, argued against utilizing church spaces for uses that do not generate tax revenue, and that people congregating around the church impacts parking and sidewalk usage.

In response to public comments, Michael Handzo, Chris Brown, and Jennifer Gomez explained that any parking or high intensity use issues would be addressed by the Zoning Hearing Board for specific cases. They further explained that the Planning Commission is not considering a specific zoning case and any decision made by the Planning Commission regarding the zoning amendment is advisory.

Holland Hunter, 737 W Tilghman St, stated that the ordinance should include a method of determining the housing status of people receiving meals.

Michael Handzo clarified that the current and proposed zoning ordinance utilizes the term "nonprofit" in the definition of Community Center. The determination of who is being fed is an operational concern that is often imposed by funding entities.

Craig Beavers reiterated that they are solely considering the text amendment, not reviewing or considering any specific project.

Action: Craig Beavers made a motion to recommend the zoning amendment favorably for passage by City Council. Erich Hornung seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Waiver Request

Item #4. Applicant: Arthur A. Swallow Associates, LLC
 Location: 856-860 N. Van Buren St
 Description: Waiver request for 350-26.C.(4) regarding frontage on public streets in association with a minor subdivision plan.
 File: SMI-2024-00005

Presentation/Discussion:

Melissa Velez provided an overview of the project as well as a summary of the staff report. The applicant proposes a set of twin dwellings fronting on North Uhl Street which connects to East Kurtz Street, with both streets being less than the minimum width to be considered a "Public Street." The applicant had not provided evidence of unique physical conditions of the property that are creating an undue hardship to justify the waiver. Given these reasons and to maintain consistency of the SALDO, staff is not in favor of granting the waiver from Section 350-26.C(4) of the SALDO. If the Commission is in favor of the waiver, staff recommends requesting for sidewalks to be added.

Michael Houston presented the project plans, including an exhibit that showcases seventeen lots within an approximate quarter mile radius of the proposed project that also front on alleys. Jeff Glazier later asked Jennifer Gomez for her feedback on the exhibit. Ms. Gomez stated that there are houses fronting on alleys throughout the city, which may prompt a closer examination of this section of the SALDO. However, the proposed twin dwellings would be the only homes fronting on this particular alley. In the future, the Planning staff plans to identify alleys that have strong frontage to find ways to improve alley development.

Chris Brown inquired about the applicant's willingness to install sidewalks on East Kurtz Street and North Uhl Street. Michael Houston stated that the owner is agreeable to install sidewalks and provide an easement to the city. Chris Brown stated that he supports granting the waiver.

Craig Beavers asked about other improvements associated with the subdivision. Mr. Houston stated that they are proposing to widen East Kurtz Street. Craig Beavers asked if the applicant could add an extra foot of right-of-way for vehicular access. Mr. Houston explained that this would lead to issues with side yard setback requirements. Chris Brown inquired about curbing. Michael Houston explained that the existing utility pole sits exactly on the curb line, and that the applicant will be willing to move the existing pole to make room for curbing.

Jeff Glazier expressed concerns about vehicular access as well as the parking in the front. Kelli Holzman stated that the proposed plan fits in with the character of the neighborhood. Craig Beavers later asked if the applicant would be willing to obtain review and approval from the Fire Chief for vehicular access. Jennifer Gomez stated that the Planning staff had spoken to the Fire Chief who had no concerns about the ability to access homes.

Jeff Glazier asked if the lot would be develop-able without a waiver. Jennifer Gomez stated that there are several other waivers involved with the project. Jeff Glazier stated that given the character of the neighborhood, the Commission's preference for infill development, and the developer's willingness to install sidewalks, he supports granting the waiver.

Erich Hornung asked if any of the trees will be preserved. Michael Houston stated that the trees on the north side of the lot will remain, but the trees on the west side will be removed. New trees will be installed to comply with the Shade Tree requirements.

Public Comment: None

Action:

Jeff Glazier made a motion to approve the waiver with the following conditions:

- Addition of the sidewalks connecting to Van Buren Street

- The relocation of the utility pole
- If necessary, providing a pedestrian easement for sidewalks
- If possible, the additional widening of the road with the back of curb to the right-of-way line

Erich Hornung seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Adaptive Re-Use

Item #5. Applicant: David Hornung Architects
 Location: 213-215 N Fountain St
 Description: Proposal to convert warehouse/office to 5 apartment units.
 File: SP 25-01

Presentation/Discussion:

Being a party to this proposed adaptive re-use project, Erich Hornung recused himself due to a conflict of interest.

Melissa Velez provided an overview of the project as well as summary of the staff report. Along with the adaptive re-use application, the project also has insufficiencies for minimum lot area per dwelling unit and off-street parking. The Fire Department has expressed concern about the difficult access for emergency vehicles as well as the means of egress from the dwellings and the increased risk of fire from the conversion from business use to residential.

Erich Hornung and Dave Hornung presented their updated fire plan, addressing concerns raised by the Fire Chief. Erich Hornung outlined the proposed fire safety features, including 2-hour fire-rated walls between floors and between apartment units. They are proposing a smoke actuating system including fire alarms, fire alarm pull stations, an iodine sensor detector, carbon monoxide detectors, heat detectors, and a control panel on the first floor. They are also proposing an added fire door in the first-floor handicapped apartment along with an area of refuge to prevent egress into the parking area.

Chris Brown asked if sprinklers will be required for the parking deck. Erich Hornung explained that the need is currently being evaluated and if the city determines that sprinklers are needed, they will add them.

Mr. Brown inquired about the plans for laundry. Erich Hornung explained that they plan to have in-unit laundry. Kelli Holzman later remarked that there is a laundromat nearby.

Chris Brown asked about the plans for trash pick-up. Erich Hornung showed the spot inside the parking area where trash cans will be picked up. They discussed the choice between public and private trash pick-up. Kelli Holzman expressed concerns over the trash pick-up and recommended further evaluation.

As a representative of Old Allentown, Chris Brown said he appreciates the building being put to productive use.

Mr. Brown asked about the plans for HVAC. David Hornung said the apartments will have HVAC split units, with outdoor compressors to be mounted at the back of the building. There are gas-fired wall units in the garage area with exhaust pipes visible on the south façade.

Chris Brown stated that this will need to go to the Shade Tree Commission, and fees will likely need to be paid in lieu of street trees.

Craig Beavers stated that with the Fire Chief's approval and the added safety features, he supports the project.

Jeff Glazier commented that this is the first adaptive re-use in which he noticed fire comments prompting significant changes to a project, which he sees as a good thing. Ms. Gomez explained that the fire comments were relayed by the Fire Chief at the project's pre-application. In the past, adaptive re-use applications were not typically routed to the AFD for comments. After this project, however, such applications will be routed to the AFD for review.

Chris Brown inquired about the possibility of altering windows or adding skylights to increase daylight access.

Kelli Holzman asked how mail will be handled. Different mail delivery options were discussed.

Public Comment:

Manny Makhoul, 1145 W. Turner St, offered a recommendation to place the HVAC unit on the roof.

In response, Erich Hornung commented that he would look into placing HVAC on the roof.

Action:

Craig Beavers made a motion to forward favorably with the following conditions:

- Evaluating trash combinations internal to the building for adequacy
- Circulation and compliance with the Shade Tree Commission
- Addressing concerns raised by the Fire Chief

As well as the following conditions outlined in the Planning Staff Report:

- Complying with any conditions of approval of HARB/City Council
- Completing a sewer planning module
- Resolving any outstanding zoning issues

Jeff Glazier seconded the motion. The votes were as follows:

Yae - 4

Abstained - 1

Item #6. Applicant: Ponce Holding Company
 Location: 701 N 8th St

Description: Proposal to convert community center and place of worship to 6-unit apartment building.

File: SP 25-02

Presentation/Discussion:

Jennifer Gomez provided an overview of the project as well as a summary of the staff report.

Attorney Ron Corkery and Manny Makhoul presented their project. Mr. Makhoul submitted and presented renderings of the proposed apartment building. This included a plan for back-in parking at the rear of the lot. Michael Handzo commented that a zoning approval will be needed for back-in parking.

Erich Hornung inquired about the required handicap unit and handicap parking spot. Mr. Makhoul explained that the current plan incorporates a handicap unit.

The painted exterior was discussed. Mr. Makhoul explained that the front will be painted brick, and the sides will be painted stucco. Chris Brown cautioned against using paint on a plaster wall. Mr. Makhoul stated that he will be using a dynamic wash and a primer for painting. Chris Brown also cautioned the use of dark colors on a natural brick façade. Mr. Makhoul described how the exterior of the building will match the coloring and design of “The Mentor” apartment building across the street. Erich Hornung later noted that the space between two dark buildings will create a heat island effect. Kelli Holzman commented that the two buildings do not necessarily need to match, and that the original brick in the front looks in good condition.

Craig Beavers commented on the building’s front façade, asking if there can be additional windows added. Chris Brown agreed with Mr. Beavers, and recommended they offer alternatives for embellishing the front.

Chris Brown remarked that the exterior lighting of Mr. Makhoul’s project across the street, “The Mentor”, was ultimately not appropriate. The current proposal includes downward facing LED lights, and Mr. Brown wants to ensure that the proposed lights do get implemented.

Regarding the proposed rear parking design, Chris Brown expressed concerns over the pillar. Mr. Makhoul stated that he plans to wrap the pillar in steel. Erich Hornung recommended placing bollards to prevent driving into the pillar. Kelli Holzman asked if the necessary parking spots for this project could be reserved within their nearby apartment’s parking lot. Mr. Makhoul explained that he is not able to do so.

The trash receptacles were discussed. Chris Brown stated that the trash should be contained internal to the building rather than outside. Kelli Holzman agreed that trash in the front is not ideal. Mr. Makhoul explained that he plans to keep the trash bins in a shed and bring them out only for trash pick-up.

Chris Brown asked if the plan can be circulated to the Shade Tree Commission. Erich Hornung recommended keeping the planters at the front of the building. Craig Beavers commented that pending Shade Tree comments, any added greenery would be welcomed.

Erich Hornung inquired about the safety of the means of egress. Jennifer Gomez clarified that they do not typically send adaptive re-use plans for review from the Fire Chief unless the street is extraordinarily narrow. Issues related to egress are covered within the building permit process.

Public Comment:

Patricia M. Engler, 726.5 W. Tilghman Street, raised concerns about parking. The construction of the developer's nearby building obstructed several parking spaces, and there are concerns that this construction will do so as well. Ms. Engler also raised concerns about the trash bins in the front, the overuse of the lot size per unit, the stapling of the Planning Commission notice onto a telephone pole, and the use of permanent "Apartment for Rent" signs on "The Mentor." She would like to see a reduction from 6 to 4 units for this project.

Bonnie Wachter, 706 N 8th Street, raised concerns about availability of parking as well as the impacts of putting garbage cans at the front of the building. She believes a 4-unit project would be more feasible than a 6-unit project.

Holland Hunter, 737 W Tilghman Street, expressed concerns about the feasibility of the parking in the back of the building. There are accidents that happen in this alley and back-in parking will be challenging. She expressed concerns about garbage being left out, recommending an enclosed garbage area. She also stated that a 4-unit building would be more feasible.

In response to public comments, Craig Beavers clarified that the Zoning Hearing Board will be decision-making body for all parking related special exceptions or variances.

Action:

Craig Beavers made a motion to forward favorably with the following conditions:

- Consider against using dark paint
- Completing a sewer planning module
- Subject to the renderings submitted at the March 11, 2025 ACPC meeting, install new windows on the ground floor at the front of the building to break up the walls.
- Subject to the specific exterior lighting submitted, one foot candle maximum at the property line except for the rear property line.
- Install trees along all frontages and receive approval from the Shade Tree Commission
- Obtain additional Zoning relief for the parking that backs out into the alley
- Retain the planters on 8th Street and remove the proposed trash enclosure from view along the street frontages
- Zoning Hearing Board to strongly evaluate the adequacy of the parking

With consideration to the following:

- Consider seeking available off-street parking in the vicinity to comply with the parking requirements.
- Consider installing bollards for the post in the rear parking area

Erich Hornung seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously

Item #5. Project: East Side Land Development
Applicant: East Side Land Development LLC
Location: 620-750 East Turner St
Description: Proposal to develop an apartment complex of six 30-unit apartment buildings.
(Preliminary plan)
File: LMA-2024-00001

Jennifer Gomez provided an overview of the project as well as a summary of the staff report. This is a preliminary plan, and no submission has been made to LVPC. The Planning Staff has received several calls from neighbors raising concerns about traffic and circulation.

Attorney Ron Corkery and Joe Rentko presented the project. Mr. Rentko explained that the current layout accommodates significant grade changes throughout the property. Mr. Rentko explained that given the slopes, any added pedestrian pathways would require steps. Chris Brown later responded to this idea, stating that steps would be appropriate for the sake of connectivity and pedestrian mobility. Kelli Holzman later reiterated Mr. Brown's comments, stating that she would like to see increased pedestrian pathways for getting on and off the site. Manny Makhoul explained that paths to nearby roads face steep slopes.

Regarding the emergency path between buildings 3 and 6, Mr. Rentko clarified that it will not be accessible to tenants and will only be used for emergency vehicle turnaround. Chris Brown later remarked that dead end parking lots should be avoided. Mr. Rentko said they could look into expanding that emergency access between 3 and 6 into a permanent drive to reduce the number of dead ends.

Mr. Renko stated that they may be needing a waiver for the city's ordinance regarding storm water infiltration rate.

Chris Brown requested for future submissions to include at least one plan that showcases the entirety of the site without match lines.

Building heights were discussed. Manny Makhoul and Joe Rentko explained that floors 2 and 3 will be full floors, and the 1st floor will be built into the slope, with access only from one side. Chris Brown expressed a preference for taller buildings with a more compact design. Erich Hornung later recommended reducing the number of buildings to 5 and increasing the height of the buildings or varying the heights of the buildings. Michael Handzo clarified that the maximum height is 38 feet or 3 stories, with height being measured from the average point of grade to the highest elevation of the building.

Mr. Brown stated that high quality exterior building design and landscaping could resolve some of his issues with the overall project. Mr. Hornung later offered a recommendation to find a specific architectural style to tie all the buildings together.

Chris Brown asked about the ongoing tree clearing and earth disturbance violation. Mr. Makhoul stated that he is working with the conservation district.

Chris Brown expressed concerns about the dumpster location and how it will be accessed and serviced. Mr. Rentko explained that they are still identifying a trash pick-up plan.

The gated entrances were discussed. Chris Brown expressed concerns about the space for turnaround outside the gates. Craig Beavers stated that he thinks a gate is inappropriate for a dense community like this, citing delivery problems, emergency access, and visitor access as some of the issues that would arise. Kelli Holzman and Jeff Glazier expressed concerns about a gated entrance, which would disconnect the development from the surrounding community.

Impacts on traffic were discussed. Craig Beavers inquired about traffic circulation and the impact of the project on the side streets. Mr. Rentko explained that a trip generation study is required for a future submission. Mr. Makhoul and Mr. Rentko asked if there are specific thresholds regarding the outcome of the trip generation study. David Petrik explained that the purpose is to evaluate the impact on adjoining streets. Erich Hornung stated that there is significant traffic through this area and recommends allowing traffic through East Turner Street as well as moving the accessory buildings to the northern side of East Turner Street for better flow. Craig Beavers urged the applicant to reconsider East Turner Street being private. Manny Makhoul argued that the cost to extend East Turner Street will make the project infeasible. Jeff Glazier explained that the Northridge development incorporated public roadways because the increased density of their project would be impacting traffic. Connecting East Turner Street would be a great benefit to the community.

Mr. Hornung expressed concerns about the spray irrigation basin affecting adjacent properties due to wind drift. Mr. Rentko explained that the spray heads will face inward, but he will look into it.

Chris Brown summarized the Planning Commission's comments, clarifying that the commission's comments are rooted in the idea of integrated and community design.

The applicant's LVPC submission was discussed. Jennifer Gomez recommended that the applicant resubmit plans to the Planning Commission and subsequently submit to LVPC. The Planning Commission cannot approve preliminary or final plans until the plans have been submitted to LVPC.

Public Comment: Lillian Bernstein read the following comment into the minutes: Faren Shade, 649 E Westminster St, stated that large amounts of water are flowing from the project site down Graham Street to Westminster.

Action:

Jeff Glazier made a motion to table the project. Kelli Holzman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Announcements

Jennifer Gomez provided a brief progress update for the ZONEAllentown. The Planning Staff has posted a second public review draft. There are two versions of each code: a redline version and a clean version. There is also a memo posted online that provides more description of what has changed. Comments will be cut off on March 21, 2025. Planning Staff hopes to make final revisions and bring the text to the commission in May for formal introduction.

Meeting adjourned at 4:33 pm

DRAFT