

## 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   |
|---|--|
| <b>Project Name/Address:</b> 1500 Bingham St (Stabilization & Renovation)                             | <b>Groups Represented (e.g., specific organizations, residents, employees, etc. where this is evident):</b><br>South Side Community Council<br>Local Review Committee<br>Residents<br>Councilman Kraus's Office (Staff)<br>South Side Chamber of Commerce<br><br>Applicant team<br>DCP staff |
| <b>Parcel Number(s):</b> 3-H-99   |  |
| <b>ZDR Application Number:</b> DCP-ZDR-2021-13922   |  |
| <b>Meeting Location:</b> Zoom   |  |
| <b>Date:</b> 2/17/2022  |  |
| <b>Meeting Start Time:</b> 6:00pm start of overall meeting (this specific DAM started at about 7pm)   |  |
| <b>Applicant:</b> Sonia (Sunny) Varrasso (Owner) and David Noss (Architect and lead presenter at DAM) | <b>Approx. Number of Attendees:</b> 24   |
| <b>Boards and/or Commissions Request(s):</b> HRC for exterior renovations and stabilization           |  |

### 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.*

Building is in the historic district. Showed current photos of state of the building. Two-story, non-descript, mid-century industrial building. Previous owner had attempted to mitigate some issues. From the sill of the upper windows to top of parapet, the façade is falling apart. The building is currently empty. There are no tenants and no partitions in the building. At some point the coping and roofing failed, and water is falling in. It has become a dangerous and hazardous situation. Showed elevation from Bingham street. Sides of building are starting to peel away.

Owner has gone through multiple variations about proposal for building. Showed visual of exterior changes planned at Bingham Street elevation. Currently, plan to remove the exterior coursing of brick and reinstall it. Remove windows and replace with new energy efficient windows in same openings/window sizes, however for the upper left window (which is a door and varanda) raise the opening to match the adjacent windows and remove the door and varanda. At bottom left of building face there is a garage door with a man door within it, and would like to take that out and replace with a garage door and install a 9ft tall man door that would reach top of that opening. Maintain three corbles across top. Replace the roof and replace wood joists. Put in new aluminum coping to protect the walls, brick soldier header course would remain, brick sills would be put back in.

Showed 15th Street elevation. Intent is to take all brick off building and replace all brick, put in new energy-efficient windows in same openings, remove the fire escape off the façade of the building now as it is in a dangerous condition and not sure if it can be replaced by code. Where garage doors were, intent is to remove garage doors and put in storefront for commercial space there in the future. Do not have profiles on windows or material selection yet for windows or for the storefront.

Some last-minute changes not shown on visuals: for far left and far right storefronts, owner would like to put doors into those units, preferably on far outside section of those to give more flexibility for possible tenant use. Likely would remove the existing door in middle of building and fill in that recess with brick, but leave a marking that would indicate there had been a prior opening. Three corbels per existing. Will have soldier header course, brick sills. New aluminum coping to be added.

Showed existing conditions: the building is a buff brick. On 15<sup>th</sup> street side of building, it appears to be 2 different colors of brick. Owner would like to change brick color to maroon or burgundy brick, and owner may have sent that brick color to SSCC. That's where the proposal is at this point.

### Input and Responses

| Questions and Comments from Attendees  | Responses from Applicants  |
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| I found a photo of the building from a real estate site that showed it before it looked like this. Not sure exactly how long ago.  | [showed photo]   |
| That photo was from many years ago at least.   |  |
| A lot to talk about and there are a lot of issues with building – a combination of work cut out for you to deal with the technical and structural issues of building. Some elements of design are in flux. We'd need to go back to the elements to your approach: some of it is very appropriate and some we'd like to debate. |  |
| How is it zoned? How are you asking it to be zoned? Are you rezoning? Any variances?   | No change in zoning requested, and no change in use. It's not currently used. The main emphasis is it is a dangerous situation with the brick falling off. We need to get that resolved and make it safe for the public and trying to do that in most respectful way and restore the building as best we can and try to create a building that has value to the community but there has been no determination of the use of the building by the owner. |
| Is it going to be residential?   | No   |
| Will it be commercial or office or retail in some form?  | It will be some sort of commercial, yes  |
| You did a great job and brought it a long way from where you started from. For everyone's awareness, it's in the historic district. It is a non-contributing building in the historic district. I helped draw the historic   |  |

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| <p>district line, we captured this building to also get the back of the other building behind it. That said, one could also make an argument for the significance of this building. It was owned by the Michaels family, which also did the Rex Theater and the building at the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> and Carson. That's why the brick matches those buildings to some degree. However, as David indicated, this was punky brick and it deteriorated to the point where it could not be removed and reinstalled. I don't have any objection nor do I think there is anything in the guidelines that says it has to go back to a white brick building. The owner could make an aesthetically appropriate choice that fits with the building. There are two other buildings of a similar type also captured in the district in the Bingham Street corridor. One was Thick Bikes, which was the original post office, but potentially more similar was the back of Schwartz Market – those are all 1920s industrial buildings, which are peculiar but not contributing to the district. So the idea of maintaining the pattern, rhythm and scale of the existing openings and changing the garage doors to storefront. I live 50 feet away from this building and have probably done 4 projects for it, so I know it quite well. It's a blessing to see this building put back together again and become part of the corner. Thank you.</p> |  |
| <p>The infilling and changing out of the garages to storefronts just happened at the Goodwill building further down in the district where UPMC is looking at occupying. A lot of those garage doors had been changed over the years and had to go through LRC and HRC beforehand, which thought it was appropriate to make changes. If we went back through the history we could probably find another couple buildings where something like this has occurred. I don't object and I don't think HRC would object to changing garage doors to storefronts and these storefronts have what I think is the appropriate flavor of transparency and yet not simply mimicking the industrial windows above. We've seen that in the past months in a couple different things where the second story windows are different from the first story due to differences in use on the two floors.</p> <p>Changing windows on the Bingham Street façade: changing the one on the [upper] left to homogenize and match openings of other two windows -- I've seen HRC sometimes get hung up on that. The original openings when they're quirky and different, if they've felt it's appropriate to keep the size and relate that to the oddness that some historic buildings have.</p>  | <p>Do you think they would want the door and varanda to remain?</p>  |
| <p>Hard to speak for them, but I know someone at Zokov's (sp?) Garage back elevation on an alley with a similar situation, had a little window with a bunch of double hung windows and they wanted to make the little window a double-hung window and HRC told them no, that they like that little window since it's peculiar and original and so wanted to keep. You could try this, but you might want to study it and keep it as a back-up option when you go to HRC. To Jerry's point, it's a blighted property and anything we can do to work with you. I think you're very</p>   | <p>One thing I did not mention is that the plan is we'd also be replacing all the sidewalks from property to property.</p> |

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| <p>close – it’s just a matter of working through the details again. If you can pull your face brick off and put it back on and rest of building stands up, then great. Jerry’s point is well taken that there other industrial buildings in Bingham corridor that are not buff but are red brick, and you could maybe push that precedent or example. Also, since this is a non-contributing building, guidelines are a bit more lenient for changes like that than if it were a contributing building of the time and era that district is preserving. You have the flexibility, you’re making all the right moves, just a matter now of details.</p> |   |
| <p>I’d also like to encourage street trees if possible in front of them.</p>   | <p>Are there street trees on Bingham?</p>   |
| <p>There are in front of Thick Bikes. Three I believe. I think City Code actually requires you to put it in on sidewalks providing there is room, and now without the garage doors I think you’d be asked to do that.</p>  |   |
| <p>A couple concerns we always hear from our residents: I think the interior ramp is gone, correct?</p>  | <p>Correct, it is.</p>  |
| <p>So that garage door on the side used to open and you’d go up. My brother-in-law used to rent the second floor of this building many years ago. They kept the garbage inside that back door. I’d like to see the new plan, so we don’t end up with more dumpsters on the Bingham Street side of this, if it becomes successful retail/businesses. Could the design incorporate some sort of common space inside that side door on the Bingham Street garage door for trash/recycling, so there is not more street-side sidewalk trash please? And then you stole my thunder -- I was also going to ask about the sidewalk.</p>                       | <p>Sure. I understand.</p>  |
| <p>Are you filling in basement? I know it’s very small, I hear</p>   | <p>Intent now was <u>not</u> to abandon it. We were going to replace the entrance down into it. If possible, we would use it for electrical service, but that’s in the future. Now, we’re just trying to get the bones of it back to something that is safe for the public and make it look nice.</p> |
| <p>Thank you. Very exciting. I know the neighbors will be pleased.</p>   |   |
| <p>The degree to which you can bring evidence or research of what window you’d like to select, HRC would probably like to know the products or profiles on that. I assume the storefront would be an aluminum storefront?</p>  | <p>Right now, I’m assuming it would be.</p>   |
| <p>No objection.</p>   | <p>Now we just need to see what kind of profiles we can get. Maybe there is an appropriate profile for time-period.</p>   |

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| <p>Or not, there are historic buildings in the district, some more historic than this, that go with a pretty straightforward storefront. Being non-contributing, we have some flexibility.</p>   | <p>We have some flexibility.</p>  |
| <p>Because you are mimicking a more industrial multi-pane window on parts of this, they may want to see a somewhat historic profile related to that, but again you have a little more leeway, and we could talk about that in more detail when you start selecting product, as to whether they would go that far in the detailing. If it was a more contributing building they would likely push that, and that has come up at two other similar buildings that came before HRC in recent months. There was product that gave them assurance that they were on target for mimicking the metal windows. And sometimes they'll ask you to follow up with staff for over-the-counter approval that meets their expectations, but the more you can bring it in ahead of time, that helps.</p>  | <p>Ok sure.</p>   |
| <p>I don't see a need to have a panelized garage door. What you have there is fine -- it's a 20s-30s era, and a bit more stripped down, even though original wood door is panelized. LRC and HRC may debate that a bit, but at the other example at Zokov's (sp?) Garage they did a very simple non-panel wood door, more a metal door I believe. So that is up for discussion, and HRC may bat that around a bit. Overall I think you're very close.</p>  | <p>Ok.</p>  |
| <p>What is the occupancy?</p>  | <p>Currently there is no occupancy in the building itself. Right now, as far as I know, the owner doesn't have any tenants going into that space right now. It was a commercial space before. Intent would be to maintain commercial in both first and second floor.</p>  |
| <p>Very thankful to see movement on this building [Chat]</p>   |   |
| <p>I appreciate people's comments in thanking the owner [Sunny] in purchasing this building. If not, we'd be spending more time. She and I are spending time in municipal court now dealing with the previous owner's neglect of the property. We have to appreciate that the building has been purchased. I guess we're grappling with how no permits are allowed until this goes through HRC, and so the earliest it can go to HRC is April. And we may say as residents we're fine with that since see light at the end of tunnel, but no movement to get permits to do any work until the issue is taken care of. I could be wrong but I think we've grappled with that, and there still is the hearing for the property being neglected, and being problematic. I think we have a 6-month window. The hearing will occur in 6 months for all of this to go through. That is the frustrating part. David and Sunny, correct me if I'm wrong, but no work can be started until this</p> | <p>As far as I know that is correct. We submitted to the City a remediation plan in which we showed the dangerous coursing of brick being brought down and weatherproofed, and they said because it's in the district you have to go through HRC and the whole process. Which is fine, that's how it is. That started back in November with winter. Sunny and I were concerned about what would happen with the brick. It stayed up and hopefully it will stay up and we can get through the process.</p> |

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| approval occurs. I don't believe we have been able to get any confirmation or correction for that not being the case.  |  |
| There is a policy / procedure in place with the City when a building is in this kind of condition that you can get an expedited review for remediation. Clearly, we had a building burn down and another get struck by lightning, the City moved to get approvals to stabilize those structures. It would not be an approval to replace or rehabilitate the structure, but in terms of stabilization, I believe that that could happen almost immediately. |  |
| But weren't those condemned?   | [Owner/Sunny]: I think two days after I purchased it, it was put on the condemnation list.   |
| But there are no blue stickers on it.  | I didn't see one.  |
| It's easy to determine that.   |  |
| <i>DCP staff: I'll look at list of condemned buildings with PLI to see if it's on there.</i>   | [Owner/Sunny]: I was confused because there was never a placard on the building, but that came from the real estate attorney I had after I had purchased it. There was a warning given to me the day of the closing that the previous owner did not make the repairs required by City and I had the choice of backing out of the deal at that time. But that this time there isn't a placard, but the chance is that it may go on condemn list. And so I decided to move forward with purchase. But then I was contacted two days later, and the real estate attorney said it made it on the condemnation list. I hadn't really received any paperwork, but I knew I had to expedite to get building repaired. Although when I purchased building, I had a certain idea of what I wanted to do with the building, and then it changed to residential.<br>But because of the condition of building, I don't have the luxury for those options of what I'd like to do with the building or the time to spend to explore those options. Now it's a safety issue and so restoring it to its original condition is probably the safest process to move forward with. And so it was really |

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|  | important to me, as I was talking to Barbara, is whether there is a possibility for me to get an emergency building permit to at least address this situation because brick is detaching from building and it is very dangerous to people in the community. |
| So the answer to that question is emphatically yes.  |   |
| With the previous owner, there were always continuances when it went to court. In spring, Sunny is now the new owner, and it might be because she is the new owner, all the violations were withdrawn or dismissed, and it had to start back up again with an inspector going to look at the place and file the violations and then we met in September and then it was continued until January. Then, fortunately the inspector of the vacant properties also was saying 'I don't know what's happening here.' We were outside the courthouse trying to figure out where do we go next. We were wondering, do we go to PLI and speak to the issues that are here. And then we were directed back to HRC. We understood that if you are going to replace something, you have to replace something within the guidelines of the historic district. That's what we thought but we were not totally sure. |   |
| <p><i>[Councilman's Office staff stated in chat that building is on condemned list]</i></p> <p><i>[DCP staff confirmed that the building is on the City's condemned list and also put emergency work request form in chat]</i></p> <p>PLI Emergency Work Request Form:<br/> <a href="https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/9152_Emergency_Work_Request_Form_ver_2.pdf">https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/9152_Emergency_Work_Request_Form_ver_2.pdf</a></p>  |   |
| <p>David, I would recommend that you make that request form with whatever remediation documents are.</p> <p>For DCP staff [Phil], can you go back to the director and the chief of the building department and say this is coming up and needs to be expedited? Council Office likely also would be interested, if you want that level of attention. But this is a no-brainer. This building could fall down at any moment and kill someone.</p>   |   |
| <p><i>DCP staff [Phil]: I'll send an email to Director Kinter [at PLI] about it. David/Sunny -- if you can email PLI app tech, please do so.</i></p> <p><i>[link to PLI app tech email and phone number shared in chat: pliapptech@pittsburghpa.gov or 412-255-2175]</i></p>   | [David/Architect]: Yeah I can do that.  |
| Councilman Kraus' office staff [Bob Charland] and I looked at this property. We were trying to figure out where the incomplete application was when we were looking at Civic Central, and through PLI App Tech. It kept coming up as incomplete because they had not applied for the Certificate of Appropriateness. But the issue was why do we need to do that when we need to stabilize the building.   | [Owner/Sunny]: If all of the exterior brick would be removed, and then start HRC process, at least it's safe from anyone getting hurt or building collapsing. David – I don't know if there is a structurally sound way to remove brick?                    |

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|   | [David/Architect] Yes, we've had a structural engineer go down there and look at it. There is a process to follow but it can be done. |
| As you're working through what needs to be done with HRC and taking the opportunity to work with LRC on windows and brick and all, LRC is extremely helpful resource and we're fortunate to have them. We're very fortunate to be working with them through all these projects. So you probably would not go to HRC until April but then what you present to HRC is what you need to be doing, once you get to that point, right? |   |
| Yes, it's a parallel approach.  |   |
| There is a plan.  | Yes.  |
| We're on the right track for 1500 Bingham, there may be light at the end of that tunnel.  |   |
| [Background on how to share comments with SSCC and HRC. SSCC website updates to happen, recording to be on Youtube page]. Thank you.  | Thank you.  |

**Other Notes**

After the DAM, DCP staff followed up with PLI and with the applicant team informing them of steps to take per PLI's instructions: submission of an Emergency Work Request Form, if emergency stabilization work is anticipated before review of the project by the Historic Review Commission; submission of a structural assessment report from a Pennsylvania licensed design professional (engineer or architect) documenting the hazard associated with the structure; reference the Building Permit number and application on file as needed. Contact information for the PLI staff contact was also provided to applicants.

After the DAM, PLI provided a reference to the following section of City code:  
[https://library.municode.com/pa/pittsburgh/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=PIZOOC\\_TITELEVENHIPR\\_CH1101HIS\\_TDISIOB\\_S1101.09EXEFDE](https://library.municode.com/pa/pittsburgh/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PIZOOC_TITELEVENHIPR_CH1101HIS_TDISIOB_S1101.09EXEFDE)

**Planner completing report:** Thomas Scharff