

Development Activities Meeting Report (Version: 4/18/2019)

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

Logistics	Stakeholders
Project Name/Address: 3250 Liberty Avenue	Groups Represented (e.g., specific organizations, residents, employees, etc. where this is evident): PHCA Residents Residents of Lawrenceville Lawrenceville United staff Project staff
Meeting Location: West Penn Recreational Center, 450 30 th Street, Pittsburgh, PA	
Date: 14 August 2019	
Meeting Start Time: 6.30 p.m.	
Applicant: RDC, Inc.	Approx. Number of Attendees: 18

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.

Applicant presented the development project using massing diagrams and describing likely program, including parking counts. Applicant described site work needed, including demolition of all but one existing building, construction of one new building, building program (office, residential, parking), relocation and reconstruction of an existing retaining wall, and widening of the sidewalk along Liberty Avenue. One of the reasons applicant selected this site (which has other offers on it) is because of its proximity to transit at the Herron Avenue Station. Applicant will be seeking Special Exceptions for multi-family use in UI Zone, as well as for height above 60 feet. Applicant spoke about potential building design and façade treatments, and presented photos of precedents, but design hadn't progressed that far so no renderings were shown.

Input and Responses

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
Will lighting flood the hillside (and houses on top of it) with light, as it has in other developments?	Lighting must meet requirements, but can be designed so that light stays on the subject property.
Concern about safety of people trying to cross Liberty.	Yes.
How will traffic flow be managed? Developer should collaborate with IC Brewery to consider reshaping the intersection at Herron Avenue.	Developer knows City is redoing Liberty Avenue to Herron Ave Bridge, which should increase safety. They'll be pulling back the on-site retaining wall to increase field of vision for oncoming traffic, and will provide a wider sidewalk. They met with DOMI and did a scoping meeting.
Concern about amount of vehicles from this development that will use Polish Hill as a cut-through to Oakland.	Agreed, they've talked about getting bus passes for site residents / users.
People who need access to transit also need affordable units.	The more affordable the units the easier they will be to rent. There are a lot of costs associated with the development of the site. They'll be providing housing where there is none, proximity of busway is a draw.
What are price points?	\$1200 -\$1300

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
A lot of the neighborhood can't afford that price. They're changing the neighborhood demographic and that raises concerns about gentrification.	
Why aren't they applying for tax credits?	It takes 18 months to go through the process to subsidize housing. The seller has backup offers on the property (they haven't closed yet).
The 2 major concerns are traffic and affordable housing. Affordable housing doesn't have to be subsidized and can be workforce housing.	
Would team consider observing IZ policy standards?	No, not at this point – they'll consider working with the City and community. Also important to note that the L'ville IZ IPOD is a pilot, there will be benefits and issues, too early to tell.
<i>Conversation re: what affordability could happen if no requirements or incentives are associated. Established that if this project doesn't go through, there are other buyers. Conversation regarding future use of site. Building is actively gentrifying, versus relieving pressure. Community discussed that it's a private site and a private transaction versus something involving public land or public finding.</i>	
Building is actively gentrifying, versus relieving pressure.	
At what point is development too much, and at what point are these units going to go unfilled?	<i>Lawrenceville community member responded that new residential development in Lawrenceville is selling / renting very quickly.</i>
	It's a good question, there wasn't development for 30 years and now development is backfilling to satisfy pent-up demand.
In 2018, 13% of Polish Hill residents were living under the poverty line. The median sale price tripled over five years. Grateful to hear they're open to working with the community to bring affordability; would they be willing to talk with other organizations?	The City would need to get involved and bring funding.
Action Housing is constructing 35 affordable units at Penn & 34 th .	
Would they consider a price point for 80% AMI? For a family of two it's \$1300.	<i>Planner response: For a rental unit, the \$1300 would include both rent and utilities.</i>
One standard for special exception is, is the site sufficiently separated from area zoned residential? Does this impact traffic approach? Can they make traffic study available?	<i>Planner: TIS will be available to the public when application is officially submitted.</i> The site is less dense than it's permitted to be.
Did they give consideration to viewshed related to height and view from the neighborhood?	Architect looked at views from surrounding hillsides, Googlemaps the new building will be only about 4 feet higher than what's there now. It will be visible but it won't obstruct views. <i>Community member suggested they take a walk in the neighborhood and look at the bottom of Wiggins, Flavian. Several community members invited designer into their backyards to see the existing view and take pictures to incorporate into view study.</i>

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Concern re: increased traffic on Polish Hill streets (x2). In the traffic study, is the upper Polish Hill neighborhood considered? Is there a way to extend the study?	Developers don't know if traffic study looked at the rest of Polish Hill. <i>PHCA member suggested that the traffic and pedestrian safety committee would be happy to meet with DOMI and the transportation consultants, as they've been doing work on pedestrian safety.</i>
Is there anything that their project brings to the community?	Yes, they'll offer space for community meetings and events in the office building. Are there needs currently unmet that could be addressed?
In response to developer's question: Laundromat, small retail, a bodega, a dog park, small grocery.	
City Planning suggested developers return for another meeting when they have the buildings and façade designed beyond massing diagrams.	Does the community have any thoughts on design?
<p>In response to developer's question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could it be more eclectically massed so the neighborhood isn't looking at the "back" of the building? - PHCA can provide community feedback garnered during the CLT site development process and share it with the developers. - Don't make it look like shipping containers (x2) 	
Is there an opportunity for affordable commercial (retail) space in the office space? Inclusion of public art on site? Also, have they considered breaking it up and being a neighborhood and not just big block buildings? Fewer units?	Site could be more dense than they are planning. There's a balance between the costs of developing the site (retaining wall, existing building demo) and the number of units need to recoup those costs.
Are they aware of Norfolk Southern's plan to double or triple train traffic?	Yes, they plan on doing a lot of sound attenuation.
Re: Sound – if a sound barrier is put up to protect the building will it amplify into the neighborhood?	It won't be that kind of sound attenuation measure.
If the development partner wants to hold the site for a long time why are they planning on building it "just" to Building Code?	Building Code was updated recently, it will be more energy efficient than buildings constructed to earlier Code. Also they will do a review to see what LEED measures they could apply to the building even if they don't pursue certification.
Will roof be accessible to people?	Maybe for the office, not for the residence. Trying to provide those amenities at the ground level.

Other Notes

Lack of affordably-priced units and the impact of additional vehicular traffic on the Polish Hill neighborhood were the largest concerns of the community.

Planner completing report: Andrea Lavin Kossis