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# LUPZ discusses zoning review needs in Chestnut Hill

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**by Kate Dolan**

The agenda at last week's Chestnut Hill Community Association Land Use, Planning and Zoning Committee meeting kept mostly to the general discussion of the future of development in the neighborhood and rezoning possibilities.

In the absence of pressure to actively review projects due to delays and postponements caused by COVID-19, members of the board, who met via Zoom on Thursday, July 2, set about defining priorities for Chestnut Hill's maintenance and growth and the LUPZ strategies and ideas for assessing upcoming projects.

One of the strategies is to improve LUPZ's approach to project review by using resources and tools accessible to the committee, such as maps from the Chestnut Hill Conservancy's 2017 Chestnut Hill Residential Study. The interactive maps provide a range of information from zoning to soil types to historically significant architecture.

"When we are charged with reviewing a project, this is the resource we should be turning to for starters," said Jean McCoubrey, committee member and co-host of the meeting. "By digging into this map, we can pick up all kinds of information, what the zoning is, whether it's a watershed priority, whether it is in the category of parcels that have been recommended for rezoning through the latest city plan, etc."

McCoubrey also announced that she would be following up on the city's 2035 Upper Northwest District plan completed in 2018, which established as a priority the renewal of streets, sidewalks, lighting and signage among other improvements to Germantown, Mt. Airy and Chestnut Hill.

Another part of the 2035 plan saw parcels recommended for rezoning.

"In general, the goal of the plan was to make zoning along Germantown more consistent," said McCoubrey. "To bring everything more into a mixed-use category," a shift from the strict commercial and residential zoning that exists currently.

However, committee members and McCoubrey acknowledged that it makes sense to look at other zoning options when taking in “the larger picture, the post-pandemic picture,” one that considers that the future of retail on Germantown Avenue is in a precarious position.

“We might want to go another way, think about if we want to encourage residential development in those areas,” said John Landis, a proposal he introduced at the last LUPZ meeting, having observed the “contraction of retail business on Germantown Avenue,” particularly on the several blocks just northwest of Cresheim Valley Road.

“Nationally, [with] retail trends, we are going to need a lot less retail space in just about every location,” Landis said.

Responding to this proposal were concerns about how to keep Chestnut Hill a walkable community if a shift were made to residential zoning along Germantown, a concern Landis described as “the biggest challenge.”

A spotlight was shown on the resurrected Green Space Committee, an initiative aimed at planting trees and educating people on the maintenance of large trees and preservation of the tree canopy.

Anne McNiff, Chestnut Hill Community Association Executive Director, has been promoting the revival efforts. McNiff spoke about the recent replacement of trees along Germantown Ave. and Willow Grove and pointed out the overlap of community organizations that share concerns about green space and how that can factor into planning and the LUPZ.

“There’s an opportunity with these big developments that green space is not forgotten when they’re looking to get our support for variances,” McNiff said.

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