

The Easton Planning Commission met on Wednesday, December 5, 2012 in the 6th Floor Council Chambers, Easton City Hall. The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Charles Elliott. Present: Charles Elliott, James Bloom, Robert Sun, William Heilman, Dennis Lieb and Ronald Shipman. Also in attendance were staff members Becky Bradley, AICP; Director of Planning and Codes, Carl Manges; City Planner and Tina Woolverton, Secretary. Solicitor Joel Scheer was also present.

The agenda was approved.

A motion to approve the revised minutes of the November 7, 2012 meeting was made by Mr. Shipman, seconded by Mr. Lieb, approved by all.

Privilege of the Floor. Mr. Lieb noted that the smoke shop at 350 Larry Holmes Drive, which had come before the Commission in November for permission to expand their operation in the floodplain to include a check cashing use has since been robbed at gunpoint.

Special Exception and Development Plan – Silk Mill Phase I. City Planning staff recused themselves from the review. The review was performed by the City's alternate Engineer, Pennoni Associates, and David Horton and Earl Armitage presented the review. Mr. Pennoni said the applicant, the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Easton, has proposed to consolidate five parcels into two lots for the development of Phase I of the Simon Silk Mill site located along North 13th Street.

The applicant has also proposed to convert two existing buildings (K & J on the Building Site Plan) into a Mixed-Use Residential/Business and a parking accessory structure respectively. The Mixed-Use Residential/Business building includes an 11,070 square foot first floor commercial area, and 36 apartment units (1 & 2 bedroom) located on 2nd, 3rd, and 4th floors. Two surface accessory parking areas are also being proposed with this application. One parking area will have 47 spaces, and the other parking area will have 14 spaces. A retaining wall (living wall) and a fence are proposed at the 47-space parking lot. The specifications of this "living wall" and fence have not been provided to staff. To accommodate the 14-space parking area, the applicant has proposed the demolition of Building M. In total, 83 parking spaces will be created with this phase of the project. These proposed changes will take place on both Lot #1 and Lot #2, and are considered Phase I of the project. Proposed site improvements for Phase I of the project also include construction of a thru street (boulevard), extending 1,370 ft. from North 13th Street to Bushkill Drive. The applicant intends to dedicate this boulevard to the City of Easton.

Mr. Horton said an underground wet well (Sewage Pump Station) is also part of this application. Currently there is no waste water system on the site, and the wet well will pump the wastewater from the proposed project to the Easton Area Joint Sewer Authority line on N. 13th Street. A generator and a control panel for the wet well will be located above ground within a steel enclosure. The wet well, generator, and control panel will be located on Lot #2 at the southern portion of the property.

The site currently contains 18 buildings, with a gross floor area of 306,986 sq. ft. From the late 1800s to the 1970s, these buildings were used for textile manufacturing. The existing buildings are no longer in operation, and currently sit vacant.

The overall development plan, as proposed, will be consistent with several related plans including the Bushkill Creek Corridor Initiative which includes a series of inter-related projects: Lafayette College's rehabilitation of the buildings along N. 3rd Street, connecting to the Simon Silk Mill by the Karl Stirner Arts Trail. The Bushkill Creek Corridor Initiative is the largest multi-partner city re-visioning and investment project in the history of City with over \$15 million in investment to date between the three projects. Final direct and indirect investment is anticipated to exceed \$100 million.

Mr. Horton said the project is located in the River Corridors & Other Green Areas Zoning District, Block Class A, where the proposed Accessory Parking uses are permitted by right, and the Mixed-Use Residential/Business use is permitted by Special Exception. However, the site is also located in the Street Corridor Overlay District where Mixed-Use Residential/Business uses are permitted by right; therefore, no Special Exception is required for the proposed use. The site is also situated in a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) defined 100-year and 500-year floodplains, placing it in the Flood Hazard Overlay District, and requires Special Exception approval for development in a floodplain.

Proposals for the future development of the site include the conversion of other existing buildings on-site, along with the creation of additional surface parking and a parking deck structure. Per Article III §520-33(A), a developer may propose a development in stages and the City may approve same if the following is met; "The application for tentative approval covers the entire development and shows the location and time of construction for each stage, in addition to other information required by this chapter." The applicant has indicated there is no timetable for future phases of this project, and has not provided any estimates as when future phases may occur. The applicant shall note on the plans an estimate when future phases may occur. When the other phases of the project are ready, the applicant will be required to submit additional land development plans.

Mr. Earl Armitage of Pennoni Associates reviewed the details of the traffic portion of the plan. Based on the response letter from the applicant's traffic engineer, Traffic Planning and Design, to PennDOT dated November 7th, 2012, there was a meeting between PennDOT and the applicant on August 30th 2012 to review and discuss the proposed site driveway on N. 13th Street and PennDOT's review comments from July 2012. Mr. Armitage said the response letter noted that PennDOT agreed to not require a right turn deceleration lane since the lane cannot be constructed due to the adjacent building that will remain. He also noted trucks will be prohibited from using the N. 13th Street driveway, and that a concept plan was prepared for PennDOT's review for the intersection of N. 13th Street and Proposed site driveway, which includes a left turn lane on N. 13th Street by reducing the length of the left turn lane on N. 13th Street for the intersection with Bushkill Drive. The concept plan shows 10' wide travel lanes and 20' curbed radii with a shoulder.

Mr. Armitage noted the applicant should provide justification for the proposed 10 MPH posted speed limit in accordance with PennDOT Pub. 46, Pub. 212.108 and the PA Vehicle Code Section 3362 and 3363 related to maximum speed limits and alteration of maximum limits. As noted in section 3362, the maximum speed limit can be lowered below 35 MPH in urban districts only when special hazards exist as noted in section 3361. Warning signs with lower advisory speeds may be installed approaching horizontal curves along a roadway in accordance with the PA Code and Pub. 236.

Additionally, he said the applicant should provide justification for the proposed unsignalized midblock crosswalks in accordance with PennDOT Publication 46, Chapter 11.9. PennDOT has established minimum requirements for new midblock crossing installations in Chapter 11 for state roads that should be considered.

Mr. Armitage suggested that instead of the proposed raised section of roadway that extends over 300 feet, considering raised pedestrian crosswalks or raised intersections in accordance with PennDOT Publication 383 if the desire is to calm traffic for pedestrian accommodations. The proposed raised roadway appears to be an extended width crosswalk where pedestrians are permitted to cross throughout. This could result in additional pedestrian and vehicle conflicts since, as proposed, pedestrians would be permitted to cross any section of the 300+ foot raised crosswalk area. The width of the crosswalk is increased based on the number of pedestrians at the designated crossing. He said properly designed and constructed speed tables/raised pedestrian crossings can effectively control vehicle speeds and improve pedestrian safety. As noted in PennDOT's Traffic Calming Handbook, raised intersections may have only a minor effect on vehicle speeds due to their long flat top and gentle sloping ramps. He believes a similar effect would be realized with the proposed raised street while a speed hump or speed table would be more effective in reducing vehicle speeds.

Mr. Armitage said the applicant's traffic engineer noted that trucks will be prohibited from using the N. 13th Street driveway. As such he requested truck turning templates for the proposed site driveway on Bushkill Drive in addition to site circulation. He asked the Identity of the delivery routes and maximum truck sizes that will utilize the site. He added that the fire chief should review the proposed site layout, intersection radii and site circulation.

Mr. Shipman said he is concerned with the traffic issues and not sure how it can be solved. Mr. Horton said some traffic control will be gained through improvements to the intersection and timing changes to the stoplights. Mr. Armitage said a left turn lane will help, as well as the continued coordination with PennDOT. Mr. Shipman questioned pedestrian safety on 13th Street. Mr. Armitage said there are plans to bump out the curbing to slow traffic. Mr. Lieb expressed concern that the turn lane would be blocked by opposing traffic. Mr. Armitage said that would be addressed through re-timing the traffic lights. Mr. Lieb questioned the disposal plan for building M. Mr. Mulligan said the brick will be ground and used for basement fill, while any metal would be recycled and any asbestos disposed of properly.

Mr. Heilman questioned that no sewer is currently on-site. Mr. Bahnick, the project engineer from Van Kleef Associates said an old gravity system that crossed the creek had been previously used, but it has been damaged from the floods.

Mr. Sun said he is concerned with traffic exiting onto Bushkill Drive, toward 13th Street. He questioned if that intersection would have a no left turn provision. Mr. Armitage said he was not aware of such a provision. Mr. Sun asked if the City would eventually own the boulevard. Mr. Armitage said they would. Mr. Sun asked if the proposed wet well was for phase I only. Mr. Bahnick said it is designed for the entire project. Mr. Sun asked how the undeveloped buildings will be secured from the residents of phase I. Mr. Mulligan said the buildings would be aesthetically secured, not fenced. Mr. Sun asked if any trouble with security on the site was foreseen. Ms. Longenbach said the Redevelopment Authority is working closely with public works to secure the site and that

the more activity on site, the less trouble is anticipated. Mr. Sun questioned the prohibition of trucks from 13th Street. He asked how trucks would access the site. Mr. Bahnick explained the current plan is for housing, so typical trucks on site would be such as UPS and Fed EX, which would be permitted to use the 13th Street entrance. He added the secondary access from Bushkill Drive is a viable truck access. He said the size of trucks permitted on site would be limited. Mr. Sun questioned the tax implications of the development. Ms. Longenbach said the site is currently exempt, and once in the hands of a private developer is under the LERTA program, and possibly the KOZ program, if it is approved by Northampton County.

Mr. Bloom asked if bollards were an option on N. 13th Street. Ms. Bradley said a regional grant had been received, and one of the catalytic projects being funded by the grant are improvements to the N. 13th Street and Route 22 corridor. She added that the project is being addressed separately from the Silk Mill project. Mr. Bloom asked if the wet well system would have back up generators. Mr. Bahnick said it would. Mr. Bloom said he applauds the tree planting efforts on the plan.

Mr. Elliott questioned at what point an emergency evacuation plan would be required of this applicant. Ms. Bradley said historically, the evacuation plan has only been a requirement of the 100 year flood plain. Mr. Horton pointed out that only a small portion of the proposed parking is located in the 100 year flood plain. Mr. Elliott asked if a drainage plan would be required before final approval. Mr. Horton said one has been submitted, there are a few technical questions on it and some approvals from NPEDS are still needed. Mr. Bahnick added that NPEDS permits should be in place by spring.

Mr. Shipman questioned the level of requirements due to this portion of the Bushkill Creek being a coldwater trout fishery. Mr. Bahnick said due to it, permits from NPDES are at the highest level.

Ms. Longenbach thanked the Commission for their support, adding a tremendous amount of work and partnership has gone into the project. She said environmental remediation is ongoing and Act 2 clearance from the DEP will be received shortly. She said there is currently \$2,000,000 in RACP funding for the infrastructure improvements.

A motion to approve the revised resolution granting conditional preliminary approval of the development plan and recommending approval of the special exception to the Zoning Hearing Board was made by Mr. Shipman, seconded by Mr. Lieb, approved by all.

Ms. Bradley introduced a resolution of the Planning Commission for overall plan support of the project to be used in applying for the EDA grant for the Silk Mill site. A motion to approve the resolution was made by Mr. Sun, seconded by Mr. Bloom, approved by all.

2013 Meeting schedule. The proposed 2013 Planning Commission meeting schedule was distributed. A motion to accept the dates as shown was made by Mr. Lieb, seconded by Mr. Shipman, approved by all.

EAC Update. Mr. Elliott said the annual potluck dinner and meeting is being scheduled for the March meeting. He said at the December meeting, the 2013 priorities of energy, climate change, public outreach in the form of a webpage, tree plantings and a strategy for waste recycling were addressed.

Solar Ordinance Update. Ms. Bradley said a public meeting was being held on Tuesday, December 11 during the City Council workshop meeting.

Comprehensive Plan Re-write Update. Ms. Bradley said the following day would be the first joint meeting with the Envision Lehigh Valley folks in the Westward. It is being held at the Easton Area Neighborhood Center from 7:00 – 9:00 pm.

As there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM.

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