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Zoning hearings were held Wednesday October 24 for the Venice One project.

The developer's architect, Steven Varenhorst, and hydrologist Dr. Weggles provided testimony.

Hillel Levinson, president of Manayunk Development Board, presented supporting testimony.

Manayunk Neighborhood Council was represented by our attorney Hal Schirmer. About fifteen neighbors and several board members provided opposition testimony.

Mr. Varenhorst testified to the basics of the project. The zoning board reacted strongly against their stacked parking and their plan to charge residents extra for parking. Stacked parking is when two parking spaces are end to end so that the second car blocks in the first. The zoning board indicated they must come back with a realistic parking plan and that there must be no extra charge for parking.

Mr. Varenhorst testified that the traffic study did show the project would make traffic worse but that the traffic report suggested that this could be fixed by re-timing the traffic lights. We pointed out that the lights had been re-timed in 2003. We also introduced e-mail from the city's chief traffic engineer stating that all the backup was at the Belmont/I-76 interchange and could not be fixed by changing the Green Lane/Main Street lights. He further



stated that if any improvements were possible on the Montgomery County side, they would be very minor.

Dr. Weggles testified that the project would not raise the flood level. Under cross-examination by Hal, Dr. Weggles revealed that he did not know the existing building was on stilts and he did not know about a remediation plan that required two feet of fill. He also testified that he thought other buildings had been removed from the site. This was not true.

Hillel Levinson from Manayunk Development Corporation, testified in favor of the project. Mr. Levinson stated that the project would benefit Main Street. Manayunk Development Corporation voted to support the project conditioned on a signed agreement incorporating certain concessions. At the hearing, Mr. Levinson testified that the agreement was not signed.

*Continued on Page 2*

## ***Venice One–Continued***

Dan Neducsin, current property owner, testified how successful the former Arroyo restaurant was, serving 2800 dinners on a good night.. Dan had testified for the Venice Island Overlay in 1999 but, when asked, didn't remember.

MNC argued that the Historical Commission decision, stating the buildings were compatible in scale and materials, was nonsense. We showed that the pre-existing buildings were no where near the height of these buildings. The zoning board didn't want to hear it, stating that they decide on land use not design.

We argued that Manayunk Deserves Better!. We showed the massive flat facades and excessive height of the buildings.

We testified that the planned six foot path was inadequate and the building and site design violated the Planning Commission's own River Greenway Design Guidelines from August 2005. The zoning board agreed that a six foot path was inadequate and asked that it be redesigned.

We introduced testimony from the 2000 hearings about evacuation, traffic and flooding. When we opposed residential development, on Venice Island, in 2000, we were able to hire expert witnesses. We received testimony from hydrologists, a traffic engineer, swift water rescue experts and a meteorologist.

This testimony combined to describe how quickly the river can rise and how people behave in floods. We introduced photos of nearby parking areas that show they are already fully occupied and cannot be used for evacuation. We showed how long it would take to evacuate the island and the consequences of any blockages. The entire Island (Smurfit Stone and all their trailers, Venice Lofts, and this project) must evacuate over a single narrow bridge. Expert testimony (from 2000) showed that people will always try to rescue their cars. 70 percent of flood deaths occur in cars.

In 1972, three police officers attempted a water rescue on Venice Island. Their boat overturned immediately, one officer made it back to shore, one was swept down river and rescued at Fairmount Dam. The third was never found.

The developers did not have an evacuation plan.

We also pointed out the danger of having all access to the island go through or under the first building. What happens to the rest of the people if there is a fire in the first buiding? How will this affect evacuation.

Finally we testified that all the recent projects on or near Venice Island, could be built on this site without requiring a variance. The existing developments are Watermill (60 units), Venice One (128 units), Waterford (205 units, construction due to start soon) and Bridge Five (70 units). Some of these exceed the 55 foot height limit but their total units and square footage would fit, on this lot, within the current zoning guidelines.

The Zoning Board did not decide at the hearing. They gave us 10 days to supply some additional materials we had referenced.

## **Zoning**

**3 Rector**–Wednesday 10/31 was the zoning appeal hearing. Our primary arguments were lack of hardship and that they forgot to ask for a height variance. We are waiting for a decision

**228 Hermitage**–The owners of M&M market at Manayunk and Markle want to open a grocery/deli at the former site of the USS Madrak bar on Main Street. Neighbors were invited to a meeting to meet the owners. Neighbors were concerned that a grocery would become a hangout point for kids and a source of trash. The owners had started renovations without permits and L&I stopped them. They need a zoning variance for a grocery. The Madrak has been closed over three years and the zoning will have reverted to single family home. Neighbors in attendance were overwhelmingly opposed. We received a few supporting responses by phone and mail. Zoning has not been scheduled yet.

**123 Leverington**–Scott Gressen of the Mill Gallery, agreed, in 2003 to fix his fence and remove and reorganize his signs. He never did. He has received L&I violations and coming into compliance. He will be at our November meeting.

**4367 Main**–Jake's Wine Bar–Bruce Cooper of Jake's is seeking to expand next door as a wine bar. The Historical Commission had denied his request to redo the facade. Bruce will be presenting his plans at the November meeting.

**JUST A FEW MINUTES . . .**

October 4, 2007

Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:30.

The Manayunk Dragon Boat Men's Team set a world record and won Gold Medal at the Championships in Sydney. The Men's Senior Team won a bronze.

**4301 Main Street Flat Rock Saloon**--Flat Rock agreed to a restrictive agreement with MNC. Flat Rock will open their second floor without a bar and with no kitchen on the second floor. There will be no live music and no cover charge.

**4243 Main Street**--Mojos will open based on restrictive agreement as listed in the minutes from last month.

**4247 Main Street**--Manayunk Tavern formerly Sole has a stop work order posted due to zoning violations

**114 Levering**--(Duff's) opened as Cheeseteak place

**4367 Main Street**--Cooper's Wine Bar will present to MNC next month. Owned by Bruce Cooper of Jakes, he wishes to open next to Jake's and will be more casual than Jakes.

**Venice One**--The concept of Venice One brought out an overflow crowd to the Venice Island Recreation Center and anxious neighbors asked many questions. Architect Stephen Varenhorst presented the concept.. Plans call for 210 one bedroom units 70 two bedroom.

Buildings are six stories raised 19 feet above ground. Floodway regulations require that the first floor be at least 11 feet above ground. The buildings are a total of 89 feet. high, five stories higher than the Green Lane bridge and over two stories higher than the famous railroad bridge.

Zoning allows for 80% of the land to be covered by a building 55 feet high. Most of the useful space on the lot is allocated to 350 parking spaces under and around the buildings. Residents will be charged for parking spaces. A small green area is planned next to the Green Lane bridge. The building actually uses 70,000 sq ft more space than is allowed.. Mr. Varenhorst explained this was done for financial reasons. He also explained the site is currently contaminated with fill material and the developers will

have to clean the site up which is an additional expense.

Residents noted it already takes one hour to get from Leverington to the Green Lane Bridge at rush hour. There was no reply.

Greg Webster of Philadelphia Management, despite the condo glut, thought these units would sell. Prices will range from 180K to 350K. Neighbors all agreed this is a future dormitory, and will ultimately contribute to late night problems on Main Street.

One neighbor asked, how will this enhance Manayunk as a neighborhood? Mr. Webster stated that the benefit to the community was reclaiming a polluted site. He further stated the public will have access to a park near the bridge and the public will have river access. It will also benefit Main Street and the local labor market. It was then noted the contaminated materials will not be moved from the site but will be capped with a pervious surface. Then it was discovered that only one of the recent test samples did not pass. Upon further questioning Mr. Varenhorst silenced his assistant so we never understood what this meant.

Parking and flooding were discussed. Venice Lofts first two open houses were both flooded out and it had flooded three times in the last two years. Neighbors pointed out the FEMA letter opposing residential on Venice Island.

Neighborhood complained about the height soaring above the Manayunk Bridge and ruining the site lines. Fears were raised about the plastic outside sheathing and what it will look like after 20 years in the sun. Others asked about even if there is a benefit to labor for this project. In response it was announced the frames will be shipped in, but drywall, plumbing, and electrical is done onsite.

An informal vote was taken on who supported the project as proposed. The response was overwhelmingly against.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:20

**MANAYUNK NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP FORM  
January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2008**

<input type="checkbox"/> \$5 Student/Senior	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15 Household	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Patron
<input type="checkbox"/> \$10 Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Business or Supporter	\$_____ Other
Name:		Phone:
Address:		Email:
City, State, Zip:		Date:
Signature:		

Please make check payable to Manayunk Neighborhood Council & mail to PO Box 4667, Philadelphia, PA 19127

## EVENTS

**River Trail Redux:** Saturday, November 10, 8:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. This is another Lower Merion activity that lets you explore the other side of the river. Park at Aquatic and Fitness Center, 600 Righter's Ferry Road, Belmont Hills. It's an amazing six mile hike along the river, rail lines, the expressway. We'll venture up hills and down gullies, and you'll see parts of Lower Merion you never knew existed. We'll supply water, snacks, and surprises. You bring a brown bag lunch and backpack. Registration required by November 7. Call the Lower Merion Conservancy at 610-645-9030 to register.

**Tree Tenders** The next tree tenders classes start January 11 at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society.

courtesy while visiting

thank you for your

our neighborhood

**CLEAN  
SAFE  
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**\*MANAYUNK\***

Manayunk Neighborhood Council  
www.manayunkcouncil.org

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TO YOUR  
NEIGHBOR

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215-482-5528 - mail@manayunkcouncil.org  
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Next Meeting:  
Wednesday, November 7  
7:30 PM  
Venice Island Rec Center

PO BOX 4667, PHILADELPHIA, PA 19127

