

**CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF MEETING
November 14, 2019 – 4:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL**

Present: Commission Members – Mr. Melosky, Mr. Malozi, Mr. Barker, Mr. Stellato and Ms. Cohen. City staff included Darlene Heller and Tracy E. Samuelson of the Planning and Zoning Bureau, Matt Dornier, Tiffany Wells, Amy Rohrbach and Ziad Sayegh representing the Engineering Bureau, Deputy Fire Chief Craig Baer representing the Fire Department and Attorney Edmund Healy attended as Solicitor to the Commission. Representing the applicants were Ed Reed, Eric Scheler, Dave Weiand, John Callahan, Laura Eberly, Eric DeLong, Emil Lucas, Lucienne Di Biase Dooley and Christine Ussler. Representing the press was Nicole Radzievich for the Morning Call and Kurt Bresswein for the Express Times.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – September 26, 2019 and October 10, 2019.

Mr. Stellato made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 26, 2019 Planning Commission meeting minutes with the additional notation that Mr. Evans stated the golf course is separate from the Capital Plan and stands alone as an enterprise. He asked that Mr. Evans’s explanation about the progress of the golf course renovations also be added. The motion was seconded by Ms. Cohen and passed with a 5 – 0 vote.

Ms. Cohen made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 10, 2019 Planning Commission meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Malozi and passed with a 3 – 0 vote.
Mr. Melosky and Mr. Stellato abstained.

2. SIGN WAIVER REQUEST

- a) 3025 Commerce Center Blvd - Crayola requests permission to increase the maximum permitted height of a Flat Wall Sign in the IN-O district from 25 feet to 40 feet.

Mr. Ed Reed, 1015 Main Street, Pennsburg, introduced Eric Scheler of Majestic Realty, and Dave Weiand with Crayola.

Mr. Reed referenced the drawings of the Crayola warehouse building and the location of where they wished to locate the Crayola sign. The sign is 13’ x 21’ which is a permitted size. In the IN-O district the height of the sign cannot be higher than 25’. The request is for the sign to be permitted to be 40’ above grade. The reason for the sign placement is to mark the building for visitors, employees and shipping and receiving. The sign will be 6’ below the top of the building.

Mr. Melosky asked Mr. Reed if the sign’s visibility would allow trucks and deliveries clearer identification of the building. Mr. Reed replied that is the purpose of both the position of the sign and the height.

Mr. Stellato asked for clarification about the height of the sign covering the windows. Mr. Reed replied if they had to install the sign at the 25’ maximum height the sign would be over top of the windows.

Mr. Malozi noted there are not any residences there, only other industrial properties.

Mr. Melosky made the motion to grant the sign waiver request at 3025 Commerce Center Boulevard, Crayola. The motion was seconded by Mr. Barker and passed with a 5 – 0 vote.

3. LAND DEVELOPMENTS AND SUBDIVISIONS

- a) 3(19-005LD&S) – Bethlehem Armory Land Development & Subdivision Plan and Landscape Waiver Request – 345 2nd Avenue - Zoned RT, Plan dated July 30, 2019 and last revised October 15, 2019.

Ms. Cohen recused herself from reviewing this project since she is employed by the architects for the project.

John Callahan of 329 Bierys Bridge Road, Bethlehem, PA introduced himself as the Director of Development for Peron Development. He is seeking final approval for the Armory project on 2nd Avenue. He reviewed the history of the site and of this project.

Laura Eberly of Pennoni Associates presented the plan. The project includes 70 apartment units in the buildings with the one additional live/work space within the drill hall. She noted they received several dimensional variances and some of them were for parking in the front of the building. She referenced the November 8, 2019 comment letter from the City. Ms. Eberly specifically reviewed the fire department comments. The parking aisle in the front of the building is not wide enough to comply with the fire code. She noted there are two options to comply with the fire code requirements. Because of the height of the building (which is about 48') a 26' wide fire lane is required. The first option is to provide a depressed curb along 2nd Avenue and provide a concrete pad properly designed to hold the weight of the fire truck so the ladder truck could have access to the upper floors of the building. With this option the project loses 3 parking spaces in the front, but parking spaces will be relocated to the northeast end of the lot which maintains the total number of parking spaces required by the Zoning Hearing Board.

In Option B the fire truck access takes 6 parking spaces, creating a parallel parking situation.

Mr. Melosky asked Chief Baer if there are stabilizers that need to be utilized with the ladder trucks in the type of situation that was described. Chief Baer remarked Mr. Melosky is correct. In any building over 30' in height the fire lane access goes from the standard 20' to the 26' for a ladder truck which takes into consideration the extra space for the outrigger.

Mr. Melosky asked if Option A with the reinforced cement area is more conducive than Option B in Chief Baer's opinion. Chief Baer replied he would be comfortable with both layouts. Chief Baer acknowledged they both have pros and cons, so he could not say which one is better than the other. Chief Baer noted that Option B loses 3 on-street spaces and entering there could be a maintenance issue in the winter time. The property owner would have to remove the snow from that area. Both options meet the intent of the Code.

Mr. Stellato asked if the developer has enough parking spaces. Ms. Eberly advised that the developer received Zoning Hearing Board relief for 99 parking spaces.

Mr. Stellato asked Ms. Eberly if there will be on-street parking on both sides of 2nd Avenue. She replied developer will be providing on-street parking on both sides of 2nd Avenue.

Mr. Eric DeLong of USA Architects gave an overview of the renderings of the building. They showed the connecting of the second level, drill hall space, the parking area for the artist, the addition where they are renovating the existing garages adding two studio apartments and the newer garage space where they will be adding four loft apartments.

Mr. Stellato asked if there are any plans for renovation work at the drill hall. Mr. DeLong remarked that there will not be any changes in the drill hall. It will be restored. The windows will be made energy efficient and will emulate the original windows.

Mr. Stellato asked if they will be changing the access to the drill hall. Mr. DeLong remarked no, the entry will still be in the front.

Mr. Callahan added that there will be a fitness center and a community room/lounge with a billiards table and coffee bar which will be in the existing Armory. There will also be a community room within the new addition. There is a market for this project with its close proximity to downtown Bethlehem. This will bring greater density with walkability to support the merchants and the shops in the downtown.

Mr. Malozi asked if any green roofs are a part of the project. Mr. Callahan remarked the project would be reducing the amount of impervious coverage at the site. There will be re-landscaping and additional green space and soil amendments. Mr. Callahan noted the proposed grass court yard is currently all parking lot space.

Ms. Samuelson mentioned there shall be notations on the plan that the plan striping along 2nd Avenue, which are the 11 spaces, and the striping of the ramp shall be maintained by the developer. The third traffic comment is the crosswalks at the northern and southern end of 2nd Avenue shall be installed with thermoplastic markings. The most significant unknown is where the fire access will be, because it is extremely significant that the front of 2nd Avenue looks heavily treed. As the plans are reviewed with the fire department that goal is to be kept because there is not any landscaping across the front of the building.

Mr. Melosky asked the developer if all comments from the letter dated November 8, 2019 from the City would be complied with. Mr. Callahan replied yes.

Jeff Pooley of 331 Prospect Avenue, commented that he was disappointed about the lack of transparency in the plan review process. Members of the public could not see the plans during the meeting, the 4:00 meeting time is not convenient for some members of the public and he was not permitted to photograph or make a copy of the proposed plans. He continues to be disappointed by the prior Zoning Hearing Board decisions related to the project. He has concerns about the impact on Rauch Street, which is very narrow. He asked about the two alternatives related to the fire lanes. Ms. Eberly stated that in the option where the fire truck would pull in and face the building along 2nd Avenue, there would be 3 parking spaces in the parking lot that would need to be removed. One option would be to put them in front of the drill hall space and extend that row of parking. The second option is to put the parking spaces off of the Rauch Street lot and increase that from 12 to 15 parking spaces. Mr. Pooley asked if that was permissible, given the 14 which were approved by the Zoning Hearing Board. Ms. Eberly stated the Zoning Hearing Board did not have to approve the number of spaces there; they just approved the total number of parking spaces provided on the site. The 99 spaces which were presented to the Zoning Hearing Board have to be located somewhere on the property. Mr. Pooley remarked the impact on Rauch Street is already so profound that to add additional spots would put a great burden on this street which is not appropriate for the traffic in the first place. He encourages the Planning Commission to not permit any additional spots to the 12 in the current plan. He asked what type of visual barriers will there be for the neighbors facing Prospect Avenue? Ms. Eberly replied she believes there will be a shadow-box fence. Mr. Callahan added the developer is open for discussion on the subject with the neighbors. Mr. Pooley feels putting urban strip mall style of parking along 2nd Avenue is wrong. The building should be moved forward and have the parking in the rear.

Christine Roysdon of 421 2nd Avenue noted that the plan shows dense parking at the base of the hill of 2nd Avenue at Spring Street. Although in favor of narrowing the street, her concern is with the heavy traffic and the speed of the traffic at rush hour. The danger is with the 10 parking spaces close to Spring Street. There is a problem with visibility. A car coming up Spring Street

cannot see the traffic coming down from the ramp on 2nd Avenue. One of the reasons for fewer parking spaces is the anticipation of the residents being walkers or cyclists who would live in the apartments. Is there dedicated bike parking that is secure and covered? Mr. Callahan replied there is indoor bike storage, which is free, that will be located in the basement of the drill hall space. Ms. Roysdon noted that the narrowing of the street will make the street less safe for cyclists going down to the tow path. She asked if the green space on the plan would remain lawn or if the developer is planning to do something more elaborate, like adding trees and amenities to the back courtyard. Mr. Callahan responded the developers do not have plans for trees in the back courtyard but they are not averse to trees back in the courtyard. She referenced the “existing vegetation” on the steep slope and would like an explanation of what the intent is for that area. Mr. Callahan remarked the plan is not to disturb the steep slope, but to clean out what is invasive and not healthy. Healthy and reusable trees will stay. Ms. Roysdon noted in the 400 block in which she lives the most successful street trees are hornbeams and she recommends for continuity the developer plants those type of trees.

Dayana Rodriguez, 315 Rauch Street, is worried about the invasive species of vegetation in the back of the Armory. She is also concerned about losing part of the value of her home because of the beautiful view they currently have and will be losing with the addition of the proposed new tree plantings. She wondered why there is not a need for a traffic study when Rauch Street is just a little alley.

Ms. Eberly remarked that the developer did a trip generation calculation. The City ordinance only requires consideration of the highest peak hour traffic volume in one direction. For their site it is 28 vehicles and the City ordinance requires a traffic study if you have an excess of 50 vehicles per peak hour.

David Howell, 405B Spring Street wondered what the expectant occupancy will be in each of the apartments. Mr. Callahan responded there will be 50 one bedroom and 20 two bedroom apartments. It is hard to predict how many will live in the two bedroom apartments.

Maryellen Dye, 700 block of 1st Avenue, is an avid walker and biker in her neighborhood. She agrees the traffic turning from Spring Street onto 2nd Avenue has a limited visibility. If the building would be closer to the front of the lot, the parking would be better placed behind the building in the rear.

Mr. Malozi remarked he believes this project will be a net positive. He understands there will be changes to the neighborhood and he appreciates the comments made by the neighbors. He believes that an adaptive reuse of a historic structure and the care being taken to maintain the art deco portion of the site is a positive. Along with the walkability and density, the parking situation is always difficult in a downtown area. He hopes the narrowing of 2nd Avenue will improve safety and reduce speeds on the street. He bikes in the area with two elementary school aged children during the summer months to the tow path and he is familiar with the grades which were remarked upon. Two blocks to the north are the transit connections with LANTA. He noted there is a lot of construction in urban areas and dust and stormwater runoff are highly regulated.

Mr. Stellato appreciated the comments from the public today. There were very good suggestions with great dialog.

Mr. Malozi made the motion to approve the Bethlehem Armory Land Development & Subdivision Plan and waiver request at 345 2nd Avenue contingent upon meeting the conditions outlined in the November 8, 2019 review letter from the City of Bethlehem. The motion was seconded by Mr. Barker and passed with a 4 – 0 vote.

4. DISCUSSION ITEMS

Mr. Melosky advised the public the Planning Commission meeting starting in 2020 will begin at 5 PM.

Ms. Heller advised there will be a new SALDO ordinance and a summary of the document will be added to the December Planning Commission agenda.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 P.M.

ATTEST:

Darlene Heller, Commission Secretary