

MINUTES

HARRISBURG PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR/VIRTUAL MEETING June 3, 2020 ZOOM PROGRAM PLATFORM

MEMBERS PRESENT: Joseph Alsberry, Chair
Vern McKissick, Vice Chair
Shaun E. O'Toole (arrived at 6:42 PM)
Jamesetta Reed
Ausha Green
Anne Marek
Zac Monnier

MEMBERS ABSENT:

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

OTHERS PRESENT:

CALL TO ORDER: 6:35 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Commissioner Marek moved, and Commissioner Green seconded the motion, to approve the minutes from the May 6th meeting without corrections; the motion was adopted by a unanimous (7-0) vote.

OLD BUSINESS:

1 Variance Applications for 50 South Cameron Street, zoned Downtown Center (DC), filed by U-Haul Company of PA, to install more wall signs than are permitted by right and to install signage larger than permitted.

Mr. Knight gave a synopsis of the report, recommending Approval.

The case was represented by Chris Schaffer with U-Haul of PA (the lessee), address unstated; and Veronica Morrison with Mette, Evans & Woodside (the legal counsel), 3401 North Front Street, P.O. Box 5950, Harrisburg, PA 17110 (aka "the Applicants").

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicants whether the case report was accurate and if they had any questions; they confirmed that they did not have any additional information to add to the case report. They stated that they felt the submitted documentation contained enough information for the commissioners to make a determination on the request. The Applicants stated that they had

worked to address any concerns related to the signs, and that they felt confident that they had provided justification for the request to be approved. They noted that they had provided notice to all property owners within 100 feet and that they hadn't received notice that anyone opposed the project. The Applicants noted that they had spoken to the owner of the property and adjoining building to the south of the subject property, and that they supported the request; they also noted that they had secured an affidavit to that effect.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether any of the commissioners had comments or concerns about the project. Commissioner Marek noted that the request was straightforward and made sense given the location of the property.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public that was for or against the project; there were no comments.

Commissioner McKissick moved, and Commissioner Reed seconded the motion, to Approve the request. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (7-0).

2 Variance & Special Exception Applications for 311 South River Street, zoned Residential Medium-Density (RM), filed by Matthew Long with Harrisburg Commercial Interiors & Associates, Inc., to establish a “Multifamily Dwelling” by converting existing office space into two apartments, and to exceed the allowable residential density.

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

1. The Applicant will coordinate with the Planning Bureau regarding the proposed work to ascertain whether the required investment will be classified as a “substantial improvement,” and thus require the structure to be floodproofed. The Bureau would recommend that the Applicant have an Elevation Certificate completed by a licensed surveyor or professional engineer.
2. The Applicant will receive HARB and/or City Council approval for any exterior alterations proposed as part of this project.
3. The Applicant will coordinate with the City’s Department of Public Works to ensure that the refuse billing account is updated to reflect the new use.

The case was represented by Matthew Krupp (the property owner), 258 North Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101; and Matthew Long with Harrisburg Commercial Interiors & Associates, LLC (the project manager), P.O. Box 10, Marysville, PA 17043 (aka “the Applicants”).

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicants whether the conditions in the case report were acceptable; they stated that they were acceptable. They noted that the building had been vacant for over ten years, and that despite being marketed for commercial use on both floors, there had not been interest in the property. The Applicants also noted that they had tried to lease the building but that they hadn't found any interested parties, and noted that the surrounding office market was difficult, with such uses mainly occupied by offices for the nearby UPMC PinnacleHealth campus.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether any of the commissioners had comments or concerns about the project. Commissioner McKissick stated that he understood why the building was having trouble leasing the space and thus supported the current proposal.

Commissioner Green asked what type of use was being proposed for the first floor. The Applicants stated that they had secured a “flood certificate” [note: this is likely reference to an Elevation Certificate, which is a different document] but they had not yet transmitted that documentation to Mr. Knight. They noted that the base of the building was approximately three feet from the AE (100-Year) floodplain boundary. The Applicants stated that Harrisburg Commercial Interiors was currently utilizing the first floor as office space.

Commissioner Monnier noted that he passed the property often on his commute to work and had considered how difficult it might be to establish a commercial use in the neighborhood. He stated that two-bedroom apartments were a need in downtown Harrisburg and that he thought the units would be viable because of that proposal.

Commissioner Marek asked whether the building was ever successfully utilized as office space. The Applicants stated that there had been an architect’s office on the second floor at one point, and noted that the building was likely constructed in the 1950s and then substantially improved in the 1970s by Gannett Fleming, who occupied the building until about 1991. They noted that the next major tenant was Premier Eye Care, which had satellite offices on-site near to their main office further south in the Shipoke neighborhood. The Applicants noted that the property also came with dedicated parking in a lot down the block.

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. Julie Iaria (308 South River Street, Harrisburg, PA) stated that she owned a nearby home and had grown up in the neighborhood. She noted that the building had been constructed before 1971 and was a warehouse for a hardware store located on 2nd Street in downtown Harrisburg, before being occupied by an architect who had rehabilitated the structure, and then several medical tenants. She said that she had spoken with the Applicants, didn’t have any objections, and felt the project would be well done. Ms. Iaria asked whether the refuse containers would be kept in the vestibule in front; the Applicants confirmed that they would work with the neighbors on a solution and stated that they felt the vestibule might be a good location for their storage.

Ms. Theresa Bell-McCauley (308½ South 2nd Street, Harrisburg, PA) stated that her rear yard abutted the subject property and that she was a bit concerned about devaluing her residential experience, noting that the rear windows overlooked her back yard. She asked whether the existing rear door would be used only as an emergency exit; the Applicants confirmed that the rear door would only be used as an emergency exit because there was an interior fire escape. Ms. Bell-McCauley noted that the rear windows in the property appeared to have been covered up during past uses and asked whether those would be cleared out for use by the residential units. The Applicants noted that the rear windows were blocked up from the inside and were willing to clean up the appearance of the windows. They noted that it wouldn’t make sense to replace those windows because they only provided light into the interior fire escape. Ms. Bell-McCauley stated

that she was concerned about the overview of her rear yard that the windows afforded and the Applicants reiterated that they did not plan to incorporate them into either of the units.

Ms. Baldock asked the public whether anyone else was interested in providing comments; there were no additional comments.

Commissioner McKissick moved, and Commissioner Green seconded the motion, to Approve the request with Staff Conditions. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (7-0).

Ms. Baldock noted that there were still members of the public in attendance and Commissioner Alsberry asked if they had any comments on the applications reviewed at the meeting. Ms. Baldock reiterated the instructions on how to request comment. Mr. Frank Mizzoni (Washington Street) noted that he lived along the grocer's alley that led to the building and that he had noticed the Applicants were doing work on the property; he stated that he supported the project.

OTHER BUSINESS:

1 Comprehensive Plan Update

Mr. Knight noted that the previously-discussed schedule for webinar sessions regarding the chapters was being pushed back a bit due to some concerns about the document from the Law Bureau. He deferred to Ms. Baldock to further discuss the issues identified by the Law Bureau.

Ms. Baldock noted that she had advised Commissioner Alsberry that the meeting should go into executive session to discuss the legal issues associated with the Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Alsberry asked Mr. Knight whether he had any other information related to the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Knight stated that the process would still follow the same schedule and format once a firm start date had been established. He noted that the advertising and public notice outreach would be the same via the City's website and social media feeds, amongst other methods. He also noted that the determination about whether to post chapters individually or have the whole document made available would be based on the rate at which the Law Bureau could review the chapters.

Commissioner Alsberry noted that the Law Bureau had advised the Planning Commission to go into executive session and requested a motion for adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT: 7:05 PM

Commissioner Marek moved, and Commissioner McKissick seconded the motion, to adjourn. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (7-0). The meeting adjourned at 7:05 PM.