

Penn Knox Neighborhood Association
January 7, 2020, 7 p.m.
Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, 143 W. Coulter Street

Attended: Brandi Levine, Terese Vekteris, Shawn Megill-Legenore, Grace Flisser, Tom Hemmerick, Clifton Hayman, Ken Weinstein, Lynne Collins, Sue Gilfillan, Ton Dong Kang, Sue Patterson, Jamal York, Georgette Bartell, Irwin Trauss, Liuda Sudaris, Maggie Manzer

1. Welcome and Introductions.

2. Ken Weinstein, a self-described “activist developer,” the President of Philly Office Retail, made a presentation in which he updated us about his Germantown “Adapt, Remove, and Re-use” building projects. Ken W’s view is that new construction maybe be fine, but tearing down old deteriorated buildings should be a last resort, as they can be improved and made functional and useful, which adds value to neighborhoods. For some projects, state and federal tax credits enable the re-use of the buildings. The City of Philadelphia is putting incentives into place so that developers can reuse old buildings; the tax abatement plan gave preference to re-using old buildings over new construction. Hence, he applauded PKNA’s recent successful effort to preserve and rehabilitate the historically significant Boys and Girls’ Club on Penn Street, which will be improved for the benefit of the children who use it.

Ken W’s vision is for a Clean Green and Safe commercial corridor in Germantown. His projects include:

- a. Both the Trolley Car Cafe and Trolley Car Table Tennis Club, in East Falls;
- b. Wayne Junction renovation of an 1876 building into whose third floor his company has moved. He is working on providing amenities in the area, as much there is vacant, and working toward residential and commercial mixed use of his own building. To this end, a number of community murals will be funded by the city, and the residents have been consulted as to their preferences for various kinds of images; a pocket park will be provided from the city Land Bank; there will be trees provided by PHS, and pedestrian crossings and trash cans provided by the city Commerce Department;
- c. Restoring and finding commercially viable tenants for the Green and Cheltenham building that used to be Allens Department store, after its tenant went bankrupt. It’s been power-washed, repainted, had roof replaced, side windows re-opened, and grates removed;
- d. The former Cunningham Piano building has 21,000 square feet, and PKNA supported the zoning request that would make its re-use possible; it will be historically rehabilitated, and Ken W hopes for two store fronts and 18 apartments there; it will take nine months of improvement;
- e. 4530 Germantown Avenue, at Berkeley, has been renovated, its grates removed; it comprises 30,000 sq. feet, and Philadelphia Woodworking will rent the second floor while Philly Bread will have a street-level retail store. This business has relocated from its Olney wholesale space, tripled in size, and has installed a large painted sign on the building.
- f. 137 Berkeley Street, the former Blaisdell Pencil Factory, has been rehabilitated and its

main tenant is Attic Brewing, which has had several soft openings. This renovation includes exposed brick, full-size windows, and other historic features. Its official opening in January 17th. Several other businesses are set to move in, including Deke's BBQ.

- g. 212 Roberts Street is now shovel-ready after some delays; it will house 32 apartments, and will be a historic rehabilitation. It used to house the 1902 Max Levy Company, a factory that made photographic and military equipment.
- h. 113 Berkeley Street, built in the late 1800s, has 15,000 sq. feet; it had been a facility that, as Ken W put it, had been "warehousing drug addicts." It needs to be made structurally sound, and has historical features; he's had calls from people interested in leasing space there.
- i. At 133 Berkeley Street, Wayne Mills had this vacant lot for parking, but this property might be used differently (perhaps the diner could be moved there.?)
- j. 4518 Wayne Avenue, an ugly lot near Goeppert recycling, has a whole acre, 50,000 sq. feet and possibly a design and fabrication works from Kensington might relocate there.
- k. The Mt. Airy Presbyterian Church can provide room for 19 condominiums, but the church's sanctuary will be kept. Thus, the building can be preserved, but also adapted for present use.
- l. Jumpstart Germantown, started five years ago, was created by Ken W to provide real estate and community development training and mentoring. Of his 685 graduates of the training to date, 85% have been women and people of color, and trainees are of all ages and in all life states; he believes there is a real need for this sort of launch pad. Currently, each Monday evening, 50-100 people show up for additional training; for example, Joe Scares will lead one in negotiation for historic preservation and re-use. Germantown Radio gives air time every Friday morning in its podcast to Jumpstart Germantown in its program on development in Germantown. The 20th cycle of training is starting in 2020. All in all, the program has helped net its developers \$16 million for 149 loans, with an average loan of \$110,000. Ken W is glad to have many other people also working on reusing and rehabilitating old buildings in Germantown. Jumpstart.org has curricula that can be used in different neighborhoods; in fact, that seven such programs, drawing on this model, have started in other cities. Ken W believes that we're reading for "Jumpstart 2.0" that would focus on commercial rehabilitation of real estate rather than on residential. There is a launch date for March 2020.

Ken W apprised us of other city and neighborhood significant activity:

The Mayor's Re-Use Task Force is looking at land use, parking, and clean streets:

With Connie Winters, he led a campaign to close the GSSD since many business owners feel that it has not been effective. For example, the trash on Maplewood Mall is rampant although 50% of its property owners had financially supported GSSD removal of its trash. It's not clear where their money went, and there must be accountability to the people paying into the GSSD funds. Currently, Ken W and other business owners are waiting for a city solicitor's report. They hosted three community meetings about this issue, and wanted to create a Germantown B.I.D. (Business Improvement District), but our councilwoman does not support that. There are currently 12 B.I.D.s in Philadelphia

- a. Recently, the Mayor and Commerce Department have started cleaning commercial districts, such as our Germantown and Cheltenham zone, but this is short term.
- b. Sherelle Parker, councilperson from Oak Lane and North Philadelphia sponsored

legislation for \$10 million to be used for city cleaning, so that each district would receive \$1 million, but Germantown requires more.

- c. The Mayor has stated that by 2023, there will be a budget for cleaning for every neighborhood. This city-wide solution will require people to move their cars.

Q and A with Ken W:

Sue P: Could our neighborhood circulate a petition in support of a local B.I.D. to demonstrate that many neighbors want this?

Ken: Right now the city is in transition, and monies were just designated by the Mayor for cleaning, so it's likely not a top priority right now.

Georgette: What's happening at a building at Berkeley and Wayne, brick with big windows?

Ken: There's a good developer in there. There will be a cooking school, apartments, restaurant and cafe. It's full financed for mixed use.

Sue G: We need parking at Wayne Junction in such a way that people feel safe and demand is met.

Ken: The needs for parking become clearer as the projects develop. Also, the public transportation there is great and there is less need for cars.

Sue and Ken suggested that PKNA talk to the L and I inspectors on Haines Street about some of our local questions or problems. Establishing a relationship would be positive. In fact, Ken W believes it's in everyone's interest, the community and the real estate people, if they go door to door to talk to neighbors.

Maggie: Who are the Jumpstart people in Germantown, and what are their properties? Is there a list?

Sue: Jumpstart people have presented to us.

Ken: There is no list.

3. Treasurer's Report: Maggie M said that PKNA has somewhere around \$1,000 in the bank but owe some money for the Boys and Girls Club Preservation effort. [Note: it's been found that we do not owe any money whatsoever for the B and G Club effort. Hurray.] It's suggested that PKNA members pay dues: \$20 for households and \$10 for individuals; checks or cash can be given or sent to Maggie.

4. Change in a building on Coulter Street: Kathy Paulmier spoke as the Germantown Friends' School Community Involvement point person. GFS want to combine two lots currently zoned separately into one, and use both buildings as offices. Hence, GFS is applying for a use change and registration permit for 36 Coulter Avenue so that it can be combined with 34. GFS plans to put an ADA accessibility ramp into the back of the property and is applying for a building permit to do so. Business office employees will be at the building (which has been vacant for a while) until 6 pm, which may add to the safety of the street and neighborhood. The building will still present as a residence and no deliveries will be coming. The windows will stay as they are for now, but historically approved Marvin windows will eventually be installed; the porch will be rebuilt, in keeping with the structure already present. The building will be pointed. GFS is waiting for the city to get back to them. GFS wishes to be a neighbor for the common good and will share the master plan currently being developed with PKNA. A letter from PKNA in support of this change would help GFS.

Sue P suggested that the PKNA historic and zoning committees discuss this. It was pointed out that a use registration permit has been requested, not a zoning change.

Sue P moved that PKNA approve a lot consolidation and use variance change for 34 and 36 W. Coulter Streets:

Nine voted in favor;
two voted in opposition;
two abstained.

Brandi will draft a letter from PKNA in support of this change.

5. Zoning Committee: Connie urged us to read and review the zoning committee's position on development and send comments to herself and Brandi. The committee is also surveying/taking inventory of the buildings within the neighborhood boundaries. They may talk to neighbors about how each property is being used, so that we know what PKNA consists of.

The City Planning Commission wants to increase the use of public transportation, so they have instituted a system wherein new construction, "by right," doesn't provide for parking. We have no "overlays" for parking since Germantown has no B.I.D. (see above.) This hurts the families on the blocks in row houses who were not notified. We need to develop a PKNA policy for parking in order to save home ownership in the neighborhood. Sue P said that Ian Hagerty from the Planning Commission will speak to us next month and that we can bring this problem to his attention.

6. Historic Designation Committee Report: Sue P said that we have a compilation from the 1960's of the historic properties in PKNA. Jim Duffin, the historic preservationist who worked on the initial Historic District nomination submitted for Penn Knox in 1990, has again brought up the possibility of acquiring a Historic District designation for PKNA; and we are about to achieve this from the Historical Commission, but we need to revise the original, 1960s, documentation. They will work with us to accomplish this. 40% of the PKNA properties are already historically designated. The Boynton Hill catchment area will be part of this effort. We need to re-photograph and fill out forms for each property. The PKNA Historic committee is looking for volunteers to work on this. Contact Sue P if interested. Perhaps we could start a fund for preservation that would help home-owners protect the historical character of their properties although likely requirements for historical preservation would be somewhat relaxed for individual homeowners.

Brandi moved that we adjourn at 9 p.m., and we did so.

Respectfully submitted,
Grace Flisser