

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING
PLANNING COMMISSION
DECEMBER 1, 2021**

The West Reading Planning Commission met for their regular meeting on Wednesday, December 1, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. at Borough Hall with the following persons present: Chair Philip Wert; Vice Chair Christopher Lincoln; Members Jennifer Bressler, Zachary Shaver, Cody Rhoads and Mariella Napoli; Borough Manager Dean Murray; Zoning Officer Cathy Hoffman. Dan Horman, Terry Siggins and Kacie Rodriguez were unable to attend.

Visitors Tom Unger, Borough Engineer
 Mike Rohrer, SDE Planner

Mr. Wert called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the November 3, 2021 minutes. **Moved** by Ms. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Shaver.
Motion carried.

New Business

a. Zoning change follow-up –

Mr. Wert referred to the letter from SDE Planner Mike Rohrer which outlined the following comments:

1. Amend the Residential/Professional District to allow for “Mixed-Use Development” and apartments on the upper levels of a building as a permitted use.
2. Amend the Institutional District to allow for “Mixed-Use Development” and “Apartments on the upper levels of a building as a conditional use.
3. Amend the Light Industrial District to allow for “Mixed-Use Development” and apartments on the upper levels of a building as a conditional use.
4. Remove “Mixed Use Development” in the Light Industrial District as a special exception.
5. Eliminating the General Business District Overlay is not necessary, due to the variety of uses already permitted by right in the General Business and Central Business Districts.
6. Further discussion is needed in regard to expanding the overlay boundaries, which include 425 Buttonwood Street and 415 Reading Avenue.

The existing Institutional district is fairly restrictive, so adding an overlay would open it up for other uses. The potential use of the General Business Overlay was discussed, with the potential changes for all four existing Institutional uses that are immediately adjacent to the traffic circle.

Mr. Wert also mentioned potential future redevelopment sites such as the shopping center and the service station at Penn and Tulpehocken Avenues and noted that if those sites were redeveloped, the Delaney Circle area would be opened up for redevelopment as well. Therefore, it is critical that the Planning Commission is forward thinking rather than being reactive. Because the Institutional zone uses are currently so limited, it will be detrimental to any redevelopment efforts. Potential uses, in addition to residential, could be cultural, retail etc. which would be appropriate use of the spaces. It was the consensus of the Commission to have the General Overlay District apply to the four Institutional properties at the circle: 425 Buttonwood (Manor Care), 401 Buttonwood (former alcohol/drug treatment facility); 415 Reading (former medical office building) and 416 Reading (Morris Pace Assisted Living).

Mr. Wert also mentioned that in the Derck & Edson Master Plan, a recommendation had been made to alter the front and side yard setbacks in order to unify the building frontages. He referred to a chart that had been prepared as part of the Master Plan and requested that Mr. Rohrer review D&E's recommendation to ensure that it makes sense. Once these changes to the Zoning Ordinance have been drafted, it will need to be reviewed by the Solicitor and then follow the usual process of enacting changes to the Zoning Ordinance.

b. New definitions –

Lot area/width non-conformities:

It is proposed that §455-113 be replaced by new language that states "Any lot of record existing at the effective date of this chapter may be used for the erection of a structure conforming to the use regulations of the zoning district in which it is located, without a lot area or width variance, even though its lot area and width are less than the minimum required by this chapter; however, such lot must comply with the front, rear and side yards, height and lot coverage standards of the zoning district wherein it is located."

Ms. Hoffman is requesting the new language because the existing subsection seemingly allows for development on a lot without having to comply with the front, rear and side setbacks, etc. Mr. Rohrer acknowledged that the proposed language is common in zoning ordinances.

Convenience store:

The convenience store definition that was discussed at the October meeting states "A retail business that stocks a limited range of household goods and groceries and may be part of a gas/petrol station." Additional discussion determined that the section referring to a gas station not be included in the definition given that they are not permitted in the Zoning Ordinance.

Neon/rope/LED lighting:

The following language for neon/rope/LED lighting was taken from another municipality as a guide for drafting an addition to the Borough's ordinances:

"(a) Policy Statement on the Use of Exposed Neon Lighting. It is the policy of the City to ensure that signs and building façades create an attractive appearance, do not negatively impact neighboring properties and improve the aesthetic character of the City. To accomplish this goal, the use of exposed neon lighting as part of a sign or as an architectural accent shall be used in moderation and only when other means of signage, illumination and architectural embellishment cannot achieve the overall architectural design for the building and necessary signage for the business. In considering whether to approve or disapprove the use of exposed neon lighting for signs or as an architectural accent, the applicant shall adhere to the following standards, and the Planning Commission shall find that the proposal conforms to the general limitations and standards specified in this section.

(b) General Limitations and Standards. Any use of exposed neon lighting for signs or as an architectural accent shall conform to the following limitations and standards:

(1) The exposed neon lighting, whether incorporated into signs or as architectural accents, shall only be proposed on a portion of a building or on a building façade that is oriented towards the street or a parking lot.

(2) The exposed neon lighting is not used as an accent feature around or within the perimeter of storefront windows, whether or not the exposed neon lighting is located within the interior or exterior of the structure.

(3) The exposed neon lighting is not designed to flash, move, animate or intermittently change in illumination or color.

(4) When exposed neon lighting is proposed as an architectural accent or element, it shall be concealed from view whenever possible through the use of parapets, cornices or ledges. When such lighting cannot be concealed, it may be used only if the Commission finds that its use is designed to reinforce specific architectural elements of the structure, has a logical and complementary relationship to the building elevation, is consistent with the architectural design of the building, and is not proposed and used solely to attract attention to the building or its use.

(5) Exposed neon lighting, whether incorporated into signs or as architectural accents, shall not exceed one-half (1/2) inch in diameter and shall not be combined with any reflective material such as mirrors, polished metal, highly glazed tiles or other similar materials which would have the effect of accentuating the size, width or area of the illuminated tube. The size may need to be amended.

(6) Exposed neon lighting shall be composed of materials manufactured by a company that is registered with Underwriters Laboratories, shall not exceed a maximum of thirty (30) milliamps per circuit, and shall be designed to accommodate a dimmer in order to reduce the brightness of the neon. Not certain about the maximum of 30 milliamps, but the dimmer is critical.

(7) A wall sign incorporating exposed neon lighting shall only be allowed for a business suite having at least thirty (30) linear feet of business frontage and shall not exceed one (1) such sign per business suite. If the business suite is located on a corner and has two (2) business frontages, with each frontage of at least thirty (30) linear feet, one (1) such sign may be allowed for each frontage of the business suite.

(8) The use of exposed neon lighting as an architectural accent shall not be permitted on any business suite where the front façade of the business suite has less than one hundred (100) lineal feet of business frontage.

(9) Only one (1) form of exposed neon lighting, whether a neon wall sign, neon window sign or a neon architectural accent, may be used for any business suite. However, if a business suite exceeds two hundred (200) lineal feet, two (2) forms of exposed neon lighting may be used (i.e., a neon wall sign and a neon window sign, or a neon wall or window sign and a neon architectural accent).

(c) *Procedure for Approval of the Use of Exposed Neon Lighting for Signs and Architectural Accents.* Any exposed neon lighting used for signage or as an architectural accent on the exterior of any building shall be subject to design review approval by the Planning Commission pursuant to procedures contained in Article 20 of this chapter of the Artesia Municipal Code, except that the standards and criteria for approval of the signage or architectural accents shall be the general limitations and standards set forth in Subsection (b) of this section, rather than as set forth in Section 9-2.2005. Notwithstanding the preceding sentence, window signs incorporating exposed neon lighting shall be subject to administrative review and approval by the Planning Director as provided in Section 9-2.1204(e), and shall conform to the general limitations and standards provided in subsection (b) of this section."

Integration of this language into the Zoning Ordinance was discussed at length. While lighting is not considered to be a sign, it needs to be stated in conjunction with signage and performance standards. §455-122 "Lighting control" can be amended to expand the requirements as noted in the proposed language. These regulations will only pertain to the Central and General Business Districts at this time. Mr. Rohrer will review the proposed addition and make recommendations.

Mr. Rohrer left the meeting at 7:08 p.m.

c. Animal ordinance change discussion –

Mr. Becker has provided some additional minor changes to the proposed ordinance which the Commission has reviewed and agreed with after some brief discussion.

A motion was made by Ms. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Lincoln to recommend to Council to approve the changes proposed to the Animal Ordinance based on Solicitor Becker's comments dated November 30th that was received as an attachment to his email. **Motion carried.**

d. Rental occupancy changes –

Mr. Wert referred to the legal advice received from the Solicitor's office that outlines areas of concern in moving forward with changes to our rental occupancy program. He asked that the memo be redistributed to the Commission given that there are new members who would not have received it before. This will be reviewed in the new year.

Proposed changes to the fireworks ordinance will also be discussed in the new year.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:27 p.m. was made by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Shaver. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Cathy Hoffman
Zoning Officer