

The Easton Planning Commission met on Monday, September 9, 2013, at 6:30 p.m. in the Mayor's 6th Floor Conference Room, Alpha Building, One South Third Street, Easton, PA 18042. Planning Commissioners Charles Elliott, Ronald Shipman, Dennis Lieb, William Heilman, and Robert Sun were in attendance. The following Planning & Codes staff members were in attendance: Chief Planner Carl Manges and Planning Executive Secretary Mike Handzo. City Solicitor Joel Scheer was also present.

Mr. Elliott called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Mr. Elliott reported that former Director of Planning & Codes Becky Bradley was in attendance to receive an award from the Planning Commission for her service to the City. He turned the floor over to Mr. Sun to present the award. Mr. Sun commended the professionalism of the Planning Bureau staff, and indicated Ms. Bradley set this tone during her tenure. He remarked that she brought passion, dedication, and persistence to her work, and contributed to Easton's renaissance. Mr. Sun then presented Ms. Bradley with an award plaque from the Commission.

Ms. Bradley thanked the Commission for the award. She expressed her good fortune to have a bright professional staff at the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, indicated that she missed her former Planning Bureau staff and the Planning Commissioners, and remarked that Easton was home to her. Ms. Bradley offered the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission's professional services for the Comprehensive Plan Rewrite.

Mr. Elliott requested a change of wording in the minutes. Mr. Shipman moved, with Mr. Lieb seconding, that the minutes be approved as amended. The motion passed unanimously.

Privilege of the Floor. Mr. & Mrs. John Babraitis, of 215 E. St. Joseph Street, were present to address the Commission. Mr. Babraitis indicated they heard a rumor that the Easton Housing Authority was preparing to demolish an industrial building under their ownership on the block, and replace it with low-income housing. He asked the Commission if they could provide any further insight.

Mr. Elliott indicated that the Commission had not received any plan submittals pertaining to this project. Mr. Babraitis inquired about the plan submission process, which Mr. Manges and Mr. Scheer explained. Mr. Elliott said that housing was a use permitted by right in the South Side Zoning District, so a housing development proposal may not require zoning approval. Mr. Scheer suggested Mr. Babraitis directly contact the Housing Authority for additional information. Mr. Elliott informed Mr. Babraitis that, per the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, he could request to be placed on a list to be notified of particular zoning activities regarding the property. Mr. Heilman suggested Mr. Babraitis contact Mayor Sal Panto, as he is also a neighbor of the property in question.

Mrs. Babraitis expressed concerns about the condition of St. Joseph Street surrounding the King Mart. She reported that the dimly-lit market was selling spoiled food, alcohol, and cigarettes, and that the block in general was home to dilapidated housing stock and illegal daycare operations. Mr. Elliott suggested Mrs. Babraitis file complaints with the Bureau of Code Enforcement for redress, as citizen complaints provide Code Enforcement with the authority and incentive to conduct specific inspections of properties. Mr. Manges additionally suggested that the spoiled food at King Mart could warrant a Health Bureau complaint. Mr. Lieb indicated that he was familiar with the Housing Authority's intent to build new construction twin and row homes onsite versus adaptively reusing the property, as certain members of the Housing Authority had informally consulted with him on the matter. He advised neighbors to express their preferences for site development to the Housing Authority expeditiously.

660 – 692 Lehigh Drive – Special Exception. Mr. Manges read that the applicant, Blake Atherton, has proposed to establish an F1 – Trade Contractor use in a 1,500 square foot warehouse area in a one-story building, located at 660-692 Lehigh Drive. This warehouse space would be used strictly for the staging and storing of materials used in the applicant's remodeling business. On-site materials are proposed to consist of cabinets and countertops, plumbing fixtures, limited quantities of drywall, millwork/trim, windows, and doors. The materials would be purchased on a per-job basis, and not be stored in the warehouse for extended periods of time. Debris left over from jobs would be disposed of in a dumpster at the site. The dumpster will be emptied each time it reaches capacity. Company trucks would be parked over-night at the site within the gated area. No manufacturing of any kind would take place at the site. Previously, this site was used for a landscaping business.

The property is located in the River Corridor and Other Green Areas Zoning District; Block Class A, where the proposed F1 – Trade Contractor use is not permitted per Article XVII §595-88, and the applicant is required to obtain a Use variance from the Zoning Hearing Board. The property is also located in the Flood Hazard Overlay District, requiring Special Exception approval for use in the floodplain. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency Flood Insurance Rate Map 42095C0287 D, 660-692 Lehigh Drive is located in a Federal Emergency Management Agency defined 100-year floodplain. The applicants have submitted a flood evacuation plan stating when water levels reach Flood Action Stage of 16 feet, all vehicles; all construction materials and equipment would be relocated to the recovery site at 3216 Keystone Street in Bethlehem, PA, which is approximately 7 miles from the proposed site. The dumpster would be removed by Raritan Valley Disposal, and arrangements have been made in the case of a flood event. The applicant indicated that the evacuation procedure should not take more than 4-5 hours. A use agreement has been provided to staff from the owner of 3216 Keystone Street, Abel Juhasz, stating that the applicant has permission to evacuate the vehicles, materials, and equipment of 660-692 Lehigh Drive to his property when the waters of the Lehigh River approach Flood Action Stage.

A conversation with the applicant August 9, 2013, revealed that materials used in his remodeling business would be stored on-site on a per-job basis, and will not be in the building for any extended periods of time. Currently, this business has 3 employees associated with it. The applicant also informed staff that the water levels of the Lehigh River would be constantly monitored on the National Weather Service website, and specific attention will be placed at the monitoring station where the Lehigh River intersects the Borough of Glendon.

Mr. Manges indicated that the proposed use was compatible with the River Corridor and Other Green Areas Zoning District, the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, and neighboring land uses. Therefore, staff advocates Planning Commission recommendation to the Zoning Hearing Board for granting the Special Exception request to Blake Atherton for Use in a floodplain at 660-692 Lehigh Drive with conditions.

The applicant, Blake Atherton, was present. Mr. Lieb asked about the scope of his operation, with Mr. Atherton indicating he carried up to six (6) kitchen and bathroom remodeling jobs at once. Mr. Elliott asked why the proposed use was zoned as F1 – Trade Contractor versus F8 – Warehouse and Storage. Mr. Manges explained that the Zoning Administrator made the determination, and that a neighboring parcel with a similar use had received F1 – Trade Contractor zoning.

Mr. Elliott inquired if the debris referenced in the staff analysis would consist of unused construction materials or demolition debris; Mr. Atherton indicated the latter. Mr. Elliott asked how often the dumpster onsite would reach capacity, with Mr. Atherton explaining this would occur twice monthly. Mr. Elliott asked Mr. Atherton if he would be amenable to a condition mandating the emptying of the dumpster, to which Mr. Atherton agreed.

Mr. Elliott suggested an additional condition to the staff resolution, requiring that any dumpster on the property be emptied upon reaching capacity but no less frequently than once every sixty (60) days. Mr. Lieb moved, with Mr. Shipman seconding, that the Planning Commission recommend to the Zoning Hearing Board the granting of a Special Exception request to Blake Atherton for Use in a floodplain at 660-692 Lehigh Drive with conditions. The motion, as amended, passed unanimously.

Comprehensive Plan Update. Mr. Manges reported that the Comprehensive Plan Rewrite Community Task Force had been meeting frequently. He explained that he and Mr. Handzo had drafted a request for proposals (RFP), which was currently under review by the City Solicitor, for a consultant to aid in the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan. This RFP would be reviewed by LVEDC and HUD prior to the creation of a timeline and its issuance. Mr. Manges reported that consultant services would be financed via grants from HUD, the Municipal Assistance Program, and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. He indicated that the RFP would make explicit a central role for the City in the process.

Mr. Elliott inquired about the firms that would receive the RFP. Mr. Manges and Mr. Handzo offered the names of several firms that would be invited to bid. Mr. Handzo explained that the Planning Bureau sought a firm that could produce a Comprehensive Plan that would serve as both a policy document and a compelling promotional vehicle for the Plan's vision. Mr. Elliott asked about the timetable for the Comprehensive Plan Rewrite, with Mr. Manges answering that the Plan was slated to reach City Council

for adoption in January 2015. Mr. Manges reported that a related grant project involving the design of the N. 13th Street corridor would begin next month, with Pennoni Associates under contract to complete the work.

Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) Update. Mr. Elliott reported that the EAC discussed the following topics at its most recent meeting:

- Fall 2013 tree planting projects around Cottingham Stadium, to occur with the assistance of the Lafayette College Landis Community Outreach Center.
- Effects of Planning Bureau staffing changes on the Comprehensive Plan Rewrite.

Mr. Manges reported that Mr. Handzo would be employed full-time by the Department of Planning & Codes beginning Wednesday, September 11, 2013.

As there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:14pm.