

A Public Hearing of Bloomsburg Town Council was held Monday, September 24, 2007, beginning at 6:04 p.m. in Council Chambers, Town Hall, 301 East Second Street, Bloomsburg, PA. Present were Mayor Claude Renninger; Council Members Don Pursel, Bill Brobst, Paul Kinney, Terry Lemon, Dan Knorr and Paul Houseknecht; Code Enforcement/ Zoning/ Planning Officer Ed Fegley; Assistant Code Officer Ralph Magill; Solicitor Jack Mihalik and Town Administrator Carol Mas.

PUBLIC HEARING – BLOOMSBURG WALGREENS, LLC REQUEST FOR ZONING CHANGE

Solicitor Mihalik opened the hearing by explaining the purpose of the hearing. The parties representing Bloomsburg Walgreens, LLC have requested a zoning change from Commercial Residential (C-R) to Highway Commercial (H-C). Council will hear testimony and take it under advisement in order to make a decision.

Cristian Foust responded to questions by his attorney Gary Norton. The official name on the application requesting the zoning change is Bloomsburg Walgreens, LLC. The area to be changed is East Fifth Street south to Seventh Street and Strawberry Avenue to Chestnut Avenue. The company currently owns 522-524 East Street and has contracts to purchase eight (8) additional properties. His partner is Scott Bastian from Mansfield. They are requesting the zoning be changed in this area from C-R to H-C. He named the businesses currently in this area noting that it is predominantly commercial and not residential. If Council were to approve their request they could meet the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance requirements.

B. Brobst said Council had received information from several planning professionals which may not agree with the testimony by Mr. Foust. He has gone on record of supporting the project as long as it were to harmonize with other buildings in the area. There are communities that have held developers to a higher standard in order to comply with their historic districts. If the developers were serious about this project, they could build without a zoning change. He argued that the neighborhoods surrounding the area in question were mostly residential.

G. Norton noted that developers are handcuffed by the current zoning ordinance. They did take their plans to the Zoning Hearing Board and their variance requests were denied. He listed commercial establishments adjacent to the area in response to the point of residential neighborhoods surrounding the area.

D. Knorr spoke with the developers last summer and has supported the project but was disappointed that they are asking for a zoning change. He is worried about some businesses allowed to locate in the H-C district being unsuitable next to the downtown district. The C-R District acts as a transitional zone or buffer from the H-C District. He suggested the developers work with zoning and planning instead of giving up after one submission.

B. Brobst is afraid we are chasing people away with this type of pharmacy. In an effort to attract a graying population maybe a second floor to serve these clients may be a good idea.

Scott Bastian pointed out that they have corporate constraints as to the dimensions of the building. He suggested Council see the Auto Zone building in Williamsport he built. It is next to a historic district. They have been asked to return to HARB with the final design plans. They are looking at brick color and the architectural features of the Shuman building and considering ways of incorporating them into the design.

Richard Koch, planning professional for Gannett Fleming, addressed the letter he prepared for Council. Council may want to consider the developer's original proposal and amend the C-R portion of the ordinance. Basically this would be a good business for this area if design alternatives could be agreed upon such as size, shape, scale, materials, windows, doors, parking, landscaping and signage. He suggests sitting down with the developer to work out an agreeable project and setting design alternatives through a design agreement. Bloomsburg has an opportunity to bring in a store in a great location. By revising provisions in the C-R District this project could proceed.

It was noted by both attorneys that if the ordinance were amended, the developers would not have to go back through zoning.

Surveyor Ted Oman remarked that they needed a variance for signage in the C-R but not the H-C. They had gone to HARB with plans showing the building at the curb but HARB wanted a set back. They need an area for a loading dock. If a drive through window is located to the rear of the building the loading dock would have to be in another location. Do you really want to see that? He also questioned whether they really need 60+ parking spaces.

J. Mihalik wondered if there were any recent studies available that say how many parking spaces are required, if the building should front East Street and if any amendments would apply to other developers as well. R. Koch said he would check on parking studies; that the building could front East, Fifth or be designed in an L-shape at the intersection and that any amendments would be applicable to all wishing to develop in the C-R District.

G. Norton recommended a committee comprised of a representative of Council, Mr. Koch, the developers and the Code Officer be formed to discuss amendments to the ordinance in order to facilitate this project and others like it. J. Mihalik suggested Mr. Koch and the developers work up amendments prior to the group meeting.

D. Pursel asked if there were anyone in the audience opposed to the project. Laura Davis of 220 East Fifth Street spoke up. She is worried about the additional traffic, lighting and the loss of the alley which will all be addressed during the planning process.

David Ashby of 306 Glen Avenue asked if a demographic study had been done to show there is support for the store. C. Foust informed him a study had been completed by Walgreens but it was confidential.

The hearing concluded at 7:30pm.

CAROL L. MAS
Town Administrator & Secretary