

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING
PLANNING COMMISSION
APRIL 6, 2022**

The West Reading Planning Commission met for their regular meeting on Wednesday, April 6, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. at Borough Hall with the following persons present: Chair Philip Wert; Vice Chair Christopher Lincoln; Members Jennifer Bressler, Cody Rhoads, Daniel Horman, Kacie Rodriguez and Mariella Napoli; Borough Manager Dean Murray; Zoning Officer Cathy Hoffman; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira.

Visitors	Mike Rohrer, SDE Planner Patrick Kaag, Resident	Paige West, Visitor Rafael Torres, Resident
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Mr. Wert called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the March 2, 2022 minutes. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mrs. Bressler.
Motion carried.

New Business

a. **Skate Park Proposal:**

Mr. Kaag shared on behalf of JD Turner of the Holistic Skate Shop a request to consider the installation of a single use halfpipe concrete skate park feature as a memorial to the late West Reading resident Gianni Molinari. A fully funded 35' by 35' concrete mini ramp was proposed to be set on the ground level with berm abutments at each end in the area roughly 30' northeast of the basketball courts along Old Wyomissing Road. This location would not impact the disc golf course and would have the ability for expansion in the future if desired. Additional information was requested for the following aspects:

- Safety/Security – Illustrations or renderings of a mechanism to close the skate park to the public if needed; lighting and security camera system; pedestrian access to this feature, and signage.
- Noise Disturbances – Methods to reduce noise disturbances and time of disturbance to neighboring homes.
- Agreement – An agreement and escrow of funds to maintain the skate park including graffiti removal and repairs or maintenance.
- City of Reading approval.
- Public outreach to West Reading Borough and Old Wyomissing Road residents to obtain their feedback on the proposed skate park feature.

Ms. Rodriguez shared her experience growing up around skate parks and the positive impact that was made on neighborhood youth. It was recommended to consider investing in the Borough's youth by giving them a free, positive and productive activity to use their bodies, learn new skills, and communicate with others in a public setting. Ideas offered to dampen the sound were to apply an epoxy coating to the concrete and to plant shrubbery. Ms. Rodriguez encouraged consideration to be given to the positive impact on neighborhood youth as opposed to dwelling on the stigma of potential negative impacts to the older population.

Mr. Kaag will share these comments with Mr. Turner to address the noted concerns. The Borough Solicitor will be asked to provide feedback on this proposal.

b. Zoning Changes:

Rope Lighting – Mr. Rohrer shared a simple addition to Section 455-159 Prohibited Signs of the Zoning Ordinance to prohibit the use of rope lighting in the commercial district. “K. String lights and rope lights (not including Holiday lights) when used for commercial purposes.”

Mr. Wert shared his concern of the potential challenges to define lighting as a sign. The solicitor will be asked to provide feedback.

Yard Setbacks – Mr. Rohrer recapped previous discussions to plan for future renovations along Penn Avenue with regards to front yard setbacks. Language was provided to amend Section 455-79 that would require minimum front yard requirements from 0-3 feet from the inside edge of the sidewalk. Maximum front yard requirements were proposed to be between 3-12 feet provided any area in excess of 3 feet provides a courtyard area.

Members of the board were in agreeance with the language provided by Mr. Rohrer and decided to share this information with the solicitor for feedback.

c. Berks County Planning Commission:

Mr. Wert noted that the Berks County Planning Commission had not been given the opportunity to comment on our proposed zoning ordinance amendment that had been adopted by Borough Council in January. It was noted that the Borough does not need to follow the County’s recommendations, however, the amendment could be challenged for not adhering to the provisions of the Municipalities Planning Code. The following comments from the Berks County Planning Commission letter, dated March 22, 2022 were considered:

1. Additional language was recommended for Section 455-97 S. in that upper-level apartments are permitted only if they do not qualify as a redevelopment in Article XVII Light Industrial District. Board members agreed to the additional language recommendation.
2. The County referred to express standards and criteria for special exceptions and conditional uses for such factors as extra lot size, increased setbacks, buffering or landscape requirements, additional parking spaces, etc., noting that these standards should be objective and measurable. Additional clarification is needed as to a specific set of standards that would be required for every use that requires a special exception or conditional use. It was decided to not implement this recommendation at this time but to request guidance from the solicitor to develop express standards for future amendment consideration.

Mr. Horman departed the meeting at 7:12 p.m.

3. As recommended by the County, the parcels within the Institutional District that are being added to the General Business Overlay District will be reflected in Section 455-83 D. as Buttonwood Street and Reading Avenue. The question raised by the County as to the underlying Institutional District being appropriate for the General Business Overlay District were reviewed and determined to accomplish the intent. No changes were made to Sections 455-84 Uses permitted by right, 455-85 Uses permitted by conditional use, and 455-86 Uses permitted by special exception.
4. The County comment regarding the use of overlays over overlays were discussed and determined to allow our small municipality to overlap uses and provide inherent flexibility.

- d. **Rental Occupancy:** Additional documentation had not yet been received from the solicitor's office. Mr. Wert recapped that the constitutional concerns raised in a memorandum from the solicitor's office were requested to be incorporated into the draft amendment. At that time the board will perform a full review of the proposed amendment.
- e. **Fireworks:** Mr. Wert noted that Wyomissing Borough amended their Fireworks ordinance a couple years ago to empower their Fire Marshal to confiscate illegal fireworks. Mrs. Madeira noted a recent conversation with the Fire Marshal regarding the use of display fireworks in the Borough and determined that based on the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Table 5.1.3.1 Distances for Outdoor Aerial Shell Display Sites, the minimum separation distance from mortars to spectators in the park land is roughly 200 feet, which would only allow the use of a 1.5-inch mortar. Based on this information it was determined that it would be unsafe to host or allow display fireworks to be used anywhere within the Borough. A draft ordinance amendment will be provided to the board for review and discussion next month as well as provided to the solicitor for review and comment.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:46 p.m. was made by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Ms. Rodriguez.

Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira
Borough Secretary