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City ZBA approves Greylock



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The Greylock estate

Posted Wednesday, November 27, 2024 12:00 am

by Tommy Tucker (/browse.html?byline=Tommy Tucker)

After months of delay, the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) voted unanimously on Nov. 20 to approve requested variances for the proposed Greylock development, putting the project on a path toward eventual construction.

The vote, which contradicts the Planning Commission's recommendation at a previous hearing, granted developer Lavi Shenkman's requests to convert the mansion into six condos and build three new detached buildings consisting of seven townhomes on the mansion's west side – one being a triplex and the other two duplexes. In addition, the plan would convert the mansion's gatehouse into two additional dwellings, bringing the total to 15 units on the property.

Last October, the Planning Commission found that Shenkman, of Rhombus Properties, had not proved sufficient financial hardship to qualify for a variance for the property, which is currently zoned for single-family residential. It recommended that development proceed only within the existing structures on the property.

Craig Schelter, a former head of the Planning Commission who now sits on the Chestnut Hill Community Association's Land Use Planning and Zoning Committee (LUPZ), said he was "delighted" by the unanimous vote.

"It was the most vetted project I think I've seen in the time that I've been on the Land Use Planning Committee," said Schelter, who supports the project because he thinks it is the best chance to preserve the historic structure, which has sat vacant and deteriorating for decades. "I'm glad that the Board did what they did, I'm glad the LUPZ and the Design Review Committee and the Chestnut Hill Community Association board voted in favor of it. I think the process here was too long, but it's one where I think it's a good result."

Developer Shenkman declined to comment on the ZBA decision.

Brad Bank, who spoke for a group of neighbors who oppose the project said “several plaintiffs, whose exact identities are not yet determined,” may file an appeal.

He pointed to the remaining fact that the property is currently protected by easements, held by the Chestnut Hill Conservancy, which prohibit such development.



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“I am personally disappointed that the Zoning Board of Adjustment did not follow the recommendation of the City Planning Commission or were willing or able to consider the role of the conservation and preservation easements on the Greylock property,” Bank told The Local. “We will now focus our attention on compelling the Conservancy to enforce the maintenance provisions which are meticulously set forth in the easement documents.”

The historic 18,000-square-foot, 22-room mansion at the top of the hill at 209 W. Chestnut Hill Ave., built in 1901, has not been used as a private residence since World War II. Since then, different organizations have used the property, but it has been unoccupied for decades. According to the Conservancy, the last residential tenants were the Missionary Sisters and Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who sold it in 1999.

Ownership of the property transferred to USABankShares.com and vBank in 2000, and Rhombus Properties, led by Shenkman, acquired the property in late 2022.

Path still unclear

Zoning approval was just the first hurdle for the eventual construction of this project. The property is governed by strict historic easements that protect the mansion, its carriage house and surrounding open space.

To move forward, Shenkman would need the Chestnut Hill Conservancy to amend the terms of the easement. The Conservancy has not yet said whether it would take that step.

“The Conservancy has not yet been presented with a formal proposal to consider any amendments to the conservation and preservation easements,” said Krista Gebbia, the conservation and easements manager for the Conservancy.

Lori Salganicoff, executive director of the Conservancy, has said that “if any eased-property owner approaches the Conservancy with a project that would require an amendment to allow for that project to be in conformance with the easement agreement, the Conservancy follows best practices guidance from the Land Trust Association and other counsel.

“The Greylock easements protect both historic architecture and also environmentally and culturally important landscape elements,” she continued. “So even if the project moves forward only using the existing buildings, there may still be elements of the proposal that would require an amendment. We don’t know enough to determine that yet.”

The process leading to this decision spanned several ZBA hearings dating back to March of this year. It is unclear what the project’s timeline is moving forward.

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Museum of the American Revolution
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- Sun, Dec 08 @7:30pm Sponsored () **Christmas Celebration - Music for Choir and Brass**
First Presbyterian Church
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- Preschool Storytime Playgroup - Lucien E. Blackwell West Philadelphia Regional Library**
Lucien E. Blackwell West Philadelphia
Wed, Dec 04
- Read Baby Read: Baby and Toddler Storytime with Ms. Susan - Wynnefield Library**
Wynnefield Branch
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- Wednesday STEAM LEAP Activity**
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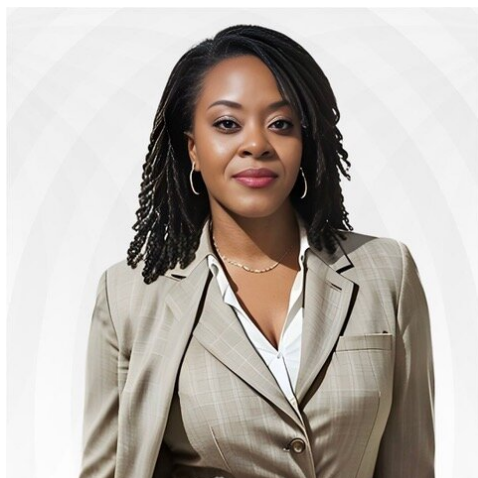
Germantown Academy's 2024-25 girls' basketball team has talent, but it may take a while for it to gel into a smoothly functioning unit.



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A big Saturday for small local businesses (/stories/a-big-saturday-for-small-local-businesses,34730)

Small Business Saturday, promoted by the Chestnut Hill Business Association, has many independent retailers among its membership.



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Hill biz district welcomes a new 'storyteller' (/stories/hill-biz-district-welcomes-a-new-storyteller,34729)

For Karise Allen-Crew, walking down Germantown Avenue feels like "opening up a gift."

Dec 3, 2024 issue (/stories/dec-3-2024-issue,34659)

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INSIDE:



HOLIDAY BONUS ISSUE



Hospital staff to protest

By Jimmy Ficker and Colin Robinson

Concerning ongoing concerns about staffing levels and increased wait times, 190 employees of Temple Health - Chestnut Hill filed a petition for an informational public hearing scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 4.

The announcement comes three months after the state and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a decision to require Temple Health to increase its workforce.

"The Temple work team, which was formed in 2022, has been working hard to address the staffing issues," says one Temple Health employee who spoke on condition of anonymity. "But we need more staff to ensure that we can continue to provide the highest quality of care to our patients."

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A big Saturday for small local businesses

By Kristin Meador-Gomez

In no other month do so many small businesses in the Chestnut Hill area celebrate their success. It's the Chestnut Hill Small Business Saturday, a day of shopping and dining support that has become a tradition in the area.

The Chestnut Hill Small Business Saturday is a day of shopping and dining support that has become a tradition in the area. The event is held on the first Saturday after Thanksgiving, and it is a great way to support local businesses.

Hill biz district welcomes a new 'storyteller'

Former entrepreneur knows what it's like to run an independent small business

By Maggie Daugherty



Kristin Meador-Gomez, a former entrepreneur and current business owner, is the new storyteller for the Chestnut Hill Small Business Saturday. She has been a part of the event since its inception and has helped to make it a success.

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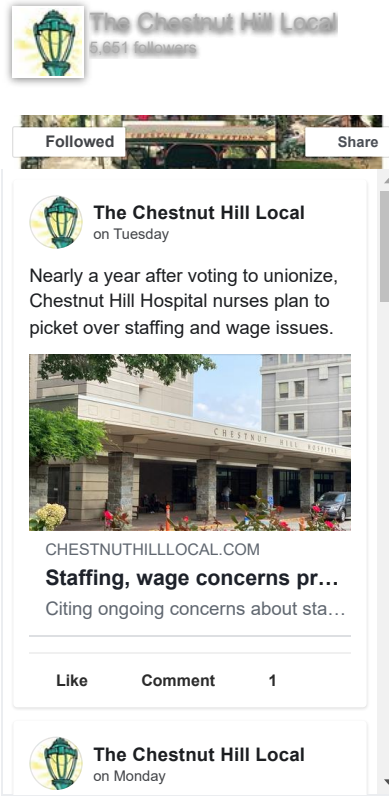
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