



Chestnut Hill Local

Tuesday, July 23, 2024

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Detweiler redevelopment project is 'too close for comfort'

Philadelphia Historical Commission architectural committee unanimously rejects apartment proposal for 250-year-old Detweiler property.



1. RED BRICK

2. METAL STANDING SEAM MANSARD FLOOR

3. HARDIE BEADED SMOOTH LAP SIDING

4. HARDIE SHINGLE SIDING: STRAIGHT EDGE PANEL-AGED PEWTER COLOR

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7. DARK BRICK

VP Vich Properties Development & Management

MORRISSEY
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Posted Wednesday, July 17, 2024 12:01 am

by **Carla Robinson**

Correction: An earlier version of this story incorrectly identified the historic house that would be renovated as part of this project. The stone Detweiler House at 8226 Germantown Ave. would be adapted as a commercial space in this proposal, not the house at 8224 Germantown Ave., which is also a Detweiler House.

In a unanimous decision, the Philadelphia Historical Commission's architectural committee voted on Tuesday to deny approval for a proposed apartment development at 8226 Germantown Avenue, directly across from the Chestnut Hill Hotel.

The project, which would transform the historic Detweiler property, heads to review by the full Historical Commission on August 9.

The quarter-acre site, home to one of Chestnut Hill's oldest buildings, was purchased at auction in December 2023 for \$1.26 million by Vich Properties LLC and VP 8226 Germantown LLC. The existing structure, a two-and-a-half-story German Federal-style stone house built in about 1760, has been on the city's historic register since 1957 and was owned by the Detweiler family for generations.

The developers' initial proposal, designed by architect G. Zamir Garcia of M Architects, LLC, envisioned a five-story apartment building on the undeveloped portion of the lot. This area comprises more than 75% of the property, including a significant frontage along Germantown Avenue. However, at the recent committee meeting, Garcia announced a revision to the plan, reducing the proposed height to four stories.

Garcia explained that the original design had anticipated a zoning change to CMX 2.5 under the city's 2035 Zoning Code, which would have allowed for building heights up to 55 feet. After consultations with planning department officials, the team redesigned the project to comply with CMX 2 zoning, which limits heights to 38 feet.

Despite this modification, the proposal continues to face strong opposition from both the Historical Commission and community members.

Commission member John Cluver said he objected to the overall scale of the building, which he described as looking "off-key" when compared to the historic building on the site.



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"It feels like it was put on a copy machine at 150 percent," he said.

Another commission member, Justin Detwiler, expressed concerns about the building's proximity to the street, suggesting it should be set back further from the sidewalk. "This is way too close for comfort," Detwiler remarked.

The development plan, as currently proposed, would create a 14-unit apartment building targeted at "active seniors." Units would range from 960 to 1,600 square feet, with an underground parking garage serving the residents. The historic Detweiler House would be restored and repurposed as a café or similar commercial space, intended to serve as an amenity for the new apartment building.

However, the proposal faces several hurdles beyond the Historical Commission's concerns. The site is currently zoned for single-family residential use, meaning the developers would need to secure a zoning variance to proceed with their plans.

Laura Lucas, board president of the Chestnut Hill Community Association, said there was “strong opposition” in the community to what she described as a negative impact on the character of the neighborhood.

“We’re concerned that this development could destroy what remains of the garden context in which the Detweiler House has survived for 250 years,” she said.

Lori Salganicoff, executive director of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy, said the developers should consider the potential archaeological value of the land.

“That site has not been disturbed in 250 years, so I think we should be asking questions about what may be there, both above and below ground,” she said.

Richard Snowden, whose company Bowman Properties owns the buildings next door where Hideaway Music and Moondance Farm Studios are located, as well as 18 Southampton Avenue, an old blacksmith shop building at the rear, said he intends to fight it. He has hired attorney Matthew McClure from Ballard Spahr to represent him in the matter.

“It’s too close to the historic Detweiler house; it’s too close to the contributing buildings next to it; it’s too large and it’s out of scale,” Snowden argued. While not opposed to limited development on the site, he considers the current proposal “over the top.”

The project did receive a recommendation for conceptual approval from commission staff on July 16. The staff suggested several modifications, including maintaining existing setbacks along Germantown Avenue, adjusting the scale of window openings and floor heights to better align with surrounding historic architecture, and removing stylized historical details. They acknowledged that while proposed materials like brick, shingle, and masonry elements are mostly compatible with the historic residence and local architecture, the overall massing, size, and scale are not.

Architect Garcia expressed a willingness to work with the community and address concerns.

“We want to do something that’s sensitive to the site,” he stated, indicating that the development team is seeking feedback from neighbors before proceeding to the zoning process.

The adjacent 18th century house at 8224 Germantown Avenue is also associated with the Detweiler name. It was built for sisters Harriet Detweiler and Caroline Detweiler Hammond between 1885 and 1889, and was nominated to the city’s historic register in June 2021.

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LOCAL CALENDAR

<p>Sat, Jul 27 @11:00am Sponsored (</p> <p>UMFPL Writer's Group 2024</p> <p>Williamstown, PA (</p> <p>Tue, Jul 23 @9:00am</p> <p>Riverbend Trailblazers Summer Camp!</p> <p>Riverbend Environmental Education Center</p> <p>Tue, Jul 23 @9:30am</p> <p>The Riverlink Ferry System on the Delaware River Waterfront</p> <p>Penns Landing Waterfront</p> <p>Tue, Jul 23 @9:30am</p> <p>Shark Summer @ Adventure Aquarium</p> <p>Adventure Aquarium</p>	<p>Thu, Aug 01 @7:00pm Sponsored (</p> <p>South Street Pun-Off</p> <p>Tattooed Mom</p> <p>Philadelphia, PA (</p>	<p>Wed, Aug 07 @10:30am Sponsored (</p> <p>Summer Reading Yoga Flow</p> <p>Lansdale Public Library</p> <p>Lansdale, PA (</p>
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See All Events (<https://chestnuthilllocal.com/events/>)

THE LATEST

CHCA Agenda (/stories/chca-agenda,32979)

Thursday, July 25, 7 p.m., CHCA Board of Directors Meeting



Northwest screenings: Outdoor movies (/stories/northwest-screenings-outdoor-movies,32978)

Who needs a darkened, air-conditioned theater when you can have free movies under the stars?

(/stories/northwest-screenings-outdoor-movies,32978)



Lincoln Drive to rock and roll Pastorius Park (/stories/lincoln-drive-to-rock-and-roll-pastorius-park,32977)

It all began in law school. Well, sort of.

(/stories/lincoln-drive-to-rock-and-roll-pastorius-park,32977)

Nostalgia and horror: Revisiting John Carpenter's 'The Thing' (/stories/nostalgia-and-horror-revisiting-john-carpenters-the-thing,32976)

John Carpenter's 1982 classic "The Thing" resonates with a particular nostalgic charm for Gen X viewers.



(/stories/nostalgia-and-horror-revisiting-john-carpenters-the-thing,32976)



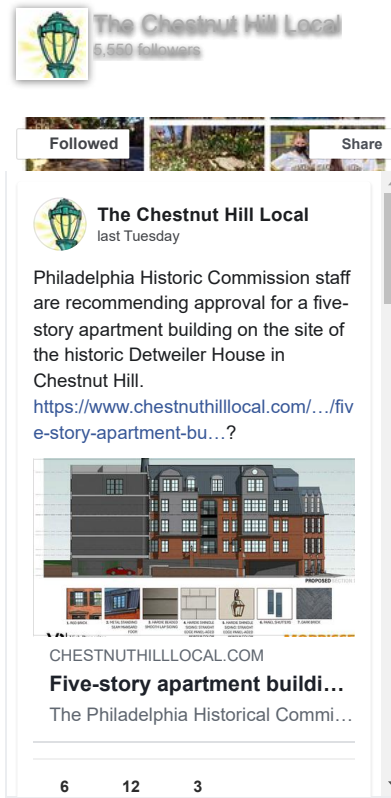
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Old Academy Players closes the season with a one-act 'Bonanza' (/stories/old-academy-players-closes-the-season-with-a-one-act-bonanza,32975)

Once again, Old Academy Players premiered its 2024 "Summer One Act Bonanza," an annual event featuring one-act plays.



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