

Community Meeting on Proposed Abbey Expansion
Meeting Notes
8/5/2019, 6:30 p.m., Stephen Foster Community Center

Dave Breingan from Lawrenceville United and Matt Galluzzo from Lawrenceville Corporation introduced the Lawrenceville Community Process and the project for tonight: proposed expansion at the Abbey. Two special exceptions and one variance for 4635 Butler Street. Same owner is also seeking a special exception 4617 Butler Street for a rear setback. Ground rules were reviewed.

Background: Community meeting on 3/19/13, zoning hearing on 5/9/13. We supported project with the conditions that helped to mitigate the negative impact. These conditions were part of the zoning approval (see slide).

Presentation from the Abbey: My name is Eric Kukura, one of the owners of the Abbey. Management team and architects are all here to help chime in too. I wanted to make sure they knew what the neighborhood was saying first hand. I put together this map of the parcels of land. Parcel 1: we have picnic tables and it's a dog friendly area. No plans to do anything with that. Parcel 2 is the Abbey itself. Green area to the left is proposed expansion. Parcel 3 is parking lot. Parcel 4 is vacant building that has nothing to do with the abbey but I am one of the owners in that partnership. We'll cover some different areas: Previous zoning requests. The Abbey as an employer. And our future plans. The Abbey was part of the Ewalt estate; it used to be the wayne brass and bronze foundry. All of the other buildings around it were demolished. Converted from industrial use to funeral home/gathering space in the early 1930s. In 2014, we bought the building. The funeral home stopped 2008-2010. We closed on the property in 2014. Added an outdoor patio. Legal occupancy for existing parking lot. The funeral home had the parking lot there. They had no occupancy permit for that lot. We converted that lot to a 14 space parking lot and screened and landscaped it with 9 trees. We had Lamar Advertising remove their billboard and we added 21 additional street trees all around the Abbey. The issue at hand with that parking lot was not because of any parking requirement that we had; it was that the parking was not continuous to our property. It was not in the rear of the property; it was in front. Those were key things we had to deal with.

As for the Abbey as employer: we have 6 full time managers, 2 sous chef, 43 hourly employees. Full time and part time employees. Nearly half of the employees reside in the neighborhood. 18% adjacent neighborhoods.

In biz community: host meetings for neighbors like The Candle Lab and Merchant Oyster Co. Patrons use facility to conduct business on daily basis. We've hosted pop-up events with nonprofit like bike pgh, candle lab, fur kid rescue. We had Abbeyfest which hosted local artists and antiques. Many local neighborhood biz use the space for meeting vendors. We also got a sign painter to put up neighborhood business signage as art. We've done things to try and encourage people that visit Lawrenceville that there's more to business district than restaurants. I had a local

sign painter do a ghost signs for Wagner's, Wildcard, Chantal's Cheese Shop and Row House. To get people to think that there's more to this neighborhood. Chantal cheese shop used to work for me for a server. She used money she made at the Abbey to open her own business. We're donating the circus fence we're using for our pop-up patio to the Ronald McDonald House.

As for A Summer Place: it will be a covered patio for primarily coffeehouse customers, but also licensed for alcohol. Look to possibly do bar outside, but with food component. We would have wood fired oven for pizza, gyros, hamburgers, etc. That space would have occupancy of about 30-40 people. Less if we added bar area. As far as design goes, I like things to be a little nicer, I am not 100% appreciative of corrugated steel and paneled contemporary architecture, I like continuous with the rest of the Abbey. We would like to be able to put greenery behind the railing so it hands down the side.

When we opened the Abbey, it was our goal to do more landscaping. We had a first set of trees and got the wind knocked out of us by having to replace them all. Perhaps with this we can do more greenery. A side view you see circus fence. This would be something more like arches, 2 columns, something substantial. You would feel like you were really somewhere, not like a chain restaurant. If you came there, you had an adventure, it wasn't just the same old thing. In the back of the building you do one story addition with cellar for storage. The building next – the Abbey has a lot of stuff stored in it and with that being developed we need storage.

As for 4617 Butler Street, Lola 1 LLC is the current owner; that partnership bought it. We are looking to move the property line over 12 feet so that the Abbey parking lot loses 3 parking places and they get relocated down and around the back underneath the addition we're doing. The idea in the renovation was to create a more 1930, 40, 50 look like retro storefront. If you recall in the 1970s, you would see cinderblock you could see through, like in hotels. The side of the building we would do would have opening French or garage doors. 10 foot by 50 foot patio. 4617 first floor restaurant speculative floor plan. The kitchen would be more toward the front so you would walk in seeing something made. Cellar and rear parking places. The building itself under 2400 square feet and it does not have parking requirement. We would be looking to add 3 spaces back there regardless. The city said something about a handicapped space, so 2 if we need that. It's a little bit gray to us right now. Second floor of building would be residential, maybe retail or artist space. The addition is roughly 33 feet wide and 25 feet deep, one story with the parking underneath.

Q and A:

Laurie, 45th Street: With removing your existing parking now, you're essentially taking away 3 but putting three back? What about the other parking on the side?

Eric: We already had approval from zoning on removing 5 from the right side of the Abbey. It was over the counter.

Laurie: One of the things we hear a lot of we don't have any parking. And now you're taking away parking. And I do believe there are some people who disagree with removing parking period.

Eric: You're entitled to that and I can tell you that we still exceed the parking requirement for code. We bought the Abbey, and we just used it. Times change, sentiments change, we hear a lot of different things from residents and customers.

Laurie: I don't know what that means.

Eric: times change, business model evolves, we hear things like "hey you don't need parking, everything is Uber." And then you hear that some people need parking. I believe you should follow the building code. I have far exceeded the parking requirement through its history and the actual occupancy requirement for Abbey is 11, with an off set of 1 to 1 ratio at 30%, and at the end of the day it's 9 spaces required, so with the lot we end up with 11 spaces with bike racks. We are not taking it down to the lowest denominator. We also have integral parking in building. We exceed the code at this point.

Owen Lampe: So you're moving 3 from the back to the new building, but you're adding 40 more people on other side of Abbey?

Eric: We don't have a number for new restaurant, so not sure the capacity there. The patio could be at maximum another 40 people, but less if we add a bar.

Owen: So you have another 80-100 people now?

Matt: Let it be known that it wasn't a zoning requirement to have the five spaces where the pop-up patio is now.

Owen: So we're down 5, but we're adding 80-100 more people, already people are parking in the cross walk down there. I understand you're trying to fit within guidelines, etc, and there are problems with zoning code, no doubt, but you're a developer and we've heard developers promise things item for item and now you just took out 5 spaces, and it does put stress on the community, like yeah right another developer going back on what they said. Also, what's the deal with the bohemian rhapsody lyrics?

Eric: Haha, come have a beer and we'll talk it over.

Keisha Patterson: Can we review the site plan? Are those spots going to be for employees? As a woman I would never go to the alley and park. As a customer, I probably wouldn't park there.

Abbey Staff: There's a stair tower. We walk everyone out as employees. We would walk customers out too, if they asked.

Keisha: I think it's difficult to propose that under building parking is for public use, which might get you out of the handicapped space thing. I'm kind of curious neighborhood wise why there aren't more agreements with vast paved parking lots.

Eric: we have had dialogue with them and busy beaver, and there are at times windows of opportunity, and times with not. The temple has events. The busy beaver is a little gun shy. I will share with you, I would love to have 100 spaces. You haven't lived until you've shoveled the snow out of a lot and then have someone from la gourmandine park in your lot. It happens a lot.

Chris: There's a sign in the lot that says Abbey customers but we haven't enforced that.

Eric: Oh, we have.

Chris: We don't have an attendant. We would be the enemy then. There does need to be more parking and plan but we can't bear the burden of everyone else's parking problem. Sometimes people park there. There are people that don't know how to park and park in our lot. We have been the catch all for this area and I just don't want to be that anymore. I've been sued for someone getting hurt. And they're not even a customer.

Keisha: that area with 3 is that striped?

Eric: it is, striped existing parking lot

Rick, Hatfield Street: Façade materials for both of efforts?

Eric: it would be a pavilion, it shouldn't be shaded gray (in the drawing), it would be open. Contained with a primary entrance. We would be able to secure that area from inside. Like the other patio on the other side. The materials we'd look at: columns themselves are the same as current patio and it is a pulverized marble and a proxy. Pretty solid and hard. Hollow columns. Cast in a centrally cast.

Rick: just as substantial looking?

Eric: Yeah, stucco or stone on upper area. Just as cool as the Abbey.

Rick: breeze block? That threw me off. Modular stuff but makes patterns. Like cinderblocks with patterned paint. Seems out of context with neighborhood.

Eric: there's actually breeze block on this building! My goal from an architectural standpoint was to tell a story with design of the building. Built at turn of the century, in 1950s, someone did modernization that we look back at today. Maybe again it was modernized with breezeblock again, etc. 2 years ago or 3 I might have agreed with you and then I had a "come to Jesus" moment with it and I thought oh maybe you could have fun and it acts as a screen rather than a wall.

Rick: if it succeeds it's playful. Diners, etc. it's based on how you do it.

Keisha: Would breezeblock include greenery?

Eric: no signage, that probably is what detracts it from popping. I would have some type of cool sign in the center of breezeblock that would be name of the restaurant, Maybe we'd do a neon pinstripe to give it a 30s, 40s, 50s look.

Nancy: So there will be a restaurant. Will it be a separate entity or like an Abbey annex?

Eric: I've had so many people look at space. I do have an agent that calls me every now and again. My staff will tell you, I've said at times, we should have a bastard step brother over there. Maybe something that would be a little different but I'm not 100% sure. If the right person came along, and keep in mind this is for a different partnership, I think we would be happy to rent to them. We had a meeting prior, we turned down a lot of people, I turned down an after hours club, they said they'd pay for everything but I don't want to be a developer, I am at Abbey every single day. It is my place. I never see my front yard in the daytime. I don't want to be a bad neighbor. I am there every single day. I like when things are nice. I don't want to be a problem business or have one go in.

Ann Landesburg, Hatfield: I do think your business is a good neighbor. We're all concerned about parking. But I also hear what you're saying. Having parking lot in Lawrenceville is hard. One thing I'm concerned about is the proliferation of places where you drink. You all can take a short ride to south side and see what it looks like. It's a one-way trip to hell and we don't want that here. Your place is just about the farthest thing from that but the plans for the circus tent in there are concerning. We don't want another Walter's. Another drunken play pen for people.

Abbey Team: We don't want that either.

Eric: I want to apologize to you if you thought we wanted to go that way. There are times where I'll say hey it's nice to attract more customers, all you have to do is put the games they have. I will not do it. I don't want free for all. I don't want chaotic mess out there.

Melissa, Bar Manager of the Abbey: I live on leech street, the addition that we're talking about on that other side, we already had lounge area on other patio side, and

just because of running our business, we had confusion with the space and where people could be, etc. We decided we should move that lounge and that's what started this idea. Yes, eventually we would like to have a separate bar. We have alcohol in our coffeehouse and it's a mature grown up responsible way. When we took out the sofa lounge, we removed some of seating on our current patio, there aren't as many tables over there as there used to be. The amount of people you could serve changed. We don't even have enough seats to fill the full patio. We've shifted it over to the other side. We want to have the fountains out there. It's more about having a nice glass of wine. A latte and a scone. Maybe have a pizza. We have a wide range of ages and we like it that way. When you start to have giant jenga and cornhole, it's fun, but it's not the environment we're trying to cultivate.

Comment: I like Walter's but one is enough.

Melissa: I don't dislike them, not at all, I just don't want to be them, that's something different entirely.

John: So it's called Summer Place? Don't have any cold weather stuff? Are you going to close it off or do space heating? Hopefully not a military tent.

Eric: Our current tents are leased, by the way. We would use a summer place when we could. Probably not every day in January and February obviously but if it's randomly nice, sure. Right now the idea would be spring summer fall, three season kinda place.

Owen: would arches have a plastic barrier or be open?

Eric: no plans to do that right now, but we have drop panels on patio, nice space for a while, but you kind of feel like it's a strange camping vibe. I don't know that I would go that route.

Dave: any fencing on this side?

Eric: I want to make it so one could visit our patio and leave with things. There will be something. No garage door.

Laurie: summer place is pop up?

Eric: the summer place is on the right side. Right now it's temp pop-up, liquor license is there until sept 30. We are going to reapply for same area. Our license does not go beyond that fence, does not cover area where you see picnic tables and gravel.

Laurie: I actually like Walter's, but you shouldn't be anything other than yourself. It's not a good look for the group (referring to community in general) to slam a great organization.

Melissa: I was not slamming just to be clear. There's room for everyone!

Laurie: I love the diversity of all the business. That makes our neighborhood great.

Eric: Foot traffic is great for all. We have a good relationship with Walters, they come for coffee all the time, we borrow things and help each other, we businesses do rely on each other quite a lot.

Nancy: One of the good things for Walter's is that it is also a playground for kids and families go there and have a good time and play corn hole.

Keisha: I'm actually happy there's a reduction in parking, fewer people bring cars that way. Starts to solve the parking problem. When there's only 9, I'm gonna have to park around the block and when people see that they start to carpool or uber or whatever. It's not all bad.

Dave: OK, we will now excuse the team from The Abbey. Thank you all for being here. We will now go to the closed-door part of the meeting.

Closed Door:

Any additional comments?

Carl, 184 Home Street: We are the Abbey's neighbor. I enjoy being their neighbor, overall a good business, once a while we get the bottles taken out late or something, but not often. Parking on Home is always a problem. We both work from home but I do hear from everyone that it's a hassle. I agree that it's not their responsibility to solve that problem alone. If it happens, it's event at teamsters, etc.

Dave: Better use of existing parking lots is something we've advocated for. The challenge that we've run into finding compatible uses because if you own property, you don't want to share it when you need it. Finding uses that compliment each other, etc. the insurance issue is also the main barrier for Teamster's and Busy Beaver. We've tried with other businesses as well.

Carl: As resident, we've approached busy beaver and we make temporary use of them sometimes if there's an event and we need it.

Matt: We use it for cookie tour, etc. Compatible uses cost with managing it and things of that nature.

Resident: What's being proposed for the corner property?

Dave: The picnic table area is fenced off. They're applying for accessory use to use the space that's part of the Abbey parcel. Eric is part owner of both parcels and they

lease to the Abbey. They are not prepared to speak fully on the tenant for that space, yet.

Matt: The apartment building is in back and what we determined is they want to do some vertical development on that site at some point. They got vacant lot and asking for permission for this and incrementally move this over and have giant lot. They quickly dispelled that as option. They want to keep apartment building and maybe do new construction at some other point.

That space is a different ownership group, though.

What they're seeking next week is for the lot as an accessory use up to 55% of their space. That's the main thing triggering their zoning board hearing.

Alyssa: My thing with parking is even though they're exceeding zoning, what they promised in a previous community process and now it's reduced. That's a bad neighbor vibes, so was throwing La Gourmandine under the bus.

Dave: Back in 2013: they were sharing 15 spots here, 4 in the back and these 5 spaces. That does exceed what they're required to provide but that was a consideration for us supporting their restaurant general special exception. Their commitment to that parking was tied to that support. I think he is right in that zoning department is not requiring that they are provided so it was over the counter process that took that away. However, I will say that the fact that they're seeking accessory use and not deemed an expansion means it's not going into their parking calculation.

Laurie: The wording and request makes it so there aren't parking requirements for 4617.

Keisha: Just because it's exterior space?

Dave: Zoning has admitted it's weird gray area. The whole area has been accessory use.

Matt: I do want to honor what you said, Alyssa. When we went through this, we had that list of 7 things that were included in zoning, parking wasn't something that we needed them to commit to then. They weren't asking for relief from that. It wasn't formalized in zoning approval. It's important to say is this still as important as it was. Obviously he mentioned Uber, but hey look this is an incremental whittling away of a thing we valued and we still need for honor for discussion purposes.

Owen: It definitely needs to be part of the discussion. And now property line is being moved so it takes away 3 spaces?

Matt: Also a question about whether they will squeeze 3 spaces on Butler Street Side, the architects can probably talk about that more but I'm not sure if they'll be able to squeeze that. Up toward butler next to new patio.

Rick: One commendable thing that they did is they did a fine job with parking lot and the way it's painted. You sort of don't notice that it's there. It's artful and a good model. It was done well.

Keisha: So the current bike parking is 4 racks? What is bike requirement?

Matt: It's not a requirement, it's an incentive, you can get 30% parking reduction if you can get bike parking. If you need ten spaces, you've met parking requirements.

Dave: Which is why the zoning board only requires 9.

Question: We're talking about this but what leverage do community members have? Well you're massively overdeveloping your extra space and if you want to do that put back parking spaces and take dog area and turn it into parking!

Dave: The reason why this process is triggered is because they need to get through zoning. The variance threshold, the duty is on the applicant; the applicant has to make a case for why they should be an exception for the zoning code, so yes we have leverage. The hearing is next Thursday and anyone can attend that and express your views. Our process is we take what you guys say and oftentimes we put some of those conditions in the zoning decision.

Owen: Do they have to show hardship?

Matt: If go to the variances, one of them is not that big of a deal, the setback off of Eden way is not one they will likely find problem with. Other one is more significant. 55% total. The residential computability setback, good there, restaurant general is common, accessory use is going to be the wildcard here.

Keisha: Where is 15 ft coming from?

Dave: that's the rear setback. This is residential here, and you're supposed to have 15 feet of setback. Because they're building out this part. That's the one relief they're seeking on that one and context has other building to the lot line. It's an archaic piece of our zoning code.

There is leverage, Ann. Zoning board looks at impact to neighbors, what the use is, are they going to have a ton of events and fundraisers or is this a sitting area? I wasn't really clear on that and they're figuring that out but those are two different

kinds of uses. They did not get temporary occupancy for any of those events. And if we go to the 7 conditions of the of agreement, this is a part of the occupancy permit. They've had amplified sound for sure, which is a lack of compliance. We've not enforced these things because no one has had issues with it or complained about it.

Question: The lot next to our house across from the Abbey that is for sale also has a hearing, depending on that will their plans change?

No. Their plans are not contingent on that.

A preview of Thursday is it houses a historic home. The developer is demolishing it and building 5 new townhomes. With parking right next to it it's a small alley how would that play out. You'd get people backing up into their houses, etc.

Dave: So what do folks think? What do you want us to do?

Keisha: I mostly like it, is there a way we can ask them to close off part of side to reduce noise? We should ask for the 15 ft setback. I wanna see what that fencing and barrier looks like. It doesn't need to be wall, but just a little sound barrier.

Dave: For those events in that space, have you noticed any noise?

Carl: nothing really.

Owen: Does this in any way create a slippery slope? If you let them get to 55%?

Dave: That slope has started with other businesses.

Laurie: The removal of parking is setting us back. Since they have an agreement they have to follow. I love the Abbey and think they do a good job, but if someone promises something, I don't want it to be something they can toss away and say hey maybe things are changing.

Dave: They let us know it was happening. They told us. Frankly they felt frustrated by other projects in the area who were coming in with less parking than they did.

Matt: We supported Lawrence Hall and they opposed that. LC supported that, LU didn't take position. There was nowhere to find parking but the owners went above and beyond to try and find a solution there for sure.

Owen: I would think the Abbey would recognize the economic advantage of having parking.

Comment: That's why I go there.

Owen: He's undermined his own advantage.

Matt: With Lawrence Hall, we worked to mitigate impact, we required things like changing room and lockers and showers for employees who bike, perks program, etc. Our rationale for that project was that it was going to employ more people, fix up a really rough streetscape element. Parking wasn't going to be a cheap determinant for a project.

Laurie: What are you going forward with?

Dave: We'll take comments from night and go back and think about what the strategy is but I think we would support but have a conversation with them about mitigating the impact overall.

Dave: I think the previous commitments are important. Event space until 2 am is very different than the impact of extra coffeehouse seating. Probably some conditions around hours.

Matt: A tie on occupancy: 40, but not tied down. We can try to get them to voluntarily commit to occupancy number. To your point, it's a good neighbor thing to agree to these conditions.

Nancy: They're adding more people and giving less parking.

Owen: And going against what they agreed to.

Matt: I think there is a difference in having 6 years of operating a business. Things change and you have to operate differently as you mature.

Alyssa: I like how it is without all the stuff. You go at night and it's quiet. It's calming and nice and they're trying to add exciting stuff but the Abbey had a vibe and now I don't know where they're going?

The exciting event stuff is attached to pop-up or not? He was a little weird with that, too. They haven't figured it out yet; they did pop-up to experiment. What's there now is really garish. When they opened it seemed like they couldn't pick a business plan, are they adding another option?

A quiet place is more important. We lived through transition on south side. It did start out with nice places and things like that, keeping out things that generate noise at late hours is always a proper. You should keep the negotiations you made the first time.

Owen: those would still apply...clarify them.

Dave: Keep the side tied down is definitely one. The zoning hearing is 8/15. Thanks everyone!