

City Planning Commission

Erie, Pennsylvania

June 17, 2014

-Minutes-

MEMBERS OF THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION:

The regular meeting of the City Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, June 17, 2014 at **1:00 pm** in Room 500, Municipal Building, 626 State Street.

1. *Roll Call*

Members Present: Richard Speicher, Gary Antalek, Daniel Collins, Thomas Dworzanski, and Don Marinelli

Members Absent: None

2. On a motion by **Mr. Antalek**, seconded by **Mr. Marinelli**, the May 20, 2014, meeting minutes were approved unanimously as received.
3. *The Planning Commission held a pre-approval Planning Commission conference and received proof of a neighborhood involvement meeting for proposed antennas to be located on top of 816 Park Ave, currently the Emerson Gridley School. This was in compliance with Section 305.45.5(h) of the Erie City Zoning Ordinance regarding antennas as a special exception in the R-2 district.*

Mr. Richard Hanson from Pyramid Network Services was present for the pre-approval Planning Commission Conference. Mr. Hanson said that he was working for Verizon Wireless to install antennas on top of the Emerson Gridley School. He was hopeful that installation would begin this year and that there would be a lease with the school. A ladder would be installed on the outside of the school for access to the antennas for maintenance. The reason for proposing the antennas at this location was to increase coverage in the area which, from customer feedback, was an issue in the area.

Mr. Collins inquired about whether students would be able to access the ladder. Mr. Hanson replied that there would be a cage surrounding the ladder. The ladder would also be locked for safety reason. Mr. Speicher noted that the elevations submitted to the Commission showed enclosed boxes. Mr. Hanson replied that the boxes were equipment cabinets, the size of refrigerators, which were locked. Mr. Speicher further asked if the position of the antennas were essential to their goals. Mr. Hanson said that the position was essential. The parapet would block any signals anywhere else. They wanted to increase coverage around the school as much as possible. Mr. Marinelli asked if the antennas were for both internet and cell coverage. Mr. Hanson replied that the antennas would be able to handle both types of signals.

Mr. Ed Kissell, a local citizen, had questions concerning the height of the antennas and if the antennas would interfere with airport equipment. Mr. Hanson said that the antennas were 6-8' high plus the building and that the FAA would not permit any antennas in the area that would affect airport equipment.

Mr. Speicher asked about how the neighborhood involvement meeting went. Mr. Hanson replied that only two people showed up and referred to the list of attendees and minutes from the meeting. Mr. Collins had concerns regarding the maintenance schedule of the antennas and if lights would be on the antennas. Mr. Hanson stated that maintenance would occur once a month and that no lights would be on top of the antennas. Mr. Speicher's final question was in regards to noise generated by the antennas. Mr. Hanson said that no noise would be generated.

With a motion by **Mr. Speicher** and seconded by **Mr. Antalek**, the Planning Commission unanimously granted pre-approval for the antennas since proof of the neighborhood involvement meeting was satisfactory supplied to the Commission.

4. *The Planning Commission reviewed an application submitted by KidderWachter Architecture for a proposed development of a Hotel and Parking Garage to be constructed next to the Erie County Convention Center. This is in compliance with Section 306 of the Erie City Zoning Ordinance for conditional uses in the WC district. The Project was reviewed and approved with revisions by the Design Review Committee on June 4th of this month.*

Prior to the meeting, the Planning Commission members received a packet that described the projects. The packet is referred to as Exhibit A.

Mr. Jeff Kidder from KidderWachter Architecture began the presentation. Mr. Kidder stated that they, the architects, would present two projects today: the hotel and the parking garage. Mr. Kidder said that his firm was the architects for the parking garage. The hotel would be located on the Convention Center's property while the parking garage would be located on the former GAF site with the structures connected by a covered walkway. The presentation would give a description of both projects while addressing the comments from the Design Review Committee meeting. Mr. Kidder then handed the presentation over to Mr. Don Dethlefs, an architect with Sink Combs Dethlefs Architects based out of Denver, Colorado.

Mr. Dethlefs began by passing out updated renderings to be placed in Exhibit A which addressed lighting, landscaping, and other changes. The idea for the hotel, Mr. Dethlefs began, is to create a select service hotel. There are five stories with a maximum height of 61'. The hotel was designed in an 'L' shape to fit the desired 191 rooms. The current loading area for the Convention Center will be covered by a landscaped deck. The turnaround will also be maintained for emergency vehicles. There is a drainage culvert that runs through the property that they are working around. The existing parking along the street will be maintained with a parallel parking instead of angled parking. The public space will also go around the Convention Center's property. The interior layout of the property was discussed which may be viewed in Exhibit A. The hotel will be a Courtyard by Marriott.

Mr. Dethlefs continued describing the exterior of the building. Brick would be used for the first story. Translucent glass panels would be used as well. These elements would complement the Sheraton Hotel. The proposed hotel would also complement the Convention

Center by using metal panels in two different tones (warm grey and stucco) for the rest of the building. No glare glass would then be used for the rest of the hotel windows. There would be a standard Courtyard by Marriott sign at the cul-de-sac on Sassafra Street with two signs on top of the building and a sign for the restaurant as shown by Exhibit A. Pedestrian lighting will be provided for the public access areas. The lights have been focused down to eliminate glare. The types of plants to be used for the landscaping plans were presented in Exhibit A. There will be shrubs along the walkways with some trees. The deck will also have green space that will blend into the surrounding landscaping.

Mr. Antalek began by asking two questions: will the air conditioners be screened and will the Sheraton Hotel be able to see the rooftop? Mr. Dethlefs replied that the air conditioning units will be screened and that the rooftop should not be seen from the Sheraton although it would be visible from their bridge. Mr. Collins inquired about having an area for boat docking. Mr. Dethlefs said that since the new hotel will be beside the marina, there would be no area for docking boats. Mr. Dworzanski then asked what the linear footage of the hotel is along the bayfront and if there would be public access to the hotel from the designated public access walkway. Mr. Dethlefs stated that the linear footage is approximately 220' and that no public access to the hotel from the public access walkway was provided. Mr. Dworzanski continued his query by asking if the restaurant was open to the public, if windbreakers would be provided, and questions regarding the designated public parking spaces. Mr. Dethlefs replied that the restaurant was accessible to the public through the front entrance of the hotel, no windbreakers would be provided although the design allowed for windbreakers to be incorporated later, and that the public parking spaces were open to anyone who would like to park there. The spaces would not be used for the hotel; the spaces were also not metered.

Mr. Collins continued the questioning asking about how the project was funded and how security would be addressed. Mr. Casey Wells, executive director of the Erie County Convention Center, said that the project was funded with a \$25 million grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Mr. Wells continued by stating that a \$265,000 grant from the Department of Homeland Security had been awarded to them as well. Security cameras were throughout the area. Mr. Dethlefs further added that the landscaping plants were chosen as to not allow someone to hide behind them.

Mr. Ed Kissell, a local citizen, voiced his concerns regarding the moving of the ten dedicated public parking spaces, the requirement to have a public park from a deed, and the area to maintain a nautical theme. His concerns were duly noted.

Mr. Kidder then proceeded to address the Commission regarding the proposed parking garage. The parking garage is to cover the N.A.P.L. site, a contained contamination site. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) does not permit residential uses to be built on the site but does allow commercial uses, parking lots/garages, and green space to be built over the site. The parking garage is to serve the whole site (the former GAF site and surrounding development) and is located in the center of the GAF site. There will be 287 parking spaces on three levels. The parking garage will be built to structurally support two more additional levels as demand from new development grows. The commercial space will enclose the parking garage on the north and east sides. The entrance/exit for the parking garage will be located on the southeast corner. The parking garage is set back on the east side to land bank that area for future commercial development. Mr. Kidder then proceeded to discuss renderings from Exhibit A.

Mr. Kidder continued. The parking garage is designed to look like a building when viewed from the proposed hotel. Brick, precast stone, bronze, and aluminum windows will be used as materials. Signage for the commercial space is to be limited to bands that face the hotel as shown in Exhibit A. The brick to be used will be slightly different from the hotel so as to introduce variety. The windows for the commercial space will be tinted. Evergreen trees will be used on the west side of the parking garage to soften that area. The upper floor of the parking garage will use solid panels to obstruct any vehicles or headlights from sight on the third floor. Landscaping will include street trees along Sassafras Street and in front of the commercial space. Pole lights will be on the ground with wall mounted lights at the entrances. Lighting will be directed down to suppress glare. There will also be lights in the center of the upper floor of the parking garage.

Mr. Antalek began by asking why a parking garage would be built first on the former GAF site. Mr. Kidder replied that there is a need for parking in the area plus the parking garage will cover the N.A.P.L. site. Mr. Wells further added that the EPA prefers a parking garage over the N.A.P.L. site. The parking garage is also a capital investment that no private investor wants to make. Mr. Dworzanski then asked if there were future plans to have commercial space on the west side of the parking garage. Mr. Kidder said that there were no current plans for commercial space there but it is always a possibility. Mr. Wells also added that market forces would direct growth in the area. Mr. Dworzanski inquired further about how deep they would have to dig before they reached bedrock. Mr. Kidder replied about 10 feet with Mr. Wells adding 23 feet in some spots. Mr. Antalek asked about any sewer system work. Mr. Kidder replied that there was a lift station at Sassafras Street that would be used to connect to the sewer system.

Mr. Kissell voiced concerns regarding the addition parking spaces, the size of the sidewalk, if the entrance would have a windbreaker, the stormwater plans, and if blocking off the view on the west side of the parking garage was a good idea. Mr. Kissell's concerns were duly noted.

With all testimony heard, on a motion by **Mr. Speicher** and seconded by **Mr. Antalek**, the hotel was unanimously recommended for approval. On a motion by **Mr. Speicher** and seconded by **Mr. Dworzanski**, the parking garage was unanimously recommended for approval.

5. *With all business completed, the Commission adjourned at 2:20 PM.*