

MINUTES

**HARRISBURG PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
September 6, 2023
THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. CITY GOVERNMENT CENTER
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Joseph Alsberry, Chair
Shaun E. O'Toole
Anne Marek
DeRon Jordan
Joe Canamucio

MEMBERS ABSENT: Vern McKissick, Vice Chair
Jamesetta Reed

STAFF PRESENT: Geoffrey Knight, Planning Director
Emily Farren, Assistant City Solicitor

CALL TO ORDER: 6:33 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Commissioner Marek asked Planning Bureau staff how she and Commissioner Canamucio should vote given that they were not at the previous month's meeting; Mr. Knight confirmed that they should abstain from voting. Commissioner O'Toole moved, and Commissioner Jordan seconded the motion, to approve the minutes from the August 2, 2023 meeting without corrections. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (3-0-2; Commissioner Marek and Commissioner Canamucio abstained as they were not in attendance at the previous meeting).

OLD BUSINESS: N/A

NEW BUSINESS:

- 1. Special Exception Application for 205 State Street, zoned Riverfront (RF), filed by David Stezin with the JEM Group, to convert the existing office building into a three-unit, "Multifamily Dwelling."**

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

1. Any proposed exterior work will be discussed with the City's Historic Preservation Specialist, who will determine whether such work can be administratively approved, or whether approval from HARB will be required.
2. 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.

The case was represented by Dave Stezin with the JEM Group (the project manager), 214 Senate Avenue, Suite 302, Camp Hill, PA 17011 (aka “the Applicant”).

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicant whether the conditions in the case report were acceptable; they confirmed that they were. Commissioner Alsberry asked whether the Applicant had anything to add to the case report; he stated that they were not planning on any exterior work and thus the project would not require HARB approval.

Commissioner O’Toole inquired as to how long the property was under the current ownership; the Applicant stated he wasn’t sure but felt it was only a year or so [note: the property transferred to the current owner on January 17, 2023, per the County’s records]. Commissioner O’Toole noted that the commissioners were reviewing an increasing number of proposals to convert downtown commercial spaces into residential uses, including several along State Street, and that he was in favor of that trend. He stated that he did not feel as though three units was too dense for the site.

Commissioner Marek concurred with Commissioner O’Toole, but noted that parking might be a concern and asked the Applicant whether there was any parking on-site; he confirmed that there was no parking on-site and stated that three employees of his firm that were residents of the city secured annual passes to park on the street. The Applicant noted that there was a public parking facility behind the subject property and that future residents could purchase month

Commissioner Jordan stated that he had no questions or comments.

Commissioner Canamucio stated that he had no questions or comments.

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

Commissioner Marek moved, and Commissioner O’Toole seconded the motion, to Approve the request with Staff Conditions. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (5-0).

2. Special Exception Application for 104 & 106 Walnut Street, zoned Riverfront (RF), filed by Bradley Jones with Harristown Enterprises, Inc., to convert each of the existing office buildings into a two-unit, “Multifamily Dwelling.”

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

1. Any proposed exterior work will be discussed with the City’s Historic Preservation Specialist, who will determine whether such work can be administratively approved, or whether approval from HARB will be required.
2. 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.

The case was represented by Bradley Jones and Hannah McPhelin with Harristown Enterprises, Inc. (the property owner), 320 Market Street, Suite 273E, Harrisburg, PA 17101; and Kathryn Sterner with Murray Associates (the project architect), 1600 North 2nd Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102 (aka “the Applicants”).

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicants whether the conditions in the case report were acceptable; they confirmed that they were. Commissioner Alsberry noted that the case report confirmed that off-street parking was not required as part of the proposal, but expressed some concern regarding how parking for residents will be addressed. The Applicants referenced the proximity to the riverfront and available parking on City Island, and noted that many of the tenants in their current downtown properties were willing to walk a distance for off-street parking and felt that the cheap and relatively easy parking on City Island would potentially be attractive to future residents. They also noted that there were \$100/month resident passes available for the downtown parking facilities, which would provide another option.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether the Applicants had anything to add to the case report; they stated that they were looking forward to another opportunity to convert historic properties back to their former residential use. They noted they had recently completed several other commercial-to-residential conversion projects of historic properties in downtown Harrisburg, for which they had received historic rehabilitation awards. They referenced the recent expansion project for the Riverfront Library across the street and stated that they were looking forward to participating in the rejuvenation of the Walnut Street corridor; the Applicants stated that the properties had been blighted and unoccupied for several years. Commissioner Alsberry stated that he felt the Applicants had done a great job in their previous projects.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether any of the commissioners had comments, questions, or concerns about the project.

Commissioner O’Toole noted that office space in the downtown area was in low demand and stated that he was in favor of the proposal.

Commissioner Marek concurred with the need for more residential units downtown and that converting underutilized commercial properties to residential units made sense. She noted that the proposed two- and three-bedroom units being proposed were welcome additions to the downtown housing inventory and contrasted with other such projects that largely featured studio and one-bedroom units. She asked whether there was a similar project that had recently been approved for that block of Walnut Street; the Applicants confirmed that the adjacent properties at 108-112 Walnut Street were being converted to residential units by the current owner of the subject properties.

Commissioner Jordan asked whether both of the properties had rear additions with separate entrances; the Applicants stated that the current proposal did not include the construction of new additions to the exterior of the property. They noted that additions had been constructed in the past by previous owners. Commissioner Jordan noted that his primary concern was whether there would be appropriate emergency egress from all units; the Applicants confirmed that 106 Walnut Street had an exterior fire escape and that 104 Walnut Street featured an interior stairway.

Commissioner Canamucio noted that the properties were located in an historic district and asked whether there was any proposed exterior work. The Applicants stated that the front of each building would be enhanced and preserved as much as possible, and that if any work was necessary, they would work with the Planning Bureau. They noted that there were some loose bricks that would need repointing and that some roof work was necessary, but that overall, they intended to keep the character of the buildings because they felt they enhanced the character of the street. The Applicants confirmed that they would be replacing the glass block windows with more traditional windows and doors.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public for or against the project; 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 (5-0).

3. Variance & Special Exception Application for 1501 Cameron Terrace, zoned Residential Medium-Density (RM), filed by Christina Reyes, to convert a single-family dwelling to two units which requires Special Exceptions for the proposed use and relief from the off-street parking requirements, and a Variance for relief from the Specific Criteria.

Mr. Knight noted that the Applicants did not appear to be in attendance and recommended that the case be moved to the end of the agenda in case the Applicants showed up late and, if they did not show up, that the case be continued until the October Planning Commission meeting. Commissioner Alsberry stated that they would move on to the next application.

Commissioner Canamucio moved, and Commissioner Marek seconded the motion, to Table the application. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (5-0).

4. Special Exception Application for 2310 Green Street, zoned Residential Medium-Density (RM), filed by Dannie Elliott, to establish a "Personal Services" use and request relief from the off-street parking associated with the use.

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

1. Given that the curb cut and driveway on-site through which customers will access the proposed business is shared with the adjacent property, the Applicant should provide an agreement with that property owner acknowledging and authorizing such access.
2. The Applicant will not install any signage advertising or representing the business on the front of the property and primary structure, but may put a sign consistent with the applicable zoning regulations on the detached garage to guide customers to the business.

The case was represented by Dannie Elliott (the property owner), 2310 Green Street, Harrisburg, PA 17110 (aka "the Applicant").

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicant whether the conditions in the case report were acceptable; they confirmed that they were. Commissioner Alsberry asked whether the Applicant had anything to add to the case report. He stated that parking for the business wouldn't be a concern because his hours of operation would be during the day when surrounding residents were at work, and noted that he had a good relationship with the surrounding community so that if any problems arose, they would apprise him of those issues. Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there would be any occasions when the number of clients would cause parking issues; the Applicant noted that he only had one chair and that his business was by appointment only, meaning there would only ever be one or two clients on-site at a time. Commissioner Alsberry noted that he usually asked whether Applicants contacted the community, and that the Applicant had already addressed that through the submission of the petition of support.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether any of the commissioners had comments, questions, or concerns about the project.

Commissioner O'Toole stated that he had no concerns and felt that the business operations would preclude any issues with parking, and concurred with Commissioner Alsberry's statements regarding neighborhood outreach; he noted that the issue was less important for downtown properties because many of the neighbors were commercial properties. Commissioner O'Toole stated that he was in favor of the proposal.

Commissioner Marek stated that she was in favor of the proposed project.

Commissioner Jordan stated that he was in favor of the proposed project.

Commissioner Canamucio requested confirmation that the neighbor of the adjacent property was okay with the business requiring access through their shared driveway; the Applicant confirmed that the arrangement was acceptable to the neighbor. Commissioner Canamucio stated that he was in favor of the project.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public for or against the project; there were no comments. Ms. Kimberley Elliott (2310 Green Street, Harrisburg, PA) stated that she was in favor of the project.

The Applicant noted that there was an additional walkway on the other side of this property from the driveway, which led into the rear yard where the business would be located; he noted that clients and customers could use that access if the shared driveway became an issue with the neighbor.

Commissioner O'Toole moved, and Commissioner Jordan seconded the motion, to Approve the request with Staff Conditions. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (5-0).

OTHER BUSINESS:

Commissioner Alsberry asked Planning Bureau staff whether there was any other business to discuss. Mr. Knight stated that there were no additional issues to discuss.

ADJOURNMENT: 7:07 PM

Commissioner O'Toole moved, and Commissioner Jordan seconded the motion, to adjourn. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (5-0).