

The Easton Planning Commission met on Wednesday, July 7, 2010 in the 5th 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 Roger Paul. Also in attendance were staff members Becky Bradley, Director of Planning and Codes; Brian Gish, Chief Planner; Carl Manges, City Planner; and Tina Woolverton, Secretary. City Solicitor Joel Scheer was present.

The agenda was approved.

The minutes of the June 2, 2010 meeting were approved.

Privilege of the Floor. None.

Special Exception and Development Plan 660, 680 & 686 Lehigh Drive. Mr. Gish said the applicant, Badway Karam, proposes to use three parcels along Lehigh Drive for the storage of vehicles and non-hazardous landscaping materials. The site is in the FEMA defined 100 year flood plain. He said the site will be utilized by a landscape contractor who will keep vehicles and equipment parked there and small quantities of landscape materials, not to exceed a total volume of 50 cubic yards. No retail operation is proposed, existing buildings will not be used and no fuels or chemicals will be stored on-site. The applicant was present to answer questions. An evacuation plan has been made in the event of a flood watch to remove the material and vehicles from the site. Mr. Paul asked if the limited visibility for entering and exiting the driveway was a problem. Ms. Bradley said it is an existing condition and the City Engineer did not think it was an issue given the low volume of traffic. Mr. Sun questioned if there penalties for not removing the material should there be flood. Ms. Bradley said FEMA determines fines. Mr. Elliott asked if all materials would be stored in the existing concrete bins. Mr. Karam said they would. Mr. Elliott asked Mr. Karam if he would object to an added condition to the resolution requiring the storage of the materials to be in the bins. Mr. Karam said he would not object. A motion to accept the amended resolution for conditional final approval of the development plan and recommending approval of the Special Exception to the Zoning Hearing Board was made by Mr. Bloom, seconded by Mr. Heilman, approved by all except Mr. Lieb.

Special Exception - 32 N. 2nd Street. Mr. Manges said the applicants, William Oliver and Jeffrey Gilbert propose to convert an existing two story D-7 Professional Office Building to an A-1 single family detached dwelling. The property is located in the Downtown Zoning District, Block class C where the proposed use is permitted by Special Exception. A motion to approve the resolution recommending approval of the special exception to the Zoning Hearing Board was made by Mr. Lieb, seconded by Mr. Sun, approved by all.

Special Exception – 700 Philadelphia Rd. The applicant submitted a continuance waiver until August 31, 2010.

Sketch Plan Review – 616-630 Northampton Street – Dutchtown Commons. Ms. Bradley said the applicant, Louis Schwartz, proposes a nine-story mixed use structure with a ground floor General Merchandise (market and café) use, a 26 space parking deck on the second level, and 44 apartments on the upper levels. An additional 15 space parking lot is planned for the rear of the building and 11 parking spaces will be across the street. Mr. Glickman, Project Architect was present to answer questions. He said the design tries to reduce impact on Northampton Street by accessing from Pine Street. Mr. Lieb recused himself as a part of the development team for the proposed development. Mr. Paul said he is concerned with the proposed height. Mr. Sun asked the projected cost of the project. Mr. Glickman said the cost would be in excess of nine million dollars. Mr. Sun asked how much the apartments would rent for. Mr. Schwartz said it has not been finalized, but in the range of \$800-\$1200. Mr. Sun questioned the target markets. Mr.

Schwartz said both young professionals and retirees. Mr. Sun questioned the financing for the project. Mr. Schwartz said a market analysis provided that a grocery store would do well. He said the state of PA has a program for food store development and New Market Tax credits are available as well. Mr. Sun asked who the management team would be. Mr. Schwartz said his company, Regency Management would manage the development. Mr. Sun asked if the rentals would be section 8. Mr. Schwartz said it is not part of his plan. Mr. Sun questioned the scale of the project. Mr. Schwartz explained a certain number of rentals were required to cover the financing need. Mr. Sun asked if the necessity of a smaller project would make him walk away from the project. Mr. Schwartz said if a certain level of finance is not achieved, he would need a plan B. Mr. Sun questioned the motivation behind the project. Mr. Schwartz said Easton is underdeveloped, and it makes sense to accumulate properties in one area and develop it to gentrify the area. Mr. Bloom said there is a need for a grocery store in the area and asked if Mr. Schwartz had any in mind. Mr. Schwartz said he has interest from two groceries one of which is a major chain. Mr. Bloom asked how many employees there would be. Mr. Schwartz said for the property, three, and for the grocery, about 30. Mr. Elliott expressed doubt over the proposed height of the building and said approval to allow a residential highrise would constitute spot zoning. He said a mid-rise (3 to 5 stories) would only require a special exception. Mr. Elliott also said parking is a real issue. Mr. Sun acknowledged that the area does need to be dealt with but questioned staff if bringing a mass of people into the space would be a help. Ms. Bradley said the West Ward Neighborhood Partnership has a vision, not of a project this large, but of a similar stabilizing force for the neighborhood. She added she is not sure how this project would affect the transition from the downtown into the west ward. Mr. Tom Jones of 934 Butler Street said he finds only the grocery store aspect of the project appealing. He said a 106 review by PHMC is a requirement to secure the Food Trust funds and the current design is not sensitive to the surroundings. He said a practical concern is more section 8 housing if the project is not successful. Julie Zando-Dennis of 1032 Lehigh Street shared concerns over the proposed height. However, she also shared that she has seen similar development completely restore a distressed neighborhood, and she hopes the plan downscales, but remains. Esther Guzman, Director of the West Ward Neighborhood Partnership said she is also concerned with the height and security, but has also seen neighborhood transformations from this type of development.

At this time Mr. Lieb left the meeting.

Minor Subdivision – Union Fuel Property for the Karl Stirner Arts Trail. Ms. Bradley, as applicant on behalf of the City of Easton, recused herself from the discussion. Mr. Manges said the applicant, the City of Easton, proposes to subdivide existing property into two parcels located at 700 Bushkill Drive. The northern parcel, lot #1, would convey to the City of Easton to be utilized for the Karl Stirner Arts Trail. Lot #2 will remain in the ownership of Union Fuel and no development is proposed. A motion to approve the resolution granting conditional final subdivision approval was made by Mr. Bloom, seconded by Mr. Heilman, approved by all.

Preliminary Development Plan – S. Third Street Intermodal. Ms. Bradley, as applicant on behalf of the City, recused herself from the discussion. Staff explained the City of Easton, in cooperation with LANTA and the Easton Parking Authority, proposes to construct an Intermodal Parking facility on approximately 2.4 acres, comprised of two parcels located at 123 and 181 South Third Street. The facility would consist of a bus transfer center, located on the ground level, a three level parking garage with 361 parking spaces and a three story commercial building of 39,950 s.f. Mr. Bill Deegan, of Spillman Farmer Architects was present. He said the facility would be the new gateway into the City and would provide a more urban feel. He said the facility would include a pocket park with a water feature utilizing a cistern water collection system. He said in the public meetings, citizens and the Historic District Commission expressed a desire for an open and green space design. Mr. Fred Williams of LANTA was present. He said the project has been worked on for a long time, with the goals of safety and security for the patrons. He said this facility would allow for safe transfer and provide amenities to the patrons and drivers. Mr.

Paul questioned noise and fumes on Bank Street. Mr. Horton, of Pennoni Associates, the project Engineer, said it was an initial concern. He said idling busses will be required to exit and move to Ferry Street. Mr. Heilman asked how many parking spaces were in the existing garage. Mayor Panto said 550. Mr. Heilman asked if the erection of the facility would result in any lost revenue. Mayor Panto said there would be a loss in property taxes, but an increase in other revenues. Mr. Sun asked when construction would begin. Mr. Horton said if all approvals were received in September, the bid package would begin being prepared with the bid process occurring in late January, and construction in spring. Lynn Fraser of 1044 Ferry Street said she was glad the façade would change, but expressed concern over the park and fountain and suggested moving the fountain toward the front to soften the view from across the street. Dr. Roger Ruggles of 111 Parsons Street suggested expanding the sidewalk on Bank Street for pedestrian safety. A motion to approve the resolution recommending Special Exception approval to the Zoning Hearing Board and granting conditional preliminary approval of the development plan was made by Mr. Paul, seconded by Mr. Sun, approved by all.

EAC Update. Mr. Elliott distributed maps and brochures on the new bike racks throughout the downtown.

Staff Update. Ms. Bradley reminded the Commission that Heritage Day was the coming weekend, and mentioned the WE project at Connexions Gallery.

As there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:50 PM.