

6th Ward Block Watch & Community Meeting on Holy Family
Meeting Notes
11.20.2018, 6:30-8 p.m., St. Mary's Lyceum

Approximately 50 people in attendance.

Dave Breingan from Lawrenceville United and Matt Galluzzo from Lawrenceville Corporation provided a presentation about LU and LC's community process. Holy Family is not currently going through any public processes, this is an initial meeting to vet early stage plans for the site. Future meetings will get into more specifics as the project approached the Zoning Board or Planning Commission.

Presentation by Project Team: E Property and Development with Indovina Architects

Emeka Onwugbenu: I am the principal of E Properties, the office is on Butler Street. We have been in business for ten years. May 2012 was the first presentation, I felt like a politician there were so many people at the meeting. I'm not running for office so I didn't know what was going on. The idea at the time was to take the church, rectory, and turn it into 80 units. We went through with different groups with Matt and Lauren. Going through the plans to try to modify the plans to make sense for everyone. The hearing was October of 2012 with support from LC and LU, there were neighbors who took time off of work to support the project. Going from a big room of strong opposition to support was great. We had some opposition, but the final hearing was 70 units with parking spaces. Next up, there was an appeal to the zoning hearing. That put a huge stop on the project. That was a crushing moment based on what we went through. To show up there with strong support and to have appeals was crushing. The matter was not settled until three years later. I will not divulge what happened, I had to sign something to keep confidential. The original plans and project did not work after 3yrs in a legal process. When we looked at the project in 2016 we could not make it work any longer based on the original plans. I thought that maybe we can call other people to see if they could make it work since I could not make it work. We did not want to demolish initially, we wanted to find a buyer. All of this time, there were break-ins, and insurance costs, and generally kids finding a way to get inside. Unless we board up the whole school section which would look bad for the community, there is no way to keep people out. We engaged Keller Williams to help sell the site, the group that wanted the purchase, they went around Keller Williams and talked to me directly, knocked on the door, and told me I had to tear it down. I called some neighbors, the first call was to the neighbor who opposed and he was favorable. I called LU and LC they said no don't tear it down. I called Lawrenceville Historical Society and they were indifferent about the demolition of the building. I was at a happy hour and I saw the mayor of Pittsburgh tweeting about the property, I called LU and LC and told them we would remit the demolition request. I didn't want to fight or butt heads anymore. First and foremost the church must be kept up, second how do we maintain the site moving forward (snow shoveling etc..etc..), thirdly how do we move through this process to come up with an agreement that captures the essence. I am not here with a variance request or a specific asks. This is an opportunity to do something different. I can look at the past and get angry but all that matters is what happens moving forward. We bought in folks from Indovna Architects and we have some ideas. This is what we would like to see, want to hear from you what do you want to see? Back then 70 units seemed like a lot, but now, it's a small amount with all the other development in the neighborhood. Now we have this site, we are responsible for developing it, I have been doing work for a whole decade. I am here, this is not fly by night. I ask that people keep an

open mind, we are going to take a recommendation and suggestions and create a good project. The idea for today is to have a conversation

Question from resident: Why isn't the 57 units doable anymore?

- **Emeka:** I will just say the three years we spent in court circling the matter lowered the value. After talking to other developers they were telling me it just doesn't work. The local guys have told me the plan and zoning the way we have proposed doesn't work.

Presentation from architects -- Rob Indovina and Indovina Associates: We are here to take a fresh look at the site. Everything that happened before, we were not involved in any of that. A lot of changed as to what makes sense in Lawrenceville. From an urban planning standpoint and contemporarily what works here. The original drawing had 57 units and parking using the church and school. When Emeka came forward he said the "the church and the school have to stay" what else do we want to do with the site. The site is in single family zoning district, so we will ask for a new non-confirming use, it will go through the zoning board in any case. One of the things that struck us immediately was the parking lot and our first proposal reacts to that. This is a very dense neighborhood and as you see there are corners and passages, every inch of Lawrenceville is owned physically or emotionally by someone. One of the only places that isn't owned by anyone is this place. We want to give this project to Lawrenceville and give ownership to people that live there. 44th street parking lot is the gap tooth of the neighborhood. The parking lot we will introduce some additional building alongside some parking, it will be advantageous to have something in that space. This idea comes from Indovina not Emeka and we really think it is necessary to add a structure to that corner. Essentially what we will try to do on the site is maximize parking as much as we can. We will have two way parking and one way parking that will give us around 65 spaces. We think it's important to have 1-to-1 parking on the site for each unit. What we are suggesting is to do a structure on 44th street that continues the urban massing and structure of the homes across the street. We would do units inside the church, we would not change the front but would change the side. What we were also talking about is maybe there is a way to add some sort of structure above the school to both kind of add a new element of architecture to the existing school building. What it does most importantly is screen and shield the parking so it doesn't look like a parking lot like it looks like today. That is to close it off and provide a courtyard feel and to make sure it is not only a parking lot. The setback is we would line the building up with the existing structures and to compliment the structures on Summit St. How do we make the 65 parking spaces land softly in the neighborhood? The structure built above the church is to create townhouses or family homes. We would consider adding private terraces and something more design based to make more interesting or desirable units. The unique thing about the site is that it slopes into two angles. The new structure would mirror existing houses across the street.

Q&A + Comments Period

Question: Can you define structure, does that mean livable area?

- **Indovina:** Yes, that may mean townhouses or multi-family building. Structure means a scaled mass that would allow for gentle street views and livable areas. We naturally don't know how the building lays out, the important thing is doing design that are gentle to the church and the neighborhood.

Brian Taylor: I understand from a design and architectural standpoint on why you want to put new mass. Would this be public or private parking? As the neighborhood has reclaimed the lot as public parking, will the spaces be for the development only? Will we lose street parking?

- **Emeka:** The plan is that every unit has an assigned parking space. These will be for sale units, so there will likely be a condo or an HOA that would be responsible for maintaining common grounds, so that would complicate any shared space with the public, so we would have to think through that.

Question: The entrance into the parking lot and courtyard is shown, what is the exit?

- One of the lots has an entrance and exit. With 40 some spaces that would be residential not commercial, the traffic wouldn't increase.

Gavin Benjamin: I don't drive, so I don't care about parking. What I want to know is, what are the amenities? Affordable housing and artist housing? All of the amenities included in the project, will the community be able to use? New York does this where the amenities—like a gym—are available for the community use and not just the residents who live there.

- **Emeka:** Affordable housing is something we've heard from LU and LC that the community cares about, so we do plan to include that as part of this project.

Owen Lampe: You talking about 65 units? Do you know how many units would be in each building? To give us an idea of the scale?

- We have not, we are looking for about 60-65 units on the site. The parking will be a match 1-to-1, but we haven't gotten that far into breaking it out by each structure.

Question: What happens when people set the building on fire? The situation is dangerous right now, what is going on about that! Board it up! Do not allow anyone in there. Or you won't have this beautiful site.

- **Emeka:** Make the calls like the officer said. For us, how do we make the site secure and how fast do we get to construction? If it's vacant for another 5-6 years there will be more issues.

Comment: Board it up, do not allow anybody in there. I'd rather see the boards then go to bed at night then see somebody lighting up a pipe and see the place on fire.

Nancy Gippert: Most of the new residential development has been quite small and not for families. Are these going to be small bedroom units?

- **Emeka:** At McCleary, the bulk of the project was 2-3 bedrooms and we're looking at something similar here.

Question: Is this rental or owner?

- **Emeka:** all owner.

Haley: The structure above looks like it will be set back. Will it be set back or straight up? The easement on the summit, will the parking entrance will be on the corner of the school? Are dumpsters going to be on the interior of the building?

- **Emeka:** The intent is not to slap on a third and 4th floor, we want to put something that compliments the pre-existing structure. With dumpsters we have not planned that far into the

project. Does this feel right? If so let's move forward. I did not want to come in here showing a finished structure. I have been down this path before. But does this feel right for everyone?

Question: I commend your tenacity and sticking with this. I also want to second the notion that squatters and who knows what goes on in there happening. In general as a community we need to see that development and moving forward is the solution. Boarding it up is not the answer....we have to move forward. Unless we move forward there will be people doing heroin inside. The school, is it historical, is there a reason why it must be kept?

- **Emeka:** The school provides a solution around affordability, and it's better for the environment and sustainability not to demolish it all. Now if we add a portion of design on it that would work. Thank you for your comment, I appreciate it.

Questions: When we did a proposal way back, there was an idea to do another floor on top of the school and the main issue was blocking sunlight to our home on Summit Street.

- The plan then was to just put another building on top of the building. If we set it back well enough, when you do a sun study, the impact on 44th is minimal.

Questions: What we see lately, is when buildings are renovated or torn down, they are not keeping with other houses in the neighborhood. When you said the building will mirror the older houses will you make sure they are keeping in design with the other houses? And will you dedicate to keeping some green spaces? Can you not build on all of it and keep some community green space?

- **Indovina:** The design has to fit architecturally. When it comes to any community space, the condo association will balance that. Not knowing what the design is yet, it's too different thing to historically replicate what happens and I don't believe in replicating what was built 100 years ago but mirror architectural details and it doesn't have to be a historical replica, but taking inspiration from community and existing architecture. By setting the building back on the corner of Summit and 44th I'm hoping that there would be a tree or a place that has a park or bench that has some sort of urban moment where people can meet and such and we want to dedicate the architecture towards that.

Comment: So 65 unit total and that includes that new building? How many units? What she says, if you are saying you are in line with the church and personally I'm not attached to the historical stuff of the school, and doing something above would be nice. The parish has never maintained anything, if people would own that then that would be something that enhances that area. But if you want to tear that school down, we would not have a problem.

Question: To address the board it up, can you board it up to as high as people can reach. Boarding it up is not going to have anything pretty, but you would have lots less resistance. The school is ugly.

Question: With LC and LU talking about low income housing family seniors, access, how does this fit into the overall view from all the development happening. How does this fit into the chess board?

- **Lawrenceville United:** We have been working on IZ for the last three months. This came out of the affordable housing task force. The project here that is being proposed would meet the threshold if/once IZ is passed by city council.
- **LC:** And Emeka is aware that this is an priority of LC and LU alongside things of 21st century construction and sustainability.

Comment: I think yall are here to build good will and show some plans that will probably change. The best you can do at the moment is make sure it's secure. It needs to be boarded up. I know it's a pain man, there is garbage and syringes. We start this meeting with the police man talking about crime and then this building is full of crime. There are a few nooks in there where people go in and do whatever they want to do. There will be people upset and I renovated the place. We want you to renovate the place and make money but you need to have somebody going by there every day.

Jenna Date: Thank you for being here and thank you for being here with the community and having an open concept. I wish every developer did this. I think also that I would really love to see for the folks that live across the street is to take care of the height and do what zoning allows you to do and not go above that. I would highly recommend keeping it under two stories. Rooftop decks are awesome if you live there and not awesome if you don't because people stare down at you.

Question: What zoning variances are you thinking of going for?

- As we get into the plan we will have more of an idea of what we are looking to achieve. And we will bring this to community process and meetings as we move forward. We know that there will at least be a special exception for the use.