

Manayunk Neighborhood Council, PO Box 4667, Philadelphia, PA 19127

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Jack Bienenfeld
<jackbienen@aol.com>

October 31, 2017

Dear Mr. Bienenfeld,

When this current scheme was introduced in July of 2017 we wrote to you

We are encouraged by the sketch and Mr. Campbell's description of the proposal as it references most of the elements which were of concern to the community, as voiced at the public meetings and through the written comments that we received.

Mr. Campbell has suggested that we and North Light meet with you and Father Lawrence to discuss these proposals further. We look forward to continued discussions, in this direction, that could lead to a community-supported project.

We were subsequently provided with a building plan and parking plan with limited details and we fully expected an interactive process regarding the new plan.

After approximately four months we were finally able to meet in order to understand the details of the proposal. Detailed notes from that meeting are attached.

After careful review of the plans, our notes of the meeting and walking the site we believe the scheme falls short, in several important ways, of something we can present to the community.

We are disappointed that you have not been willing to accept input on modifications to the scheme and sincerely hope you will reconsider that decision.

Key areas we believe would make the project more attractive to the community and to prospective home owners include.

- Move the houses on Carson Street back sufficiently to provide two side of the street parking. This is a clear contribution to the surrounding neighbors and is not subject to management priorities or uncertainties.
- Move the Conarroe South houses to the south end of the lot and remove the eight extra parking spaces from the rear. The current scheme puts a driveway in the back yards of the houses on Mansion Street and eight parking spaces in the back yards of the houses on Gay Street. Moving the houses and eliminating the parking integrates the three houses much better into it's surroundings.
- Eliminate a row of parking from the center of the lot. This can be made up with parking under the church or behind the rectory, if desired. The current houses have extremely limited outdoor space (potentially only a small third floor deck) and a view over an expanse of cars which we believe would make them undesirable for long term home ownership that would contribute to the community.

We truly hope you will consider changes to the scheme and we look forward to further discussions.

Thank You,



Kevin Smith
President

Redevelopment proposals for St. Mary's Properties. Manayunk

Notes of meeting held on Monday, 23rd October, 2017 at North Light Community Center

Attendees:

Irene Madrak, Dana Dabek - North Light,
Jack Bienenfeld
Jim Campbell - Campbell Thomas
Kevin Smith, John Hunter - Manayunk Neighborhood Council.

Following the withdrawal of the ordinance for St. Mary's redevelopment by Councilman Jones in May, a revised proposal has been made by Mr. Bienenfeld for the redevelopment of the property.

Drawings showing the outline proposal for the revised scheme were circulated by Mr. Campbell in August, 2017. It was agreed that negotiations between Mr. Bienenfeld and North Light for the purchase of the land to be used as a parking lot should advance before any discussions on the details of the proposal take place. Mr. Campbell waited for Mr. Bienenfeld's instruction to organize a meeting, when appropriate, to discuss the proposals in detail to establish if there was sufficient agreement for the scheme to be presented to a public meeting.

The revised proposal includes a separate parking lot on Carson Street for use by North Light and a combination of single family dwellings in all new construction, and multi-family units within the 3 existing buildings - the church, rectory and school - which would be retained. If this proposal could secure community support, Mr. Bienenfeld's intention was to request that Councilman Jones submit a new ordinance to City Council, supported by a Master Plan drawn up by PCPC, in order to obtain zoning approval for the proposal.

Distribution of Single Family Houses: the proposal includes a total of 21 houses: 2 blocks of 6 houses face onto Carson Street, 1 block of 6 houses faces the north side of Conarroe Street and 1 block of 3 houses faces onto the south side of Conarroe Street.

Layout of the single family houses: Prior to the meeting, Mr. Campbell briefly showed the plans for the houses which included a rear deck accessed off the living room at the 2nd floor, which projects over the drive aisle, and 2 upper floors with 3 bedrooms in total. Each house is of similar design with variations at the front entrances to accommodate the conditions at the sidewalk due to the sloping topography.

Provision of parking across the development: All new houses have a 2 car garage accessed from a shared drive aisle at the rear of each house. In addition, there are 45 surface parking spaces between Carson and Conarroe Streets with a further 8 parking spaces behind the houses on Conarroe South, and 4 parking spaces within the existing School building, together with a further 3 spaces in the area adjacent to Gay Street.

Single family houses for sale or rent: When asked, Mr. Bienenfeld stated that the houses may be for sale or for rent, dependent on a number of factors including the eventual cost of construction for each house.

Sequence of construction: Because of the amount of excavation required in that area, and the need for parking to be available for the apartments to be built within the Church and Rectory, the houses along Carson Street and the parking behind those houses would be constructed first. The demolition of the Convent and the renovation of the Church and Rectory could follow, with the houses on Conarroe South and the School following on with the Conarroe St houses being the final phase.

Redistribution of the space allocated for parking: The provision of single family, RSA-5 conforming houses along Carson, and Conarro North and South parcels should allow the equivalent of conventional row houses with front doors on the street and rear access parking from the equivalent of Brewery Alley for the new houses. This could be entirely in accordance with the Zoning Code, and similar to the existing houses on Carson and Conarro Streets. However, the present proposal seeks to isolate the houses from any ground floor space in favor of 3 bays of parking spaces between the Carson and Conarro Street row homes, with little external ground floor space provided and, in the case of Conarro South houses, in favor of a drive aisle and with 8 parking spaces, negatively impacting both these new houses and the existing houses on Gay Street.

Discussion regarding the latest proposals: The latest proposal, providing parking for the proposed multi-family units in the existing buildings in other locations on the site, makes any zoning approval complex and could not be done 'by right'; a number of simultaneous variance applications would have to be undertaken. To avoid this, a Master Plan, changing the zoning classification for these properties with an ordinance passed by City Council, could be introduced. An approach that would simplify this problem would be to provide adequate parking within or related to each existing building; an approach which has been successful in several other similar projects in the neighborhood. This may involve modifying the existing structure at first floor to efficiently accommodate standard parking bays. The Church and Rectory provide no parking under the building in the revised proposal, and only 4 spaces within the School building.

Parking Provision: Besides the 2 parking spaces provided per house in the latest proposal, 65 parking space are proposed for 35 apartments in the existing buildings. This is a ratio of almost 2 parking spaces per unit. In the previous proposal, the ratio was just under 1.4 spaces per unit, which was considered generous. None of these proposed spaces would be available for community use, unless there is a surplus; any available spaces would be available only at the developer's discretion. There is no commitment from the developer to provide any parking for rent except for his tenants. This (over)provision of parking spaces would be a revenue stream for the developer, separate for apartment rent revenue.

Alternative proposals suggested by MNC:

Set the proposed row of 12 houses along Carson Street back to provide additional parking spaces along the south side of Carson Street. The property boundary would need to be revised but we (MNC) have been assured by the Planning Commission that this can be done. These spaces (8 or 10 spaces) would become on-street parking open to the local community. This setback would potentially reduce the number of parking spaces provided within the site.

Provide parking spaces at the lowest level of the Church, accessed from Brewery Alley, providing approximately 8 parking spaces. This would displace the mail room/commissary and exercise room in the previous scheme.

Replace the 7 apartments in the Rectory with 3 single family units. Provide 6 parking spaces in the rear yard, accessed from Brewery Alley. With this configuration, the number of single family units would increase to 24 while no additional parking would be necessary.

Position the proposed 3 row houses at the south end of the site on Conarro Street South to replace the Convent building which the developer proposes to demolish. This would improve the view for apartments within the School building. The 8 parking spaces behind the houses should be eliminated to allow a conventional 'fee simple' development.

Eliminate the 'dog park' adjacent to the School building. With the reduction in the number of apartments, there is less demand for a dog park, particularly as there is an existing dog park 2 blocks away in Pretzel Park. The noise from a dog park would be intrusive to the adjacent properties and, in this case, also to the tenants on the upper floor of the building.

Re-locate the elevator in the School building to the Gay Street side of the building and provide a dedicated loading area for trash vehicles and moving trucks to avoid blocking Conarroe Street. Also eliminate the 3 parking spaces and develop a generous landscaped area in front of the building. In addition, add cosmetic improvements to the Gay Street facade of the School as part of the renovation, to mitigate the overwhelming scale of the School building on Gay Street. Consider relocating the management office to the first floor of the School building, accessed from the the Gay Street loading area, allowing use by FedEx, UPS, mail deliveries. The handicapped parking could also be located in this area allowing access to the management office and elevator in the School building which is the only elevator proposed in the entire project.

Response from the developer:

Despite this meeting being the first opportunity to discuss the proposal both for single family houses or the division of the existing buildings, all the proposals received negative responses.