

**9<sup>th</sup> Ward Block Watch & Community Meeting on 4735 Butler St  
Meeting Notes**

September 17, 2019  
6:30 p.m., St. Mary's Lyceum

Approximately 40 people in attendance.

**1. Public Safety Update**

*Dave Breingan from Lawrenceville United (LU):* We always start with a public safety update but Zone 2 Police could not be here tonight. Crime report had two crimes for 9<sup>th</sup> Ward over last month: a burglary at a house under construction. We've been seeing a lot of this. Burglars will intentionally target construction, wait until contractors go home and steal their tools. If you're renovating or under construction, have your neighbors keep an eye out. There was also a strong-armed robbery. Strong armed robbery means some sort of use of force; can't tell you exactly what force it was but probably not weapon, just a threat of violence. Reminder that next month will be a Lawrenceville-Wide Public Safety Meeting on 10/15 at 6 p.m. at Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (279 Fisk Street). Agenda includes Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy talking about their plan for improving public parks and a presentation on 311 vs. 911.

**2. Office of Community Affairs**

*Leah Friedman (Office of Community Affairs):* For anyone who doesn't know, the Office of Community Affairs works with the Mayor's Office, we go every week to different community meetings just to give city-wide announcements and take questions and priorities from you all. Announcements:

- Garbage Olympics: City-wide competition where neighborhoods compete. Compete for fun prizes, etc. that's coming up on Saturday, 9-11 a.m. ceremony and lunch at Threadbare Cider afterwards at noon. This event is brought to us by the Clean PGH Commission. Meet at Goodwill if you want to go in Lawrenceville. We'll have bagels and coffee and stuff.
- Dolly Parton Imagination Library: Dolly Parton loves books for kids and has created a program where you can sign up any child under 5 and they will receive a free book in the mail until they turn 5. She is giving out one million books per month. I have info here. You can sign up on the form or online.
- Electronics & Hazardous Waste Drop Off: We all know by now that we can't throw our TVs or paint cans out with the regular trash. Until now, we haven't had any other place to drop them off. There is now a drop off location for these items through a vendor the city has contracted with. It's in the Strip District, half the price of the other drop off centers. It's called Electronics and Household Hazardous Waste. You can make an appointment to drop them off.
- Customer Assistance Program: they have general bill assistance through PWSA and a free lead line replacement program based on income. Different

from lead line replacement when they do public lines. They also replace private lines.

- Health Equity Study: The Allegheny County Health Department is doing a health equity study about how you perceive health in your community. This info will go toward equity indicators toward where funding goes, etc. There are paper copies but also electronic forms, too.
- Department of Mobility & Infrastructure (DOMI) 2070 Plan: our city's newest department that works within the public right of way, sidewalks, traffic lights, they're conducting a survey of public input for 2070 plan. Huge undertaking and looking for our input. A link to that survey is on the table also.
- Housing Opportunity Fund (HOF): URA now has Housing Opportunity Fund, which is a dedicated fund of 10 million dollars across 10 years. Have about 5 programs that are pretty new, includes rental assistance, home repair, down payment & closing cost assistance, etc.

*Question:* If you don't qualify for free lead line replacement, how long until they replace?

- *Leah:* I don't have an exact timeline; PWSA is doing a number of things about the number of lead lines that go into people's houses. They're replacing that public line. They also have the three lead line replacement program and targeting areas of city where they believe people are most vulnerable. Don't necessarily have timeline. Sometimes they get grant funding and it does come with fairly strict requirements but the goal is to get every person lead free. They will send you a free lead test and a filter in the time being.

### **3. Community Meeting on 4751 Butler Street (Park LV)**

Dave from LU reviewed the community process and ground rules.

#### ***Presentation from Brett Minarik from Park LV:***

My name is Brett Minarik. We're neighbors, we live just down the street at Fisk and Butler. Some of you might have been part of and this is connected to the process for Lawrence Hall, which is a food hall project we're exploring for that warehouse site. Quick update on history, in the past year, we had this meeting, we had good feedback, went for zoning board coming with 7 different things to add as conditions for our zoning decision, things like buying employees bus passes, discounts for people who use ride share, etc, even operating a shuttle for parking. The idea was there's no parking and we know it's an issue but also wanted to be forward thinking and they got granted. However, our zoning hearing was appealed because we had zero parking, it went to a judge and we got overturned and lost our zoning approval. Explicit reason was no parking. At that point, two options: let the project die or find an alternate solution. The alternative solution is bringing parking for our zoning requirements but also some extra parking as paid public parking for people to come in from outside of the neighborhood and use.

The site was formerly a used car lot. It's on the corner of Plummer and Butler. Oddly shaped lot. Challenging property for traditional uses. A long time ago it was a gas station and then after that a used car lot. We think it has potential. Coming down from Upper Lawrenceville, the street curves around, and it's the first thing you see as you're approaching the Central Lawrenceville business district and within easy walking distance of most of Lawrenceville.

Largest problem facing Lawrenceville is parking. These are the first new parking spaces brought to Lawrenceville since PPA lot. Idea here is to bring offsite parking for food hall with 14 spaces, and then we would install a second carousel and that would bring us up to 22 spaces.

How are we going to fit so many cars? Rotary parking carousels. I know they look weird at first, they grow on ya a little bit. Surprisingly old technology, I found several old b&w photos of these things. But it is surprisingly consistent with modern goals and initiatives in urban setting. They come with a number of benefits. First and foremost: they're not permanent. These things are in some way a means to an end. But we can still do that means in a manner that is efficient.

Benefits: available space is always at ground level. Eliminates need to drive around parking lots. Here you drive into base and the car moves up and away. Cars park very quickly which reduces emissions. People remain in plain sight. Base of facility itself is well lit. Not a place where people can loiter or whatever. It's more secure for vehicles because they're out of reach, no one can vandalize them or anything like that, etc. no risk for dents and dings. They also can't fall; they utilize durable chain technology that just locks up and is released by gravity. In case of power outage you can lower all vehicles using gravity. Bike racks, greenery, etc. reduce the emissions from vehicles, etc. They also use very little power. Aesthetics: because of city code we plan on screening them. Some renderings can show screens. Can get community's view on those for sure. We can screen around the carousel itself or screen entire property. Our idea is to put out a RFP for local artists who could do some metal-working so you have art installation on screen. These are not permanent; can be moved. Relocate as needed. We recognize that this lot could be used for a more neighborhood friendly reason. To the extent that the city makes or improves upon one of the existing lots, we would love to remove this and use it for something a bit more friendly longer term. The carousels are also quite silent. They are about as loud as an air conditioning unit. This one is with carousel screened. Leaving plenty of room for green space and putting in trees. Second option with second carousel is more space efficient. It also shows the alternate screening. It would be a frame that wraps around the corner, gray or what is to show how the screening would be. We could get creative metal work or ivy.

Potential concerns: we will make sure the site will be well lit, cameras, on site parking attendant, cut down on any risk, safe than traditional lots. We're hoping this will reduce overall traffic because there will be less cars on Butler looking for a

parking spot. Entrance is on Plummer, not Butler. Proximity of the intersection there should do job of constraining. It won't be a free for all. Visual and noise pollution: it's parking, but we want to make it as visually attractive as we can. And the noise is only as loud as A/C units.

### ***Q&A with Audience***

Owen Lampe, Fisk Street: What's the current zoning and what's maximum height? Do you own the property? Inside the requirements for being less than 1000 feet from your food hall?

- Brett: The area is currently LNC. We are as of today the owners of this property, just closed on it. 45 feet is maximum height. The 10 vehicle carousel is 44 ft. It's 930 feet from food hall to structure.

Alex, 40<sup>th</sup>: What is your capacity for food hall?

- Brett: Seated: 159. We're hoping most of the people won't be driving vehicles. 11,000 people live within a 10-12 minute walk and that's who we're seeking. Parking requirements are driven by square footage. Because it's just over 5,000 square feet, there's a mathematical formula that calculated our 14 spots.

Anna, house right next door: I have a few questions. If there are 2 of those carousels, wouldn't that make for a very tight fit for vehicles to turn into them?

- Brett: According to manufacture, they require 24 feet clearance outside of the carousel. We have 26 feet. With parking attendant on site, with multiple cars, he can put one in, get the other one parked and manage that whole process so it's not chaos.
- Anna: How can you ensure that weather won't ruin it? Like the Microburst? How secure are those carousels from not being blown over?
- Brett: Moving them does take a whole construction process. Structural steel and concrete on the bottom. Our architect is involved in building that. The cars are resting on platforms and those platforms are secured to the device. The cars are not tied to the structure. All very secure.

Maureen, 45<sup>th</sup>: Initially, the one carousel is just for your food hall parking, right? The second carousel being the additional public parking?

- Brett: Total parking for the whole site would be 22 with two carousels. Our requirement is 14 spaces.

Matt Barron: This is what I'm going to see out of my front window. There are two huge underutilized surface parking lots nearby. Have you used that?

- Brett: Version 1 (with the carousel itself screened) is still an option, which wouldn't obstruct your view; up to the site planner with city zoning – we want to hear their feedback. Initially, we reached out to both Busy Beaver and Teamster. For Busy Beaver, that parking lot is leased from another property owner and that owner is not willing to let them sublease. Even the

CEO of Busy Beaver was amenable to us using it for parking, but it couldn't work out. Teamster's has a lot of special events and couldn't work out an agreement with us because of that. I would love to use one of those surface lots. It's closer to our business. Unfortunately, we haven't had success there.

Nan Dowiak: I live on 48<sup>th</sup> and I own a business next to you. My question is: when I put my business in, I made sure that the business I had in mind was permitted in that zoning district. Did you consider putting these ugly machines someplace where the zoning was already permitted for the project or did you assume this was the correct place?

- Brett: Being that it is zoned LNC, it's the same zoning for the food hall, that zoning comes with requirements on that end and this end. Food hall requires parking and on any side of the coin, we had to pursue a variance for either property. We tried without parking. It did not succeed. We are seeking zoning relief for parking business but it is consistent with LNC.
- Nan: No, it is not. Zoning exists for a reason. You're asking for 3 variances. Why didn't you consider where the zoning was in place to accept?
- Brett: There is relief under the letter of the zoning code. It does account for variances. There's also nowhere else within a 1000 feet limit. There's no space.
- Nan: It's unfortunate that you closed on this lot, but that's just hubris.

Josh Bayer: One street you're not showing is 48th, that's a very busy and very complicated 3 way intersection. The city has no way of measuring but I would bet it's one of the most dangerous intersections. Have you talked with city about the changing of the signals? We walk it daily and take our life in our hands. The traffic signage there is a joke to begin with and adding increased traffic flow, did you talk with them about addressing that?

- Brett: No, we have not at this point but certainly willing to undertake that. If it is, as a community we can come together and push for that.
- Josh: Hours of operation?
- Brett: Daylight hours into evening, 6 p.m. to midnight. We post for it but if they park there they get ticketed after hours. Machinery wouldn't be operational after hours as well.

Jim: 45<sup>th</sup> St: If your car is on top, how do you get it out?

- Brett: They all rotate. The least flattering way to describe it is like a ferris wheel for cars. You can get any car out. Yes, it's primarily for food hall patrons. We actually entered into letter of agreement with Clean Care Linen on 51st. They have an unused parking lot. We were going to operate a 15 person shuttle, but that was overruled in our appeal.

Laurie: I want to thank you for your creative design. It's a challenge. Is the parking in this picture for handicapped? Are you required to have that?

- Brett: We are, one needs to be ADA. The individual could also have the person park their vehicle, too since we have an attendant.

Mary, 45<sup>th</sup> St: I am amazed that you did this and bought the lot, that to me assumes that there would be no community uprising against it. I feel personally offended by that. You're proposing we have a culturally vapid design for what? A car parking lot? Personally offensive. You're giving us nothing. An insult to our neighborhood. There could be something that could benefit the community. This is absolutely offensive that you would propose parking here. Where do you live?

- Brett: Fisk and Butler
- Mary: So you don't have to look at this. Are those trees existing?
- Brett: We would plant them.
- Mary: So it's a rendering of what will exist. Those aren't there now. Those trees aren't going to be 8 feet tall right away. This is just a way to sell it.
- Brett: We want to commission that screening from local artist to make it more visually appealing for sure. I hope it is a good way to sell it because it's just the truth. It was the requirement from the seller that we close on it today. Where you take offense I just took personal risk because if we don't have approval, we have to find another use for it.

Mark Dowiak: 48<sup>th</sup> St: You mentioned this used to be a gas station. Rumor has it there's underground storage tanks there.

- Brett: Our onsite due diligence did not present that; that would be something we'd have to clean up but it wasn't there.

Poli, Home St: How long do they take to rotate? Tremendously challenging intersection already. I'm worried there would be a line of cars.

- Brett: it takes about 45 seconds.
- Poli: Do they have to back up out of the parking lot?
- Brett: The manufacturers say it needs to be 24 feet and there's room for three point turns, definitely. The parking lot attendant will be practiced in that.

My question goes back to the food hall business: about 160 patrons you're expecting? And how many employees?

- Brett: 14, about.

Comment: Mine is more of a statement but we need to take a lesson from Shadyside and build a garage and solve this. This seems like a band-aid solution and I think we need a serious parking solution that brings hundreds of spots.

- Brett: We did not want to be in the parking business; it is in means to an end. That's our goal.
- Dave, LU: I do think this is an opportunity to talk more broadly about mobility strategy. This is a good case scenario of the pulls and pushes that exist right now.

- Comment: As far as Lawrenceville United and the group, how the heck did the Foundry get built? This is pretty horrible; this could be a domino that falls into automation on the street and we have a nicer look than that. It sucks that neighbors don't play ball with the already existing parking.
- Dave: The Foundry went through a similar community process as this one; you can see all of the projects all on our website. You can see notes, position, you can see presentations, etc. great resource on our website.

Rachel: I'm about to close on a house on 48<sup>th</sup> next week so I'll be your neighbor soon. Business hours until midnight or so? How do you prevent people from coming after and messing with machinery?

- Brett: Sure, if it was after hours, they're inaccessible. There's also a little office on site. That would be power center so it would be deactivated. After hours remain well lit. Hopefully that's a deterrent.

Rachel: What if someone drinks and drives and then leaves it overnight?

- Brett: If they leave it after hours? They'd have to come back and get it the next day of course, may be a fine for that, but of course as restaurant proprietors we are required to do everything in our power not to have people drink and drive.

Kevin: I do want to give you guys some credit, you're trying to be ambitious and I admire you for that. We also took a risk in buying in Lawrenceville. I do have a few thoughts. Plummer Street is very busy and so is Butler. All you have to do is spend 20 minutes around and there's kids walking and pedestrians everywhere. But to try to shoehorn two 45 foot structures? You never try to shrink, you always try to add. A phase 1 and a phase 2; it's just not going to work. Unfortunately this is something Anna and I aren't going to support but we support you. You invested and I give you credit for that.

Amber, Howley St: Is there some kind of timeline for the city to address Lawrenceville's parking issue? Is this some kind of interim to this issue?

- Dave (LU): No plans related to parking. Things that we've pushed for: shared strategic parking facilities. Goal is not to create parking structures everywhere but we do believe there is a place for smart, well-placed and shared parking. Advocated for that with the City. Haven't been met with support. We have also been trying to pursue a myriad of other parking strategies and options like Residential Permit Parking, dynamic pricing, etc. We have not gotten anywhere on a lot of this.
- Amber: At some point, you're going to stifle your growth so you should think about how this individual has put the time in to do it. None of our elected officials are doing this to work with him to figure out how we can get some type of parking solution.
- Dave (LU): I completely agree. This is the situation we are stuck with. They were opposed previously based on not having parking. Now they're trying to

provide parking and are being opposed. Balance is very challenging to find in the absence of a larger solution. Individual business owners are not capable of creating broader solutions. We need to look to the city to support some of that. We have also looked at other solutions like conditions that discourage people from driving, like encouraging biking and ride sharing. We have also been looking at the Parking Enhancement District that was modeled in South Side; what it could do is create residential permit parking below Butler Street. It changes the hours of operation for residential permit parking when we all come home and folks come to visit our bars/restaurants. You can do what's called dynamic pricing with meters, increasing the cost of on street parking, frees up parking spaces along Butler Street. Those funds from the PED could be captured locally to be used for more mobility methods. It does put businesses in a bind though, because if the neighborhood is all RPP, where do patrons park? Those are things we've all advocated for. We have not been successful. I think that is something we need to talk about. Where is the place for all of us to push for some of those things?

Kate: Do you own that building (the food hall)?

- Brett: We close on October 1.
- Kate: Is there a reason you're super set on that location? Mews is now opening townhouses in Upper Lawrenceville. There's way more potential parking. Seems like that might be a great business opportunity. Did you guys look at alternative food hall locations?
- Brett: No, but for a different reason. We didn't approach finding the warehouse with the food hall. We approached that property for that space and the food hall model is perfect for Lawrenceville and the neighborhood and supports other small biz who are the restaurateurs. It wins on every single front except for parking. That location can't get any better.
- Kate: Totally agree, but we've been sold on this is going to be Lawrenceville's place but it's all outweighed if you put this parking here at this site. I frankly wouldn't support a business that did that.
- Brett: We're in a means to an end. The point of minimum parking requirements is also a problem.
- Kate: How did federal galley get away with that?
- Brett: I think because of their affiliation with Nova Place. I mean, think about if something could be built at Busy Beaver. The first surface spaces are for their customers and the other levels are for visitors to the neighborhood.
- Kate: What happens if it doesn't pass with those two properties?
- Brett: We'd find a Plan B. We'd still pursue the food hall. The food hall is the priority.

Nancy Gippert: I think the Lawrence Hall idea is fabulous. Any all sorts of god awful things could go in there. What would happen to that site if the food hall didn't happen and you had to sell? That could be horrible. It could be a big box store or something like that.

- Brett: It would probably be torn down. Only thing that's economically viable is to tear it down.
- Nancy: How long has the triangle been empty?
- Brett: 4 years.
- Nancy: That little yellow building currently on the lot is ugly as sin. I think you're covering it well. You're our neighbors and I admire you for what you're doing. It's not going to look like that screened with the art.

Vanessa, 36<sup>th</sup>: I really commend you guys and I know what you've been up against and it's been excruciating. I want to speak to their character; probably no one else that would have tracked Lawrenceville by foot and exhausted every possible solution they could creatively think of. There's been silence from the political people that could support them and really unfair litigation against them. They're not going to be the slumlord parking people of Pittsburgh; they're going to support the best option for the community.

Linda: Anyone that knows me that knows I'm not negative nancy; I think it's a good idea and it would look better than the MASH tent on 45<sup>th</sup> street.

Matt B: How are you going to direct people to the 14 spaces associated with your restaurant? How will you control who parks there?

- Brett: The info will be in our website and marketing. It's not required to be available strictly for customers or employees; we just need the 14 spaces to get through zoning, but it's 14 cars off the streets regardless. We can threaten to ticket people and charge a fairly expensive rate and make it free if they actually come to the hall. They could bring the receipt back if they actually went to the hall and get that free parking.

***Closed Door Discussion:***

Dave from LU reviewed positions that the organization takes. You can turn in extra questions. It will be on our website. Keep you all posted. Updated on zoning board date. Not yet been scheduled. Those hearings are all held at 200 Ross Street.

Dave: We have been under tremendous pressure to reject all parking variances and we've advocated for parking and mobility solutions; this is kinda where we're at naturally because of all of that. I'm looking for direction. I know this issue is bringing out a lot of feelings but on a broader sense we need to have a conversation around what is our strategy around mobility in the community.

Nan: This is not a strategy. I thought the food hall was good but I'm also a small biz owner and my whole savings is in that 1840 building across from one of the most iconic historical buildings. It's ugly and like putting lipstick on a pig. Why is my business going to be sacrificed to this food hall? Do we need more food on Butler Street? Do we need more small retail? That's what we need. We're very familiar with that intersection. Parking is not scarce on Plummer. You can park there. Parking is

amazingly abundant on that intersection. The only purpose this serves is to be able to move forward with their business. I will hire a lawyer and I will fight this because my business is at stake. That part of the neighborhood is zoned for small retail and zoned for residential. They're asking for three variances. God did not come down to Brett and Phoebe and say to them you must open your business here. There are other places. They could have found a place where it fits better. I am so sorry they're closing. We have no financing. We just have our life savings and it is in jeopardy. If anyone wants to put their money into the lawyer pot to fight this, let me know.

Anna: I echo much of what Nan said – overall, we oppose for a variety of reasons. We did not invest in our home to live in parking lots. We did assume the streetscape would be definitely be developed to look like the rest of the street. Two: I think that there is an ongoing parking issue and I think opposition to this parking space should be tied to an ongoing request to fix the LV parking issue and/or to decouple the need to open new biz and have parking be part of that requirement. If it's possible to have three variances, that lot near Upper Lawrenceville with a shuttle obviously sounds like the better option.

- They were opposed through litigation and they lost that option.

Amber: How did that happen? Isn't the person in this room who went through with that litigation?

- Eric, owner of the Abbey: The only thing I can really say is this was the position that I was in. If you could experience the feeling of shoveling snow in your parking lot only to have people that don't patronize your business park in it and go to places around it like La Gourmandine. My business has a 50 seat dining room and they have 150 seat dining room in that food hall. Personally my feelings are if they address their parking issue that's fine, my numbers are up, I don't like this parking idea, it's hideous, but I wish the city would be more helpful in negotiating something with Teamsters and Busy Beaver.

Amber: The energy you put into opposing this: it should be taking that energy to address your elected officials instead.

Eric: I had neighborhood folks saying you should withdraw had there been anything on the radar saying we're going to get parking. Why does the Abbey have to be the catch-all? The city basically said park wherever when they grant approvals like that. I do wish them all the best.

Amber: It's pitting you all against each other when it should be you all working together to solve these problems.

Mary: Other mobility solutions are great. The bike lane meetings are amazing. There's a great bus line, imagine that! In terms of this particular lot you have to split hairs. I'm going to be the voice to be the aesthetics of the neighborhood and it's

damn ugly. It puts us in a tricky situation. They're good people but bad idea. Just because we're opposed to this lot doesn't mean we're opposed to parking solutions.

Dave: To be clear, LU is not bringing this to you as a mobility solution. They applied for something and they come through this process via the variances.

Nancy: Variances exist to make zoning code work.

Nan: Every dog and their owner is going to start to do this if it happens. The ugly parking machine, one on every block.

Amber: Instead of trying to create the solution, we're all focused on this problem. You can't fight with your businesses; you need to fight with the people who are in control. Brett has done everything above and beyond and we need to pay that same respect. I don't see any of business owners try to make that same effort. They either deal with it or leave.

Nan: Or they die because this parking lot exists.

Matt: I'm completely opposed to this. It's well lit which means I'll have to deal with that at night. It's going to be a huge increase in traffic. Already huge issues with the pedestrians in that corner. I feel for them and I understand they're in terrible position. The city's parking minimums should have gone away a long time ago. This is going to affect quality of life and nightlife. It's absurd.

Laurie: Could we put together a committee for parking? Like we did for IZ? Why aren't we doing that?

Mary: The committee is a great idea, but it still doesn't change this lot.

Mark: I don't see this as serving interest as community; it's only serving his private business. This is a showcase piece of property. Not a lot of options to work with. Its been repeated. I'm surprised with no guarantee he would get any zoning changes. I feel sympathetic for him but I don't think it's a valid reason. He stuck his neck out. His other option is plan b to sell this property.

In order to get a variance you have to show hardship. What hardship can he demonstrate?

Dave: There's a point I'm trying to make, and I'm not making a case here that this parking carousel should be supported, but the only point I'm trying to make is that this use is a natural consequence of the community opposing any parking variances – this is what they've been forced into. The committee is a great idea to get some action and keep that moving forward. Some businesses should participate in that as well. My board will meet next week and decide on this particular use. They are a 15 member, all-resident all volunteer board that's elected by our membership base.

Rachel: What's the process for forming a committee?

Dave: We can figure that out. Laurie mentioned a housing committee that meets third Monday of the month. We can do something similar for parking. Make sure you sign in and we can do follow up.

Mary: We need to take vote. In favor. Opposed votes.

(Show of hands for oppose and support: majority people in room opposed).

Dave: These are tough issues and I want to acknowledge that. I appreciate people maintaining decorum. The presentation will go up on our website. If you have any additional questions or thoughts, share it with us. The slides will be up on the website.