

Passyunk Square Civic Association
General Membership Meeting
Tuesday, January 2, 2018

The General Membership Meeting of the Passyunk Square Civic Association (PSCA) was called to order by President Sarah Anton at 6:31 PM in the South Philadelphia Older Adult Center. Board members in attendance included Sarah Anton, Andrew Stober, Suzanne Tavani, Kristi Buchholz, Andrew Emma, Henry Sullivan, Monica Montiel and Jeff Brown. Absent was Ilene Wilder. Sarah wished everyone a happy New Year and stated that PSCA is in a planning mode. She mentioned that PSCA is having a Christmas tree chipping event this Saturday, January 6 between 9:30 AM and 2 PM at Columbus Square Playground. For a suggested donation of \$5 trees will be chipped by Bartlett Tree contractors who will distribute the mulch to gardens throughout the neighborhood. If anyone wanted some of the mulch let her know. However, if the weather is too cold the event may be cancelled. Sarah indicated that the two community gardens PSCA handles, Passyunk Gardens and SPOAC, are getting ready for the spring. She invited neighbors who may be interested to get involved. Sarah also asked for anyone who is interested to participate in the annual art auction that will be held at the end of April.

Sarah introduced the Board members present and said that they can inform neighbors what is occurring in the community. Sarah also stated that PSCA has many active committees and referred to the list of committees and their duties on each table. If any neighbor is interested in joining any committee they should contact the committee chair, Sarah said. A sign in sheet was distributed and Sarah requested that people sign in.

Tom Wyatt inquired if neighborhood businesses were accepting trash cans. Sarah explained that a City ordinance requires take out businesses to have and maintain trash cans outside of their establishments during operating hours to reduce litter. Although PSCA is offering trash cans to neighborhood businesses, they were not interested in new cans. Sarah mentioned that PSCA was trying a different angle to get the trash cans to the businesses.

Sarah then asked that people take five minutes to introduce themselves to others who they don't know, which they did.

Hightop Development, 829 Wharton Street – Sarah turned the meeting over to David Goldfarb who is on the PSCA Zoning Committee to chair a presentation by Hightop Development, the new developer of 9300 square foot lot at 829 Wharton Street. David explained that this is the second presentation that Hightop is making to PSCA; they are interested in becoming neighbors. He emphasized that this meeting is only to provide feedback; there will be no decisions this evening. After this meeting, Hightop will make a proposal to the Zoning Committee and at that time a straw poll vote will be taken. David promised to notify the neighborhood when that Zoning Committee meeting will be held. David Landskroner, the developer, Michael Phillips, the attorney and Michael Skolnick, the architect, were present.

Michael Phillips indicated that Hightop met with about 20 neighbors from the 800 block of Wharton Street at the end of November and the neighbors made many suggestions. The lot is zoned RSA 5 and the neighbors want it to be developed for single family houses. Hightop incorporated changes to their plans to retain the residential character along Wharton Street and the commercial character on 9th Street. Michael explained that no parking is required under the

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existing zoning or the commercial CMX 2.5 zoning in the area. As a result of the meeting the plans were revised to eliminate all parking. In addition, three town houses are being proposed along the eastern side of the parcel. They will be the standard 38' height. The rest of the parcel will be an L shaped building with ground floor commercial and 28 apartments above. Floors two to four will contain a mix of one and two bedroom and studio apartments. The top floor, the fifth, will be set back and will have three bedroom units. This compromise of adding three houses along Wharton Street is not beneficial to the developer since the L shape prohibits apartments being uniform while it increases construction costs. What is key Michael said is maintaining commercial development along 9th Street.

David Goldfarb opened up the meeting for comments. He asked the lot dimensions of the town houses and was told the lots were 15' X 45' with each house being 600+ square feet. David explained that the developer went from 30 apartment units in its first proposal to 28 apartments with three town houses. In response to another question, the developer indicated that the maximum height of the 5th floor is 55 ½ feet, which is normal along Passyunk Avenue.

Suzanne Tavani inquired what happens to the rectory building at the eastern end of the lot and the developer explained that it will be demolished for the construction of one of the new town houses. The developer indicated are also no plans for a roof deck, in response to another question.

A resident of the 800 block of Wharton Street asked about making the corner triplexes and what is happening with parking. The developer replied that the site was designed without parking in accordance with zoning. The resident mentioned that whatever is developed could get a variance in the future for something like a bar. David Goldfarb explained that any property in the City could request a variance but to get one the developer must go before the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) and prove a hardship.

Mike from the Zoning Committee asked the height of the building before the fifth floor set back and Michael replied 43', almost the same height as the building next door. Andrew Stober asked what materials will be used. The architect mentioned they will use some red brick with limestone on the bottom, the cornices will be wood while the bays will be metal. There was a question about the number of commercial units. The developer answered that there was about 5000 square feet, and most likely three commercial units. There will be a neighborhood food user but not like a Seven Eleven.

David Goldfarb explained that the developer is under a sale agreement for the lot contingent upon zoning.

A neighbor felt that the developer was where they wanted to be in the first place. She did not feel there was a compromise. She explained that the 800 block of Wharton Street is residential and the developer is putting a commercial structure along it. She said the neighbors want to retain the residential status of the block. Although she didn't have a problem with a commercial building at the corner of 9th and Wharton and she appreciated the attempt to incorporate neighbors' concerns, she will fight to retain the residential character of the block.

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David Goldfarb asked if a fourth town house would satisfy the neighbors. A resident said the more town houses the better and they wanted the new construction along Wharton Street to resemble the existing homes. Removal of the bays in the apartment building was also suggested. Another neighbor said that so many additional rental units will bring more congestion. David mentioned that the building did have some advantages, it has elevators for the handicapped and a trash area in the basement. The architect indicated that they will use a private trash collector.

Frank Hober asked what could be built by right. Michael replied that there is no parking required in the RSA 5 residential zoning or the CMX 2.5 commercial zoning. Michael explained that any revisions to the plans will not increase the number of apartment units above 28. Frank Hober said that the developer is wasting his time; there is no way the neighbors are going to agree to 31 new units. Michael explained that if the entire lot was rezoned CMX 2.5 and developed 35 units could be built.

Andrew Emma mentioned that the previous developer was proposing between 18 and 21 units and now the proposal is 28. The previous development was going to be four stories high this one is 5 stories and 55 feet. The developer replied that the front of the proposed building will match up with the next door commercial building. David Landskroner explained that every developer looks at things differently. Andrew suggested that he lower the height to the exact height of the adjacent building and lower the density.

Suzanne Tavani was concerned that the developer would rent to people who may not respect or want to be part of the neighborhood. She was concerned about who they would rent to, the number of apartments and the density.

Michael Skolnick indicated that the lower level will have rooms for the mechanicals, a trash room and a room for bikes. The entrance was moved from the corner of 9th and Wharton Streets to the northern end along 9th Street.

The developer said he could consider possibly changing the bedroom configuration. He was also open to revising the corner façade to resemble the buildings along Wharton Street. In response to a request for a fourth town house, the developer replied he considered that but the building won't function from an architectural standpoint if that were done.

A neighbor mentioned that the ZBA ruled that the previous developer had too many units and should build residential along Wharton Street and commercial along 9th Street. Michael said they expanded the commercial building 47' along Wharton Street to make it work.

David Goldfarb took an informal straw poll just to judge neighbors feelings on the project. He asked who would support the project with minor changes, who would oppose it if there were any commercial building along 9th Street, who would support it with a reduced number of units and a four story maximum height, and who would support a development with 22 units. He reiterated that PSCA will let everyone know when the Zoning Committee will hear this development.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:40 PM.

Submitted by Jeff Brown.