

MINUTES

ALTOONA CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, April 6, 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT

Dave Albright, Vice Chair
Dick Haines
James Dixon
Larry Bilotto

MEMBERS ABSENT

Michael Haire, Vice Secretary
Randy Isenberg
Charles Myers

GUESTS PRESENT

Adam Long - Keller Engineers for Senior Life
Elizabeth Heggi – Lehman Engineers for Ontario U.S. Capital
John Gillen – Ontario U.S. Capital via phone
William Kibler – Altoona Mirror

STAFF PRESENT

Rebecca Brown – Codes & Inspections Director
Kim Carrieri – Administrative Assistant

The Altoona City Planning Commission held its monthly meeting on April 6, 2021 in the City Council Chambers, 1320 Washington Avenue, Altoona. Dave Albright, Vice-Chair called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

1. Approval of meeting minutes of March 2, 2021.
The minutes were previously distributed for review. A motion was made by Jim Dixon for approval of the minutes and seconded by Dick Haines. Motion carried unanimously.
2. Public Comment Period. – None.

SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

3. **Ontario U.S. Capital, LLC – Land Development Plan for Introduction /Possible Adoption** - *Ontario U.S. Capital, LLC proposes to construct a parking lot located at 1909 4th Avenue, for the tenants of 1901 4th Avenue. The proposal calls for paving of eight parking spaces along the alley behind 1909 4th Avenue. Access to the parking lot will be through the alley to the rear of the site.*

Elizabeth Heggi from Lehman Engineers introduced herself, presented a new updated plan in response to Keller’s review letter dated March 31st and also requested an additional waiver from the previous 6 requests which will make 7 requested waivers. The additional waiver request is for the bike parking. The residents will typically park their bikes inside their apartments or inside the building itself. It is a 2-story apartment building, however there should be no issues with people carrying their bikes to the 2nd floor apartments and there is also a large laundry storage in the basement with a side entrance where bikes can also be stored.

They are asking for the waivers of the following requirements:

- Section 640-63.B.3 – Parking facilities shall be set back from property lines and building foundations a minimum of 5 feet.
- Section 640-63.C(3) – Access ways service parking stalls shall be 24’ wide.
- Section 640-63.C(7) – Curbing shall be placed around the edges of all surface areas.

Section 640-65.C(4) – along the parking lot, trees and shrubs shall be planted to screen the parking facility.

Section 640-65.E(1-4) – Interior landscaping shall be required to define and control traffic.

Section 640-63 Parking and Vehicular access – for every 10 spaces provided by the applicant for motor vehicles, one bicycle parking space shall be provided, with a minimum of two bicycle spaces for all proposals in accordance with this section.

Ms. Heggi explained that there is an existing house on the lot where the parking lot will be and there will be a 3' high solid privacy fence that separates the parking lot from the yard and the house in lieu of landscaping.

There is a waiver request for the five-foot setback for the parking lot as the adjoining property owner is the same owner as the parking lot. The proposed parking stalls will end in line with the existing garages in the alley.

Larry Bilotto asked why the privacy fence would only be 3' as opposed to 6'. Ms. Heggi explained that it is not really a privacy fence but more of a buffer for headlights from the parking area. The 3' fence is replacing the hedge row landscape barrier requirement.

Rebecca explained that the fence was the only concern that the City had as they were not sure if it was 50% open or solid and since it will be a solid 3' fence the City has no issue with it.

Dave Albright explained that they also gave a waiver to the Nehemiah project for the elimination of a bike rack because of the limited space. The bike racks are more of a use for visitors rather than residents. We have established a precedence in multi-family residential developments, at least in smaller developments, to waive the bike rack requirement.

Rebecca explained that if the Commission is okay with the plans that were presented today, then the City can move forward.

Dave Albright entertained a motion for approval of the plans as submitted with the 7 waivers as long as the fence is a solid material to be determined at a later point. Larry Bilotto made the motion and Jim Dixon seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

- 4. Senior life – 2891 Fairway Drive – Resubmission of the Land Development Plan -**
Senior Life is proposing to construct a new facility at 2891 Fairway Drive in the City of Altoona which will include health services for senior citizens. A special exception for this use in a Residential Urban Zone was approved on 1/21/2021 along with the granting of sign variances by the Zoning Hearing Board.

Adam Long from Keller Engineers explained that this is a resubmission of the plans after the first review letter from the Eads Group. They have addressed most of the comments on the letter but they are still waiting for the NPDES Permit. They are providing ample parking and took away one of the driveway entrances, so they cut that from 3 to 2 entrances/exits. They are requesting 8 waivers and would like a decision today because a few may require plan changes if denied. Open to entertaining a conditional approval based on addressing the rest of the comments as they get finished.

The following waivers are requested:

Section 620-12.B(4)(D)(8) – Request to eliminate the access road and easement to the basin.

Section 620-12.B(4)(d)(9) – Request to allow a flat-bottom basin bottom.

Section 620-12.B(4)(d)(10) – Request to eliminate fencing around the surface rain gardens.

Section 620-12.B(4)(a)(10) – Request to eliminate 1' of freeboard requirement.

Section 640-64.A(1) – Request to eliminate sidewalks along the property line.

Section 640-65.E(6)(a) – Request to have light poles taller than 15'.

Section 640-65.D(4) – Request to minimize foundation landscaping.

Section 640-65.C(4) – Request to reduce perimeter landscaping.

The first 4 waivers are requirements for the old types of stormwater management detention basins, a request to have light poles taller than 15' given the commercial nature of the neighborhood it would not be detrimental and it will reduce the number of light poles needed, another is a request to minimize foundation landscaping as there are some allowances in the ordinance based on sidewalks adjacent to the building and there will be sidewalks at the front of the building and on the one side of the building there is a large concrete patio and there are provisions in the ordinance that if there are architectural features that break up the wall space then you can reduce the foundational landscaping. They are also doing quite a bit of other landscaping on the site and street trees that will also help buffer the building wall. The other waiver is to reduce perimeter landscaping, as there is only one part of the parking lot that shines off the property to the west, the south edge of the south parking lot the topography slopes uphill so the headlights will shine into the topography. They will provide some evergreen trees to help screen it plus the neighboring property is 170 feet away. The northern edge of the northern parking lot behind the building will have a raingarden with landscaping and there is existing vegetation along the property line with the apartment complex will be left and serve as a landscape buffer as well. The final waiver request is for sidewalks along the front edge of the property. The hours of operation will be 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday through Friday.

Dave Albright stated that the only waiver request he is concerned about is the elimination of the sidewalks. There was some discussion at the previous meeting to make sure there was an easement provided if the sidewalk requirement were waived in order to install a sidewalk later with further development. Adam Long explained that there is sufficient room in the plans to keep the sidewalks within the right-of-way and they are eliminating the mounding that was placed along the right-of-way so there would be enough room for a 2% grade across the sidewalks. Dave Albright explained that they have required some properties along Plank Road to install sidewalks without other connecting sidewalks. We have a precedence for keeping the sidewalk requirement. He is fine with the updated rain gardens and the landscaping plans they have provided but he is not comfortable with eliminating the sidewalks. Dick Haines and Larry Bilotto both agreed with keeping the sidewalks as there has been an established precedence and there is a housing complex down the road and there is a bus stop down near the Veteran's Hospital.

Larry Bilotto asked about the upper entrance point. He went and took a previous PennDOT Traffic Engineer and walked the site this past weekend. You will be allowing left turns out of the upper parking lot to go southbound to get onto I99. He looked at the site lines against the planting plans and he is concerned about the site line looking back to the rights side towards the hospital and there are a couple tree plantings at the top of the small detention pond and you may want to see where they are placed to make sure none of those trees are aligned with the site to the crest of the hill. Those trees may need to be pushed back a little to avoid obstructing the site lines.

Rebecca explained that the City does not have any other concerns and Keller did address all of the stormwater comments that Eads had except for the waivers they are requesting and they received letters from the Water Authority indicating that there was sufficient capacity for both the water and sewer. Adam explained that they are still waiting for the NPDES Permit and should have that within a month or two. They will also have to apply for the driveway permits.

Dave Albright asked to entertain a motion to accept all waivers except for the waiver to eliminate sidewalks along the property line, and approving the plan contingent upon the resubmittal of plans with the design changes and obtaining the required permits. Jim Dixon made the motion and was seconded by Larry Bilotto. Motion passed unanimously.

Larry Bilotto asked if detectable warning devices for ADA will be installed at the main entrances. and Adam Long explained that they are not required for sidewalks, only in street intersections.

5. Staff Level Reviews –
5107 Broad Avenue, Ben Barstow – Lot Consolidation (Merger of 2 lots into one)
Rebecca explained that they are reviewing this simple lot merger.

URBAN REDEVELOPMENT

6. Spot Blight Declaration – None for this meeting.
Rebecca explained that there will be an emergency garage demolition for next month. There was a garage that Code Enforcement had enforcement action out on and one wall of the garage fell into the alley so they had to do an emergency demolition and could not come to the Commission first for approval. That will be on next month's agenda.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

7. Staff Reports – None.
8. GAEDC Report – None.
9. Blair County Planning Commission Report – Jim Dixon explained that there is a car wash being installed in front of the Kmart building. They just hired a grant writer and are looking to hire an administrative assistant.
10. Commissioner Forum – Larry Bilotto stated that he would be willing to be an alternate for Randy for the GAEDC Meetings if he is unable to attend.
11. Discussion Items – None.
12. Additional Public Comment - None.
13. Questions from the Media
Bill Kibler from the Altoona Mirror asked if someone could explain how the driveway aprons on the S curve on Fairway Drive will not be dangerous.
Larry explained that it is all about site distance. The designated speed limit is 25 mph and some people drive faster than that so they would estimate people traveling 35 mph. It is all about stopping distance, so if someone pulls out at the upper driveway and turns left across traffic would they have enough site distance to pull out safely and also the vehicles heading from the hospital toward 99, coming up over the grade, would they have sufficient site distance to see someone pulling out of the parking lot or turning into the parking lot. Both vehicles will be able to see each other. That is why he wanted to make sure that the trees were not in the site line along the upper driveway.

Bill asked if the sidewalk would be along the whole frontage of the property. Dave Albright explained that the ordinance requires it to be along the whole front of the property and the frontage is roughly 1,000 feet.

Bill asked where the driveway entrances will be. Larry Bilotto explained that the employee parking lot lines up almost across from the back entrance to the Computer Learning Network and the main entrance is slightly offset to the southern-most parking near 611 MRI.
14. Adjournment – Motion to adjourn by Dick Haines and seconded by Larry Bilotto. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 3:42 PM