

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

**Community Zoom Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, February 7, 2023, 7:00 pm**

Attending: Deneene Brockington, Kevin Zuber, Adam Kaufman, Grace Flisser, Terese Vekteris, Pat Albright, Diane Pieri, Peter Shrier, Kathy Wilson, Benno Groeneveld, Else Eaton, Aneesha Shabazz, Georgette Bartell, Irwin Trauss, Sue Gilfillin, Pam Bracey, Rose, Karen Singer, Peter Handler, Zarah Adams, State Representative Darisha Parker, Douglas Respass (Phil. Dept of Revenue)

1. Greetings from PKNA Chair Deneene, setting guidelines for the meeting, neighbor introductions

2. Legislative Update from State Rep Darisha Parker

Rep Parker said that the State House will return to session shortly with a very small Democratic majority. She has been working on legislation regarding making tiny homes available, safety training for gun owners, and environmental issues that pertain to pollution and clean drinking water. She is on Committees for Agriculture, Aging, Rules, Consure issues; she is Secretary for the Black Caucus. Regarding guns, she said that if someone convicted of a crime is living in a home with someone who owns a gun, there should be some action that can be taken. Governor Shapiro will shortly give his State Budget address. She urged us to be in touch with her regarding issues of concern. Several people, including Irwin, mentioned that gas-powered leaf blowers have a terrible effect on city air and waste an enormous amount of gas; Rep. Parker said she was glad to become aware of this. It is hoped that Irwin will send her information from a newly formed neighborhood committee that hopes to ban such leaf blowers in Philadelphia. Rep Parker is active regarding constituent services all the time and would like you to reach out to her legislative Assistant at ALnoine@pahouse.net regarding issues of concern, such as Pat's concern with anti-poverty legislation such as tax credits.

3. Presentation from Doug Respass of Philadelphia Department of Revenue:

His mission is to provide resources for home owners who want help in paying their property taxes, which are assigned by the Office of Property Assessment. He is contacted at Douglas.Respass@phila.gov. You can find your tax assessment online at www.phila.gov or at 215-686-4334 or make other inquiries.

There are five property tax assistance programs, and once you're accepted to a program, there's no need to re-apply.

a. Homestead Exemption is available to all home owners with no income nor age requirement, as long as one lives and owns one's property. It may offer \$80,000.00 off property taxes. The hotline is 215-686-9200.

2024 applications for Homestead Exemption are available online, and must be submitted by Sep. 13, 2023 in order to apply to 2023 taxes. Contacting Tax Payer Services Assistance Program Unit, Tcap@phila.gov might be helpful to you.

A home owner cannot take advantage of Homestead Exemption and the LOOP (see #b) at the same time.

b. LOOP (Longtime Owner Occupancy Program) is available if the owner has lived in the property for ten or more years and has had taxes increased from 50-75%. There is an income maximum to qualify.

c. Low income Senior Citizen Real Estate Program is available if the owner is 65 or older, and it requires an income maximum. If an owner qualifies, their taxes freeze for as long as they own the property at the amount that's taxed at the point of application.

d. OOPA (Owner Occupied Payment Agreement Program) : If owners who live in their homes are a year or more behind on their taxes, they can apply for a consolidated tax bill that will help them out somewhat. There is an income maximum for this program.

e. real Estate Tax Deferral Program: In this program, owners can pay back taxes or have them deferred, sometimes paying on an installment plan, but paying interest on the taxes is required.

For water bills, there is a Senior Citizen Water Bill Discount of 25% off as well as another water program called TAP (Tiered-Assisted Program).

Kevin said that because of a tangled title problem, he was denied the Homestead Exemption and will have to re-apply for next year. He also said that when he sent forms electronically, they seemed to get lost; he had to go to the tax office in person with all forms and applications.

4. PKNA Member survey:

Denise urged us all to return it so that the officers know what the neighbors would like to see addressed by PKNA.

5. Update regarding the status of the property and historically designated building at 156 W. School House Lane:

Irving reviewed the situation; the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (PSD) bought this historically-designated building, whose designation as such should protect it from demolition, but PSD wanted to demolish it since it is in the way of a re-landscaping design that they have for the school. PKNA protested and has been working with the Preservation Alliance to find a way to prevent this, but there are areas of disagreement that remain. PSD wants to build a very wide driveway that they believe is needed for traffic safety, and such a driveway would entail destroying a historic porte-cochere on the building - and without even paying for damage to the building. PKNA's independent engineer contested the need for such destruction and suggested that ensuring greater safety for students didn't require widening the driveway to that extent. Also, PSD has said that it would grant us the "right" to market the property, but for now they are saying that they will only lease it and not sell it; in addition, although we have found developers and prospective buyers, PSD will not allow us to see the inside of the building nor specify what land allotments would be included in such a rental. They still plan to demolish it after three years, rental or not, most likely.

We have found someone who can draft a compromise plan that should satisfy both parties, but we need to raise \$1,000 to pay this person. State Representative Stephen Kinsey has said that he is willing to attend a meeting with both parties to help enable us to come to an agreement.

6. Update regarding development of Germantown Town Hall:

At a February 6 zoom meeting, Cindy Bass introduced a developer that she hopes will be accepted to renovate the historically designated building which is in sad disrepair and has been vandalized. Many people couldn't get into the meeting, which was capped at 100, but PKNA will forward a QR code provided by Councilperson Bass for those who'd like to watch the meeting.

7. Update regarding the application for a zoning variance that would enable Germantown Friends School to build a new building at Green and Coulter: the variance was granted, so we will have a new building go up. It's hoped that it's facade will be red brick so that it will not clash too badly with the brick auditorium that will be adjacent to it.

8. Treasurer's report:

We have a balance of \$1, 632.09 after having received \$55.55 in dues. Please pay dues, \$10/person or \$25/household since we have many expenses such as lawyers (!) , printing clean-up equipment and so on.

9. Open Mic:

Our next community meeting will be Tuesday, March 7.

Our block clean-ups will continue in the Spring.

We still need volunteers to distribute flyers every two or three months as many people are covering very large areas of our catchment. Be in touch with Adam Kaufman, adamrk103@gmail.com, to volunteer.

Georgette offered to bring hard copies of the Owners Maintenance Manual for home owners that the city put out; it has great information that will help owners better understand their systems and infrastructure. Give Georgette your contact information, and she will get you a copy. If you call 215-685-6300, you can be sent an electronic copy.

Georgette asked that we put the Clean Quiet Philly program on our next meeting agenda, to educate us about gas-powered leaf-blowers.

Kevin said that the Phila Water Department offers to dig up the service lines from the street to people's houses in an effort to replace lead or galvanized steel water pipes. Home owners would have to pay for any collateral damage that occurs such as replacing sidewalks, porches, and so on. Go to the Water Department website for information.

Pat said that the Global Women's Strike is circulating an international survey addressing the experience of caregivers and mothers. Call the Crossroads Women's Center for information, 215-848-1120. The survey is at wmwsurbvey@gmail.com.

Submitted by Grace Flisser

