



Chestnut Hill Local

(/)
Tuesday, May 25, 2021

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10 Bethlehem Pike gets zoning permit, LUPZ reviews process of 30 W. Highland



(/uploads/original/20210512-101008-10 Bethlehem Pike-3 (1).jpg)

Developers of the former Sunoco site at 10 Bethlehem Pike received a permit to build an apartment building. The CHCA is preparing an appeal.

Posted Wednesday, May 12, 2021 10:30 am

by Walt Maguire

The LUPZ meeting May 6 reviewed several agenda items, but no decisions were made, pending input from other groups.

The city has granted a zoning permit for development at 10 Bethlehem Pike, based on the by-right plans submitted. In the February DRC meeting, the developers had presented the “by-right” option with slightly below-grade retail space on the ground floor and 34 one- and two-bedroom apartments in a 46 foot, nine-inch-tall building. Since it would be constructed “as-of-right” it does not require any variances and would not be subject to local review. An appeal is being prepared by the CHCA.

The main topic was a discussion on possible revisions to the Land Use, Planning, and Zoning committee procedures for reviewing building projects, both preliminary and official.

The procedural review has been prompted by recent zoning variance requests on new residential projects in Chestnut Hill, and perceived inconsistencies in the Chestnut Hill Community Association’s consideration of community input.

The community reaction, and the projects, are not uniform: Neighbors to the proposed redevelopment at 102 E. Mermaid Lane seem to be working successfully with the CHCA (<https://chestnuthilllocal.com/stories/letters-chca-stands-with-neighbors,17291>) at this stage in the process, but the 30 W Highland Neighbors feel their concerns are being ignored (<https://chestnuthilllocal.com/stories/letters-chca-ignores-its-constituency-in-highland-ave-vote,17288?>).

A complaint by the 30 W Highland Neighbor group, for instance, is that CHCA was aware of the plans for 30 W. Highland Ave. in October 2020, but the community group did not see the plans until February 2021. CHCA’s position is that it has been standard practice to review a project for fact-finding and due diligence first, in case there are legal or technical issues that must be resolved before consideration by the community could be merited.

By contrast, the Goldenberg Group presented their project to the community group first, though it was a verbal description, not blueprints or renderings. (Goldenberg representatives had a meeting with LUPZ (<https://chestnuthilllocal.com/stories/neighbors-oppose-250-unit-development-for-e-mermaid-ave-property,16772>) a few days earlier to consult on how to work with the neighbors, which covered procedure but not design.

“The result of the meeting was a discussion about how to proceed, which will be that all interested parties agree to meet together with The Goldenberg Group and not hold separate meetings,” said Celeste Hardester, LUPZ Coordinator. “We want everyone to be on the same page with the same learnings and understandings, so concerns and ideas can be ongoingly shared.”)



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Because of a general mistrust of Goldenberg's intentions and to maintain a united front, a small working group representing CHCA, the Mermaid Lane neighbors, Ruffian Tittman of the Friends of the Wissahickon and three members of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy met recently to discuss a strategy for negotiating with Goldenberg Group.

The underlying concern in both cases is that variance requests might be given too frequently, making the zoning inconsequential.

Other topics on the agenda included a review of new member nominations and an update on the Green Space Initiative.

The Green Space Initiative (https://chestnuthill.org/green_space_initiative.php) is subsidizing the Chestnut Hill Tree Tenders (<https://chestnuthilllocal.com/stories/planting-trees-good-for-the-planet-good-for-you,15734>), part of the Philadelphia Horticultural Society's street tree giveaway program. A bequest left by a former resident will cover some costs for planting next Fall. Ardleigh Street and Winston Road are target areas, since the east side of Chestnut Hill has fewer trees than the west side. Requests for trees closed May 10.

Recent shifts in the real estate market and the community's concerns with developers this year have raised questions within the CHCA about their own communication process. LUPZ is considering revisions to their Meeting Procedure for Preliminary and Official Project Review.

As Jean McCoubrey, Co-Chair, described it, "The events of the last few months have raised the question among various groups of stakeholders in our community as to what the nature of preliminary reviews should be – should preliminary reviews ever be held in a non-public fashion."

The committee debated possible changes to bring the public into the process earlier.

"I think these recent things have been quite an education," said John Landis. "Our group, particularly LUPZ, has expertise, and we try to bring the expertise to these projects, both to the benefit of the applicant and the benefit of the community."

He recommended, as a start, they provide more explanation to their decisions, to improve transparency and to assist the DRC in their work. The process guidelines continue under review.

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