

## MINUTES

**HARRISBURG PLANNING COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING  
November 4, 2009  
THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. CITY GOVERNMENT CENTER  
PUBLIC SAFETY AUDITORIUM, ROOM 213**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Joseph Alsberry, Chair  
Vern McKissick, III, Vice-Chair  
Calobe Jackson, Jr.  
Shaun E. O'Toole  
Ronnie G. Shaeffer

**STAFF PRESENT:** Candace H. Stowell, Deputy Director for Planning  
Jennifer Boyer, Zoning Officer

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Mr. Frank Baxter, VP of Design and Development, Vartan Group  
Mr. Barry Ramper, Director, Homeland Center  
Ms. Nicol Brown, HR Director, Homeland Center  
Mr. Morton Spector, Chairman for Homeland Center  
Ms. Jae Alexander

**CALL TO ORDER:** 6:35 P.M.

**MINUTES:** Minutes of the regular meeting on October 7, 2009 were approved. The motion was made by Commissioner Shaeffer, seconded by Commissioner Jackson, and approved unanimously (5-0).

### **CONTINUANCES:**

- 1. Special Exception for 1125 North Cameron Street, located within the Business General (BG) zoning district, filed by Ms. Martha Camacho (to request five feet of relief of the side yard setback, and to construct a building in the 100-year floodplain).**

The applicant has provided staff with a letter stating that they intend to continue this application until further notice.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

- 2. Special Exception for 1500 North Sixth Street (to include addresses 500, 502, 504, 512 Reily Street; 1502, 1504, 1512, 1514, 1516, 1518 North Sixth Street; and 1505, 1507, 1509, 1511, 1513, and 1515 North Fifth Street), located within the Business General (BG) zoning district, filed by Vartan Group, Inc. (to request an eighteen (18) month extension of time for the previously approved relief of the front yard**

**setback, rear yard setback, side yard setbacks, parking lot setback requirements, and the required amount of off-street parking spaces; and to request additional relief for four off-street parking spaces).**

Ms. Boyer gave a synopsis of the Planning Bureau report. Mr. Frank Baxter from the Vartan Group, Inc. represented the case. Mr. Baxter noted that he is amenable to the conditions of approval listed in the staff report.

Commissioner Shaeffer asked the applicant if there was any possibility of them acquiring the property at 1515 ½ North Fifth Street. Mr. Baxter noted that they have tried to purchase the home over the past 1 ½ years, but those attempts have failed. The Vartan Group decided to redesign their proposed building and proceed without the sale of this land.

Commissioner Shaeffer asked the applicant why they had to come back after this amount of time had passed. Mr. Baxter noted that since they were before the Board in 2008, the economy has taken a downturn. The Vartan Group decided to pull back the project and wait for a more appropriate time to commence. Mr. Baxter noted that it is now a more appropriate time to move forward to ensure the success of this project, and anticipates a spring groundbreaking. Mr. Baxter noted that they do have the financing in place for the project, and they have a contractor hired who will begin work in either March or April 2010, weather permitting. Mr. Baxter said that the 18 month extension from the original expiration date is enough time. Their construction in the spring will begin with pulling back the bad soil and replacing it with good soil, proper excavation of the site, and the erection of a retaining wall.

Commissioner Shaeffer asked if Boyd Street was an alley, and what other properties existed along Fifth Street. Mr. Baxter said that Boyd Street was an alley. The parking for their building will enter into the building from Fifth Street. Mr. Baxter also noted that, at this time, only a church and one home remain on the western side of Fifth Street. The rest of the block consists of vacant land.

No public comment was given.

Commissioner O'Toole moved and Commissioner McKissick seconded the motion to approve the request with the conditions and for the reasons listed in the staff report. The motion was adopted by unanimous vote (5-0).

**3. Official Map Change for 1901 North 5th Street, located within the Residential Planned Conversion (RPC) zoning district, filed by Homeland Center (to vacate a portion of Muench Street between Fifth and Sixth Street).**

Ms. Boyer gave a synopsis of the Planning Bureau report. Mr. Barry Ramper, Mr. Morton Spector, and Ms. Nicol Brown from Homeland Center represented the case. Mr. Ramper spoke of the history of Homeland Center, including the first building and the establishment of care for widows during the Civil War. Over time, the facility moved towards caring for elderly individuals. Mr. Ramper stated that Homeland Center has a no

nepotism policy. Mr. Ramper also stated that the surrounding neighborhood has been stabilized by Homeland's presence. Expansion of Homeland Center is crucial, as there will be 10,000 new seniors a day for the next 20 years, mostly due to the aging population among the Baby Boomer generation.

Mr. Ramper explained to the Commissioners that for the past nine years, Homeland Center has been purchasing surrounding properties in order to accommodate future growth of their facility. Their strategic direction is to add additional services, such as adult day care, hospice, outpatient rehabilitation, assisted living and personal care, and skilled units. These expansions are in response to the needs of the growing elderly population.

Mr. Ramper went on to explain how the strategic plan of Homeland Center is to create the best possible environment for seniors. They want this to be someone's home, not just a building. They are not willing to compromise overall quality, and feel like an overhead walkway is only the second best choice. The street vacation is the best opportunity to create something unique for the seniors living in Harrisburg, and build on what Homeland Center has already created. Homeland Center does make bold decisions, but does not want to create a stressful situation. To that, they are willing to work with the Fire Bureau to keep the portion of Muench Street between Wood Street and Sixth Street open for their use.

Commissioner Alsberry said that he has seen Homeland Center grow over the years. He appreciates what they have done for the City and for seniors. Commissioner Alsberry stated he has concerns about the exact purpose of the street vacation, not the history of Homeland.

Commissioner Jackson also said he is familiar with the history of Homeland Center. He asked the applicant if they owned any property on Sixth Street. Mr. Ramper said they do own some property along Sixth Street. Commissioner Jackson also asked what the costs would be for an overhead walkway. He remembered Polyclinic did something similar. Mr. Ramper said he did not know what the total cost would be for this type of project. Mr. Ramper did say that there are open gardens along Fifth Street and that with the creation of any future buildings, they would like to retain this type of atmosphere. Homeland's goal is to have continuous gardens along their properties so that when people venture outside, they do not feel like they are living in an urban setting. They would like the ability to attract people on a larger scale, just like other facilities do in suburban areas.

Commissioner McKissick stated that the traffic impact report indicated that the Level of Service (LOS) does not change, and he felt there was not a lot of traffic in this neighborhood. Mr. Ramper said that most of the traffic may be coming from his staff. Commissioner McKissick did note that there was not a Master Plan associated with this street vacation petition. Commissioner McKissick stated that he would like to see a Master Plan in order to properly weigh the value of the street vacation request. Commissioner McKissick said that he would vote in opposition to this request tonight, because Muench Street is a major street within the City, and is not an alley. He would

be willing to review the application again, along with a Land Development plan. He also appreciates the willingness of Homeland to work with the Fire Bureau. Mr. Spector said that they are willing to keep the portion of Muench Street between Wood Street and North Sixth Street open, not only for the Fire Bureau, but for their delivery trucks as well.

Mr. Ramper asked if there is an option to table the request until a Master Plan can be developed. Commissioner Alsberry said yes and that he felt this may be the best option right now for Homeland Center. Commissioner Alsberry stated that there is potential for this area of the City to expand. While there may not be a lot of traffic now, future development projects could change that. At that time, it may be the City would need to keep Muench Street open to the public.

Commissioner McKissick asked if there were any problems with the sewer lines. Mr. Ramper explained that there is a sewer line along Muench Street right now. Homeland Center had been working with the City Engineer to discuss the possibility of vacating the sewer line so that they can construct a building, if the street was vacated.

Commissioner Alsberry asked if anyone from the public would like to speak towards this project. Ms. Jae Alexander said that her mother, daughter, and grand-daughter live at 501 Muench Street. Homeland Center owns the property, and her family rents the apartments on the first and second floors. Ms. Alexander said she is in favor of growth and stability for this neighborhood, but she has concerns for her family. Her mother has lived here for 17 years, and her daughter and grand-daughter have lived here for two years. Ms. Alexander wanted to know how soon her family would have to leave their home. Mr. Ramper explained that they will look into the best possible solution for her family and will not do anything that is not in the best interest of her and her family.

At the request of the applicant, Commissioner McKissick moved and Commissioner Shaeffer seconded the motion to table the petition until such time that the applicant comes back with a Master Plan. The motion was adopted by unanimous vote (5-0).

**4. Re-Use of Blight Certified Properties, filed by Harrisburg Property Reinvestment Board (to certify that the re-use of blight certified property is in conformance with the General Plan of the City of Harrisburg) for the following properties:**

- 1905 Green Street, located within the Residential Limited Zone B (RLB) zoning district, and
- 644 Woodbine Street, located within the Residential Zone No. 5 (R-5) zoning district, and
- 2333 Jefferson Street, located within the Residential Limited Zone B (RLB) zoning district, and
- 1935 Market Street, located within the Residential Two Family Zone A (R2A) zoning district

Commissioner Shaeffer commented on the properties and noted that they are all deemed unfit and are blighted properties. Commissioner Shaeffer moved and Commissioner Jackson seconded the motion to approve the request for the reasons listed in the staff report. The motion was adopted by unanimous vote (5-0).

**DISCUSSION:**

**5. Discussion of the status of the 2009 Conditional Use Permits for Commercial Parking**

Ms. Stowell provided the Commissioners with an update on the Conditional Use Permits for commercial parking that had been heard by the Commissioners earlier this year.

**6. Discussion of the 2010 Board meeting schedule**

Ms. Stowell provided the Commissioners with a draft schedule of the 2010 Land Use Board meetings. Ms. Stowell asked if the Planning Commission meeting could begin at 6:00 p.m. instead of 6:30 p.m. All of the Commissioners stated that they would like to have the time remain at 6:30 p.m.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

Commissioner Shaeffer moved and Commissioner Jackson seconded the motion to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 7:50 P.M.