

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
JANUARY 9, 2025**

The West Reading Planning Commission met for their regular meeting on Thursday, January 9, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. at Borough Hall with the following persons present: Chair Philip Wert (arrived at 6:08 p.m.); Vice Chair Christopher Lincoln; Members Jennifer Bressler, and Daniel Horman; Zoning Officer and Code Department Manager Chad Moyer; Borough Manager Randall Miller; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira. Members Zanna Leiendecker, Cody Rhoads and Kacie Rodriguez were unable to attend.

**Visitors**

Mark Evans, Derck & Edson, LLC

Nicholas Johnson, Johnson Environmental Engineering

Mr. Lincoln called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m.

**Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

Mr. Wert arrived at 6:08 p.m.

**Approval of Minutes**

Motion to approve minutes of the November 6, 2024 meeting. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mr. Horman. **Motion carried 4-0.**

**New Business**

a. **Review of Solicitor Comments of the Final Draft Downtown Zoning and Sign Ordinance**

A few minor comments from the solicitor's office were reviewed:

- Definition of "Frontage" – To be all inclusive, should it include the following underlined clause, "a strip or extent of land abutting or within a thoroughfare, civic space or other public right-of-way."

The addition of the thoroughfare may offer better clarity and was found to be an acceptable inclusion to the definition.

- Section 455-83 – To correct a typo, a clause in this section should read as underlined, "and to diversify the community's housing choices."

The typo will be incorporated into the proposed amendment.

- Sign Amendments/Regulations, Generally: They're probably constitutional because they primarily regulate based upon signage types, not content, message, or political versus non-political/commercial speech.

Reassurance was provided by the solicitor that legal challenges would be minimal with the proposed amendments.

- Zoning Map – Does the General Business Overlay District have a crosshatch area in the map as identified on that map's key? If so, I do not see that crosshatched area on that map.

The crosshatch will be added to the General Business Overlay District on the Zoning Map.

A final legal comment from the solicitor read: "Given the technical nature of the amendments as they primarily concern dimensions, parking, and signage, whether those updated regulations are lawful may ultimately depend upon to what extent they restrict or impose additional costs upon development / redevelopment, if at all."

Pushback from a legal standpoint is unknown until someone feels aggrieved by the regulations. Mr. Evans referred to the Municipalities Planning Code, Article VII-A Traditional Neighborhood Development that created a manual of written and graphic design guidelines that sparked "form-based" code regulations in Pennsylvania in the late 1980's.

The format of tracked changes versus clean / proposed version were discussed to present to the county for their review and comment. It was decided to provide both a tracked change and clean version to the county.

Motion to forward the finalized text, including solicitor comments, of the zoning amendments to the Berks County Planning Commission for their review and comment. **Moved** by Mr. Lincoln and seconded by Mrs. Bressler. **Motion carried 4-0.**

Mr. Evans offered to begin the conversation with General Code to incorporate amendments into the e-Code platform. Mr. Miller was tasked with providing a cover letter for the submittal to the Berks County Planning Commission.

**b. Civic Spaces, Stormwater Management, and Impervious Coverage in Downtown West Reading**

Mr. Evans provided an outline of a coordinated strategy to modify the impervious coverage requirements to be more plausible for both new development and redevelopment within the downtown business district. The existing street trees along Penn Avenue were noted to have insufficient trench drains to allow the tree roots to grow and survive. Mr. Johnson noted that typically these poor growing conditions result in damage to the sidewalk, curbing or roadway that shorten the tree's life expectancy.

As the borough's MS4 Engineer and Secretary of the Wyomissing Creek Watershed Coalition, Mr. Johnson was in support of incorporating stormwater improvements within civic spaces. Independent of Zoning, the Stormwater Management and Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) look solely at a certain threshold of additional impervious coverages per parcel that are difficult to achieve. There is no way to atone for the offences of the past with regards to the creation of excessive impervious coverage per parcel. Even the expansion of impervious coverages would still limit the viability of redevelopment. Both The Wyomissing Creek Watershed Coalition and Mr. Johnson would provide letters of support for related project grant funding applications. Example stormwater management municipal regulations to review were Etna and Lemoyne Boroughs, Lancaster, and Washington D.C.

The new regulations will require sites greater than 10,000 square feet to provide a minimum of 7.5% of the total lot area of the development tract to be permanently preserved as Civic Space or contribute to a Civic Space Fund. A map of civic space and stormwater recharge strategy was provided with locations that would need to be vetted along Penn Avenue, Reading Avenue, Buttonwood Street, Franklin Street, Second Avenue, Sixth Avenue, and along the Schuylkill River. Mr. Johnson could provide guidance as to which of the seven types of stormwater best management practices to utilize such as meadow planting, subsurface recharge areas, and trench drains. These types of projects could be listed in the SALDO as projects where funds would be allocated towards.

A recommended next step would be to draft additional language to include in the SALDO to reflect plausible development scenarios and impervious coverage ratios while incentivizing development to provide Civic Spaces and innovative regional stormwater management techniques.

A Conditional Use approval process would be an alternative to a variance request of the Zoning Hearing Board that would allow applicants the choice to increase their impervious coverage based upon the design and implementation of certain desired stormwater management improvements in coordination with the construction of desired Civic Spaces compliant the zoning and SALDO standards. A point system that rewards an applicant that checks both civic space and stormwater boxes could allow an increase in their projects impervious coverage.

Draft language will be provided for review next month keeping in mind that the Stormwater Management ordinance may also need updating. It was recommended that a meeting be held between the Borough Manager, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Evans and a member of Systems Design Engineering to address the stormwater amendment aspect.

**Adjournment**

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 7:28 p.m. by Mrs. Bressler and seconded by Mr. Horman.

**Motion carried 4-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira  
Borough Secretary