

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING
PLANNING COMMISSION
JANUARY 3, 2024**

The West Reading Planning Commission met for their regular meeting on Wednesday, January 3, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. at Borough Hall with the following persons present: Chair Philip Wert; Vice Chair Christopher Lincoln; Members Daniel Horman, Cody Rhoads, Kacie Rodriguez (via Zoom), and Jennifer Bressler; Zoning Officer and Code Department Manager Chad Moyer; Borough Manager Dean Murray; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira. Member Zanna Leiendecker was unable to attend.

Visitors

Mark Evans, Derck & Edson, LLC

Steve Ware, Derck & Edson, LLC

Mr. Wert called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the December 6, 2023 minutes. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Horman.

Motion carried.

New Business

- a. **Discussion with Derck & Edson – Downtown Zoning Ordinance – Session 5** – Mr. Evans referred to a recommended agenda to review a portion of the lengthy information that was provided this month of a first draft of zoning amendments.

Proposed Zoning Format Changes

Mr. Ware provided an overview of the proposed format changes noting no changes to Part 1 General Provisions, Part 2 would have the new hybrid form-based code definitions inserted. Article XV was proposed to be inserted in Part 3 District Regulations to change the General Business Overlay District to a new Gateway District. Article XVIII was proposed as a Downtown Overlay District replacing the Commercial and Light Industrial Overlay with new sections such as street frontage types, service frontage, and edging elements. Reserved numbering was placed throughout for future changes. Mr. Evans recommended a legal review of the proposed numbering sequence as well as comments on referring all downtown uses of defined procedures and supplemental regulations to one section, Section 455-113. For ease of reference, a table of permitted uses will depict allowable use districts. The solicitor's office will be requested to provide feedback by the end of the month.

Zoning Map

Mr. Evans noted the Institutional District has been converted to a Gateway District for the Buttonwood Street corridor that would have its own set of standards. The Retail Frontage Overlay along the 400 through 700 blocks of Penn Avenue would restrict office or residential uses on the first floor and encourage active type uses to contribute to the vitality of Penn Avenue as a walkable district. The Office Frontage Overlay for the 300 block of Penn Avenue and the 500 through 700 blocks of Reading Avenue would allow retail, restaurant, or office space on the first floor but not residential uses within the front twenty feet. A strategic expansion of the business district onto Fifth and Sixth Avenue was recommended to connect Penn Avenue and Reading Avenue. It was also recommended to encourage structured parking in the center of the shopping center lined with street front retail uses. A minimum frontage occupancy would require appropriate district use.

Aspects of the Regulating Plan that controls form were reviewed. It was recommended to convert the 000 block of Tulpehocken Avenue, between Penn Avenue and Delaney Circle, to a parking lot based on the irregular shape and frontage of these parcels. Suggested dimensional standards were requested for North Eighth Avenue and it was recommended that Main Street Frontage standards apply to the wrap around area from Penn Avenue to a distance of thirty feet for continuity.

Frontage Standards

Mr. Evans recommended removing the storefront frontage standards from the area near the borough garage and the bridge that spans the river. Building stepback standards were reviewed recommending a six-to-ten-foot stepback based on the height of the building. These regulations would apply to all districts except for Neighborhood Professional. The maximum distance between entrances on Main Street was recommended not to exceed fifty feet and not to exceed sixty feet in Main Street Transition areas. Examples of two feet architectural massing setbacks were reviewed where changes in façade material were recommended at a maximum of every fifty feet. Examples of clear glazing standards for the Main Street Transition and Commercial districts were 50% between two and ten feet above the first floor. The neighborhood professional and eastern gateway districts were 40% between two and ten feet above the first floor. Rear setbacks were recommended to be sufficient to accommodate vehicle swing access.

Mr. Evans requested feedback of desired standards for the Eastern Gateway District. Minimum front and side façade zones were noted for the various districts. Minimum front parking setbacks were discussed with regards to five or ten feet for Main Street, Main Street Transition, Commercial, Neighborhood/Professional and Eastern Gateway. Robust landscape standards established in Philadelphia for ornamental fences/hedges or brick piers could be established in the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance. It was noted that 10 feet is a more suburban standard, with five feet as the urban standard. Commission members agreed to five feet as the standard minimum front parking setback.

Main Street Frontage minimum lot dimensions and building forms were reviewed that would allow a five story building with a maximum building footprint of 20,000 square feet, which would prevent big box stores from being established on Main Street. The most restrictive standard for the core of the downtown would require building placement standards of 0-5'.

Permitted Uses

Mr. Evans requested commission members to review the permitted use tables and signage to provide feedback. The commission planned to work through uses next month to provide feedback to allow Mr. Evans and Mr. Ware to update the chart and prepare to meet again in March to discuss the remaining agenda items.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira
Borough Secretary