



September 16, 2019

Attn: Zoning Board of Adjustments
City of Pittsburgh, Department of City Planning
200 Ross St., Fourth Floor
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Re: Zone Case 193 of 2019 – 318 52nd Street - VFW Post #214

On behalf of Lawrenceville United, we write today in support of the relief sought by the VFW Post #214 (318 52nd Street) for Zone Case 193 of 2019. Lawrenceville United's (LU) mission is to improve and protect the quality of life for all Lawrenceville residents. LU and Lawrenceville Corporation (LC) have created a community process that provides a forum where proposed development projects can be discussed, vetted, and measured against community plans and priorities. This process enables the local community organizations to identify priority issues that will help guide conversations with the developer through the planning and construction processes.

LU and LC conducted an open and public community meeting on 8/13/2019 with representatives from the VFW Post #214 and Matt Diersen with Midland Pittsburgh. Notes from that community meeting are attached.

LU is pleased to support this expansion of VFW Post #214, which is a long-standing and valuable presence in the Lawrenceville neighborhood—not only for veterans, active service-members, and their families, but also for the broader community. We appreciate their participation in our community process, and their efforts to mitigate the impact of their expansion by creating a shared use agreement for parking with Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania and by committing to continue their track record as a very responsible neighbor to adjacent residents.

We hope the Zoning Board of Adjustments will accept this letter as part of their consideration in issuing a decision. We regret that we were unable to attend their zoning hearing in person, and apologize for the delay in submitting this letter.

Sincerely,

Dave Breingan, Executive Director
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10th Ward Block Watch & Community Meeting on 318 52nd Street (VFW Post #214)
Meeting Notes
8/13/2019, 6:30 p.m., Goodwill Workforce Development Center

15 people in attendance.

Meeting began at 6:32 p.m.

1. Public Safety Update – Pittsburgh Police Zone 2 – Sgt Lance Hoyson – 2 months worth of statistics. Last month was a good month. Only 1 burglary: MO is pretty common to what we're seeing in Lawrenceville & Strip District – construction project was broken into and stole a bunch of tools. Typically we can find them at a pawn shop if they keep receipts and good records, will lead us to a suspect. Use caution if you own a business or are doing work on your house – lock up your house/business.

Month previous to that: residential burglary, another construction site burglarized, and a domestic violence related burglary that resulted in an arrest. Aggravated assault for a suspect kicking a police officer. One theft from auto over two months is pretty good, glad to see that declining. Make sure you continue to lock your doors. One non-fatal overdose: that's positive as well. Side note: we found a deceased woman at Hambone's – nothing more to report than what was in the news; nothing suspicious.

- Ron: Suspected drug dealing around 54th and Dresden. Sgt Hoyson: Put it through 311 with as much detail as you can. Plainclothes guys are stuck to downtown neighborhood for a while b/c of recent stabbing. What keeps drug activity in Lawrenceville is a lot of users allowing dealing to happen in their home.

2. Community Meeting on 318 52nd Street (VFW Post #214) – Dave from Lawrenceville United explained the community process and ground rules. Dave from LU introduced the project team: Steve, Mark and Dale from the VFW, and Matt Diersen from Midland Architecture.

- Matt Diersen: proposed hall will go in the vacant lot next to the existing building that fronts Carnegie Street. When the club first existed in 1937, there was a building where this expansion will go: German Salem Church. Club was operating out of a wood church building, co-existed until 1957 until the church was lost to a fire. Just an interesting historic perspective. Zoning district is R-1A-VH, single-family residential with very high density. If we were on the other side of Dresden, we wouldn't require any zoning variances because it's Local Neighborhood Commercial there and this project would likely be by-right. Looking to give VFW an event space for small gatherings, club meetings, etc., distinct from the bar area. One of the key things we had to figure out was parking – have been working on securing an off-site parking from Goodwill for the required 5 parking spots: under 1,000 feet, which is the requirement under zoning.
- Hall space will be built with new restrooms, small bar area for food and drink service. Club will become accessible by creation of a new vestibule that goes to 52nd Street. Can be used for either the bar area or the hall. Two spaces are fire separated. Site features will include bike parking: taking the 30% parking reduction. There will be a smaller yard area for reinstating a memorial area and the existing flagpole. One benefit: adding zero-step entry but also raising up the fill of the yard – currently feels very cavernous. Will be landscaped and community amenity.
- Design: new construction will have concrete masonry for the ground floor – looking for low maintenance and appropriate to existing uses. Above that seal is a fiber cement board rain screen – looks like very clean, gray panels. Vestibule entrance area will be significantly shorter

than the existing building to break up the scale. Trees and landscaping in the side yard. Fence: VFW has desire to create security, especially with the memorial there – open metal fencing, something decorative, would be nicer than the chain link that's currently there. Leaving open the possibility that it would be higher than 4' – something like 6'.

Q&A

Dave from LU: How tall is the building?

- Vestibule height is 11'. At the extreme corner height to the parapet is 15'. Roof has a pretty generous slope to make it feel a good bit shorter. Another point is that the addition will be 2' setback from where the current VFW bar is.

Taylor: If approved, when would the construction start and how long would it go on?

- Don't know for sure, but educated guesses. Club would like ASAP. Fall feels like a push at this point, so probably looking at a spring 2020 project at this point. In terms of how long, depends on who they hire. 2-3 months to start interior work. Whole lifespan would probably be 5-6, but can be longer. In terms of construction impacts on the neighbors, typically construction workers are there when neighbors aren't. Spots at Goodwill could potentially be in play.

Anthony: How long is the event space open at night?

- Steve Stefanik: I'm current Commander, been there since 1995. We typically try to get people out by midnight. I live on Carnegie Street so not going to let anyone mess up my neighborhood. Don't open by 3 p.m., usually closed by 10 p.m. Friday or Saturday are our late nights, try to close by midnight, sometimes it's a little later. We have bands in there now, by midnight we're closing up. Try not to get real loud.
- Anthony: for events, you're going to try to get people to park at Goodwill.
- Steve: Never had people complain before and we have events there now.
- Anthony: concerned about an uptick.
- Steve: Only going to be about 86 people so not a huge uptick. Might do Bingo that's 100 people. A lot of the people that frequent the club live in Lawrenceville and walk. We do wakes, we don't charge.
- Anthony: open to the neighborhood?
- Steve: PA Law is that clubs can't be open to the public, but every so often we try to do events that are open to the public – e.g. bingo.

Jim: Not only a member of the band Shot o' Soul, but a veteran and a member. My comment is that I would like to enthusiastically recommend the community to support this. Going to be great – have a lot of people coming back from Afghanistan and Iraq – this is a great place for people to get together, serves as a gathering place. Never any trouble there – there are events all the time. Parking is not really an issue. Building looks the same as when I was a little kid – this is very needed. Going to ensure that this facility is around for the community for a long time.

- Steve: William Ralph McNulty was killed in service in 1918. Leslie Park was the original site of the VFW then moved to this site. September 2nd is our 100th anniversary.

Abby: Back to parking... you said it's about 100 people, is that what your events are like now?

- Steve: Just had an event with 100 people there.
- Abby: Great, so it's not going to be a significant difference.

Dave: Bands? Sound proofing?

- Steve: never had a noise complaint. We're friendly, we invite people in.
- Matt: Way we laid out the space was intended to buffer any sound impact. Restrooms are essentially a screen against existing residential. Stage would be faced towards AOH to avoid an impact.

Abby Rae: Are you doing anything to celebrate your 100th birthday?

- Steve: DJ from 4-8 p.m. plus food and a cookout. \$10 to get in. Buy your own drinks.
- Abby Rae: I work for Councilwoman Gross and she wanted me to tell you that she's excited to see this project.

Dave: Total occupancy?

- Matt: can't have more than 100 as it's currently designed.

Meeting adjourned 7:20 p.m.