

**Penn Knox Neighborhood Association  
Germantown, Philadelphia 19144**

**Minutes of January 3, 2023 meeting**

**Attending:** Deneene Brockington, Adam Kaufman, Kevin Zuber, Maggie Manzer, Grace Flisser, State Rep. Stephen Kinsey, Patrick Jones (Rep Kinsey, Constituent Services), Suzanne Ponsen (WCGN), Donna Clement Jackson, Dara Silverman, Irwin Trauss, Georgette Bartell, Craig Alston, Aneesha Shabazz, Steve Elkinton, Mikal Jenkins (Rep. Kinsey's office), Birdie Busch, Sharnay Ratchford, Victoria Best (Historic Germantown, Community Engagement, Cliveden), Stephanye Watts (Historic Germantown, Community Engagement)

**1. Presentation from Pennsylvania Rep. Kinsey:** We began with a welcome from Deneene Brockington, PKNNA Chair, who turned the meeting over to Rep. Kinsey, who had to leave by 7:15. He gave us an update and background on the fact that the Pennsylvania House had just that evening elected a Speaker, Marc Rozzi, who revealed that although he had been a Democrat, would henceforward be an Independent.

Rep. Kinsey's legislative priorities are public safety, education funding, gun reform, and health care. He has sponsored many reforms on the availability of guns, citing the Third Thursday walk, when local clergy and police from the 35th and 14th districts walk in Northwest neighborhoods to make people aware of the fact that there are others they can call if need be, about guns, if they would rather not call police. These walks provide connection between the community and police and third party/ non-profit organizations concerned about safety. Rep Kinsey works with many non-profit organizations and neighborhood organizations. La Salle University, for example, will make its facilities available for use by neighborhood groups thanks to Rep. Kinsey meeting with the University President. Rep. Kinsey is also working on economic development and helping small businesses in his district, only funding projects that neighborhood organizations approve of. For example, when neighbors were hesitant to accept the proposal from a developer for Germantown's Town Hall, Rep. Kinsey asked the developer to do further due diligence in order to win the neighborhood's trust and validation.

**2. Update on the status of 156 W. School House Lane:** Deneene asked Rep. Kinsey and his colleague Patrick Jones to look into Pennsylvania School for the Deaf's stated intention to demolish historically-designated 156 W. School House Lane if it can't be rented or marketed. We had not opposed the PSD's demolition of a rear property. Irwin summarized that PSD had claimed a hardship in that they couldn't do anything that they wished to do with the property (156) that they'd purchased, so they wished to demolish it although they had not tried to market it. They won't show the interior of the building to those who'd be interested in renting or using the property, which makes it almost impossible to market. They want to build a very wide driveway that the Philadelphia Preservation Alliance (PA) engineer we employed deemed unnecessarily wide and that might well damage the historically designated building itself, as well as demolishing its side porte-cochere. If we can't find a renter for them, they are threatening demolition.

Irwin stated next steps:

- we need a follow-up meeting with PSD after months of no communication;

- Irwin will write a response to PSD's latest communication, and run it by the "156 committee";
- Paul Steinke of the PA will follow up with a developer who evinced interest in the property;
- we need another engineer to advise us on whether there will be damage to the building if the present path is destroyed to make way for a huge driveway for school buses;
- we need an expert witness to present an alternative plan for PSD that won't threaten damage to the building;
- we need to keep track of the Historic Commission schedule since the PSD "exception" for a hold on the demolition process can change whenever PSD wants it to;
- Irwin hopes to get the Pennsylvania budget committee involved in the questions since PSD receives state money, and to get the community involved.

Patrick will meet with Deneene and also bring local preservation expert, Oscar Bisect, into the process.

**3. Neighborhood survey:** Deneene noted that everyone on the PKNA membership list received a survey in the latest email blast. We are urged to fill it out in order to provide the PKNA Board with the priorities perceived by the community.

**4. Status of zoning variance request for 23 W. Coulter Street:** Maggie reported that Germantown Friends School (GFS) is planning on some extensive building, called The Commons Project, on their campus, at 23 W. Coulter Street/5443 Greene Street., which faces both Greene and Coulter Streets. There was one RCO zoom meeting held to give information about the proposed building; a second will be held on January 9 6:00-8:00 pm. Here is the zoom link:

<https://ballardspahr.zoom.us/j/83781455450?pwd=SkxLVnRpaVVaS3dXejFVK251YTU1QT09>

At this second RCO meeting, there will be a brief presentation and some answers to questions previously posed. The project aims to change the flow of traffic coming from GFS so that 50% will be channeled to Coulter and 50% to Greene Street. We have many more questions on the effect of this building project. A vote regarding whether the community approves will be taken on January 9.

Deneene urged us to attend so that the voices from the community are represented in expressing concerns - both to GFS and to PSD. They must hear from neighbors.

**5. Historic Germantown Community Engagement Liaisons: Stephanye Watts, Victoria Best**

Denise introduced Stephanye and Victoria. Stephanie said that they're in the process of creating a plan to increase community engagement with eighteen historic Germantown properties; Vicky emphasized that their focus is very local. Stephanye is assigned to manage Stenton Manor and Vicky to Cliveden Manor.

Maggie requested that they provide RCO's with lots of easily communicated flyers and materials so that we can distribute it to our listservs. We would also like a tour, of properties, for example, the Germantown Historical Society, the better to tell people about our local resources.

Steve would like walking tours for the whole community, especially for schools so that kids can learn about the significance of places that they likely pass every day.

Stephanie told us that a pilot program, “Black in Germantown,” which toured properties from the Johnson House to Market Square, had been very successful when piloted in September, and the organization is looking to scale that up and repeat it.

Vicky also runs a tutoring service to provide free tutoring for people ages seven and up so that we can be more confident that people taking the tours will have enough literacy to interpret what they’re seeing. She is looking for volunteers, who can begin on January 23. You can volunteer by emailing Vicky at

Deneene would like a walking tour of Penn Knox itself. She foresees possibly having a PKNA Meet and Greet event at a historic site. You can volunteer by emailing Vicky at

vbest@cliveden.org or at votes.org.

Stephanye’s email address is Stephanye.watts@stenton.org.

Take a look at Historic Germantown at [historicgermantownpa.org](http://historicgermantownpa.org).

**6. Treasurer’s Report:** Maggie stated that we had a \$250 refund from Fairmount Park for our security deposit from our September Meet and Greet, and had \$50 incoming for dues, so we have a total of \$1,581.54. We encourage everyone to pay dues at \$10/ year for an individual and \$25/year for a household.

Irwin recommended also making tax-deductible donations to the Philadelphia Preservation Alliance who are acting as our fiscal sponsor for our expenses in our ongoing litigation regarding 156 W. School House Lane. They are a 501-C3 designated organization .

## **7. Announcements and Open Mic:**

**a.** The next PKNA meeting is on Tuesday, February 7.

**b.** Our block clean-ups will start again in the Spring, likely with the Philadelphia-wide clean-up.

**c.** Adam called for volunteers for flyer distribution every other month since some of our volunteers carry a heavy load. You can volunteer for just one block or for more. Email Adam at [adamrk103@gmail.com](mailto:adamrk103@gmail.com) to volunteer.

**d.** Deneene said that PKNA signature events are the Stuff Swap in June and our Meet and Greet in September.

**e.** Maggie meets with representatives from other RCO’s regarding preservation matters such as establishing a Germantown Historical District, especially on Germantown Avenue. Suzanne of West Central Germantown Neighbors said that WCGN has hired Oscar Bisect to help them with preservation issues.

**f.** Kevin mentioned some of the activities that the Quality of Life Committee is addressing, including clean-ups, stating that the committee consists of himself and his wife; help would be appreciated.

Submitted by Grace Flisser, Recording Secretary