

486 S Graham St Trek Development Community Meeting
Meeting Notes by Sam Spearing

Wednesday, June 30th 2021

Presenters: Bill Gatti of Trek Development, Kevin Wagstaff of Perfido Weiskopf Wagstaff & Goettel, John Ginocchi of Trek, Janelle Kemerer of Trek

Approximately 50 Zoom participants plus those watching on Facebook

1. INTRODUCTION - Christina Howell

- a. Introduces Sam Spearing - taking notes/allowing folks to join the meeting
- b. BDC mission and goals
- c. Points to hand raise function
- d. Comment: There wasn't substantial content provided ahead of time to review.
- e. Bill Gatti: Feel free to circulate the PowerPoint as well.

2. PRESENTATION by Trek Development, Bill Gatti, Kevin Wagstaff of Graffito, Wagstaff architecture firm, John Ginocchi of Trek, Janelle Kemerer

- a. Trek specializes in housing development
- b. Points to Mellons Orchard, Garden Theatre Block as other housing developments they've worked on.
- c. Bill: We were invited to the table last fall by Tony Ross who currently has legal control of the property.
- d. The project has been stuck where it is for a while.
- e. Tony asked us to come in and consider an affordable or mixed income development approach
- f. Bill: Rare collision between affordability and preservation which don't always mix well
- g. Bill: The church entity has the goal of selling a piece of property they don't consider useful to them anymore
- h. Kevin Wagstaff presenting slideshow
 - i. Our design charge was to look at affordable housing in an apartment building
 - ii. Shows current state of the church building exterior
 - iii. Shows interior photos of the building
 1. It's intact but suffered and continues to suffer water damage
 2. Has unusual secondary space opening off of the sanctuary
 - iv. Shows context of adjacent streets/buildings
 - v. Looked at feasibility of keeping the building
 - vi. Covers the current zoning limitations for the site, height, Floor Area Ratio, parking requirements
 - vii. The main church building sits in the middle of the site up from the street slightly

- viii. There's limited space to put an additional building on the site and preserve the church
 - 1. Also looked at wrapping a new building around the current structure and preserving a part of the building
- ix. If the lot was vacant we would be looking at an L shaped building
 - 1. Came to a design with an L shape and the bell tower preserved as part of the structure
- x. Mentions facadism and the idea of only preserving a fragment of the building
- xi. We concluded that if we want to do affordable housing on the site then the church building isn't compatible with that goal
 - 1. Financially and architecturally
- xii. We decided to consider the ability to preserve some of the possible artifacts for reuse at this site or elsewhere
- xiii. Shows rendering of L shaped residential building with some retail & community space possible at street level
- xiv. Design concept
 - 1. First floor: Small residential footprint (lobby, office, common room), Centre frontage is a mix of commercial tenant space and community meeting space, rest of ground floor devoted to parking
 - a. Question: Couldn't you achieve the same parking scheme with the existing building by doing 1 level underground
 - b. The church is in the middle of the site so it wouldn't be possible
 - 2. Floors 2-4 are residential with 42 total units 9 2 bedrooms, 33 1 bedrooms
 - 3. Shows rendering of site and streetfront along Centre Ave
 - a. Masonry on most of Centre Ave face
 - b. Some siding on upper floors along Graham
 - c. Parking entrance passes under building hiding the surface lot in the rear corner of the site
- i. Bill Gatti: Trek does value old buildings and losing those buildings is hard. Losing churches and other buildings is happening around the site
 - i. We've concluded that given the conditions of the site that we don't control demolition of the existing structures and a new construction is the most feasible although still financially difficult plan

3. Discussion/Questions

- a. Christina: There aren't any variances being asked for or formal hearings at this point.
- b. This is an early on conversation with the community for Trek to know what the community thinks
- c. Christina: BDC doesn't take a position on development before community feedback and engagement can happen.

to since disinvest in the site and let it fall into worse condition intentionally. I'm in favor of affordable housing but how many will actually be places there. 10% of the units at 60% AMI being balanced with preservation doesn't necessarily feel like a fair choice. Looking at other churches being repurposed into mixed income housing. I value your work in Pittsburgh but I wonder have you/we thought and fought hard enough. Is there a way to leverage other funds or work to get the building at a lower cost to Trek?

- i. Bill Gatti: A few things: We're not saying the building is deteriorating and that's why we can't save it. It's certainly not helping. We can't save it because of the toolbox available for affordability and the cost of the site. Maybe your question is what happens if this doesn't happen and Tony Ross walks away? Would the church reconsider? I don't know. That might take years. Wasn't approached as "the building can't be saved" but hoping to
- k. Rob Pfaffman: Is this going to BCI as well?
 - i. Christina: Yes this would go to them eventually. We maintain close communication.
- l. Abby Rae: How is affordability defined here? Wouldn't be 10%. At Mellon's Orchard we did 75% at 60% Area Median Income with additional deeply affordable. Likely something similar.
- m. Amy Fisher: I do like the development plans compared to things we see elsewhere. I just wish it could be at another corner and keep this church. I work with Preservation Pittsburgh and others. We've looked at many reuse of churches. My personal opinion is that we should do what we can to save the church and find a possible use.
- n. Walt Haim: I do think this particular program is very needed in the neighborhood and city. Has a lot of great architectural designs as well. The United Methodist Church could schism in the near future. Does that affect the site?
 - i. Christina: I don't know that any of us can answer that question.
 - ii. Bill: Candidly I've had very minimal contact with the church. I don't have any knowledge of that or what the ramifications might be.
- o. Jodi Lincoln: What would financing plan look like? Tax credits, URA, etc...?
 - i. Bill: The masonry renderings are a stretch to figure out how to deliver what we've talked about. I'd expect 75% affordability at 60% AMI. 9% credits to PA Housing Finance Agency. Things are upside down with lumber prices and backlog. Applications are likely to open in 2022. If we were successful in securing credits wouldn't find out until 2023
- p. Ken Stiles: This is fantastic work. I was impressed by the comment that they've saved worse and the building has been allowed to fall into disrepair. Has there been pressure from the city to force the owner to do maintenance? They're waiting us out. There should be action to force the owner to maintain the building.
- q. Deb Gross: As a councilperson this is heartbreaking. We should be issuing citations across the city on developers. It seems like we need to hire 20 more

inspectors. Occupancy and building codes aren't being enforced. This is hard to get done but could be included in the city budget.

- r. Michael: We'll never have another building such as this. It would be great if there was money to reuse the site incorporating what's there. Has to have funds to make it worthwhile for a developer.
 - i. Christina: BDC doesn't have the capacity to program a space like this. We've looked for partners but hadn't even looked at finances because Tony Ross has had the church under contract for 4 or 5 years. We were trying to understand the pieces of the contract and how they relate to Tony and the Methodist Conference.
- s. Janine: Might non-commercial 'open to the public' neighborhood spaces have been considered when considering alternative land use for this property? The proposed plan privatizes the structure (as well as limits any artifacts that would be maintained in a new construction)?
 - i. Bill: That wouldn't be something we do.
 - ii. Christina: We talked to some developers about potential reuse for community use. Could be great for workforce development, childcare, etc... due to transit service. Haven't found any partners on that. I don't think anyone wants to stop looking for those alternative funding and development sources.
- t. Janine: How might the proposed project create value? enhance lives? and strengthen communities?
 - i. Bill: Creates value by bringing the property back on the tax rolls. Enhance the lives of the residents that live there. Strengthens the community as it's not currently additive to the community. I think we could provide a fine example of mixed income housing. I also think conversations like this strengthen communities.
- u. Jennifer Haven: When we discussed possible reuse. If you were to move forward on the project shown how long would it be until a building was on the ground?
 - i. Bill: At the earliest late 2024 or early 2025
- v. Bill: Whatever you come up with let us know. There is a fuse here. This can't go on open ended for us indefinitely. At the very least we can hopefully bring some clarity on this issue.

4. Private Discussion

- a. Summarized notes will be shared for this portion.
- b. We have heard from folks in favor of taking down the church.
- c. I'm not sure how you discern the opinion. I'm not sure how the decision is made in the aftermath of the meeting.
 - i. Christina: We record and make the notes available after the meeting.
 - ii. The notes will be shared with Trek and Tony Ross.
 - iii. We use the feedback and information we gather to think about what we need to do next.
- d. I'm hearing that there's a desire for both historic preservation and affordable housing. I think it's okay to want both and that neighborhoods deserve it. I'm also

heartened to hear a call for community spaces because we have been seeing more of those public spaces disappearing.

- e. I wanted to say that we need affordable housing and we don't have to save every church.
- f. What are the options? I know BDC is limited in budget and staff as it always works in community advocacy. If the community (people living and working nearby) decides we don't want to take this first option but we're not saying no to a second option from Trek that incorporates community input. What are the options for next steps?
 - i. Christina: Bill and I have had a conversation and I believe him when he says he's not interested in moving forward if the community doesn't want this. If Trek walks away it will still be under contract with Tony. Working outwards in terms of advocacy there's a timeline for Trek due to applications for tax funding. Trek likely wants to know if they should move forward by the end of the summer. In this case there's no ask for a variance but Trek has been a good community partner. BDC still wants to hear more from the community and listen more. Need to understand Trek's timeline more clearly. It seems like what we're looking at is that if this plan isn't acceptable then Trek will likely just walk away. I'm not sure what it would take for Tony Ross to walk away from the property but while he has it under contract he would be the one making decisions about what will and can be brought in.
- g. What would the scope of outreach be to create community space and do an adaptive reuse? Jobs incubator, childcare, housing
 - i. Mennonite Church organization led the Union Project process
 - ii. Generally organizing takes staffing to push a process through. Project managers and others to carry the project forwards. Without something to drive it it's not clear that we can outpace the private development market.
- h. I think it's a valid question to ask if there's funding available to help plan and preserve the site. The site is right next to the wealthiest neighborhood in Pittsburgh and the foundations have money.
- i. The B'Nai Israel site was complicated but they were able to make the development happen. To say maybe we can hopefully save some stained glass doesn't serve the preservation needs here. I do think the affordable housing is phenomenal but think we could do more to preserve the site.
- j. I know this is probably slightly outside of BGC boundaries but they worked intimately on the B'Nai Israel site so might be helpful for conversations regarding this site.
- k. BGC has a deep history with purchasing, rehabbing, and managing sites. Could likely provide more information about what might be feasible.
- l. I love the idea of a public process. I also don't think the aesthetic presented tonight was particularly exciting or pleasant to look at.
- m. Was concerned to hear that the presentation was the top possibility that might not even be financially feasible.

- n. Is there a middleground where Trek stays involved in the project but the building is able to be preserved somehow?
- o. We'll send out follow-up info to attendees.

Chat Log:

Sam Spearing (he/him) to Everyone: Agenda: 1. Intro 2. Presentation from Trek Development 3. Question and Answer 4. Closed Door Discussion

Jennifer Haven to Everyone:
open "reactions" and the hand raise is under the emoji

Christina Howell to Everyone: www.bloomfieldpgh.org

Sam Spearing (he/him) to Everyone:

BDC Contact Information
Christina Howell, Executive Director
christina@bloomfieldpgh.org

Sam Spearing, Housing & Mobility Coordinator
sam@bloomfieldpgh.org

Call us at 412-681-8800

Regina Kakadelis to Everyone: The presenter mentioned that the stained glass windows and other parts of the church might be integrated into the new design. From the images presented, I don't see how they would fit in. Can you elaborate?

Michael Staresinic to Everyone: ready to ask, wish to hear from other first. Thanks! I admire Trek efforts, feel this site needs to preserve the gorgeous building in any future community development.

Rob Pfaffmann to Everyone: This is at a cross roads of 4 neighborhoods...Is this project going thru BCI too?

Nick Courage to Everyone: Thanks, Ryan Morden - agree 100%!

Kevin Wagstaff to Everyone: I have to sign off now. Thank you for the feedback.

Melissa McSwigan to Everyone: Can we get the U Methodist to donate the church?

Abby Rae LaCombe to Everyone: How is affordable being defined?

Abby Rae LaCombe to Everyone: 100% Jennifer.

Rob Pfaffmann to Everyone: The City needs to lead with URA City to develop an innovative TDR or other trade to get Ross out of the deal. Used to happen with Buncher all the time.

Deborah Gross to Everyone: I am still here!

Ryan Morden to Everyone: Well said, Jennifer

Melissa McSwigan to Everyone: Ditto! Thank you Jennifer for articulating all that!!

Walter Haim to Everyone: My gut reaction is that the program being proposed in this redevelopment (dense mixed income housing with commercial and community space) is ideal and greatly needed in our city. Understanding that there would be iterations ahead of PHFA submissions and then the actual design, this escape draft is a decent start for the architectural design. I would support the special exception for height beyond the current proposal. Does a likely UMC denominational schism play into any economic strategy?

Rob Pfaffmann to Everyone: Comment: Like the Community Land Trust, a new Financial “Toolbox” needs to be rethought...As always we are caught reacting not anticipating...Some sort of TDR for Historic Preservation...The city traded with Buncher for decades to get the value out and save a riverfront...Thanks Trek for the try!

Jennifer Haven to Everyone: Bill, how about the corner of graham and Baum? at the Keller Williams site?

Abby Rae LaCombe to Everyone: 75% of how many units? I'm sorry if I missed that.

Sam Spearing (he/him) to Everyone: I think roughly 46

Abby Rae LaCombe to Everyone: Thanks, Sam.

Janine Jelks-Seale to Everyone: Might non-commercial ‘open to the public’ neighborhood spaces have been considered when considering alternative land use for this property? The proposed plan privatizes the structure (as well as limits any artifacts that would be maintained in a new construction)?

Abby Rae LaCombe to Everyone:Yep.

Melissa McSwigan to Everyone: If the United Methodist Church isn't willing to donate the property outright, we can find foundation funding to make it a true, public community space and green space!

Phillip Wu to Everyone:Food 21 may be someone to reach out to for workforce development. They have a program upcoming at the historic Larimer School

Phillip Wu to Everyone: <https://www.food21.org/>

Janine Jelks-Seale to Everyone: For Trek: how might the proposed project create value? enhance lives? and strengthen communities?

Janine Jelks-Seale to Everyone: Goal: Keep the church standing

Jennifer Haven to Everyone: i was feeding my dog. I'm sorry thank you!

Amy Fisher to Everyone: Not surprised. :/

Walter Haim to Everyone: UMC is supposed to have a general conference in 2022. The breakaway denomination may leave before that. No idea how that would fall locally.

Amy Fisher to Everyone: This was helpful and great comments ~ thank you for hosting!

Abby Rae LaCombe to Everyone: Thank you!

Sam Spearing (he/him) to Everyone: We're no longer live on Facebook!

Brian Bevan to Everyone: Is the video of this meeting made available?

Walter Haim to Everyone: It's a very complex contradiction - wanting to support both this type of development and preservation! - Thinking about another recent BDC public process on 4808 Baum (car wash proposed), I would love to see Trek do their thing on that site. Also noting that the current entity who has site control and most power for preservation is not here in this community process.

Maura Bainbridge to Everyone: Totally agree with you, Walt- let's have it all! affordable housing instead of car washes, historic preservation where the community wants it, and public spaces!

Abby Rae LaCombe to Everyone: It is really hard... 30 units at or below 60% is impactful. But the rendering, imo, is really unattractive when compared to the aesthetic value of the church.

Nahom Beyene to Everyone: I would like to see if BDC could aggregate the ideas from residents on what they would like to see in the space....Then do a "service fair" to identify who has the talent/capacity to deliver on those services....with some collaboration, it might be possible to do a mashup for two or more servicesand maybe an emerging church group too?

Abby Rae LaCombe to Everyone: The rendering we saw did not look like an effort to protect the Church.

Nahom Beyene to Everyone: oh right, that should be enough to work towards...the ideas/needs remaining unmet

Lindsay Patross to Everyone: I believe that the Union Project was started by some of the students involved in PULSE.

Sam Spearing (he/him) to Everyone: It was Lindsay (I did PULSE. Historically they were affiliated with the Mennonite church)

Janine Jelks-Seale to Everyone: Might projects that stimulate economic activity be prioritized over projects that are paying a premium for locations in markets that are already strong? Or prioritize new construction projects in under-invested neighborhood sections as opposed to advancing projects in neighborhood sections that have received high levels of investment? Might BGC do some match-making with Trek and other property owners to "find another corner" for the project that they proposed so affordable housing opportunity is not lost?

Melissa McSwigan to Everyone: We'll be demolishing all those structures that were slapped up in 20-40 years! Let's embrace the environmental benefits of reuse too!

Walter Haim to Everyone: Developers are allergic to the cost of brick veneer right now... (Saying how that is how it is, not characterizing it either way)

Michael Staresinic to Everyone: don't give up

Michael Staresinic to Everyone: more beautiful buildings will never be built - concurring with Melissas's point

Sam Spearing (he/him) to Everyone: Take our survey as well!
<https://forms.gle/KSR6TytQrr4BzTnFA>

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Christina Howell, Executive Director
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Lindsay Patross to Everyone: Thanks for hosting/organizing the meeting!