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Neighbors find planned hospital signage too big, bright, unseemly

Posted on January 29, 2020 (<https://www.chestnuthilllocal.com/2020/01/29/neighbors-find-planned-hospital-signage-too-big-bright-unseemly/>), updated on January 29, 2020
 (<https://www.chestnuthilllocal.com/2020/01/29/neighbors-find-planned-hospital-signage-too-big-bright-unseemly/>)
 by Contributor (<https://www.chestnuthilllocal.com/author/contributor/>)



by Kate Dolan

Neighbors responded unfavorably to a proposed expansion of signage at the Chestnut Hill Hospital and expressed skepticism that Tower Health, which has owned Chestnut Hill Hospital since 2017, is approaching its development in the residential district with the neighborhood's historic character and maintenance in mind.

Chris Heinely, CEO of L&H Companies, a sign company contracted by Tower Health, presented the plan at the Chestnut Hill Community Association's Development Review Committee meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 22. That plan calls for the addition of several internally illuminated signs, a new canopy sign and a sign on the hospital's tower that would prominently display Tower Health's logo.

"The sign system here is old, it's dilapidated," Heinely said to the assembled crowd of more than 50 neighbors who attended the meeting. The aging signs are problematic for safety and the hospital's motivation lies in improving the signage for brand recognition, as well as patient and visitor experience, he said.

"It's a tough hospital to see," Heinely said. "Your emergency sign is the smallest emergency sign I've ever seen."

Many in attendance said they live across the street on Germantown Avenue or on Norwood Avenue behind the hospital, which is located at 8835 Germantown Ave. Neighbors acknowledged and agreed that visibility is a key component of hospital signage, but also said they were concerned about adding more lights and larger signs to the property.

Michael McHugh, who lives across the main entrance on Germantown Ave., suggested that technical reasons be supplied for the changes and included in the plan.

"Can you explain the engineering aspects that drive the illumination and the sizing of the signs, like how far away should you be able to read the signs," asked McHugh. "Is it a quarter mile, half a mile, a mile?"

Some changes drew more attention than others. The proposed replacement for the hospital's entrance sign will be built with a concrete base, and neighbors said they the solid base would reduce visibility. The current sign sits on posts that are easy to see around.

While many neighbors were skeptical of hospital arguments that it was difficult to navigate, Amanda Yoder, representing the Chestnut Hill Business District, attested to having trouble as a non-resident.

"I'm not visually impaired," Yoder said, recalling a trip to the hospital 10 years ago. "And I couldn't find the parking garage. I'm unfamiliar with this space."

Many questioned whether the magnitude of the project – 45 signs are proposed – is too large and therefore unnecessary. Others wondered if rebranding efforts were more important to the hospital than the practical wayfinding and safety purpose.

Patricia Cove, Chairperson for the Chestnut Hill Conservancy and Historic District Advisory Committee, brought up the Germantown Avenue Urban Design guidelines, which she co-authored and which the conservancy, the business association and the community association all supported.

The guidelines cover building, scale, sidewalks and "a lot of aesthetic information regarding lighting, signage and colors" and were "specifically written to maintain the historical character of Chestnut Hill and probably the main reason a lot of us moved here," Cove said.

"Unfortunately, I haven't seen anything in your plans tonight that even alludes slightly to what we have written in those guidelines," she said.

"When you do come back, we will be looking for significant changes to your signage designs, your lighting sources and the sizes of the signs as well as the coloration and the illumination," said Cove referring to the meeting on Feb. 6 when Tower Health's plans would be presented to the HDAC and Land Use Planning & Zoning Committee.

"We want to see a thriving hospital," said Lori Salganicoff, Executive Director of the Conservancy. Salganicoff expressed the need for a plan outlining the hospital's progression to be shared with the community – the last master plan she saw was in 1991.

"One of the struggles that we have is understanding how this institution wishes, under RSD-3 zoning, without a master plan, to evolve?" She said. "We have signs and lighting and things that are being proposed that definitely happen with hospitals but they're not what has been described as the plan for this hospital in this community in past plans."

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It is amazing to see neighbors with nothing better to do to come to a meeting to complain about signs Chestnut Hill Hospital is proposing to erect on their property without taking into account that the proposed signage is to be out there for the benefit of customers and employees who come to the hospital and need to know where to go for treatment or to handle hospital business. The signage is of no benefit to the neighbors unless they have to go to the hospital.

The hospital is not a historical facility for people to look at but a place where the sick go to get treatment. It is their prerogative as to what kind of signage is needed and where it is to be sited is for the convenience of all who have to go to a specific location on the campus.

My suggestion is to defer to the hospital about directional signage and to let them erect critically mandated signage to show people where various offices and locations are. They can talk about the sign illuminated from the top of the building and the canopy.

To create a ridiculously nuanced argument about signage will hurt business in Chestnut Hill as we have seen businesses close or move out

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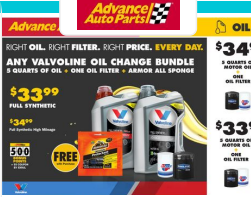
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