

MINUTES

HARRISBURG PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR/VIRTUAL MEETING April 7, 2021 ZOOM PLATFORM

MEMBERS PRESENT: Joseph Alsberry, Chair
Vern McKissick, Vice Chair
Shaun E. O'Toole
Jamesetta Reed
Anne Marek
Zac Monnier (arrived at 6:40 PM)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Ausha Green

STAFF PRESENT: Geoffrey Knight, Planning Director
Tiffanie Baldock, Senior Deputy City Solicitor

OTHERS PRESENT:

CALL TO ORDER: 6:32 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Commissioner McKissick moved, and Commissioner O'Toole seconded the motion, to approve the minutes from the March 3rd meeting without corrections; the motion was adopted by a unanimous (5-0) vote.

OLD BUSINESS:

NEW BUSINESS:

- 1 Variance & Special Exception Applications for 100-112 North 13th Street & 109-119½ Linden Street, zoned Residential Medium-Density (RM), filed by Gregory Radon with Radon Construction, to establish a 12-unit, "Multifamily Dwelling" use on-site, to request relief from the off-street parking requirements, and to request relief from several aspects of the Development Standards relating to the accessory off-street parking area.**

Mr. Knight gave a synopsis of the report, recommending Approval with Conditions; the conditions were that:

1. If granted approval for the requested zoning relief, the Applicant will subsequently file a Lot Consolidation & Land Development Plan and receive approval from the Planning Commission and City Council.
2. The Applicant will submit a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application and receive approval from HARB for the proposed parking area and fencing, which is located in the Summit Terrace Architectural Conservation Overlay District (ACOD).

3. The Applicant will coordinate with the Department of Public Works to confirm the appropriate size and location of refuse collection on-site, and update the billing accounts to reflect the new use.
4. The Planning Bureau recommends that the proposed parking area be reduced by two spaces to create room for the required vegetative screening, and potentially handle stormwater management on-site; while the Applicant has indicated that a fence will screen the parking lot, the Zoning Code requires vegetative screening be installed on the outside of the fence. The Bureau also notes that if the required tree is not planted on-site, it can be planted in a tree pit in the surrounding rights-of-way.
5. The Planning Bureau recommends that the Applicant install the requisite bike racks near the proposed entrance from Walnut Street; if possible, the Bureau would recommend that the Applicant consider a secure, indoor bike storage area, since the building will not be equipped with elevators.

The case was represented by Gregory Radon with Radon Construction (the property owner), 4704 Richmond Street, Philadelphia, PA 19137; and Chris Dawson with Chris Dawson Architect (the property architect), 300 North 2nd Street, Suite 701, Harrisburg, PA 17101 (aka “the Applicants”).

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicants whether the conditions in the case report were acceptable; they confirmed that they were. Commissioner Alsberry asked whether the Applicants had anything to add to the case report; they noted that they had been coordinating with Planning Bureau staff over the previous few months, and that they intended on getting approval from the Planning Commission and Zoning Hearing Board for the requisite zoning relief, before developing a final site plan for the project. They noted that they had been working on the design for about a year, and were excited to move forward with adaptively reusing a blighted property.

Commissioner Alsberry noted that he had observed the building over the years and was not able to understand why it hadn’t been developed; he stated that he was pleased to hear the Applicants’ proposal. He stated that he was interested in hearing the Applicants’ approach to off-street parking, and how the lot would be developed. He stated that the neighborhood was very congested with respect to parking.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether any of the commissioners had comments or concerns about the project. Commissioner McKissick stated that he felt the Applicants’ submission was logical and well-presented. He inquired regarding the condition of the interior of the property; the Applicants stated that the roof was in very good shape and confirmed that a previous property owner had recently replaced the rubber roof.

Commissioner O’Toole stated that he felt it was as good project, and state that he would be supporting the proposal.

Commissioner Marek stated that she was happy to see the building being reused and felt that the Applicants had taken a great approach to revitalizing the site.

Commissioner Monnier noted that his employer (Habitat for Humanity) had once owned the property and stated that he was pleased to see the adaptive reuse proposal.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public that was for or against the project; Ms. Baldock gave instruction to the public in attendance on how to request to be unmuted so they could provide comment. There were no comments.

Commissioner Alsberry reiterated his support for the project, noting that he hadn't realized how long the building had been vacant, and requested clarification on the project's approach to addressing parking, additionally inquiring as to whether the proposed parking was to be located on the same block. The Applicants confirmed that the proposed parking would be located to the northwest of the building, and asked Planning Bureau staff whether they could share the proposed site plan on their screen. Mr. Knight brought up the site plan and confirmed that the proposed parking area fronted Linden Street to the northwest of the principal building on-site; he noted that there would be pedestrian access from the parking area to the building via internal sidewalks. Mr. Knight noted that the proposed parking lot had one point of ingress and egress, and confirmed that it would include the required ADA parking space.

Mr. Knight noted that the final proposed lot was larger than just the building and parking area, and noted that the size of the property, once consolidated into a single lot, would allow the by-right establishment of twelve units on-site. Commissioner Alsberry requested confirmation that traffic would access the property only through Linden Street; Mr. Knight confirmed that was the case, noting that Linden Street was bidirectional and that Linden Street could be accessed by either Calamus Street or Walnut Street. He also confirmed that there was no on-street parking along Linden Street.

Commissioner McKissick inquired as to the plan for the remaining vacant land just north of the proposed parking area. The Applicants stated that they did not have a definite plan, but that it might provide room for a development in the future. They also stated that their current proposal would only require relief from one off-street parking space, but that the Planning Bureau's recommendation would require them to seek relief from three off-street parking spaces.

Commissioner McKissick asked the Planning Bureau staff which spaces they would recommend removing; Mr. Knight stated that he would remove one space from each side of the parking lot, which would allow the footprint of the parking lot to be removed from the setback areas and create space for the required landscaping screening, which would obviate the Variance requests that the project otherwise required. He also noted that the project would replace the loading dock area along Walnut Street with a pedestrian entrance, meaning that the curb cut could be removed and at least one additional on-street space established as part of the project.

Commissioner McKissick asked whether the Planning Bureau wanted to see the landscaping around the parking lot. Mr. Knight confirmed that the proposed parking lot had limited aesthetic value and that he wanted to ensure the project was as attractive for the neighborhood as possible. He noted that the location of the proposed parking lot was also in the Summit Terrace Architectural Conservation Overlay District (ACOD), which was something of an historic district-lite designation, and thus that component of the project would require HARB review. Mr. Knight stated that the Board would likely not require decorative fencing, but would require the vegetative screening.

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicants whether they spoke to any of the local residents or the local neighborhood association; they responded that they had not. Commissioner Alsberry stated that he knew an active neighborhood association was in the project area. Mr. Knight confirmed that the Summit Terrace Neighborhood Association was still active and that he had contact information for an individual associated with that group. Commissioner Alsberry asked Planning Bureau staff to provide that information to the Applicants. The Applicants stated that they were looking forward to having that meeting once approvals were in place.

Commissioner Monnier moved, and Commissioner Marek seconded the motion, to Approve the request with Staff Conditions. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (6-0).

2 Variance Applications for 1101 South Front Street, zoned Institutional (INS), filed by the Dauphin County General Authority, to install a fifty-square-foot, five-foot-high, free-standing sign on-site.

Mr. Knight gave a synopsis of the report, recommending Approval with Conditions; the conditions were that:

1. The Applicant will receive approval from the Floodplain Administrator of the Floodplain Development Permit application that accompanied the submission of this Variance application.
2. The Planning Bureau recommends that the Applicant consider locating the proposed free-standing sign in the triangular median at the intersection of South Front Street and Sycamore Street. This location would put the sign at a location where drivers may be looking for direction to the facility (as opposed to the current location, further into the property), and would also obviate the requirement for a Floodplain Development Permit application.

The case was represented by Breanna Vogelsong with Property Management, Inc. (the property manager), 1300 Market Street, Lemoyne, PA 17043; and Corey Bray with Gannett Fleming (the project engineer), 207 Senate Avenue, Camp Hill, PA 17011 (aka “the Applicants”).

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicants whether the conditions in the case report were acceptable; they confirmed that they were. Commissioner Alsberry asked whether the Applicants had anything to add to the case report; they stated that they did not.

Commissioner Alsberry noted that the project and review seemed straightforward and asked whether any of the commissioners had comments or concerns about the project. Commissioner McKissick commended the Applicants on submittal of the project and stated that he wasn’t even sure that the project site was part of the city’s street grid.

Commissioner Monnier stated that he felt it was an attractive sign, but concurred with Planning Bureau staff that the signage would be better located further up the road into the median triangle at the intersection of South Front Street and Sycamore Street.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public that was for or against the project; Ms. Baldock gave instruction to the public in attendance on how to request to be unmuted so they could provide comment. There were no comments.

Commissioner O'Toole moved, and Commissioner Marek seconded the motion, to Approve the request with Staff Conditions. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (6-0).

3 Variance Applications for 1405 & 1413 James Street and 1400-1414 William Street, zoned Residential Medium-Density (RM), filed by Alice Anne Schwab with the Susquehanna Art Museum, to request various zoning relief from use and Development Standard regulations, including maximum impervious lot coverage and setback encroachments, in order to construct an accessory surface parking lot on-site for the adjacent museum.

Mr. Knight gave a synopsis of the report, recommending Approval with Conditions; the conditions were that:

1. The Applicant will transmit final stormwater management approval from Capital Region Water to the Planning Bureau.
2. The Applicant will coordinate with the City Arborist on the selection of trees and vegetative screening for the project site.

The case was represented by David Tshudy with Troutman Pepper (the legal counsel), 36100 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101; Alice Anne Schwab with the Susquehanna Art Museum (the developer), 1401 North 3rd Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102; and Marc Kurowski with K&W Engineers (the project engineers), 2201 North Front Street, Suite 200, Harrisburg, PA 17110 (aka "the Applicants").

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicants whether the conditions in the case report were acceptable; they confirmed that they were. Commissioner Alsberry asked whether the Applicants had anything to add to the case report; they stated that the Planning Bureau's case report was comprehensive and accurate, and thanked Mr. Knight on working with them to ensure the current request was complete.

Commissioner Alsberry stated that he was pleased to see they were improving vacant and underdeveloped lots, and that they would be adding parking to the neighborhood.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether any of the commissioners had comments or concerns about the project. Commissioner McKissick inquired as to who would have access to the parking spaces; the Applicants confirmed that patrons and employees of the art museum. Commissioner McKissick asked whether spaces would be rented out on a monthly basis to other residents, businesses, or institutions; the Applicants confirmed there were no plans to lease spaces and that all forty spaces would be for the museum.

Commissioner McKissick inquired as to the amount of existing paving and how much additional paving would be added as part of the project. The Applicants referenced the site plan and noted that the gray area on the eastern half of the site would involve new paving. They noted that they had been designing and redesigning the site for several years, and that they had incorporated rain gardens into the corners of the lot, but that their design would need to be reevaluated under the current stormwater management regulations.

Commissioner Monnier noted that the Susquehanna Art Museum had been considering the construction of a parking lot for several years and that it was often discussed during his time spent volunteering for the organization. He stated that he was glad to see the project moving forward. Commissioner Monnier also noted that there were some green stormwater bump-outs in the streets surrounding the museum, and that these might be able to handle some additional stormwater runoff.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public that was for or against the project; Ms. Baldock gave instruction to the public in attendance on how to request to be unmuted so they could provide comment.

Commissioner O'Toole moved, and Commissioner Reed seconded the motion, to Approve the request with Staff Conditions. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (5-0-1; Commissioner Monnier abstained from the vote due to his membership with the Museum).

4 Utility Easement Application for 2 North 2nd Street, running along River Street and Strawberry Street, across North Front Street, and through Riverfront Park, filed by John Shive with Crown Castle Fiber, LLC, to install fiber optic cable within various public rights-of-ways and Riverfront Park.

Mr. Knight gave a synopsis of the report, recommending Approval with Conditions; the conditions were that:

1. The Applicant will work with the City Engineer and the Parks & Recreation Department to ensure that no damage occurs to any of the Riverfront Park infrastructure.
2. Due to the prime location of the proposed easement, the utility easement fee should be set at a minimum of \$4.50 per linear foot.
3. The Easement Agreement will include a provision that construction for maintenance or repair will not be conducted during preparation for any public events in Riverfront Park, or while such events are being held.
4. Per City Ordinance 9-103.1, a Street Cut and Sidewalk Permit, obtained from the City Engineer, will be required before any work can commence with the public rights-of-way.
5. The Applicant will contract with a city-approved arborist to ensure that no tree root systems are damaged and no trees are removed for this project.

The case was represented by John Shive and Len DeWees with Crown Castle Fiber, LLC (the project contractor), 3200 Horizon Boulevard, King of Prussia, PA 19406 (aka "the Applicants").

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicants whether the conditions in the case report were acceptable; they confirmed that they were. Commissioner Alsberry asked whether the Applicants had anything to add to the case report; they stated that they had nothing to add.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public that was for or against the project; Ms. Baldock gave instruction to the public in attendance on how to request to be unmuted so they could provide comment. Ms. Kathryn Sterner (Applicant for the project at 112 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA) asked whether the project would involve trenching along River

Street and Strawberry Street; the Applicants confirmed that it would. Ms. Sterner inquired as to whether there was a timeframe for that work to begin. The Applicants stated that they were awaiting City Council approval of the current request, as well as approval of a Street Cut Permit from the City Engineer; they noted that they had PennDOT approval for the portion that ran across Front Street. They stated that work would likely begin around the end of April. Ms. Baldock clarified that the project would require City Council approval.

Ms. Sterner asked whether the alleys would be shut down during the time work was taking place. The Applicants stated that they would not be completely shut down and that traffic flow would be maintained, per PennDOT standards.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public that was for or against the project; Ms. Baldock gave instruction to the public in attendance on how to request to be unmuted so they could provide comment. There were no other comments.

Commissioner McKissick moved, and Commissioner Reed seconded the motion, to Approve the request with Staff Conditions. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (6-0).

5 Subdivision Application for 1103 South Front Street, zoned Riverfront (RF), filed by Thomas Zimmerman with Veterans Outreach of Pennsylvania, to subdivide the property into two lots, the southernmost of which will accommodate a 15-unit tiny home village for homeless veterans.

Mr. Knight gave a synopsis of the report, recommending Approval with Conditions; the conditions were that:

1. An easement or other right-of-way dedication, the width of the existing footprint of the Capital Area Greenbelt running from the property to the north (1101 South Front Street) to the bridge over the railroad tracks, will be completed alongside the other easements noted in the application, to ensure that the public maintains access to this critical stretch of the existing multi-use trail.
2. All easement agreements for access through Lot 1 to Lot 2 will be provided to the Planning Bureau.

The case was represented by Bruce Grossman, Esquire with Caldwell & Kearns (the legal counsel), 3631 North Front Street, Harrisburg, PA 17110; Tom Zimmerman with Veterans Outreach of Pennsylvania (the prospective property owner), 6526 Plowman Ridge, Harrisburg, PA 17112; and Christine Hunter with H. Edward Black & Associates, Ltd. (the project engineer), 2403 North Front Street, Harrisburg, PA 17110 (aka “the Applicants”).

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicant whether the conditions in the case report were acceptable; the Applicants stated that they could not accept the first condition of approval. They stated that they had not legal power to comply with the first condition since they did not own or control the land. They stated that the City did not have the power to compel the owner to provide the easement.

Commissioner Alsberry asked Planning Bureau staff whether they wanted to respond. Mr. Knight stated that Ms. Baldock could address the legal aspects of the issue raised by the Applicant, but noted that other easements across the property had already been secured. He confirmed that the Applicants were not the property owners, and would not be the owner of the northernmost parcel after the Subdivision process was completed.

Mr. Knight reiterated that easements across the property had been secured and that the Planning Bureau was requesting that an additional easement be granted across the property for the Greenbelt for the benefit of the general public. He noted that the property owner was a party to the application, although they may not be the direct Applicant, and reiterated the Planning Bureau's position that securing an easement across the property was in the public's best interest. Mr. Knight stated that it was a logical and opportune time to formalize an easement for the Greenbelt, given that other easements across the property for the access roads and utilities had been granted.

Ms. Baldock inquired as to which entity granted an easement for existing access to the property; the Applicants stated that no such easement existed, and that access was granted via "oral license" between the property owner and the public. Ms. Baldock asked whether a representative of the property owner ("Green Chair Trust") was in attendance; the Applicants confirmed they were not. Commissioner Monnier stated that Peggy Grove should be contacted regarding questions related to ownership and access. Ms. Baldock stated that she needed to more fully explore the issues, but that she felt the Planning Commission could take action on the application at the current meeting, and then outstanding issues could be addressed prior to the City Council meetings at which the Subdivision application would be heard.

The Applicants reiterated their position that they could not legally grant the easement request, and inquired as to the legal basis for including the easement requirement; Ms. Baldock reiterated that she would be looking the matter, and that her counsel was that the Planning Commission could move forward with a vote because their resolution was recommendatory to City Council. She stated that she would be examining the issue from a legal perspective, and would communicate with the Applicants.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether any of the commissioners had comments or concerns about the project. Commissioner McKissick stated that he supported the Planning Bureau's condition of approval, noting that that this stretch of the Greenbelt had been accessible for a long period of time and that they could not be sure of its continuance after the current request. Commissioner McKissick noted that it would be helpful to have the property owner at the table. He concurred with Ms. Baldock's approach to approval at the current meeting, but noted that the alternative would be voting to Table the review, and invite the property owner to the next Planning Commission meeting. Ms. Baldock noted that the decision was ultimately up to the commissioners. Commissioner McKissick stated that he supported the project and didn't want to delay it, but that he also wanted to ensure the outstanding issue of Greenbelt access was addressed.

The Applicants noted that a letter of support from the Capital Area Greenbelt Association (CAGA) accompanied their initial zoning relief application, stating that they were aware of the overall development and the need for a subdivision of the property, and that they understood they were relying on arrangements with the owners on the continuation of Greenbelt access. They stated that

CAGA did not raise objection to moving forward with the project without the dedication of a permanent easement. Mr. Knight noted the letter referenced by the Applicants stated the property owner “intended to allow the Greenbelt to be relocated to the northern end of the property,” and reiterated that the Planning Bureau’s condition was simply asking that that commitment be honored in a formal manner.

Commissioner Alsberry asked Commissioner O’Toole if he had any thoughts on the legal issues regarding the current review; he stated that he felt that the commissioners should act on the issue and allow the City’s Law Bureau to coordinate with the Applicants prior to City Council review.

Commissioner Marek concurred with Commissioner McKissick’s comments and stated that she did not feel comfortable moving the project forward if the easement issue had not been addressed. She noted that it was an outstanding issue that was known for several months, and that she was unsure as to why there was resistance since there was already a letter of commitment to maintain the Greenbelt trail. Commissioner Marek stated that she felt it was necessary for the issue of the easement to be resolved before the case moved forward.

Commissioner Monnier stated that the property was a good person who was a supporter of the city’s parks, and stated that he believed she would work with the Greenbelt to ensure space was reserved for trail. He stated that he felt the easement needed to happen, but expressed his belief that the property owner would agree to it, and that he didn’t think action on the application would need to be delayed. Commissioner Monnier also addressed the Applicants’ assertion that they had no legal requirement to include an easement as a condition of approval, noting that the Planning Commission’s role was to consider the future of the city, and to review projects in light of the types of developments that would work create a better community for everyone.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public that was for or against the project; Ms. Baldock gave instruction to the public in attendance on how to request to be unmuted so they could provide comment. Ms. Ellen Brown (284 Golf Lane, Grantville, PA) stated that she was a County citizen and a Greenbelt enthusiast, and asked whether CAGA currently had a formal easement across the subject property during the many years in which access was permitted.

Mr. Knight noted that an easement across the property had not been formalized; Ms. Baldock concurred. The Applicants inquired as to why an easement application needed to be formalized as a condition of the current request; Ms. Baldock reiterated that it was in the public interest to maintain Greenbelt access across the property. She noted that the Applicants may also have issues once the application was under review by City Council.

The Applicants noted that the Greenbelt was currently running across the property without an easement; Ms. Baldock confirmed that and stated that it was because the current property owner had allowed public access to the property. The Applicants speculated that that could continue in the future; Ms. Baldock stated that might be the case in the future. She confirmed that the Law Bureau could review the specifics of this issue and would coordinate with the Applicants prior to the case being presented to City Council.

Commissioner Monnier stated that it was important to ensure that continued presence of the Greenbelt through the property because the current ownership may change abruptly, and that a new owner may not be as willing to accommodate public access through the property as the current owner. He stated that since other easements were being granted and the property was being developed, he felt it would be a good time to formalize the Greenbelt access as well.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone else from the public that was for or against the project; Ms. Baldock gave instruction to the public in attendance on how to request to be unmuted so they could provide comment; there were no other comments.

The Applicants stated that they understood the importance of the Greenbelt access, but that they felt the Planning Commission was holding the project hostage to a request they could not control. They stated that they were willing to let the commissioners proceed with their recommendations to City Council and work towards a resolution, but that they were advising the commissioners that there was no legal basis upon which the easement could be required. Ms. Baldock interjected and noted that the Applicants were not legal counsel for the Planning Commission. The Applicants reiterated that they would like the matter to be moved forward to City Council with the commissioners recommendations.

Commissioner Monnier moved, and Commissioner O'Toole seconded the motion, to Approve the request with Staff Conditions. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (6-0).

6 Land Development Plan Application for 112 Market Street, zoned Downtown Center (DC), filed by Brad Jones with Veterans' Building Investors, LLC, to convert the existing eight-story, office building into a mixed-use building, with a bank on the first floor and up to 35 residential units on the upper floors.

Mr. Knight gave a synopsis of the report, recommending Approval with Conditions; the condition was that:

1. Any proposed signage advertising the businesses on site – either existing business or new ones, if the second floor remains as office space – will conform to the regulations in Chapter 7-325 of the Zoning Code, or file a zoning relief request and receive approval from the Zoning Hearing Board.

The case was represented by Brad Jones with Veterans' Building Investors, LLC (the prospective property owner), 320 Market Street, Suite 273E, Harrisburg, PA 17101; and Kathryn Sterner with By Design Consultants (the project architect), 1950 Market Street, Camp Hill, PA 17011 (aka "the Applicants").

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicants whether the conditions in the case report were acceptable; they confirmed that they were. They expressed their appreciation for the information in the Planning Bureau's case report and noted that they always learned something about the properties they worked on. Commissioner Alsberry asked whether the Applicants had anything to add to the case report. They stated that the project was a continuation of the trend of adaptive reuse projects they had proposed in the past, and that they were continually trying to envision the highest

and best uses for older commercial buildings. They stated that there continued to be strong demand for residential units in the downtown area.

Commissioner Alsberry noted that the Applicants had addressed issues regarding off-street parking in their application, and that they had completed other projects in the area without parking, but asked the Applicants to clarify the proposed parking arrangement. The Applicants noted that the Downtown Center zoning district did not have off-street parking requirements, and stated that they were intending to continue their efforts to have tenants utilize the existing parking garages. They stated that tenants would have multiple nearby garage options, including the Walnut Street and Market Square garages, and noted that there would be a fairly easy walk to the parking options on City Island and in lots south of Chestnut Street. The Applicants stated that they did not anticipate parking to be an issue for interested tenants and that the views from the building would be some of the best in the city.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether the Applicants would be apprising potential tenants that they would need to secure their own parking; they confirmed that they would be apprising tenants of that situation, and noted that Park Harrisburg had been more flexible on a residential parking program for the City's garages, allowing residential parkers to leave the garages up to five times a month. They stated that they felt they could direct more potential tenants to these spaces given the proposed changes.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether any of the commissioners had comments or concerns about the project. Commissioner O'Toole concurred that there was no parking requirement for the Downtown Center district, but stated that it was a bit unfortunate that was the case, given the issues for existing community residents that had arisen from other downtown residential conversion projects. He stated that while they could not require off-street parking, he felt the Applicants should consider providing a written approach to parking that would help them better determine the potential impacts on the neighborhood. The Applicants stated that they believed the commissioners were addressing parking issues created by another residential project (the BenMar apartments on Pine Street), and noted that those residents were permitted to purchase Residential Parking Permits (RPP) just like any other resident of the neighborhood. The Applicants stated that the long-term parking lease had handcuffed many people in the city, and noted that if there was more flexibility in that arrangement, Pine Street would make a good option for expanding the RPP zone.

Mr. Knight noted that the subject property was located in an area with minimal on-street parking nearby, noting that there was no parking on the Market Street or Front Street portions of the block and that Strawberry Street, River Street, and Walnut Street parking were reserved for City vehicles; he further stated that most of the uses in the immediate area were institutional and commercial buildings, meaning there would be limited conflicts with existing residents. Mr. Knight also noted that the nearby apartments along North Front Street each had rear-yard parking areas for residents. Finally, Mr. Knight noted that the City Island parking garage had electric vehicle charging stations, which might encourage residents of the project to park there instead of the surrounding neighborhood; he noted that the subject property was one of the closest buildings to those chargers and thus tenants of the proposed project would be the most likely constituency to use them.

Commissioner Marek stated that she did not have comments about the proposed development and felt that it was a good adaptive reuse, although she concurred with the other commissioners regarding the conflict between the RPP zones and the managed parking facilities. She stated that she hoped the City could work towards a better resolution of the downtown parking issue in the future.

Commissioner Monnier stated that he was happy to see the building be converted into a residential use and thanked the Applicants for including more two-bedrooms apartments, which was a missing unit configuration in the current downtown housing market. He noted that there was a parking garage attached to the subject property which might be able to accommodate the off-street parking demand of new residents. Commissioner Monnier stated that he wanted to see more apartments downtown to help make the neighborhood more than a “9-to-5” area focused on State workers.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public that was for or against the project; Ms. Baldock gave instruction to the public in attendance on how to request to be unmuted so they could provide comment; there were no comments.

Commissioner McKissick stated that the Harrisburg Parking Authority had commissioned a parking study that the Board was in the process of reviewing, noting that the COVID situation had created skewed data which was more difficult to interpret. He reiterated his support for the project, but expressed concern for the uncoordinated approach to downtown development that resulted in a growing demand for on-street parking in the area. Commissioner McKissick stated that while he did not expect developers to provide parking for all the units, he wanted to see more efforts to plan for or secure leases for off-street parking for some of the units. He stated that while there may be a future in which off-street parking wasn't needed, he felt that it would be a primary issue for the next five to ten years. Commissioner McKissick stated that he felt like the issue was getting out of hand and would continue to be an issue for the Planning Commission. Commissioner Monnier agreed with the need for a more coordination and flexible approach to parking.

Commissioner Alsberry agreed with Commissioner McKissick that parking was an issue and noted that he always expressed concern that new developments be able to address parking without creating impacts on existing residents and businesses. He stated that he felt that there might be a small constituency for people who would park on City Island and walk to the property, but that he didn't think it would be a big group. He stated that there would be parking problems in the future if the commissioners didn't begin to address the issue.

Commissioner Marek moved, and Commissioner Monnier seconded the motion, to Approve the request with Staff Conditions. The motion was adopted by a majority vote (5-1).

OTHER BUSINESS:

1 Report from Commissioner Reed on climate action group

Commissioner Alsberry noted that he had recently been invited to participate in a committee meeting, and had asked Commissioner Reed to attend on behalf of the Planning Commission; he asked whether she could provide a committee report on the discussion at the meeting she attended.

Commissioner Reed noted that she attended the first meeting of the Harrisburg Just Climate Action Stakeholders' Group, but noted that the group eventually transitioned into an advisory board. She noted that the group had already completed an inventory of greenhouse gas emissions and was now establishing reasonable reduction targets and ways to meet those. She stated that the board would be discussing options and deliberating on them from April through June, with a public engagement component being run through the summer; she noted that the plan would be updated and finalized in September and October, and presented to City Council by the end of the year.

Commissioner Reed noted that the advisory board would be meeting every other Wednesday through the spring to discuss plans for the various plan sections which included: electricity, residential, commercial, transportation, industrial, and solid waste/waste management. She invited commissioners to attend meetings regarding different sections if they were interested in those aspects of the document. Commissioner Alsberry asked if she'd be able to continue attending on behalf of the Planning Commission, and Commissioner Reed agreed to do so.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there were any questions for Commissioner Reed. Commissioner McKissick noted that it was a challenging undertaking, and said that he hoped they were able to make meaningful recommendations.

2 Introduction of new Deputy Planning Director, David Clapsaddle

Mr. Knight introduced the new Deputy Planning Director, David Clapsaddle, and asked him to introduce himself and provide a little background as to his experience.

Mr. Clapsaddle stated that he was looking forward to working with the commissioners. He noted that he was originally from the Gettysburg area, and stated that he had held a variety of positions throughout North America, including serving in municipal governments in Broward County, Florida; Las Vegas, Nevada; Alberta, Canada; and Florida (again) before returning to Central Pennsylvania.

Commissioner Monnier asked whether Mr. Clapsaddle would be taking over management of the Planning Commission meetings; he confirmed that was the case. Mr. Knight noted that he would be attending meetings in the future to discuss large Planning Bureau projects and initiatives, including the Comprehensive Plan and the documents that came after that, such as the Zoning Code update and small area plans.

3 Comprehensive Plan Update

Mr. Knight noted that he had spoken with Councilman Madsen on April 5th, who had made an initial proposal to postpone the next round of community engagement until August or September so that more people would be vaccinated and the weather would be nice enough to host large, outdoor events. Mr. Knight stated that the proposal was based on concerns voiced during the City Council-led Comprehensive Plan webinars that not enough people could engage with the process through Zoom and the internet; he noted that that issue had been raised a couple times during the webinars. He noted that Councilman Madsen had considered outdoor and large indoor venues throughout the city, including Reservoir Park and the Zembo Shrine Center. Mr. Knight stated that

Councilman Madsen had been engaging with neighborhood groups throughout the city to discuss how they could help sponsor and support individual meetings.

Mr. Knight stated that he had not responded to Councilman Madsen, as he had been waiting to discuss the issue with the Planning Commission to understand their perspectives on the proposed timeline. He stated that he was hoping that City Council would move the process forward much quicker, but noted that ultimately the process was in the hands of City Council. He stated that the Planning Bureau would be supporting City Council throughout the process to ensure that outreach was coordinated with the community and the councilmembers felt confident about the process.

Mr. Knight solicited the commissioners' thoughts on the proposed timeline. Commissioner Marek stated that she disagreed with the proposed process, and Commissioner McKissick stated that he was the delay was reminiscent of the multiple failed attempts to pass a Zoning Code update in the late 2000s.

Commissioner Marek noted that she attended most of the City Council's webinars and that she had not heard people from the public express concerns about access and engagement. Commissioner Reed stated that she had heard those comments from the public, but that she had been surprised by the small number of individuals from the public who had attended the webinars. Commissioner Monnier noted that the issue of access had been brought up during the Sunday Facebook discussions led by the Harrisburg Young People of Color organization, and stated that the group often mentioned that there needed to be more time for the community to provide input on the document. Commissioner Monnier noted that if councilmembers felt that they needed more time to ensure the public felt they were heard, they would design the process to expand opportunities for input; he stated that if it helped the community feel more ownership of the plan, then it would be worth waiting.

Commissioner Alsberry expressed his frustration with the delay, stating that it was indicative of the procrastination that too often accompanied these processes. He stated that he had spoken with multiple organizations throughout the community who stated that they wanted to provide input, and that he had directly invited them to attend meetings, but that no one from those groups ended up attending public input events. Commissioner Alsberry reiterated his frustration with the proposed delay in the process, and stated that too often more time was demanded and then was not effectively utilized.

Commissioner Marek concurred and noted that there had been many opportunities to participate in the process and that there was a substantial amount of notice given to the public; she stated that if people did not take advantage of the opportunities provided to them, then that was not the fault of the commissioners or the process. Commissioner McKissick noted that the commissioners were appointed to be representative of the community and that their guidance of the process did entail public input. He noted that approximately ten years ago, the commissioners had caught wind of a Comprehensive Plan meeting being scheduled by the previous mayoral administration, and that Commissioner Alsberry had attended, only to see that the attendees were people from outside of the city. He stated that Commissioner Alsberry had been told that the Planning Commission was not needed to begin the process, and that they had objected to that and demanded that the public be involved.

Commissioner Monnier agreed with the commissioners and stated that he also felt they had done a great job with the Comprehensive Plan process, and that he agreed with them that the delay was excessive, but reiterated that the community felt they had not been given adequate time. He stated that part of the issue was the amount of time the process had taken, and noted that there had been a substantial turnover in the city's population during that time, and that some people who were currently active in the city's civics were not living in Harrisburg during the initial public engagement process. Commissioner Monnier stated that he didn't believe the process needed to start over, but felt that expanding the public engagement would be effective at addressing their concerns.

Commissioner Marek stated that she didn't understand the proposal to delay the next round of public engagement until August; she asked why the outreach couldn't occur in June. Mr. Knight noted that Councilman Madsen's process outline was an initial proposal, and that he expected he was looking for feedback on the proposal from the Planning Commission and Planning Bureau. He stated that he did not feel the proposal was an intentional delay tactic and that he felt Councilman Madsen wanted to ensure there was a final round of accessible public engagement in a manner that did not jeopardize public health.

Mr. Knight noted that he was the person in the city who had been working on the process the longest, and had been intimately involved with all aspects of the process, and that he was hoping to see action taken sooner rather than later. He stated that there were points in the process where a lack of public engagement was a reasonable criticism, but that since the Planning Commission had initially held webinar events in September 2020, there had been a substantial amount of public outreach and notification. Mr. Knight stated that he didn't think people were not aware of the process, but that perhaps they didn't know how to submit comment or felt more comfortable providing verbal input than written input, which was more difficult given COVID restrictions. He expressed concern that the delay would result in a lull, after which the process would need to be reintroduced to the public.

Commissioner McKissick stated that he didn't think anyone would vote on the document before the election in November. He noted that the State's Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) did not have any process deadlines or provisions that would force City Council to vote on the document. Mr. Knight stated that he would convey the commissioners' interest in moving the process forward faster, and suggested they draft a letter which they could all sign.

Commissioner Marek stated that she was in support of a public meeting within a public space, and that she saw benefits to more outreach as a continuance of the previous webinar sessions, but that she was opposed to waiting until August to hold such meetings. Commissioner McKissick concurred and stated that he was disappointed in the proposed delay; he stated that if City Council did not support the document, they should vote it down and restart the process. He stated that he felt the COVID issue was being used as an justification for delay, and noted that there were many other examples of mass gatherings such as baseball games, school reopenings, and grocery stores, which demonstrated that people could currently gather in a safe manner if precautions were taken. He expressed skepticism that there would be a large turnout for an in-person event. Commissioner O'Toole agreed and stated that he believed there were currently safe ways to hold a meeting.

Mr. Knight noted that vaccine appointments would be opened to everyone in Pennsylvania by April 19th, so that there should be ample time for the public to get multiple shots by the end of May. Commissioner McKissick noted that City Council was on hiatus during the month of July, and Ms. Baldock confirmed that City Council had one meeting during the first week of July and one meeting the last week of August. She noted that City Council still needed to hold a public hearing after any community engagement sessions, before a vote could be taken.

Mr. Knight noted that he thought meetings or hearings after the primary election on May 18th may avoid some of the concern about political influence on the process. Commissioner O'Toole stated that he felt the delay might result in a vote after the general election in November. Commissioner Marek stated that the proposed process gave an appearance that the process was becoming political which was something the commissioners wanted to avoid when they craft their timeline back in the fall of 2020. She stated that she didn't want the process and the document to become a political issue.

Commissioner Alsberry asked Planning Bureau staff whether they could draft a letter to the City Council, which the commissioners could sign, requesting that the process be accelerated with action being taken earlier. Ms. Baldock stated that she didn't think that Planning Bureau staff should drafting a letter on behalf of the Planning Commission. Commissioner Monnier stated he thought Commissioner Marek might be the best individual to draft a letter since she had been the most involved throughout the process; he stated that he trusted her to convey the commissioners' thoughts and perspective.

Commissioner Alsberry stated that in his professional experience, staff could draft letters for approval by a board, although he stated that he didn't want to put Mr. Knight in a bad position. Ms. Baldock stated that Mr. Knight was in a tough position, as he worked for the Administration and answered to City Council.

Mr. Knight concluded by noting that the Planning Commission would draft a letter that he would provide to Councilman Madsen. He reiterated that the timeline was an initial proposal and that he felt there was some room for adjustment. Commissioner Alsberry requested that Commissioner Marek circulate the draft letter for comment before the commissioners signed a final version.

Commissioner McKissick stated that he felt the commissioners were doing the next Mayor, whomever that may be, a favor by providing them with a new document that they could pick up at the beginning of their term, to begin implementing projects and drafting neighborhood plans. He stated that the next administration could get a lot done in four years with the current plan, rather than waiting longer to reconsider the current draft document. Commissioner McKissick noted that it was great that there were more than twenty development projects currently in the works, but asked how coordinated they were without a formal Comprehensive Plan; he noted that the main justification for most of the new projects was that they were taking advantage of the new Federal Courthouse, but stated that there needed to be a more overarching and cohesive vision.

Commissioner Alsberry asked Commissioner Marek to ensure the letter was positive and supportive.

4 Subdivision & Land Development Ordinance regulations

Mr. Knight stated that the last item under “Other Business” was a discussion of the SALDO regulations, but noted that the commissioners may want to consider how they should prepare for a discussion at the May meeting. Commissioner Alsberry asked whether the May agenda would be lengthy, and Mr. Knight confirmed that there were nine cases to be heard, including six requesting zoning relief, a Street Vacation, and two Land Development Plans.

Commissioner McKissick asked whether the current SALDO was a complete rewrite from scratch, or whether it was a document that had gone through several editing cycles. Mr. Knight stated that he was unsure on often it had been amended, but noted that there were references throughout the document to sections that had been amended in subsequent years through City Council action. He stated that he didn’t expect that the Planning Commission would pursue a ground-up rebuild of the ordinance.

Mr. Knight noted that one of the issues that precipitated the current review was the definition of “land development” and what types of projects require formal review. He suggested that the Planning Commission could begin with a discussion of what constituted “land development” and thus required a Land Development Plan application, and then address other topics during subsequent meetings when there was a lighter agenda. Commissioner McKissick asked whether the commissioners could get a Word version so that they could do a “track changes” edit of the current document. Mr. Knight confirmed there was a Word version of the document, although it was only the chapters and he would have to edit them together into a full document. Commissioner Monnier and Commissioner McKissick agreed that that would be a helpful step.

Commissioner McKissick asked how SALDO amendments might tie into the current Comprehensive Plan process and an eventual Zoning Code update. Mr. Knight stated that it would follow a separate and distinct path from those processes; he noted that while there are references between the documents, the SALDO was more of a standalone document that could run on a parallel path to other zoning or land development documents. Commissioner McKissick noted that he wanted to address any changes in a timely manner and not delay necessary changes any longer than necessary.

Mr. Knight noted that the Planning Commission might want to review and make recommended changes to the SALDO, but wait to take formal action until after the Comprehensive Plan is adopted, after which the SALDO amendments could proceed in a timely manner.

ADJOURNMENT: 8:30 PM

Commissioner Marek moved, and Commissioner O’toole seconded the motion, to adjourn. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (6-0). The meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM.