

**East Falls Community Council
Zoning and Land Use Committee
Minutes of February 16th, 2016 Meeting**

Committee members present:

Todd Baylson	Meg Greenfield
Chris Rooney	Paul Elia
Michelle Kleschick	Bill Epstein
Jen Arnoldi	

Committee members not present:

JD May, Emily Nichols, L.B. Young, Mark Taubman, Matt McClure

-Carlton Park Apartments- Informational meeting about ideas for their new signage.

-New owners don't intend to change the name because of the historical/well established name of the property.

-Upgrading and improving signage

-Making "V" shapes instead of the flat signs that currently exist. Want to have the presence of both streets of each corner.

- Owners intend to push signs back further from street than where the current locations are.

-Replace banner on leasing office with a proper flat wall sign on the side of the leasing office.

-Add one more small sign to point the way to the leasing office.

-New Owners wanted to get in front of the neighbors as soon as possible to check if there are any concerns.

-PE asked to know what amount of signage is permitted, and how much of a variance will be required.

-Owners said they will get that info for next meeting.

-TB mentioned that the signs had been out of compliance for awhile.

-Owners said they found out about the issue 2 days before closing.

-Owners said they intend to add landscaping and tidy the parking lots in addition to the signs.

-Neighbor thinks that it is a good idea to add the sign at the leasing office and upgrade the others. Good signage near the office is especially helpful/important.

-Neighbor asked if the fencing was going to remain as is.

-Owners said that if the existing split rail is replaced, it is likely that all the fencing may be upgraded to black wrought iron

- PE asked about the illumination of the signs.

-MG asked that info about lighting be brought to next meeting.

-Owners hope to get a refusal soon so they can see us at the April meeting.

-HOW project, corner Midvale & Conrad

-TB said that Notice to Community was confused and not very informative, also there was still some back and forth between the near neighbors and HOW.

-BE said that the main dispute is the design of the 5 townhouses fronting on Penn St.

-Philadelphia University SPIN district

-TB said two big points:

- Getting the “technical modifications” sorted out, things like lighting notes, restrictions on the back driveway to Calumet St., what can be built in “building zones” etc

- The matter of dedicated open space

-TB said that personally he thinks we are at an impasse. He thinks the neighbors are pushing for “No” but that EFZC is leaning to “yes”. Thinks that the technical points can be worked out but that the open space conversation is going around in circles.

-Neighbor thinks it is not a bad idea to ask EFCC general membership/ have a vote. Thinks that the general membership is more in agreement with zoning committee than TB thinks. She thinks that with some clarification about what is protected in other ways, many of the neighbors concerned about open space preservation will be ok with the current plan.

-Neighbor cited the SPIN definition in the zoning code and noted that the “occupied area” can be no more than 70% of the parcel. Based on the environmental regulations (steep slopes and Wissahickon watershed) about 35 acres of campus are already protected, so why doesn't the University further reinforce the 30% open space by putting in deed restrictions for permanently protected green space?

-MG said that given the past variances granted to build more than is usually permitted in the Wissahickon Watershed, that having something that is more difficult to modify/ grant a variance around, would encourage growth of the campus on the interior rather than on the contentious/ protected areas that face the neighborhood.

-MG and Neighbor both reinforced that since much of what the neighbors want a deed restriction on is protected by legislation, that the University could do much to ease the neighbors' concern by permanently protecting it.

-Neighbor is still concerned about the environmental impact, especially the removal of trees to put buildings in places that don't make planning sense- despite the University's statement that the buildings were being placed near related buildings to make it easier for students to get to related labs/classes.

-Also commented that given the neighbors can't be sure of the next University president or the make-up of the Zoning committee, that land protection should not be left to a zoning matter.

-JA voiced concern that if the University feels like they are being held back, they may resort to a court case to put pressure on movement without less of the protections for the neighbors than the SPIN.

-Neighbor, an alum of the PhilaU said that she likes the improvements that have happened to campus over the years, and does not understand what the school has done in the past that the neighbors do not trust them.

-She commented that the proposed garage site wasn't in the pristine part of the park, but rather in an area that had an old ruin of a building.

-Neighbor said that there was a valley and a stream running through there, with the stream still buried in the hill. Also stated that the University is in an unenviable place because among the other institutions that have SPIN zoning, they are the only ones that don't want to have dedicated permanent open space.

-Neighbor suggested creating a map/information sheet about what areas are already protected

-JA said that there are three places that aren't protected, along School House Lane, Vaux and ???

-TB mentioned that the University is setting up a direct meeting with Councilman Jones.

-Neighbor suggested that the Committee follow standard procedure in calling for a vote. Then let the neighbors ask for a general membership vote if they like.

-A motion was made to move on, since the discussion was going in circles.

-Rivage site-

TB said that David Grasso has pushed back his presentation, as his request.

-Neighbor questioned wisdom of building in the floodplain since a garage down near Chestnut Street has flooded on the second floor, more than once.

-Neighbor pointed out that the portion of the river near East Falls is not in the tidal area like near Chestnut, and that the lower level is restricted to non-residential uses.

-New Courtland- Has asked to have an informational meeting next month regarding their plans to add senior housing.

-Zoning Remapping-

-3 sites discussed, using Matt Wysong's question sheet.

-BE said that since the last meeting, someone from City Planning has reached out to St. Bridget's to answer questions. BE thinks that City Planning will be ok with recommending the parcel be left "as is" given the push back and confusion from the Parish.

-Neighbor said that given the state of the Church in the US, having the parcel be CMX-3 makes sense in the case of the need for future redevelopment.

-MG thinks that CMX-3 or RSA-5 as the only options, does not take into account the many types of development that could be appropriate there, and that it should remain as it is, and deal with what can be developed, if/when it ever becomes an issue.

-Neighbor said he had attended an East Falls Forward meeting, and that the thought there was that the CMX-3 designation would encourage community development. Put the question out there, that the community needs to think about if they want to encourage more development by right, or by variance.

-Neighbor discussed that the neighbors and members of St. Bridget were not well informed, which has created a lot of confusion and worry.

-Someone suggested that PCPC looked over the area on a map, saw a parking lot near a train station, and followed the normal rules of zoning, to have it designated commercial.

-Neighbor (and member of St. Bridget) is worried over the damage that the rumors have caused

-TB said that most of the comments they had heard were that the zoning is best left the way it is.

-BE said that he would write a letter to St. Bridget in hopes of communicating/clarifying what is going on.

-Neighbor suggested that City Planning was missing another opportunity to look at the neighborhood as it is made up of natural, cultural and historical components, and how those things contribute, rather than just the zoning.

-TB mentioned that much of the City was rezoned starting in 2008 because 70% of projects needed a variance, so clearly the uses of areas had changed over time.

-TB said that he was hearing that EFZC was overall ok with changing the PHA site to CMX-3, since there was a slight rumor of Penrose backing out or taking a lesser role in the parcel's development, and the zoning change would mean that the development that has been previously discussed would still be allowed with only small variances, instead of the big variances if the parcels stays as is.

-Neighbor said that if the East Falls overlay is extended to include that area of Ridge Ave, that it would require commercial on the 1st floor, and keep the height down to the desired 60' (rather than unlimited as is usually allowed in CMX-3)

-People seemed in favor of requesting that the overlay be continued along that section of Ridge Ave.

-Regarding the small clump of residential buildings along Ridge/East River, that have been recommended to be rezoned (correctively) as residential rather than commercial, TB had heard previously that the change was not favored.

-Gina Snyder said that the EF Development Corporation would like to see them stay as commercial, to encourage the further development/ commercial use of Ridge Ave. and East River Rd.

-MG said that she is worried that requiring commercial in an area that is already struggling to fill commercial spaces, may not be ideal.

-Gina Snyder said that the EFDC had pushed for the overlay since some lots have zoning that is tied to a parcel on the other side of the block, where residential may be desirable, but that a fully residential use is generally not desired on Midvale and Ridge.

-Conversation and clarification may be needed to have the overlay work as it is intended.

End of public meeting.