

## 4652 Friendship Community Meeting

September 23rd, 2019

Taken by Sam Spearing

Presenter: Geoff Campbell, Principal, Rothschild Doyno Collaborative (architect)

Developer: Marty Gillespie, Principal, Laurel Communities

BDC Staff: Christina Howell, Sam Spearing

### **Section I: Welcome and Ground Rules**

Christina Howell (CH), facilitator:

- Gives background on BDC, community process
- Due to RCO legislation developers now required to come to registered community organizations (explains what designation means)
- Ground rules established on the back of the agenda sheet. Make space for other voices!
- Explains potential outcomes of meeting (Support, support with conditions, oppose, no position)
- Introduces Geoff the architect
- Gives history of former proposals for the site
- Marty with Laurel Communities introduced
- Explains zoning variances being asked for
  - The first is a variance for the minimum lot size. They want to go down to about 1200 sq ft. They're allowed 1800 sq ft by right.
  - The second is for the rear setback of the two homes closest to Friendship which would cross the setback line.
  - May need a third variance for the surface parking which also crosses the setback line

### **Section II: Presentation from Development Team**

Geoff Campbell (G)

Background on past plans

- Walnut Capital didn't feel like they could make adjustments to the plans that would be profitable and address concerns
- Property extends from Friendship back to the alley way facing Pearl St
- 2 homes on corner, building near alley way, and garage are currently existing structures
- Shows nearby buildings in order to demonstrate context
- Bloomfield homes often have 2 story square facade with canopy and a front stoop. Lots are about 20 feet wide. Fairly narrow lots.
- Original concept had 6 townhomes. We wanted to get parking within buildings for marketability reasons

- Heard past concerns about the removal of street parking spaces. Community wanted spaces to be preserved.
- Residents wanted to see green space in the past.
- Density was a major concern. 3.5 houses allowed by right.
- Affordability was a concern.
- Previously were meant to be rental but now intended for private ownership.
- Major concern about walkability

## NEW PLAN

- Dropped from 6 to 5 units on the site. 4 wasn't considered to be financially feasible.
- Houses are now meant to be owned rather than rented
- All but 1 curb cut has been eliminated. Other parking entries are relocated to either the alleyway or the surface lot in rear.
- Green space has been added at the corner of Friendship and Pearl
- The 4 legal parking spaces on the street are preserved
- Streetscape enhanced by trees being added along Pearl St
- Asking for a variance to go from 1800 to 1222 average lot area
- Asking for variance for 2 homes to cross rear setback line
- May require a variance for parking in setback area
- Curb cuts aren't completely unprecedented in the nearby area with several on Pearl St between Friendship and Penn
- Trying to make sure that design doesn't allow cars to fit in front of the garage door blocking the sidewalk
- Each building setback from the other to add variability
- Varying facade materials for different houses to fit with unique character of houses in the area.
- Proposing possible porch area set back not blocking the right of way for homes that don't have a garage in front. This would be similar to a stoop area but it wouldn't block the right of way.
- Previous plans had dormers but we got rid of them because they made the structures seem even taller in comparison to adjacent homes.

## Section III: Q & A

**CH:**Christina Howell

**M:**Marty Gillespie (Laurel Communities)

**G:** Geoff Campbell (Rothschild Doyno)

**R:** Resident

**R:** Will the USPS mailbox stay?

**M:**Yes.

**R:**Will there be rear balconies?

**M:**We haven't determined that portion of the design yet. We may put cantilever decks on rear of houses extending at most 5 feet out from the back of the house.

**R:**I like the variable setbacks of the houses. I'm glad that you got rid of most garages. I think it's important that for the remaining garage you ensure that parking cars blocking the sidewalk won't happen. Is it possible to put in the house deed that the owner is not allowed to park across the sidewalk?

**G:**I think it's illegal by city standards.

**R:**Police don't enforce parking on sidewalks.

**M:**I think the design should be ensuring that if someone tries to park that way they will be sticking out into the street. Garage will be extra deep.

**R:**Who will own the greenspace?

**M:** The owner of the house adjacent to the greenspace.

**R:**Can you tell me where else you developed?

**M:**In Lawrenceville we did rental townhomes near the cemetery. Townhomes in the strip district.

**R:**Are you looking to build any more in Lawrenceville?

**M:**We don't own any property at this point.

**R:**There's a bus stop on Friendship that is fairly important. Would you be willing to agree to not close it during construction or ever?

**M:**We definitely don't intend to close it and would most likely be able to keep it open during construction.

**R:**Would you come in from the rear during demo?

**G:**Probably in order to make sure that equipment doesn't block traffic or the bus.

**R:**There are 2 driveway easements through surface lot. It seems like that could happen for house 3 as well.

**M:**The proximity to the Noodle Factory building would be tight and it would be difficult to do another easement without taking a space from the surface lot. Walnut Capital doesn't want to push out one of their residents from the parking lot.

**R:**The center building seems to stand out in one picture. Is that intentional or will it look so different next to the others during the final construction.

**M:**We're looking at different options to add variety to facades. We'll definitely do a mix but it will probably not be such a stark difference as in the presentation.

**R:**Will houses be the same or unique?

**M:**They will have unique characteristics but be in the same family. Not as unique as some houses in the area are.

**R:** Does each have a 1 car garage?

**G:** 2 of the houses fit 2 cars and the rest fit 1 car.

**R:** How much space is there in the houses?

**G:** They're all 3 bedroom houses.

**R:** How much will they cost?

**M:** I would be guessing. Would like them to be as low as possible. Likely in the high \$200,000s or low \$300,000. As the project continues we'll have to look at it.

**R:** What would the impact on real estate taxes of neighbors be?

**C:** My understanding is that they don't look at that block by block.

**Sam:** School district is seeking real estate tax reassessments but Peduto has put a moratorium on reassessments. [Those living with disabilities or over the age of 60 may qualify for Act 77 tax relief programs

<https://www.alleghenycounty.us/treasurers-office/senior-citizen-tax-relief.aspx>]

**R:** Are you planning to sell these before they're finished?

**M:** They'll be pre-sold before they're built.

**R:** What's the time frame?

**M:** Each house takes 5-7 months for construction. 9 months total for all 5 to be built.

**C:** Where will construction workers park and where will the staging happen?

**M:** Not sure where workers park. Staging would have to be around rear of site worked out with Noodle Factory.

**R:** Will there be noise?

**M:** The city restricts time when construction can be happening and we would adhere to those restrictions.

**R:** I'm pleased to see greenspace added to the plan. I think it will be visually pleasant.

**R:** Is the green space fenced in?

**M:** As it currently stands it will be owned by adjacent homeowner and will be their responsibility to maintain.

**R:** Will the owner of The Noodle Factory site (Walnut Capital) need a variance to allow the 2 easements for garage access?

**M:** Not to my knowledge. They're currently in excess of what they need.

## Section IV: Community Discussion

**C:**Christina

**C:**We do share these notes with the developer. Just to summarize they need density and rear setback variances. Down from 4 curb cuts to 1 curb cut.

**Resident 1:**How do we know that they will keep their commitment to 1 curb cut?

**C:**That's our [BDC] job. After this meeting we consider and draft opinion to include resident concerns. We can take 4 positions. Support with conditions is most often used. We write out all of the important commitments they've made and often ask for additional things such as paint to mark curb cuts. Zoning puts conditions into occupancy permit. Letter goes to BDC Property & Planning Committee for discussion, then they present it to BDC Board for a resolution. Once a resolution is passed it becomes a binding position of the organization.

**Resident 1:**Where do board meetings happen and can anyone attend?

**C:**They are open to the public and held in the Liberty or Burstin room in West Penn Hospital.

**Resident 2:**Very concerned about the ability to park blocking the sidewalk with a smaller car. Could that be in the occupancy permit?

**C:**I need to do research on if there is precedence. (*Motorcycles could block sidewalk*)

**Resident 3:**I have to look at the litter gathering in the current lot. I'm very excited to see the site redeveloped. I think it will be good for the neighbors and am very much for it.

**Resident 4:**Is there something that can be done to clean up the site?

**C:**I've called but will be happy to call again and ask for more consistent clean up.

**Resident 4:**What's the process? When can the building start?

**C:**The Zoning Board wants to hear from community and RCO first. Zoning board hearing can't happen until they hear our opinion.

**Resident 4:**I don't think it's unreasonable to ask for regular maintenance.

**C:**I'll call tomorrow to see what can be done. I'm also going to check into parking precedent to see how we can ensure the sidewalk isn't blocked.

**Resident 5:**Do you know what the properties in Lawrenceville went for?

**C:**They would have gone for \$400,000-\$500,000 if they weren't rentals. Affordable housing isn't a reasonable ask here but we can ask them to not try to sell for over a certain amount. Someone has a number somewhere and I think we can get it from them.

**Resident 6:**I realize they went down to 1 curb cut but I'm not convinced that they can't get rid of them all.

**Resident 4:**Can they get rid of some of the green space to do parking with a curb cut on Friendship.

**C:**That would potentially interfere with traffic flow and the bus stop.

**Resident 6:**How much do people oppose a single curb cut?

**Resident 4:**Try parking on Pearl on a Saturday losing any parking will make it worse.

**Resident:**Can they give one of the surface parking spaces to the house that currently has the curb cut as a way to get rid of all curb cuts? [discussion by several residents of the feasibility of this]

**C:**Is anyone opposed to that?

\*Room agrees with that\*

**Resident 7:**A nearby house just sold for around \$400,000. I think they're going to start at \$500,000 for these houses.

**C:**On a larger scale project we can pressure more on price, but for a project of this scale there's little room for affordability.

**Resident 7:**Did Laurel buy the property?

**C:**No, Laurel has an option on the site but Walnut Capital still owns the site.

**Resident:**Is it considered one lot?

**C:**Yes it would be split into multiple lots.

**Resident:**I realize it seems to be a risk to go from 6 to 5 units. But I think it's a smart marketing move in the neighborhood to offer slightly more space.

**Resident:**Are there basements?

**C:**No there are no basements.

**Resident:**Where would the utilities be?

**C:**I'll have to follow up with them to ask.

**Resident:**What would you be walking into if there's no garage?

**C:**I'm not sure.

**Resident:**The lights at the Cercone Village lot have gotten incredibly bright and have been bothering my mother.

**C:**I can follow up with the city, and West Penn Hospital as they rent some of the office space in that building.

Meeting ended at 8:07 P.M.