
MEETING MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION BOARD
MAY 9, 2024

MEMBERS PRESENT

Robert Melosky, Chairman
Matthew Malozi, Vice Chairman
Joy Cohen
Thomas Barker

VISITORS PRESENT

David Hitzel
Joseph Ingaglio
Rachel Leon
Kim Carrell-Smith

MEMBERS ABSENT

Eddie Burgos

STAFF PRESENT

Matthew Deschler, Solicitor
Darlene Heller, Bureau of Planning & Zoning
Craig Peiffer, Bureau of Planning & Zoning
Stephany Sebesta, Bureau of Planning & Zoning
Basel Yandem, Public Works

The June 5, 2024 meeting of Planning Commission held at the City of Bethlehem Town Hall, was called to order by Chairperson, Robert Melosky at 5:00 PM.

AGENDA ITEM #1: APPROVAL OF MINUTES April 11, 2024

Discussion: There was no discussion, Mr. Melosky called to make a motion.

Motion #1: Ms. Cohen

Second: Mr. Barker

Result of Vote: The motion carried 4-0

AGENDA ITEM #2: SKETCH PLAN REVIEW

Property Location: 934-946 & 1004 Evans St.

Property Owner: HH Evans Street, LLC.

Developer/Engineer: Bustamante Engineers Inc.

Proposed Work: Representing the property was Mr. Hitzel of HH Evans St. LLC, and Joseph Ingaglio of Bustamante Engineering who discussed the proposed plan. The applicant proposes to consolidate three parcels creating a multi-family dwelling (apartments) at 934-946 Evans St. The applicant also proposes to demolish the existing building and build a forty (40) car parking lot at 1004 Evans St.

Discussion: Prior to starting his presentation, Mr. Hitzel handed out packets containing pictures of the current and proposed views of the lots. The location of the properties is located in the RT (high density residential) zoning district. 934-946 Evan St. is currently a vacant lot. Mr. Hitzel is proposing to build a 37-unit multi-family dwelling (apartments) with ten (10) parking spaces in the back, with two being ADA. 1004 Evans St., there is

currently a vacant building that is unable to be refurbished. Mr. Hitzel is proposing to demolish the vacant building and construct a forty (40) car parking lot. A total of fifty (50) parking spaces.

The proposed multi-family dwelling (apartments) will consist of 7 – 2 bedroom, 29 – 1 bedroom and 1 studio. The 2-bedroom dwellings will be two story with a deck, the first floor will be the bedrooms while the second is the living area. Since this is a three-story building there will be no elevators. There will be two entrances, one facing Evans St. and the other facing State St.

Mr. Peiffer stated that though this is a sketch plan review, the Planning Commission can make recommendations to the Zoning Hearing Board. There is a certain amount of Zoning Hearing Board relief that Mr. Hitzel is requesting for the development. The Review Letter is the Fire Marshall's comments in regard to having the required access for the fire apparatus; especially in the rear of the building. The applicant is required to reach out to the Fire Marshall's office in order to find a way to meet these requirements. There are density concerns from City of Bethlehem staff and there is no buffer yard in the rear of the structure adjacent to single family dwellings and around the parking. The recommendations from the letter state that; the applicant should look at the structures to the West and East for neighborhood context.

Mr. Hitzel responded to Mr. Peiffer's comments explaining that he wants to keep as much green as possible in the front of the building. The fire lane in the rear of the building it would take the rear parking away.

Mr. Melosky questioned Mr. Hitzel if he is willing to work with the Fire Marshall and come to an agreement in regard to the fire apparatus. Mr. Hitzel affirmed that he is willing to work with the Fire Marshall. It was also asked of Mr. Hitzel if he is willing to discuss affordable housing with the City of Bethlehem. Mr. Hitzel answered when he first spoke with Ms. Heller and Mr. Peiffer, ten percent (10%) would be affordable housing. This number was with 50 units; now that the building is proposed to be 37 units affordable housing is not feasible.

Ms. Cohen asked Mr. Hitzel for clarification on the Northwest corner of the property on the sketch plan. It was not clear where the property lines are and where the Right of Way is. Mr. Ingaglio clarified which lines represented the property. Ms. Cohen also questioned the sight triangle in the northwest corner and the height of the building. It was explained by Mr. Hitzel and Mr. Ingaglio that the building does not hang over the street and there is approximately fifteen (15) feet from the second floor to the ground.

Mr. Barker stated he is very impressed with the overall plan.

Mr. Malozi said that he is appreciative that the vacant properties will be used once more. He noted that it is a high density and is forty (40) percent over what is permitted in the RT district, commends them for keeping the proposed building in line with the surrounding neighborhood. He asked about the retaining wall and vinyl fence in the rear of the building were then brought to question by Mr. Malozi. The existing retaining wall will get smaller and the vinyl fence, and the greenery. Mr. Ingaglio explained that

there will be a section of grass either in front or behind the fence. Mr. Malozi recommends some type of green screening in the rear. Mr. Malozi stated, this area is very well served by public transportation. It is some of the highest frequency on the LANTA system within three blocks.

Ms. Heller stated that the City is not taking a position on the project at this time. She did note that the City is in need of more affordable housing and the Open Doors plan recommends that development be compatible and suitable infill. Density and hardship need to be discussed with the Zoning Hearing Board.

Public Comments: Ms. Rachel Leon of 946 E. 5th Street spoke about the high density that already exists in the area. She spoke about the one-ways getting tight especially when it is festival season. Ms. Leon believes that 37 units is intense and will create an even more dense area that is unsuitable. She encourages the Planning Commission to go see the area at night when the parking is at its densest.

Ms. Kim Carrell-Smith of 833 Carleton Ave. is excited for more housing but has the same concern as Ms. Leon about the density of the area. She also brought concerns of the variances that Mr. Hitzel is seeking. Ms. Carrell-Smith reasons that since Mr. Hitzel is seeking so many variances from the Zoning Hearing Board, then the building is not a fit for that property. Affordable rent needs to be looked at by Mr. Hitzel, South Bethlehem is seeking more affordable housing. Ms. Carrell-Smith talked about the one-way street and the concerns she has in regard to people not following the law. A map of the surrounding area which indicate where the one-way streets are was brought to the Planning Commission. Impervious surfaces are another concern. Ms. Carrell-Smith also encourages Mr. Hitzel to use more greenery when possible. Lastly, Ms. Carrell-Smith wants the design to be looked at more closely.

There was no vote but the Planning Commission requests their comments be forwarded to the Zoning Hearing Board.

AGENDA ITEM #3: DISCUSSION ITEMS

Mr. Peiffer reviewed the updated list of recent development plan submissions.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:30PM.

ATTEST:

Darlene Heller, Commission Secretary