

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING
PLANNING COMMISSION
NOVEMBER 1, 2023**

The West Reading Planning Commission met for their regular meeting on Wednesday, November 1, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. at Borough Hall with the following persons present: Chair Philip Wert; Vice Chair Christopher Lincoln; Members Cody Rhoads, Daniel Horman, and Jennifer Bressler; Zoning Officer and Code Department Manager Chad Moyer; Borough Manager Dean Murray; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira. Members Kacie Rodriguez and Zanna Leiendecker were unable to attend.

Visitors

Mark Evans, Derck & Edson, LLC

Steve Ware, Derck & Edson, LLC

Mr. Wert called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the October 4, 2023 minutes. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Horman.

Motion carried 5-0.

New Business

- a. **Zoning Update – Form Based Codes – Session 3** – Mr. Evans noted that most of the time this evening will be discussing permitted uses. The plan of action for the hybrid form-based code is how to control form. The existing zoning districts appear to be an appropriate approach to control use. Moving forward, Mr. Evan’s recommended the use of both a regulating and use plan. Characterization of frontage districts will be recognized by minimums and maximums, such as a minimum two-story and maximum six-story structure in the Central Business District (CB). The desired form of street frontage types for a main street, main street transition, neighborhood professional, gateway, service and commercial areas were reviewed.

Zoning Districts:

A review of the existing zoning map and various existing uses by district were discussed with regards to professional office space and residential uses on the ground floor. Mr. Wert, Mr. Lincoln, and Mr. Horman were in favor of retaining retail uses in the 700 block of Penn Avenue as opposed to the recommended General Business District Overlay that would promote professional office space. The 300 block of Penn Avenue has two parcels on the south side closest to the 400 block that would be more appropriately included in the CB regulations. Mr. Evans noted the geographical vertical shift of the reaming parcels on the south side of the 300 block of Penn Avenue that may be appropriate to uses of the General Business District (GB). The GB overlay was recommended to be removed from the 700 block of Penn Avenue.

Automobile oriented use locations were discussed as to where to allow these types of uses, such as motor vehicle repair, motor vehicle sales, motor vehicle washing, and drive-in service places. In the GB Overlay District, a special exception would allow these types of uses. It was noted that a drive-in eating or drinking service establishment would be permitted by right in the GB. It was recommended to prohibit drive-in service places in the GB and GB Overlay Districts, and to remove the option of special exceptions from these districts. It was thought that drive-in uses would be preferred on the north side of town.

Mr. Evans noted that a number of institutional uses are currently not allowed in the Institutional District (I) and inquired as to the desired character of the area from the traffic circle to the Buttonwood Street Bridge. An extension of the CB was noted as a preference. Mr. Murray shared that two of the parcels on the south side of Buttonwood Street are not connected to a public sewer, and that a pump station would be required to make that connection.

Mr. Evans recommended reconsidering the Light Industrial District (LI) designation for areas that are currently residential and medical facilities. He noted the difficulty in financing development of multiple use structures. Mr. Wert recommended considering the creation of a new transitional Gateway District to support a varied number of uses for the current I and LI parcels located between the traffic circle and Buttonwood Street Bridge. Mr. Moyer noted that the two current institutional uses are not congruent to the flow of creating a commercial or gateway use from Penn Avenue or the traffic circle. A few recent use inquiries for the LI were a fitness center, apartment building, and senior living facility which are not compatible uses to a LI. Mr. Evans recommended consideration of an Artisan Production transitional type use for furniture, stained glass, and pottery makers.

It was recommended by Mr. Evans to consider the establishment of secondary ground floor use in an area 30' to 40' behind the commercial frontage. An example of Bold Realty was provided where a coffee shop is in the front with a realty office space in the rear. Mr. Wert noted that a percentage had been used as opposed to a reference point for secondary use.

Acceptable uses in the new Gateway District were thought to be medical professional such as a doctor's office but not a nursing home, and residential.

It was noted that the GB does not allow restaurant use and that Candlewood Suites does not have an auto-oriented restaurant nearby that could potentially be established within that vicinity. Members agreed to allowing that type of use. Also, the north side of the 700 block of Reading Avenue was thought to be conducive to an auto-oriented eating establishment.

Mr. Lincoln departed the meeting at 7:30 p.m. The remainder of the meeting was used as a workshop due to the lack of a quorum.

The GB designation within the 700 block of Reading Avenue was reviewed in comparison to the 2020 Master Plan that provided slanted parking and auto-oriented restaurant uses for this area. The overall intent for Reading Avenue was to create an extension of Penn Avenue and the CB. Redevelopment of the shopping center and apartment complex within the 500 blocks of Penn and Reading Avenues was desired.

Mr. Evans noted available funds within the grant to perform a parking study and the good decision not to require parking facilities for commercial uses within the CB. Mr. Wert noted previous discussions to create additional paid parking through shared parking programs with various property owners and the current paid parking program within the shopping center that has lessened certain parking stresses. Residential parking stresses were identified as well as discussions to perform a Borough-wide permit parking program. Mr. Evans recommended establishing a per bedroom parking requirement as opposed to two spaces per unit to avoid penalizing studio type uses. Mr. Moyer shared that converting the 700 block of Reading Avenue from GB to CB would remove the commercial space parking requirements and could foresee an increase in first floor residential to commercial conversions.

Regulating Plan:

Commercial parking standards could be loosened in the regulating plan to be more permissive in the types of ground floor use. Building frontages would not be required to be as close to the street along Reading Avenue.

Mr. Evans referred to the Table of Uses and the orange cells that represent uses that could be simplified by merging and requested feedback. Mr. Wert preferred all efforts to simplify the reading of the zoning ordinance. Mr. Evans noted plans to continue to rethink the districts and zoning map and review areas to insert the noted regulations with the least amount of disruption to the existing ordinance sections.

Sign Types and Definitions:

Mr. Ware provided a number of definitions noting that the definition of mural could be kept in both the sign and zoning definition sections. Feedback was requested on the provided list of permitted, not permitted, and exempt sign locations. Graphic images were shared for the ease of understanding sign regulations. Contact will be made with General Code to determine how best to include these graphics within the ordinance.

Mr. Evans and Mr. Ware departed the meeting at 8:33 p.m.

- b. **Mechanical Equipment** – Mr. Moyer referred to modified language to add to the yard requirement section of the zoning ordinance to limit the placement of mechanical equipment in the front yard and to require screening. The reference to architectural and landscape style screening was noted to be open to interpretation. The definition of Screening that is included in the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance was found to be acceptable and requested to be added to the zoning ordinance definition section.

A draft ordinance amendment will be provided for consideration next month due to the lack of a quorum.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira
Borough Secretary