

Development Activities Meeting Report (Version: 06/24/2020)

This report created by the Neighborhood Planner and included with staff reports to City Boards and/or Commissions.

Logistics	Stakeholders
Project Name/Address: Steel City Squash Proposed Zone Change (from RM-H and R1D-H to LNC) / 600 block of Larimer Ave	Groups Represented (e.g., specific organizations, residents, employees, etc. where this is evident): Larimer Consensus Group Urban Redevelopment Authority
Parcel Number(s): 124-J-350, 124-J-355, 124-J-358, 124-K-65, 124-K-66, 124-K-68, 124-K-69, 124-K-71, 124-K-72, 124-K-73, 124-K-74, 124-K-75, 124-K-76, 124-K-77, 124-K-78, 124-K-78-A, 124-K-78-B, 124-K-123, 124-K-123-A, 124-K-124, 124-K-127, 124-K-128, 124-K-130, 124-K-131, 124-K-132, 124-K-133, 124-K-147, 124-K-149	
ZDR Application Number: DCP-MPZC-2020-01245	
Meeting Location: virtual, via Zoom	
Date: February 3, 2021	
Meeting Start Time: 6:00 PM	
Applicant: Steel City Squash, with GBBN Architects and Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC	Approx. Number of Attendees: 35
Boards and/or Commissions Request(s): Planning Commission	

How did the meeting inform the community about the development project?

Ex: Community engagement to-date, location and history of the site, demolition needs, building footprint and overall square footage, uses and activities (particularly on the ground floor), transportation needs and parking proposed, building materials, design, and other aesthetic elements of the project, community uses, amenities and programs.

- The Steel City Squash project team was represented at the meeting by board member Lafe Metz of Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC, Executive Director Brad Young, and GBBN Architects' Anne Chen and Melanie Ngami.
- Community engagement has included a number of meetings with the Larimer Consensus Group dating back to a year ago, and the project has the support of that group.
- The URA began exclusive negotiations to sell 26 of the 28 parcels included in the rezoning (totaling just a little under 1 acre) to Steel City Squash back in August 2020.
- The project is focused on fundraising right now and on beginning design work with the architects. GBBN was recently selected amidst a competitive search for an architectural firm.
- Due diligence of the project site is also ongoing, including some survey work, an environmental site assessment (as the site was once home to a dry cleaner and an auto body shop), and some geotechnical work (as there were once buildings on the site that were demolished with materials left in place and buried), with completion of these items anticipated this month.
- The site is proposed to be rezoned because the current residential zoning (RM-H for the building, with some R1D-H for the proposed parking area) does not permit the Indoor Recreational Use. The applicant will be seeking to change the zoning of the parcels to LNC for two reasons:
 - 1) The Larimer Ave corridor is already zoned LNC from Maxwell Way (one block south of the project site) down to East Liberty Blvd;

- 2) The LNC district permits all of the same residential uses that are present in the vicinity today, so in the even the project does not go forward, it would not be detrimental to the redevelopment of the site.
- Two of the parcels included in the rezoning, 124-J-350 and 124-J-355, will not be owned by Steel City Squash and will remain under the ownership of the City. However, they are included in the application to provide a continuous LNC district. L. Metz explained that this was best practice and that the City did not like to have “islands” of discontinuous zoning.
- The project team has received a significant amount of feedback to date from the Larimer Consensus Group and residents about the proposed parking lot at the rear of the property (which will be achieved through the vacation of portions of Regis Way and Rapidan Way). The goal of these discussions was to ensure that the parking lot would not be disruptive to neighbors. The team also met with the homeowner at 6312 Joseph St to discuss the project and parking lot.
- L. Metz explained that this Development Activities Meeting was the final step prior to presenting before the Planning Commission. He stated that there would be a Planning Commission briefing for the proposed rezoning on February 23, with action taking place at the March 9 hearing. If the Planning Commission recommends approval, an ordinance will be presented to City Council to change the zoning map.
- Aside from the rezoning focus of the presentation, the project team also presented on the building and on the Steel City Squash organization itself:
 - A very preliminary conceptual site plan was shown, just for a rough scale of what is to be expected of the project and the locations of the amenities (squash courts, locker rooms, classrooms, parking, etc.). The site plan was from earlier work on the project and was not produced by the current architect GBBN.
 - Some preliminary sketches and renderings were also shown to provide a preview of the interior of the facility, including classrooms, study areas, common areas, and the squash courts.
 - A. Chen discussed GBBN’s work on other educational facilities (including libraries) and on the firm’s philosophy in terms of the built environment and sustainability.
 - M. Ngami mentioned that she lived near the project site and was excited to be on the design team.
 - B. Young discussed the nature of the Steel City Squash program, explaining that it was an out-of-school academic and athletic enrichment program drawing from Pittsburgh Public Schools and other districts. The program involves tutoring and college preparation along with mentoring activities and works with students all the way through university and career obtainment. The program is centered around the sport of squash and is part of a national and international squash network located in other economically disadvantaged communities. 94% of the students in the program move on to post-secondary education, with 64% completing their bachelor’s degrees. The program works with students to provide internship and career opportunities as well as summer school and travel opportunities. Services are free of charge to participants and are fully funded as long as students and their families commit to the program. The Pittsburgh group recently won a Squash in Education national championship in its division.
 - The organization is looking to expand the programming to Larimer youth. It has been serving 64 students consistently at the University of Pittsburgh squash courts but believes that it can double its enrollment in the program with the new facility. The organization would like to expand to a greater population, be more geographically focused, and provide a place for the students to play squash on the weekends when the Pitt courts have not been available. It would also like to have members of the community learn the sport of squash and to have access to other health and fitness activities. Going forward, the organization will be partnering with Chatham University. The Chatham squash team will practice at the facility, and Chatham students will tutor the youth and serve as coaches as well.
 - The organization recently received a \$500,000 grant from the Commonwealth’s Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) in support of the Larimer project.

Input and Responses

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
There were no questions or comments from attendees.	

Other Notes

Text

Planner completing report: Phillip Wu