

## **Community Meeting: Proposed Development 4520 Penn Ave. Notes**

January 30, 2017

6:30-8:30pm

Attendance: 17 community members

### **Welcome and Introductions- Christina Howell**

Christina introduced herself as the Executive Director of Bloomfield Development Corporation and the moderator for the evening. BDC has started these development meetings to make sure that the community has a say in proposed developments in Bloomfield.

Christina explained that this is the second meeting for the 4520 Penn Ave. site which was called to get more details from the developer's plan and answer questions that the community had from the first meeting.

### **Overview of Meeting Ground Rules- Christina Howell**

### **Developer Presentation- Michael Kratsas (developer, KN Penn LLC) and Conor Magee (JMAC Architects), Traffic Engineer**

Conor Magee explained the design of the hotel. Showed slides of the development from different angles.

- Site: 6,688 sq ft lot catty corner to UPMC Children's Hospital near Friendship Ave. and Penn Ave.
- 115 room hotel with patio area in back of building for guests.
- Parking: Basement of building will be parking with enough spaces for if the hotel is at 50-60% occupancy (61 spaces). Entrance for parking will be along Comrie Way.
- Governor's drive: 'U' shaped driveway that is recessed into the hotel building off of Penn Ave.
- Landscaping: Native to the area and keep the neighborhood aesthetic.
- First floor: Governor's drive on Penn Ave., and a 24,000 sq ft space for a local business.
- Comrie Way elevation which shows that most guest rooms do not face homes behind the hotel.
- Shadow: Solar studies show that many of the times shadows are not projected onto residential areas.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> party business- Image showing a space for a 3<sup>rd</sup> party business (not part of the hotel) with window façade and three stories on top.
- Materials: gray/blue bricks, red brick above, metal panels on upper floor. Glazed glass for entrances for lobby.

Traffic engineer talked about the traffic study that is being finalized for the project.

- Traffic engineer studied the current traffic at the intersections of Penn Ave./Friendship Ave. and Friendship Ave./Comrie Way. He also looked at the existing access points for the driveways that are on the site now.

- Counts and circulation are being analyzed right now. Engineer said that he is waiting for input from the community and does not have a traffic study prepared tonight.
- Sight distances are adequate for pulling out onto Penn Ave. and for Comrie Way.
- Some parking would be removed from in front of the governor's drive, but overall parking spaces will be the same since there are existing driveways.
- Friendship Ave. and Penn Ave.: Looked at safety improvements. Intersection signals were recently updated with pedestrian count downs and new ADA ramps that fit City requirements. Engineer says that the intersection is up to date.
- Pedestrians show 140 pedestrians at peak hour (7-9a and 4-6p) or 3 pedestrians per minute. From what the engineer saw, there were not any conflicts with pedestrians. Video taping was done and did not see any conflicts. Engineer offered to show the video. Engineer does not see any safety conflicts.
- Traffic engineer said that estimates for a hotel of this size generates about 65 trips at peak hours in the afternoon. Engineer said that the estimate for an office similar to the current use allowed on the site would generate more trips during the peak hour than this hotel.
- Traffic report still needs to go through City Planning for approval.
- Penn Ave./Friendship Ave. intersection has a grade of C or D, but that is typical for a narrow urban street and the only way to improve the grade is to increase the number of lanes.

#### Construction Parking Plan

Michael Kratsas is talking with a realtor to find lots for parking and he is considering getting a lot for staging for the construction. Once the hotel basement is completed, construction parking can be placed in the parking in the basement.

#### Q&A

Questions to the development team Michael Kratsas, Conor Magee and the traffic engineer.

Q: Will residents have access to Comrie Way throughout the construction?

A: Kratsas said that he cannot foresee them shutting down Comrie Way, but construction may need to cut into the ally and so one entrance to Comrie Way would be closed temporarily.

Comment: Concern about cars queued up waiting on Friendship Ave. blocking access to Comrie Way for hotel and subsequently the Penn Ave./Friendship Ave. intersection.

A: Engineer said that he could recommend that the City add a painted boxed area to prevent cars from blocking the Friendship Ave./Comrie Way intersection.

Q: Did the traffic study find speeding on Comrie Way?

A: Engineer said that from his observations all the drivers were going at an appropriate speed. The engineer also said that he didn't expect that people could go very fast on Comrie Way.

Q: How do you envision cars going in and out of garage?

A: Engineer said that cars would approach and leave the garage from the Friendship Ave./Comrie Way intersection. There are plans to widen Comrie to accommodate cars entering and leaving on the hotel site plans.

Comment: Adding 65 trips onto Penn is less significant than onto Comrie which would be a sea change.

A: Any change onto Comrie would be a significant change since there are so few cars currently.

Q: Would cars exiting the garage turning onto Friendship Ave. run into people entering Comrie Way?

A: Recommending expanding entrance to Comrie Way to allow room for two way traffic.

Q: When the engineer compared the flow of traffic from an office building vs a hotel, when did you do the traffic counts? No one is currently using the office building.

A: Calculations were based on a general office of that size, not existing building.

Q: Are you expecting that people would make a left turn onto Penn Ave. from the governor's drive to get to the garage?

A: The engineer said that he expected cars going both directions getting in and out of the governor's drive.

Q: What is the queuing you projected for the governor's drive? What is the space inside to queue cars?

A: Magee said the drive is 4 cars bumper to bumper.

Q: Did you do calculations for hospital shift changes?

A: Engineer said that he did not do counts during shift changes.

Q: Do you know how long it would take to turn left during peak time? From experience living on Mathilda, taking a left on Penn Ave. can take a long time.

A: Engineer estimating a 30 second delay for an average car to find a gap in traffic based on general characteristics for this kind of intersection.

Comment: Does not seem that someone pushing for gaps seems unsafe for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Q: Have there been any analysis for hotel generated traffic on pedestrian and bicycle?

A: Counts were conducted for pedestrians and bicyclists, but no analysis.

Q: Do you know how much the intersection will be delayed because of the hotel?

A: Engineer said overall there is a 2% increase in traffic based on generated trip for the hotel. Engineer said that the hotel may also be taking away trips from visitors that would have been driving to the hospital from another hotel.

Q: How did you model trips? Are all of these trips including using the governor's drive and going to the garage?

A: These models are based on peak trips for motels in the suburbs where everyone is driving to the hotel. Assumption is based on all guests going to the governor's drive and then turning onto Penn Ave. to Friendship Ave. and then Comrie Way to get to the

garage. Kratsas said that if the office was leased then no approvals would be needed and there would be a larger effect on traffic.

Q: If current office space was open, would cars enter through Comrie Way?

A: No, since that part of the parking lot is currently blocked off.

Q: What area did you talk about generating need for a hotel and did you look at existing hotels?

A: Competition is extended all the way to Shadyside, Oakland, and East Liberty basically the East End.

Q: Would you be operating a shuttle?

A: Kratsas said that the hotel will be using a shuttle.

Q: What uses do you want to use in the open space?

A: There is no target usage, it is considered retail. Kratsas said he was thinking that it would be a café with sandwiches.

Q: Is there allotment for parking for the retail space?

A: Planning will not require parking for the retail space because of its size. No additional parking will be provided in the garage for the retail space.

Q: How large will the retail space be?

A: Up to 24,000 sq ft. for retail.

Q: Is there a front door to the hotel on Penn Ave.? How do people get into the hotel walking from Penn Ave.?

A: The sidewalk will continue into the governor's drive.

Q: How many parking spaces can fit in front of the governor's drive on Penn Ave.?

A: 4-5 spaces.

Q: Would we be able to use a pull off similar to other hotels in the City instead of a governor's drive for the hotel?

A: Kratsas said that other examples he has seen have their own negative aspects like safety for guests especially since Penn Ave. is regularly used unlike the other examples in the city.

Q: Would there be a valet?

A: Kratsas said that he was interested in the valet.

Q: How many parking spaces will be taken out from Penn Ave.?

A: None since there is existing driveways on Penn Ave. and the parking spaces will just be moved around.

Q: What kind of landscaping will there be?

A: Landscaping with native species in between governor's drive and at the edge of the building on Penn Ave. also the hotel will be adding street trees.

Q: How wide are the sidewalks?

A: 6 ft wide.

Q: What are the windows on the wall abutting Comrie Way? How tall is the wall?

A: The garage wall on Comrie is 12 feet tall with openings at for the garage to address concerns about a blank wall.

Q: Where will deliveries be made? Where will the dumpster be?

A: Kratsas said that the dumpsters will be stored inside, and they will be large wheeled bins. Deliveries will be done on Penn Ave. whether in governor's drive or in between driveway. Trash pick up may happen on Comrie Way or Penn Ave.

Q: How will HVAC noise be mitigated?

A: Rooftop units will be on Penn Ave. side of the building, and the parapet will screen the rooftop equipment. Noise will be aimed upward and closer to Penn Ave.

Q: Will the openings for the garage be high enough to prevent lights?

A: Kratsas said that he will make sure that they are.

Q: Will the openings for the garage be covered?

A: Kratsas said that there will be screening through fenced bars, but still finalizing designs.

Q: Will there be a gate at the opening of the garage?

A: Yes, there will be a gate.

Q: Will you have any way to improve visibility for people exiting the garage or going down Comrie Way?

A: Kratsas said that he would like to have an opening wall closer to Friendship Ave. on garage to improve visibility on Comrie Way.

Q: Will the City expand the road?

A: The developer will work with the property owner next door since it is on their land.

Q: Paving is poor along Comrie Way and there are many potholes. Will the developer repave the entrance to Comrie Way to the hotel garage?

A: Kratsas said that his company will probably repave that section and potentially past the garage entrance since water connections will need to be changed.

Q: Is there LEED certification for the building?

A: Magee said that the building will probably not seek LEED certification for a building of this size, but will be using energy efficient appliances and different water retention designs including a "blue roof" that would trickle water down slowly if it rains.

Q: Would you have any consideration for service animals?

A: Connor said that the hotel would definitely allow service animals, but he hadn't had any specific designs for them.

Christina thanked the development team for their time and coming to this meeting. She said that on Wednesday evening the BDC board will meet and she will ask for a resolution for a decision on the project.

Development team left.

## **Community Conversation**

Christina asked for input from everyone in the community and anyone that is using the Comrie Way daily.

Comment: Seems relatively clear that feedback from other groups that reached out today that none of the comments from the previous meeting were including in this presentation and there was not a full analysis of traffic study.

Christina said she received clarification multiple times from the developer that they understood what deliverables the community was looking for and tonight they did not receive construction parking plan or the traffic study.

Comment: Skeptical about how narrow Comrie Way is and how cars will enter and exit garage placement.

Question: What is on corner of Comrie Way and Friendship Ave.?

Answer: Property on corner is for sale and in the rear facing Comrie Way is a small parking lot with a dumpster.

Christina: Would the community feel better about the hotel offering valet only?

Comment: Valet may be more unsafe than regular drivers.

Comment: Would not feel safe going by a valet driver as a pedestrian or bicyclist.

Christina: Would you be concerned about people parking on surrounding streets?

Comment: Would not want to use valet if it was an extra cost.

Comment: Since the parking cost more, there may be an extra cause for people to go out into the street.

Comment: If you are coming from another city, there is less of a chance that you will park on unfamiliar streets.

Comment: That section of Penn Ave. could be absorb parking.

Question: Why did attendees have to pay for valet parking for this meeting?

Christina: BDC does not accept funds from developers and it was not possible to pay for valet parking for attendees. Also, the meeting was scheduled with such a late notice that the Marriott was one of a few options.

Comment: Felt belittled by the traffic engineer and recommends that the engineer sends the traffic study to the community when it is completed.

Christina: Board can approve or not approve or no suggestion based on lack of information.

Comment: Based on information from pedestrian and bicycle counts from the City at Main and Penn with 60 pedestrians per hour and about 60 bicycles.

Christina reiterate that BDC asked to have a fully developed traffic study for the community that includes bikes and pedestrians.

Comment: Did not appreciate the engineer's comment to the resident about how long it takes to pull out of Mathilda. It is not 30 seconds.

Comment: If they agree to bring the traffic study, why didn't it end up here?

Comment: The traffic study seemed to not be recently done since the bicycle count was done January 25, last Wednesday.

Comment: It seemed that the traffic engineer would dismiss comments and questions and referenced comment about office use in a building.

Comment: A car that is trying to shoot into a gap because a car it has been waiting for an opening on Penn Ave. can be dangerous to someone biking.

Question: As residents, do you prefer a flawed project hotel to an empty parking lot?

Comment: It does not have to be answered either/or today. Just because it is a parking lot now doesn't mean that the parking lot will be left that way. There is a lot of interest to build along Penn Ave.

Christina: If the neighborhood says that it does not have enough information and takes no position then the developer may come back to the community.

Comment: The main issues rely on bringing on traffic to Comrie Way vs adding to Penn Ave. and there needs to be a complete plan for that area.

Comment: To widen Comrie Way it looks like a utility poll will need to be move.

Question: Will the utilities allow moving that poll?

Christina: The developer would need to pay for this.

Comment: He can see the use for a small to medium sized hotel very close to Children's Hospital. Thinks that the next piece in the hotel project will be based on who the franchise for the hotel will be and their requirements.

Christina: Her understanding is that there is a franchise already in mind with input in the design.

Comment: Based from the previous meetings the developer has built hotels in the past that have been bought by Holiday Inn Express, and Spring Hill Suites.

Comment: If the board cannot make a determination based on the information provided. There is still an opportunity to talk about what design features that the community preferred or didn't like.

Christina: Resolution of support, support with conditions, oppose and no position are what the BDC can offer. If BDC offers a letter with "support with conditions" there could be room for requests to the developer and they may take it or not. BDC staff will take this information from the community meeting to the BDC board.

Question: Is the question if the plan will be supported or a hotel in general?

Christina: The developer is seeking variance based on hotel use and a variance on the building height. Objection on use allows more options while the stories would require a very specific request.

Comment: Initial response when he first heard about a hotel on this spot is that this would be too large a project for the space available and he does not feel better seeing the developer's plan.

Christina said that the building would be 5 floors high from Comrie Way.

Comment: There might be some hotel for this space, but not this one. Shoe horning a suburban hotel into a scale of this area is difficult.

Comment: If the developer is able to get an adjacent property then there may be more space for an internal garage.

Comment: If there is already a franchise for the space, there may not be an opportunity for any big changes in design.

Q: Is there anyone from LU or LC at this meeting?

Christina: Helen Ewing from Lawrenceville United is here.

Ewing: LU will be present at the zoning hearing to represent their residents.

Comment: Community group will be able to speak at the zoning hearing, but if you are an individual resident you need to be within a certain distance from the site.

Christina said that the Zoning Board of Adjustment meeting will be 9:40a on February 9<sup>th</sup> at 200 Ross St 1<sup>st</sup> floor and speakers have 2 minutes.

Comment: It seems like the only way to make this hotel work is to have parking in the basement.

Christina: It seems that a significant amount of people that have said that there are concerns about size of the hotel.

Comment: What will LU say?

Ewing: We will reiterate what the Lawrenceville community says.

Comment: Better Streets Lawrenceville will discuss this project at their meeting.

Question: Is there a way to say that we are not against development and have the BDC say something so that there is an opportunity to work with this developer?

Christina: That is her job to write the letter with BDC's position that walks that line between welcoming development and communicating community concerns.

Question: Will you provide the developer with the letter before? To potentially postpone the zoning meeting.

Christina said that the BDC board will vote on the letter and send the information to the developer. BDC will make the notes and letter publically available and keep the community updated via Facebook and the BDC website.

Meeting adjourned.