

Penn-Knox Neighborhood Association
February 4, 2020 7:00
Pennsylvania School for the Deaf

Attending: Brent Agostini, Keith Brooks, Gwen Beale-Williams, Matt Cadwallader, Kristin Cassidy, Grace Flisser, Sue Gilfillan, Tom Hemmerick, Adam Kaufman, Russell Kleinbach, Brandi Levine, Maggie Manzer, Sandra McGeathey, Darisha K. Parker, Sue Patterson, Chris Paulmier, Kathy Paulmier, Martha Savery, Angela Steele, Irving Vaughn, Terese Vekteris, Margaret Wilmerding, Connie Winters

1. Welcome from Brandi L; introduction of speaker, Ian Hagerty.

2. Presentation from Ian Hagerty, from the American Institute of Certified Planners and the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, summarized below:

a. The purpose of zoning is to ensure that the owners of buildings or land also own the set of rights that they are thereby entitled to (along with the building or land itself) that pertain to the uses and “bulk” (shape or size) of such buildings. Knowledge of the zoning rights enables an owner to know what to expect from the uses of nearby properties (such as if they may be rentals, or industrial trash processors, single-family owned, and so on) and to know how s/he may use his/her own property.

For new buildings:

If a building is built according to the zoning regulations, then its owner uses it as such “by right.”

If the owner wishes to change the way it will be used from those possibilities provided by its current zoning, then s/he must apply for a “variance.”

b. The City of Philadelphia is developing a comprehensive plan for its eighteen districts, and the Penn-Knox neighborhood’s plan appears within the “Upper Northwest” district. Currently, the Planning Commission is working with our City Council member regarding the zoning in her (and our) district.

The zoning plan for our district is designed to help the creation of new jobs in our commercial district, which is near transportation hubs and include the major arteries in the area - Germantown and Cheltenham Avenues. There will also be rehabilitation and “infill” of vacant lots and wasteland areas around railroad tracks. At the same time, there be some limits to zoning that encourages growth, especially at the periphery of our district.

c. For Penn Knox in particular:

- we will continue to have single-family zoning on minor streets;
- master plans are strongly encouraged for campuses such as GFS and PSD. Currently both schools are engaged in their planning process. (Likely Greene Street Friends also has its own plan.)
- Germantown Avenue is zoned for retail, housing, dining, and employment with most building structures to be re-used, and some new constructions;
- the corner of Queen and Green will be rezoned for mixed use, and designated CMX-2;

- the community gardens will receive park zoning, which will protect them.

d. The City Planning Commission is interested in getting feedback from the community for the new plan; they will also talk to Cindy Bass, the Councilwoman, regarding her writing a bill with this content.

e. Q and A and discussion:

- The Queen and Green corner, has a lot that has potential for future development (since currently the building thereon doesn't match the zoning prescribed,) so the Planning Commission will designate it for mixed-use, likely for small apartment housing and commercial use.

- In order to add value to the commercial corridor, the building at Cheltenham and Germantown, Murray's (-which used to be a Woolworth-) has been nominated for historic designation, so that it can be re-used and thus not threatened by demolition and development. With a historic designation, it could not be used as a furniture store, but could have a furniture show-room.

- Apartment units with more than twenty units would require that a certain amount of parking for tenants be made available to them, but Penn-Knox currently is not going to be zoning for any such buildings.

- Wayne Avenue south will need (and will receive) new infrastructure such as street lights and trees, which are the priorities.

- In answer to a question about what historic preservation entails, Ian H stated that buildings on the local historic register with institutional or commercial use can use a CMX-3 zoning, which permits some

restructuring, and doesn't limit the usage of buildings to anything "below" CMX-3.

A discussion about traffic and parking ensued.

The Streets Department provides oversight regarding "carrying capacity" of the neighborhood, especially when new zoning has introduced new usage of buildings, and this will certainly be the case in Germantown once a new zoning plan has been implemented. At present, we have not outgrown our carrying capacity. In addition, we need to encourage development of public transportation so that the traffic growth is not haphazard. According to Ian H, the Planning Commission does or cannot plan around car capacity since our monies are limited, and affordable housing is a greater priority. Nonetheless, the Planning Commission attempts to plan around the pool of people who live in NW- which is currently 30,000 less than its population in the 1970's. However, he said that we can expect that our population will grow in density, especially regarding higher-density commercial zoning on Germantown and Cheltenham Avenues.

Maggie M. asked how we will know when zoning changes - since such zoning will likely change our lives, and we would like to be prepared.

Ian H replied that there's no legal requirement to notify of zoning changes way ahead of time, but that the Planning Commission does attempt to communicate this information. We can go to the Planning Commission's website, www.phila2035.org at any point to note changes or new information. By the same token he noted that no major changes are planned for our neighborhood; the scale of buildings and their usage will remain mostly the same in the new City plan.

Connie W stated there was a need for more parking where large apartment buildings were being

built.

Ian H stated that the Planning Commission hoped to re-use existing buildings or use areas where parking wouldn't create big problems; the zoning requirement to provide parking space still exists for any building housing more than 20 units. He stressed that with limited funds, the priority of the City's money will go for housing and greening the neighborhoods rather than for parking and that the planners will try to balance various needs in the neighborhoods. If we do want to get more parking for our neighborhood, then we would have to request it.

When asked to sum up the need for a new plan for zoning for Penn-Knox and Germantown, Ian H stated that the Planning Commission was trying to make the zoning regulations consistent with the actual usage of properties so that there is a measure of predictability within neighborhoods regarding the nature of the usage of their buildings. He added that adjusting our zoning will help to build in the possibility for needed jobs and related sorts of growth. As an example, Ian H stated that corner stores often are no longer viable, or in fact become neighborhood nuisances, especially if they're abandoned. Those properties will lose commercial zoning, and as a result, such businesses will likely be scaled back in residential areas.

Connie asked how we defined "affordable" housing. Ian H said that very roughly, it refers to housing costing 30% of the median income for a particular district or area, roughly \$600-700 for a one-bedroom apartment in our neighborhood, which is on the low-average end of the City (or national?) spectrum. These are often found in rehabbed apartments of smaller than twenty units. He stated that high-rise apartments and single family homes are often not affordable; therefore, people who are in that economic bracket are often competing against each other to find housing, which is not adequately available in our area. Therefore, we need the help of the federal government to provide it

In answer to a question, Ian H. also stated that the City needs a better, quicker process for addressing and solving the problem of abandoned houses, but also stated that re-use of buildings is going relatively well in Germantown, other than in City-owned properties.

2. Treasurer's Report

Maggie M reported that we currently have \$1,523.94 in the PKNA bank account, free and clear of any debt pertaining to the Boys and Girls Club project.

3. Spring Fair Event

Irving V stated that the event will be held on June 13, with a June 20 rain date, at Howell Park. We will communicate the event, called the "Spring Outreach Party" to the entire community, using FaceBook, pamphleting, and so on. Sue P and Irving V will ask for prizes, raffles, and in-kind donations from local businesses. We intend to make hotdogs and water available for free. Maybe we can follow up at a later point with a potluck at a central location. The next meeting to plan this event is on February 15 at 9:30 at Ultimo Coffee on Wayne Avenue.

4. By-Laws Committee

Adam Kaufman stated that the committee met last week to work on the by-laws; two more meetings are planned. The committee still welcomes community input, and considers everyone's comments carefully. The committee will present the first draft for community review in March. A final draft will not be presented until the April or May meeting.

5. Zoning Committee

Connie W stated that the Committee will send its draft of a position statement on development to the entire listserv; there were also copies available at the meeting and all were encouraged to take one. They are attempting to take inventory of the entire Penn-Knox housing stock. There was discussion of the approach to parking that should be taken in our neighborhood,. Connie W stated that we needed more parking to preserve our quality of life. Grace F and Maggie M emphasized the importance of using public transportation in our neighborhood.

6. Open Mike:

Angela S asked about the status of the lot at Hansberry and Knox. Irving V responded that it's a terrible "shell of a shell" with dangerous rotting trees falling into the street. The Roxborough owner owes a lot of back-taxes. Maggie M. pointed out that through a sheriff's sale, one could buy the lot by paying the back taxes.

Sue G urged us to visit Attic Brewery.

Brandi L moved to adjourn, and Irving V seconded. Thus we adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Grace Flisser