

Meeting Minutes
State College Borough Planning Commission
February 5, 2020

The State College Borough Planning Commission (PC) met on Wednesday, February 5, 2020 at the Municipal Building, 243 South Allen Street. Anita Genger, Vice-Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m.

Members Present

Scott Dutt; Jon Eich; Anita Genger, Vice-Chair; Mary Madden; Ron Madrid; and Mallory Meehan

Members Absent

Zoe Boniface, Chair

Others Present

Greg Garthe, Planner/Zoning Officer; John Wilson, Zoning Officer; Isabel Storey, Planner; Jeff Spackman, Pennsylvania State University (PSU) OPP; Karl Shellenberger, Buchart Horn; Al Drobka, Architect; Mark Saville, HRG Engineering; Mark Torretti and Tony Fruchtl, PennTerra Engineering; and Esther Matthews, Administrative Assistant

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Dutt and seconded by Mr. Eich to approve the January 23, 2020 meeting minutes. The vote was unanimously in favor.

Chair Report

Ms. Genger, Vice-Chair, had nothing to report.

Public Hour

No comments or concerns were heard during the public hour.

Land Development Plans

Final Plan - 706/708 South Atherton Street Apartments (formerly 430 West Irvin Ave); Valient Real Estate Investments LLC, Applicant; CP-3 Zoning District; PennTerra Engineering, Engineer; Albert A. Drobka, Architect

Mr. Drobka's overview included:

- A major change from the preliminary plan was the site would have a South Atherton Street address. The proposed development included two buildings – one with four units, the other with eight units – each on its own lot.
- The site would be accessed from a shared driveway off the former West Irvin Avenue and would have a shared parking lot but would be two separate tax parcels with separate utilities.
- Adjustments to the site grading from the preliminary plan allowed for changing the elevations for both roof lines to be equal in height.
- For energy saving purposes, no additional windows were added to the side of the building.
- The final design included a solar-panel ready roof along with conduits down to the mechanical rooms for future updates.

Planning Commission (PC) comments:

- Ms. Genger asked for further explanation on what energy thresholds he was referring to. Mr. Drobka replied the international energy code stipulates how much fenestration a building may have, which is utilized by Centre Region Code to review building plans and issue permits accordingly.
- Mr. Eich asked if windows on the side of the building were in units or in stairwells. Mr. Drobka replied the windows were in units and they put the stairwells inside the buildings, centrally located away from exterior walls.
- Mr. Eich then inquired if just the name changed to 706/708 South Atherton Street Apartments or if that would also be the address. Mr. Drobka responded it would also be the mailing addresses for the apartments and each apartment within each building will have a designated unit number. Mr. Garthe interjected the change happened due to the Borough vacating West Irvin Avenue at that location, which resulted in a shared driveway on Atherton for those properties.
- Ms. Genger asked what the Design Review Board's (DRB) comments were and Mr. Garthe responded their comments included an inquiry about there being elevators or not, questions about planters or other vegetation as well as the lot grading and a recommendation against the use of ginkgo trees.
- Mr. Madrid felt compelled to remark the buildings are subjectively unattractive, doing absolutely nothing to enhance the architectural character of the Borough, but putting a stop to it on grounds of poor aesthetics was not within the PC's purview. He went on to empathize with developers and landowners who wish to maximize profit and minimize investment, pointing out there are properties within the Borough which have made an effort. Mr. Madrid stated the applicant has the right to build as they see fit as long as it conforms to zoning and all other requirements.
- Mr. Eich noted the presence of a dumpster pad and asked if there would be space for recycling containers or if it was internal. Mr. Drobka responded it would be a part of the dumpster enclosure.
- Mr. Eich, referencing an exterior aerial rendering of the property, asked if the parking lot to the right of the property would be accessible. Mr. Drobka answered the gray area, a parking lot, and adjacent green space, up to where the rendering shows the sidewalk ends by the dumpster pad, all belonged to the State College Area School District. Mr. Eich then suggested helping facilitate the creation of pedestrian routes to make it accessible, which would make the building useable to a wider range of tenants.

Staff comments:

- Mr. Garthe shared staff was still working out details regarding the three properties which share common access at this location and the borough requirement for a pedestrian connection to a public sidewalk for multi-family residential buildings.

Ms. Genger motioned to send the proposal to Council and was seconded by Mr. Eich. The vote was unanimously in favor.

Final Plan - West Campus Substation; The Pennsylvania State University, Applicant; UPD Zoning District; Buchart Horn, Engineer; Michael J. Burns, Architect

Mr. Shellenberger's presentation included:

- One major change made since the preliminary plan was presented to PC in November is the addition of the landscaping plan, which included some small trees and shrubs along the wall between the substation and Walker Building.
- The proposed substation exterior would be made of stone which would match the existing surrounding building exteriors.

DRB's comment:

- Mr. Garthe shared the DRB's main comment was regarding whether or not PSU would reuse the stone from the wall which would be demolished.

PC's comments:

- Ms. Genger asked if the stone would be reused and Mr. Shellenberger replied yes, depending on the condition of stone.
- Mr. Eich asked if there would be security for the area, suggesting more substantial fencing or means of securing it, and stated hopefully in the future, this kind of facility on campus was moved underground. Mr. Shellenberger responded the area was secure by locks and a service gate only accessible by staff.

Ms. Genger motioned to approve the final plan, and all were in favor.

Preliminary Plan - PSU West 2 Building; The Pennsylvania State University, Applicant; UPD Zoning District; HRG, Engineer; Payette, Architect

Mr. Saville's presentation:

- There would be a large glazed, glass façade shielding the parking deck and providing visual interest.
- There would be a high-bay research lab and maker's space with a large gantry crane as well as general-purpose classrooms.
- Two engineering buildings were being proposed; the West 1 Building preliminary plans are forthcoming.
- The majority of the mechanical equipment was located in the basement, connecting to the tunnel utility system already in place.
- Utilizing a phase process would provide a more economical means of consolidating and migrating the College of Engineering by creating a new space first to move everything into, then starting renovations and work on the Hammond Building.
- Skylights on the roof would be added, allowing natural light into the open space classroom format.
- Due to the zoning restrictions for this area, the max build height was based on the elevation above mean sea level, not the difference in elevation from grade to the top of height.
- The main entrance would be located in the northeast corner of the West 1, adjacent to the EES Building.
- There would be a service yard area just outside of the high bay research lab and maker space, allowing projects to be taken outside if need be.

PC's comments:

- Mr. Madrid asked what buildings would be demolished once this project was complete and Mr. Saville replied PSU was working on the master plan and how Hammond Building would be transitioned and eventually demolished.
- Mr. Madrid then asked if the one-story building to the south of the Leonard Building would remain and have other uses. Mr. Saville responded yes; they plan to repurpose once this building was complete.
- Mr. Madrid asked if this means it would increase the overall square footage of buildings on the PSU campus. Mr. Saville said it was going to increase at the opening of the proposed West 1 and 2 Buildings, but the intent would ultimately be net zero with the loss of the spaces in Hammond.
- Ms. Madden inquired about the bike maintenance facilities and who would have access. Mr. Saville responded it would be accessible university-wide to anyone using the bike paths.

- Ms. Madden noted the large scale of the buildings and wondered how much green space there would be in the quad relative to acreage. Mr. Saville responded there would be approximately two and a half acres.
- Ms. Madden asked how the bike parking would be accessed. Mr. Saville answered there would be bike paths and they planned to create pedestrian paths to encourage people to use the Westgate (formerly IST) Building to cross over Atherton Street.
- Mr. Eich questioned if it would be built to LEED standards and what they would be doing for solar energy. Mr. Saville replied it would be designed to meet LEED standards as well as daylighting through the skylights into an open floor plan. He also said the roof structure would be designed to support future installation of solar panels, but that most of the solar panels and conduits had been designed into West Parking Deck for a larger capacity.

Mr. Garthe shared comments from the DRB:

- DRB had asked about the availability of parking for service vehicles.
- There were questions if the proposal included any outdoor seating and made suggestions about potential food truck locations.
- The DRB inquired if there would be any outdoor exhibition/performance space in the quad and if it would be accessible for delivery trucks for such events.
- They recommended conduits for solar energy.
- The DRB questioned if there would be anything done to help prevent birds from flying into all the glass on the front of the building and questioned if the large glass façade would mean adding to light pollution.

Staff comments:

- Staff still needed to verify the stormwater & traffic impacts were completed, which should have been included as part of the West Parking Deck plan set.
- The preliminary plan set did not include color elevations, so the plans would need to be included in the final plan.
- Parking questions, during and after, construction.

Ms. Genger moved to vote on recommending the proposal to Council, and all were in favor.

Community Planning

Request to Rezone a Portion of Tax Parcel 36-26-223 (732 E Marylyn Ave)

Mr. Torretti's presentation included:

- Originally the parcel was zoned R2, zoning was changed to public activity (PA).
- The single-family home on the parcel was used for staff but was no longer needed and would be subdivided off.

Staff comments:

- After further review, staff recommended it be brought before Council for approval.

Mr. Eich moved to recommend the rezoning be approved, seconded by Mr. Madrid, and all were in favor.

Request to Amend the Zoning Ordinance to Allow Four-Car Garages at Single Family Dwellings

Mr. Slaybaugh's presentation included:

- The proposed change would add limits for detached garages, but separate attached garages out of the ordinance to not have a limit on the number of bays since other provisions set forth in the ordinance already limit square footage on the lot.

- Concerns had been raised which proposed rule would be borough-wide, leading to unintended issues in some of the downtown areas and illegal uses.
- In this particular case, the lot was much larger when compared to the rest of the borough.
- One approach would be to amend section 501.L5 - which currently limits garage size by referring back to the definition - by creating an exception for only attached garages in the borough, with larger lots exceeding 25,000 square feet to allow four vehicles and lots exceeding 30,000, to allow five vehicles.
- Another suggestion would be a more limited approach to that amendment and not make the change borough-wide, just in the R1 zone.
- An ambiguity exists in terms of what exactly constitutes a vehicle or single bay in a garage and at the last meeting, as noted in the memo, they came up with a more definitive metric of 288 square feet per vehicle.

Commentary:

- Staff agreed definition two would be the better approach.
- Mr. Wilson said option three would be the way to go because it defines size of a single garage bay and staff does not think it would have negative impact on community since it's limited to R1. Ms. Storey's research, however, did not find any similar situations elsewhere for defining the size of a garage bay and with the zoning ordinance rewrite underway, Mr. Wilson cautioned against adding a specific size for a garage bay at this time, supporting option two.
- Mr. Dutt said, in principle, does not agree with limiting how many vehicles a person can own; it is too invasive.
- Ms. Genger asked why it was set up initially to limit the number of bays. Mr. Slaybaugh responded he believed a logical reason for 1959 rule was because the older part of the borough has an alley system allowing for a detached garage with a minimum rear lot setback of five feet. Mr. Slaybaugh noted there were rules now that limit the size of the main building on a lot that were not in existence in 1959 that can address/handle attached garages from being disproportionate.
- Ms. Genger then asked why the requirements were bundled or care about how much of a legal footprint was used for the garage. Mr. Slaybaugh responded it may have been poor draftsmanship and times were different then.
- Ms. Madden inquired if there was a lot coverage limit, why was there a need to identify how many specific vehicles a garage has if it was attached. Mr. Dutt added that even with a two-car garage a lift could be installed to store additional vehicles. Mr. Slaybaugh replied to Ms. Madden and Mr. Dutt's comments, stating they could go with their original proposal and make it applicable only in the R1 zone not the entire borough.
- Mr. Eich expressed appreciation for Mr. Slaybaugh's work and preferred the option limited to R1 as well since the principle use was residential in this zone. There should be considerations included for exceptional situations but did not want to necessarily limit number of accessory buildings either.
- A variance request was brought up by PC and staff responded it was not an option.
- Mr. Eich asked Mr. Wilson how many properties in the borough had accessory buildings. Mr. Wilson responded most properties had at least one when you take into consideration garden sheds or tree houses.
- Mr. Eich asked if non-passenger vehicles meant commercial vehicles and Mr. Wilson replied it meant RVs, campers, boats and things of that nature.
- Mr. Slaybaugh pointed out, as example, the limits set forth by Ferguson and College townships for residential lots consisting of two acres or less, the combined square footage of all accessory structures may not exceed 25% of the gross useable floor area of the principle building with a maximum of two accessory structures allowed.
- Ms. Genger asked if it would be possible for any of these lots to be subdivided. Mr. Wilson replied lot lines can be moved, but these lots were limited to single-family homes and generally do not change. He also noted in order to park behind the main structure, accessory buildings would have to be placed on the side or in the rear of the property; most lots don't allow for longer driveways to get around to the rear.

- Mr. Eich asked if they could make the garage size calculation simpler by round up to 300 square feet increments. Mr. Wilson responded it was something staff had discussed, but they began to think about other considerations like workshops in garages or if someone has a boat they would prefer to store inside.
- Mr. Dutt cautioned to limit the proposed changes to R1 as well, but with the rules they were trying to set up, be able to extend it to other residential zones in the future.
- Ms. Genger asked how much of an influence the existing lot coverage or buildings would have on what could be built on the lot if the lot boundaries were moved. Mr. Slaybaugh responded he believes it would be prorated on lot size and offered the following example: if the lot lines were moved such that the overall lot size decreases, resulting in the existing buildings to then exceed lot coverage, then that would be non-conforming and cannot be done.
- Mr. Madrid questioned if they wanted to approve one of the options Mr. Slaybaugh had presented or leave it to staff. He commented he thought they should zone for the worst-case scenario. He moved to approve approach three.
- Mr. Eich moved to allow staff to come up with final language.

Ms. Genger motioned to put it to staff, Mr. Eich further clarified they would like staff to look at the record – the minutes from the last meeting as well as this one – to develop an approach that addressed the question before them, and all were in favor.

Official Reports and Correspondence

Borough Council (BC)

Mr. Garthe reported BC reviewed the borough solicitor's draft decision for the CORE Spaces conditional use permit request on Monday night and would revisit it at the meeting on March 2nd.

Zoning Hearing Board (ZHB)

1. Variance - HERE State College

On February 25, 2020 the ZHB would hear a request for a variance from the 25-foot height limit of the Borough's sign ordinance to allow for the installation of an exterior building sign for the HERE State College project at a height of 28 feet along E Calder Way.

Upcoming Land Development Plans

1. Final Plan - PSU Field Hockey Stadium
2. Preliminary Plan - 1401 South Atherton Street, former site of AutoPort

Staff Updates

Nothing to report.

Centre Regional Planning Commission

Mr. Eich reported the first meeting would consist of routine reorganization and approval of the contract between the NPO staff and PennDOT for the funds to support staff activities. They would also be looking at a zoning amendment in College Township which affects PSU's planning districts eight and eleven. There would also be a report on Census and American community updates.

Other Business Matters

Mr. Eich requested a public comments section be added to future agendas, as well as the addition of the zoning ordinance rewrite to the routine items staff reports on.

Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, Ms. Genger adjourned the meeting at 1:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Esther Matthews
Administrative Assistant